



## **Supporting Yourself in Support Work**

### **A Reflective Guide & Wellbeing Resource for Our Team**

**How to use this guide:** This is an optional resource designed to support your wellbeing. You can work through it at your own pace, use specific sections that feel relevant, or explore it with your supervisor. There's no expectation to complete everything—take what's helpful.

**For supervisors:** Some reflective exercises may bring up difficult feelings. Please check in with staff before and after deeper exercises, and ensure appropriate support is available.

### **Why This Work Matters, and Why It's Hard**

Supporting families through difficult times is some of the most meaningful work you can do. Whether you're visiting homes, coordinating support, volunteering your time, or working with families in crisis, you're making a real difference in people's lives.

#### **But this work is also emotionally demanding. It asks you to:**

- Stay calm and steady when families are in distress
- Hold hope even when progress feels slow
- Build trust with people who may have been let down before
- Navigate complex situations without always having clear answers
- Carry stories and struggles that can stay with you after work

"Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or affected by the work doesn't mean you're not good at your job. It means you're human, and you care."

This guide exists to help you pause, reflect, and look after yourself, so you can keep doing this important work in a sustainable way.

### **What You Can Expect From Us**

Your wellbeing is our responsibility, not just yours.



While this guide offers personal strategies, we recognise that your wellbeing depends on organisational support too. Self-care alone cannot fix systemic issues like high workloads or inadequate resources.

As your employer, we commit to:

**Regular Supervision** Protected time for reflection, not just task management. Your supervisor is there to support your wellbeing as well as your work.

**Manageable Workloads** We monitor workload intensity, not just numbers. If you're feeling overwhelmed, please tell us - it's our responsibility to listen and respond.

**Training & Support** Access to training, peer support, and external resources. You don't need to be an expert in everything - we'll support your development.

**A Speak-Up Culture** You can raise concerns about wellbeing, workload, or safety without fear. We want to hear from you, especially when things are difficult.

### **When to raise concerns:**

- Your workload feels unmanageable
- You're consistently working through breaks or outside hours
- You're losing sleep or feeling constantly anxious about work
- You don't feel supported in supervision
- Something about the work feels unsafe or beyond your capacity

**How to raise it: Speak to your supervisor, or if that doesn't feel safe, contact [insert relevant contact/HR/wellbeing lead].**

### **Recognising When You're Carrying Too Much**

Support work involves emotional labour - holding space for others' distress while staying steady yourself. Over time, this can quietly affect your own wellbeing.

It's completely normal to be affected by this work. Noticing the signs early helps you respond with care before things become overwhelming.

### **Common signs you might notice:**

#### **Emotional Signs**

- Feeling emotionally drained after visits



- Increased tearfulness or irritability
- Feeling detached or numb
- Dreading certain visits or tasks
- Loss of satisfaction in work

### **Physical Signs**

- Trouble sleeping or constant tiredness
- Headaches, tension, stomach issues
- Feeling constantly on edge
- Physical exhaustion even after rest

### **Behavioural Signs**

- Avoiding colleagues or supervision
- Working through breaks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased use of distractions (phone, TV, etc.)
- Withdrawing from friends and family

### **Relationship Signs**

- Becoming over-involved with families
- Feeling personally responsible for outcomes
- Taking work home emotionally
- Difficulty switching off

### **Reflective Questions:**

- What signs do I notice in myself when I'm carrying too much?
- When was the last time I paused to check in with how I'm feeling?
- Am I offering myself even a fraction of the care I offer to the families I support?

### **Healthy Boundaries in Support Work**



Boundaries in support work look different to clinical settings. You're often in people's homes, building longer-term relationships, and working flexibly around families' needs.

Boundaries aren't about being cold or distant. They're about protecting your capacity to care sustainably, so you can keep showing up for families over time.

### **Common boundary challenges in support work:**

- Feeling personally responsible for a family's situation or progress
- Thinking about families constantly when you're off work
- Saying yes to requests when you're already stretched thin
- Difficulty ending visits or phone calls
- Wanting to "fix" situations that aren't yours to fix
- Feeling guilty when you set limits or say no

### **Practical boundary strategies:**

**End-of-visit rituals** Create a simple routine to mark the end of a visit: brief notes, a walk to your car, a deep breath. Something that signals: "The visit is over, I'm returning to me."

**Monitor emotional leakage** Notice when you're thinking about a family constantly outside work hours, or when you're losing sleep over their situation. This is a sign you may need to re-anchor your boundaries.

**Remember your role** You're here to support, guide, and advocate - not to rescue or take over. Families need you to be steady and boundary orientated, not overwhelmed alongside them.

**Use supervision** Talk through situations where boundaries feel blurry. Your supervisor can help you reflect on what's yours to carry and what isn't.

"Setting boundaries doesn't mean I'm abandoning them. It means I'm showing up in a way that's real, steady, and sustainable."

### **Check in with yourself:**

- Am I feeling pulled to fix, rescue, or prove something?
- Where does this emotional intensity sit in my body?
- How do I know when I've taken something home emotionally?



## **Protecting Your Personal Life**

Support work can easily blur into your personal time, especially when you know families are struggling. But sustainable work requires clear space for yourself - time when you're not helping, supporting, or problem-solving.

You are more than your job. Your identity, relationships, and wellbeing need protecting too.

### **Strategies to protect personal time:**

Schedule in recovery Plan restorative activities before you feel depleted. Block out breaks, plan something to look forward to, protect your time off.

Create transitions Build in a buffer between work and home: listen to music, go for a walk, sit quietly for 5 minutes. Give yourself permission to decompress.

Remember who you are outside work Keep hobbies, friendships, and activities that nourish you. Ask yourself: "Who am I when I'm not helping someone else?"

Notice over-functioning Be aware of when you're doing for others what they can do for themselves, or staying late "just to be sure." Use supervision to explore where guilt or urgency might be driving you.

### **Signs the work-life divide is eroding:**

- I feel guilty when I'm not thinking about work
- I'm irritable at home but don't know why
- I've forgotten what I enjoy outside of work
- I check emails or messages during personal time
- My friends or family have said I seem distant or stressed

"Saying no or stepping back isn't a failure - it's what allows me to keep saying yes over time."

## **Reconnecting With Why You Do This Work**

When progress feels slow or invisible, it's easy to question whether you're making a difference. But meaningful change in families' lives often unfolds slowly - in small shifts, quiet moments, and trust that takes time to build.



Your presence matters, even when you can't see the results. Sometimes the most important thing you offer is consistency, steadiness, and the message: "I'm not giving up on you."

### **Ways to reconnect with purpose:**

Notice small moments A parent who answered the door this time. A child who smiled at you. A family who asked for help. These are powerful shifts, even if they don't come with words or big changes.

Keep reminders Create a "Why I Do This" folder with thank-you notes, messages, or moments when you felt connected to the work's meaning. Return to it when you need grounding.

Reflect on your values What values guide your work? Compassion, integrity, justice, kindness? How did you live by those values today, even in small ways?

### **Reflective Questions:**

- What drew me to this work in the first place?
- When do I feel most connected to the meaning of what I do?
- Who or what reminds me that showing up matters - even when it's hard?

"I may not see the result, but the work still matters. I'm planting seeds - many of which I'll never see grow. But that doesn't mean they won't."

### **Practical Wellbeing Tools**

These are simple, optional tools you can use to check in with yourself and respond early when things feel heavy. Use what helps - ignore what doesn't.

Note: Some of these exercises ask you to reflect on difficult feelings. If something feels too much, pause and come back to it later or talk it through with your supervisor.

### **Weekly Check-In**

Use this at the start or end of each week to gently notice how you're doing:

My emotional weather this week: ☀ Sunny | ☁ Partly cloudy | ☔ Rainy | 🌩 Stormy | 🌪 Mixed

### **Questions to consider:**



- What helped me feel grounded or connected this week?
- What signs of strain have I noticed?
- What support do I need right now?
- What do I want to protect next week?

### **Emergency Self-Care Plan**

Fill this in when you're calm, so it's ready when things feel overwhelming:

My early warning signs: (What I notice when I'm struggling)

What helps most: (Things that ground or restore me)

Who I can turn to: (People, roles, support)

One thing I'll do differently: (One pause or start)

### **Simple Decompression Ideas**

Try these simple rituals to mark the end of work and return to yourself:

- Change clothes or shoes after work
- Brief walk before going home
- 3 deep breaths at car or doorstep
- Listen to calming music
- Quick journal or voice note
- 5 minutes of gentle stretching

Choose 2-3 to try this week. Notice what helps you feel restored.



## Grounding Techniques

Simple ways to calm your nervous system when you feel overwhelmed:

**Box Breathing** Breathe in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4. Repeat 3-4 times.

**5-4-3-2-1 Technique** Name 5 things you see, 4 you hear, 3 you feel, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.

**Feet on Floor** Feel both feet flat on the ground. Press down gently. Notice the chair beneath you.

**Cold Water Splash** Splash cold water on your face or hold an ice cube briefly to reset your system.

## Support & Resources

**You don't have to navigate this work alone. Here are internal and external supports available to you:**

### Internal Support:

- Your supervisor - for regular reflection and wellbeing check-ins
- HR/Wellbeing lead - [insert name/contact]
- Peer support - colleagues who understand the work
- Team meetings - opportunities for shared reflection
- Counselling / Therapeutic Support – [Insert here]

### External Support:

- GP or counselling services - for personal mental health support
- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) - [insert details if available]
- Professional support lines - [insert relevant helplines]
- Training opportunities - [insert relevant courses/resources]

### For all staff:

- Trauma Stewardship by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky - A foundational guide to sustaining yourself while supporting others in caring roles.



- Self-Compassion by Kristin Neff - Research-based but highly practical techniques for treating yourself with kindness, especially when things feel hard.
- What Happened to You? by Dr Bruce Perry & Oprah Winfrey - An accessible, conversational introduction to understanding trauma and its impact.

**For those wanting a deeper dive:**

- The Compassionate Mind by Paul Gilbert - Evidence-based therapeutic techniques to build self-compassion and manage self-criticism.

**Final Thoughts**

This work matters. You matter. And looking after yourself isn't a luxury - it's what allows you to keep doing this important work over time.

You're not expected to be perfect, endlessly available, or unaffected by what you see and hear. You're expected to be human, to care, and to ask for support when you need it.

**We're here to support you. Please use us.**

*This guide draws on established research about staff wellbeing in caring professions, trauma-informed practice principles, and evidence that organisational support and reflective practice help sustain practitioners in emotionally demanding work.*

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