

Working When You're Emotionally Drained

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

BY ESHA CHAKRABORTI, RCC

What would you do if you woke up with the flu and wanted to stay in bed? You would probably take a sick day. What if you were dealing with heartbreak or grief? You might take a self-care day. But how many days would you take for a terminally ill family member?

As a private practice clinician, there is a unique struggle between getting paid to help others and taking time off for our own emotional needs.

Two years ago, when my family dog of 16 years was ill, I limited my number of clients and spread sessions throughout the week to manage vet visits and home care. Though I was focused and grounded while working with clients, I worried about my family's needs during

breaks. I felt guilty if I couldn't attend a vet appointment. I knew I had limited time with my dog, and I wanted to support him and my family.

But I also felt guilty taking time off because of the loss of income and for cancelling clients. I often wondered if I would have more support if I was working for a company. I imagined time off for vet appointment days, support from co-workers, and paid self-care days. My normally cheerful attitude and positive morale drained away.

One day, when I didn't go to a vet appointment, I got the dreaded phone call that my dog had passed away during the vet visit. It was the middle of my workday. My receptionist cancelled sessions with my remaining clients. I took a week off but, still, it was difficult to

come back to work. I procrastinated about writing up client notes from that day, because I wanted to forget it completely. I recall being worried I would lose clients due to my unprofessional manner of cancelling sessions followed by a weeklong absence. Ultimately, things went back to normal, but that situation made me realize I needed a better self-care plan.

We can't be present for our clients, if we aren't grounded in our own lives. Taking time off as a private practice clinician means losing income, which could result in more difficulties and stressors. When there is financial instability, it often means we are working when we are emotionally drained. But self-care and being prepared for expected and unexpected emotional situations are

important. I am still working towards finding a balance with my self-care, but I hope my situation helps you reflect on how you are managing your emotional needs.

Ask yourself this: What are you doing to take care of your emotional needs? Do you have a plan for yourself and your business if you need time for a family problem, terminal illness, or critical situation? You owe it to yourself to give it some thought.

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