

10 Top Tips

for World Mental Health Day, 10 October

By Eve Menezes Cunningham

As 10 October was World Mental Health Day (10/10), take some time to think about your own (and your clients') mental health. NLP can help with a wide range of issues but it's important that, as practitioners, we both ensure our own mental health and we recognise when clients have mental ill health that is beyond our scope to deal with.

There are 1 in 4 adults affected by a diagnosable mental health condition every year and 1 in 6 at any given time, so I hope you'll find these tips for 10/10 helpful.

1 *Give some thought to your own mental health.* Pause to think about the ways your mental health has been most noticeable. When have you felt at your best, mental health wise? When have you felt that your mental health might have been suffering? How did you handle these warning signs? The better you come to know your own mind, the better you'll be able to help others. Who in your family and amongst your loved ones has struggled with mental health conditions?

2 *Be mindful.* As well as running www.mindfullyogatherapies.org with Lana Jackson, Clinical Psychologist, Lucy Clarke works for the NHS supporting people in living well with chronic illnesses. Her top tip for ensuring good mental health is to pause life, 'We all lead very busy lives and can spend a lot of time looking externally for strategies for self-care, personally and clinically. Using practices which develop self-awareness, such as meditation and mindfulness, enable you to take a step back. You can then become more responsive rather than reactive, learn more about yourself and become clearer on what's your stuff and what's your clients.'

'Often, we carry around negative thoughts and feelings without really noticing them,' agrees Beth Burgess (www.smyls.co.uk), a therapist specialising in mental health, addiction, anxiety and stress. 'Develop your self-awareness. I teach mindfulness, which is where you objectively notice the mental and physical stress you are subject to. Stop a few times a day and pay conscious attention to your thought patterns. Are the thoughts you are having healthy and supportive or negative and self-defeating? Replace negative thoughts with more helpful ones. Notice also if your body is tense or relaxed. Often we feel stress and tension in the gut,



“Using practices which develop self-awareness, such as meditation and mindfulness, enable you to take a step back”

shoulders and jaw. If you feel any tension in those areas, gently release it to de-stress your body.'

3 *Set and maintain clear boundaries.* 'Make sure you limit your working hours in a sensible way, and do not take your "work" home with you, physically or mentally,' says Beth. 'Eat and sleep well and keep your own life balanced. It is vital that you are able to recharge your energy and keep your mind and body healthy. You will be unable to help others effectively if you are burnt out, preoccupied or emotionally fragile.'

What warning signs let you know that you're letting your boundaries be compromised? Crankiness is a good first sign for me. If I'm able to notice it and be curious about it, I'm able to stop the cycle and set firmer boundaries as necessary rather than allowing myself to get dragged into others' dramas. Anytime you come up across any kind of boundary issues (changing a session time, taking on someone new, anything that begins to raise your 'Hmm, beginning to feel that this is too much' Spidey Sense), pause. Just waiting to tune into your own needs and wants rather than immediately and reactively responding to others' demands can help you set and maintain healthy boundaries for life (and on days where they slip a little, you'll catch it quickly and bounce back faster).

- 4** *Care for the carer.* 'Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is a psychological therapy that helps people to think and behave in healthier ways,' says Beth. (This includes self-care.) 'It focuses largely on self-awareness, regulating emotions and taking effective action,' advises Beth. 'And looking after your mental health. If you are working in a field where you deal with people with problems and challenges, always have some form of support yourself. This can come in the form of another professional, a supervisor, colleagues or even a support group. While talking to friends or a partner can be tempting, both confidentiality issues and the fact that they may have limited understanding of what you feel like, mean that getting support from others close to the field is important.'
- 5** *Watch what you 'feed' yourself.* 'Anything that you subject your mind and body to will have an effect on your mental health,' says Beth. 'Too much junk in your diet will actually affect the way you think and feel. Listening to negative people or living in a negative environment can drain you of your energy and make you feel low. Learn to 'feed' your body with nutritional food, positive people and healthy thoughts that support you to be a happy, healthy person who can cope with challenges.'

Think about what you've fed yourself today, so far. Which foods may increase your anxiety and stress levels? Which are more nourishing? Similarly, which activities and people raise your energy levels and what leaves you feeling more depleted? I often encourage clients to log food and energy, to treat themselves as an experiment and then look back to see which days felt best and what they were doing/eating/saying yes and no to on those days.

- 6** *Deal with problems as soon as possible.* 'Avoiding addressing the root cause of problems means that they can become entrenched and even more difficult to deal with,' says Beth. 'Facing issues head on means that you are less likely to resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms and you will build on your own sense of personal strength and self-esteem.'

What are your default unhealthy coping mechanisms? Notice lapses and be curious about what problems you may be avoiding with them. Think about times in the past where you've faced up to things and handled them with aplomb. And, in this moment, be as kind to yourself as possible. Are you using all of your resources? Who might be able to support you through this if it's too challenging for you to go through alone?

- 7** *Create your own multi-disciplinary network.* Lucy benefits from multi-disciplinary team assessments in her NHS work but says even if you can't do

“ You will be unable to help others effectively if you are burnt out, preoccupied or emotionally fragile ”

that and you don't know your own blind spots regarding mental health ('It's difficult to know your blind spots because they're blind'), you can create good links with other professionals so if someone is on a cocktail of medication which might be affecting their wellbeing or mental health, you can ask a doctor or nurse.

- 8** *Know your limits.* 'Never be afraid to admit you can't help someone,' says Beth. 'You are doing them no favours if they actually need specialist help. If you have any suspicion that someone's mental state may be too much to deal with, then refer them to a specialist. It is better to be safe than sorry. Signs that someone may need more therapeutic support include cancelling lots of appointments, low mood, unpredictable behaviour, pervasive negative thinking patterns and a lack of progress. Immediately refer someone on to a specialist if they are using damaging coping mechanisms such as drinking, taking drugs, self-harming or if there are signs of an eating disorder.'
- 9** *Know how to signpost.* 'It's important to know how to signpost someone to more appropriate services and to not be afraid to say, "No, this is out of my depth". As helping professionals, we need to know our limits and boundaries,' says Lucy Clarke. 'Seeking good supervision will enable you to check in.'
- 10** *Use all of your resources.* Do you have supervision in place? Are you part of an NLP practice group or peer supervision support group? Do you have friends in the NLP and mental health communities who you can speak to when you want a sounding board? Think about your practice and the kind of support you think you'd benefit most from. Set it up. We can grow much stronger and become so much more effective for our clients when we seek the support we need. ■

