

# Self Care

## FOR Peers

### WORKING IN OVERDOSE RESPONSE SETTINGS

Peer workers face many different stressors<sup>1</sup> and are particularly vulnerable to compassion fatigue<sup>2</sup> and vicarious trauma<sup>3</sup>. Over time, this can lead to decreased job performance and morale, mental health challenges, as well as interpersonal and behavioural issues.

Although the root causes of the drug toxicity crisis are broad and systemic, **self-care** (time dedicated to preserving your personal health and wellbeing) promotes self-awareness, self-esteem, and relaxation; this, in turn, fosters healthier relationships with others, and the resilience required to withstand difficult situations at work.

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## SPIRITUAL



1. Make time for **reflection** and **journaling**
2. Seek out a spiritual connection or community such as through **faith-based activities** and **cultural activities** such as **ceremony**
3. Engage in **artistic activities** that you enjoy such as drawing, painting, singing, and listening to music
4. Take time to **connect with nature**
5. Set aside time for **meditation**

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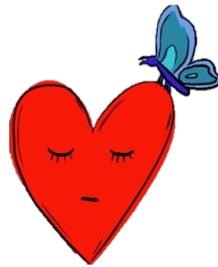
## SOCIAL



1. Create a **support network** for yourself including friends, family, and colleagues whom you can turn to for support
2. Try to **spend time with people** whose company you enjoy
3. Attend a **support group**
4. Get to know the **resources and events** going on in your community

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## PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL



1. Take time to develop a **hobby**
2. Attend **therapy**<sup>4</sup>
3. Seek out free or low-cost **learning opportunities** that interest you<sup>5</sup>
4. Regularly practice **gratitude**<sup>6</sup>
5. Make sure you **attend to your basic needs**, such as money management, paying your phone bill, food, and housing<sup>7</sup>

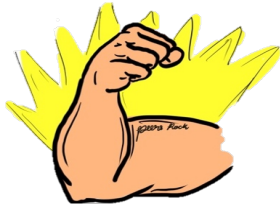
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## PHYSICAL



1. Eat **regular meals**<sup>8</sup> and keep **hydrated**
2. Prioritize addressing any **medical issues**<sup>9</sup>
3. If possible, **exercise** for at least 2.5 hours per week<sup>10</sup>
4. Try to get enough **sleep** to feel refreshed

# WORKPLACE



1. **Know your rights** as a worker and familiarize yourself with your organization's policies<sup>11</sup>
2. **Advocate for yourself** and ask for help when you need it, or identify safe people who can help you advocate
3. **Put up a whiteboard** where folks can write things that they love about being a peer worker to serve as motivation and a reminder to practice gratitude
4. **Share your experiences** with a new peer worker on your team
5. **Ask your employer** what supports are available through your workplace

**Disclaimer:** Because your professional life as a peer worker is often so closely tied to your personal life, ***we recognize it may be very difficult to find the time and energy to practice self-care.*** Until bold systemic measures are taken to end the drug toxicity crisis, peer workers may continue to face compassion fatigue, stress, and burnout and have a hard time prioritizing their well-being.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>“Running myself ragged”: stressors faced by peer workers in overdose response settings. *Harm Reduct J* 18, 18 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-020-00449-1>.

<sup>2</sup> State of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by repeated and prolonged stress.

<sup>3</sup> Indirect trauma from when an individual is constantly exposed to and witnesses other people's trauma.

<sup>4</sup> Find a list of low-cost/free therapy options in the Lower Mainland [here](#) and Victoria [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> Check out free Street Degree sessions offered by PHS and the BC Peer Worker Training by the BCCDC Peer2Peer Project [here](#).

<sup>6</sup>“How to Practice Gratitude” *Mindful*. April 15, 2021. <https://www.mindful.org/an-introduction-to-mindful-gratitude/>.

<sup>7</sup> Check community resource guides for the [DTES](#), [Fraser Valley](#), and [Victoria](#).

<sup>8</sup>Check out directories of free and low cost food programs for [Vancouver](#), the [Fraser Valley](#), and [Victoria](#).

<sup>9</sup> Due to stigma against people who use substances, it can be difficult to visit a doctor. If you feel wary about seeking medical help, we encourage you to ask a friend or family member to accompany you.

<sup>10</sup>“Physical Activity Tips for Adults (18-64 years)”. *Government of Canada*. October 1, 2018.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/physical-activity-tips-adults-18-64-years.html>.

<sup>11</sup>“Best Practice Manual for Supporting Peers/Experiential Workers in Overdose Response Settings”. *The Peer2Peer Project*. August 2020. <https://towardtheheart.com/resource/supporting-peers-experiential-workers-in-overdose-response-settings/open>.

