In our second annual workshop in October 2019, members of the Working Group agreed that it would be useful for the group to focus on the importance of psychological and social support for people and organisations working in atrocity prevention. We are now working to find the best strategies and ways of working as a community of organisations to make more space for mutual support and self care. This one-page document acts as a brief guide to how the Working Group can serve as a support structure and highlights examples of easy self-care.

The fields our organisations work in present particular challenges. We often witness difficult, stressful and traumatic situations first hand, we work with communities affected by exclusion, violence, and atrocity, we work to support survivors, victims and loved ones. Some of us work in very small organisations while others work in large, international ones; all come with their own challenges. Our work can take a toll on our mental health and general well being, which makes us less able to do good work and more vulnerable to burnout.

We are now facing an unprecedented situation as the world seeks to respond to the Covid-19 global pandemic. While the impact of the virus and its consequences are not yet clear, Covid-19 is already presenting us with unique challenges to our work, our mental health, and our resilience, as individuals, as teams, and as a sector. Working from home, in a state of lockdown, and self-isolation can exacerbate pre-existing issues, or provoke new ones. We are all worried about the vulnerable communities we work with and to support, both here in the UK and around the world. Other worries such as how to support our staff, how to fundraise, how to adapt programming, and how to uphold our charitable objectives are likely to occupy many of us for the foreseeable future. And at the same time, many positive coping strategies we might have had, such as exercise, have now been made more difficult.

Networks like our Working Group are crucial in times of difficult, providing valuable support mechanisms for their members and staff. We provide solidarity, a safe space to vent frustrations, a means of sharing problems and of learning from one another.

Throughout this crisis, we will be holding fortnightly calls for our members, as informal drop-in sessions to share concerns, ideas, warm words with one another. We will be working with members of the Working Group to determine how best to facilitate access to individual and collective psychological and social support. Like everyone else, we are learning to adapt to this extraordinary situation as we go and will be learning from others what works and what does not.

Self-care

Keeping yourself safe and well is a crucial part of the work we all do however can easily become the last thing on our to-do list. We all have our own tactics and there is no magic solution, particularly during periods of collective stress. Coping strategies for difficult situations therefore look different to different people. Healthy coping mechanisms might include going for a walk, or taking other exercise; watching a film or show you enjoy on TV; talking with friends and family; enjoying a hobby; resting; or reading.

Unhealthy coping strategies might include withdrawing from friends and family, smoking, drinking more than the recommended amount of alcohol, excessive use of drugs, becoming frequently angry or aggressive, poor eating habits, isolating yourself, not taking care of your personal hygiene because of how you are feeling, and not sleeping or oversleeping.

Making a personal self-care plan

A self-care plan can help us keep an eye on whether we're doing enough to keep ourselves healthy: while everyone's approach to their mental health and self-care is specific to their needs, there are healthy and unhealthy ways of coping with challenging situations. Some people like to think of self-care as different areas: physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, psychological, social, and professional. Writing down, for each area, the positive things you do, (i.e. I go for a walk every day) and the things you would like to change (i.e. I would like to spend more time with my family) can be helpful to see where you're currently taking care of yourself and where you might be able do more.

It can be useful to set self-care goals – these can be as small as taking a half hour tea break, meditating for five minutes at some point in the day, or as ambitious as taking up a new exercise routine. Weekly goals can help you keep track of whether you're taking care of yourself as much as you would like. Then, at the end of each week, you can reflect on what you have achieved, and what you felt was preventing you from achieving your goals. The following self-care plan was put together by the UN Development Program

Area of Self-Care	Current Practices	Practices to Try
Physical (e.g. eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups, etc.)		
Emotional (e.g. engage in positive activities, acknowledge my own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way, etc.)		
Spiritual (e.g. read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, explore spiritual connections, etc.)		
Professional (e.g. pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, positive relationships with co-workers, time management skills, etc.)		
Social (e.g. healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends, etc.)		
Financial (e.g. understand how finances impact your quality of life, create a budget or financial plan, pay off debt, etc.)		
Psychological (e.g. take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, journal, pursue new interests, learn new skills, access psychotherapy, life coaching, or counselling, etc.)		

Resources

Here are some websites, guides, and documents – some are specific to those working in the same fields as members of the Working Group, while some are general guides to positive mental health:

- Changing Faces' guide to self-care planning
- The Headington Institute – a great set of resources including online trainings and suggested coping strategies, with a section on Covid-19
- A UNDP guide on creating a self-care strategy
- A great piece by someone working in development on self-care in the NGO sector
- OCHR's guide to trauma and self-care (p. 20 onwards)
- Understanding, preventing and coping with burnout by the Young Feminist Fund

Contact

If you would like more information, just a chat, or are in need of something more specific, please get in touch with us, or reach out to the wider group by emailing the Working Group, or messaging the whatsapp group.

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