



Tips for Taking Care of Yourself, Your Family and Each Other

Michael F Myers, MD

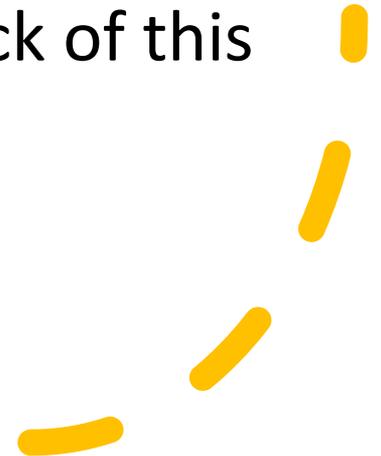
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Setting the stage...

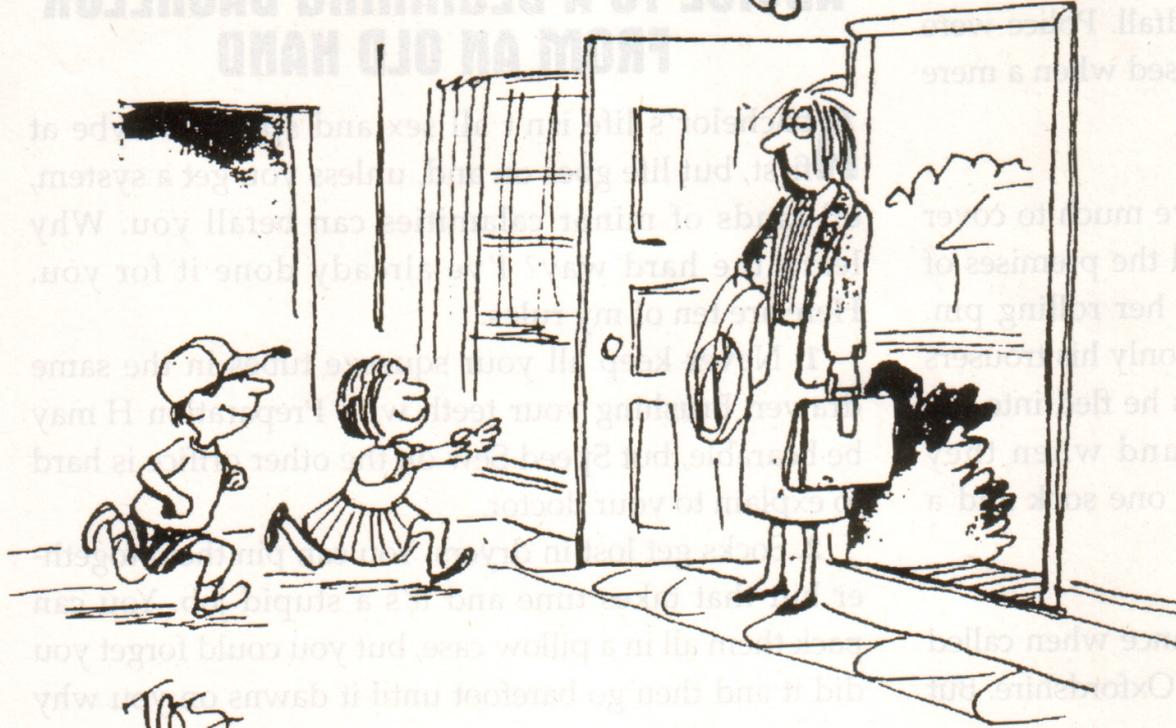
- Even before the pandemic, many folks working in the health professions were feeling stressed, burned out, depressed, drinking (or using drugs) a bit more than usual, feeling marital and family strain
- Since Covid-19, an uptick of this strain



Setting the stage...

- Covid-19 has made a massive assault to our equilibrium, illness and deaths of loved ones, disruption of routines at home, virtual learning, in some cases unemployment, financial worries, huge load on working mothers and fathers, and more
- Many losses – physical contact with extended family, in-person events (weddings, grads, funerals), travel and restful vacations
- And now, worries about the Delta variant and illness in vaccinated individuals

OH MY GOD,
I FORGOT!
I HAVE
CHILDREN



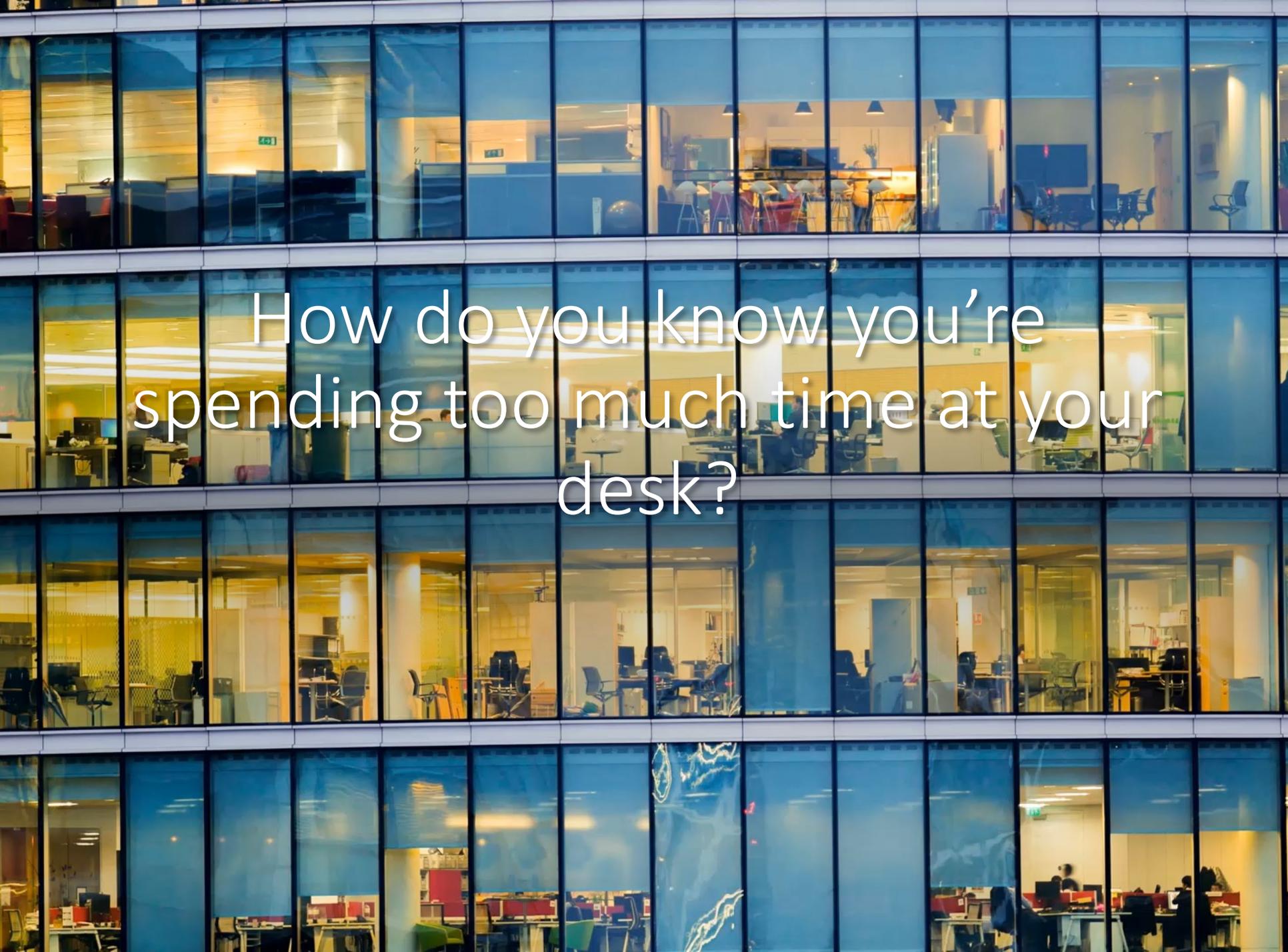
TOS

Multi-
tasking
father



But
throughout
the
pandemic,
we have
also seen..

- Solidarity and camaraderie
- Open expressions of caring and concern for each other
- Much emotional language and unbridled disclosure of feelings
- More friendliness and less formality
- Fluidity in medical hierarchy
 - Myers MF. CrazySocks4Docs, COVID-19, and Hope. Blog. Psych Congress. May 28, 2020

A multi-story office building at night, viewed from the outside. The building's facade is composed of a grid of large glass windows. Through the windows, the interior of several floors is visible, showing office desks, chairs, and people working. The interior lights are warm and yellow, contrasting with the cool blue tones of the night sky and the building's exterior. The text "How do you know you're spending too much time at your desk?" is overlaid in white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.

How do you know you're
spending too much time at your
desk?

The Perfect Computer



Symptoms of stress

- Anxiety symptoms – excessive worry, panicky feelings or panic attacks, muscle tension, headaches, etc.
- Depressive symptoms – feeling down, sad, pessimistic; crying; insomnia; decreased energy; trouble concentrating; indecisiveness; appetite increase or decrease; change in libido; irritability; anhedonia.
- Somatic symptoms – backache, IBS, GU symptoms, etc.

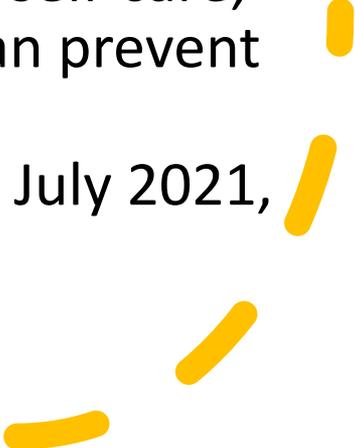
Signs

- Late for work, absenteeism, concerns expressed about your performance or behavior at work, formal complaints to your boss or employer, disinterest in your residents and co-workers
- Increased use of alcohol and/or other drugs – both proprietary and street
- Concerns raised by your loved ones about you at home – tuned out, late coming home, irritable, violent, bedseeking

Don't
forget.....

- Denial is very common – hard to see the Sx – in the health professions, there seems to be almost a ‘macho mystique’ – that we’re tough (as Governor Cuomo says “we’re New York tough”)
- Because of stigma, shame is very common – there is a very sad sense of being the only one “who’s not coping” or that as coordinators, you are letting your residents, staff, co-workers down by not feeling well.

Suggestions about self- care

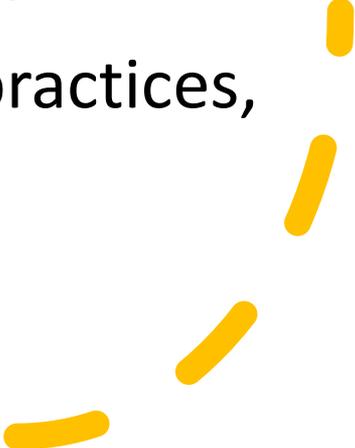
- What follows are some recommendations by Tanya Thomas, MD
 - She is a board-certified psychiatrist with interests in chronic illness, women's behavioral health, and minority mental health
 - Thomas T. Incorporating self-care, wellness into routines can prevent physician burnout. [Mdedge.com/Psychiatry](https://www.mdedge.com/psychiatry) July 2021, page 9.
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Dr
Thomas
5-minute
wellness
check

1. How am I feeling? What am I feeling?
2. Assess HALTS: Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, Too hot, Too cold, Sad, or Stressed
3. Identify the number on your scale
4. Methods of quick de-escalation

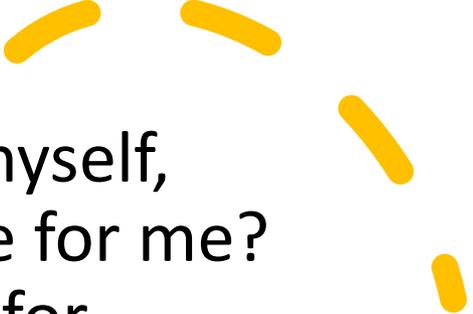


Dr
Thomas
5-minute
wellness
check

- Designate and schedule personal time
 - Write down daily goals
 - Repeat positive affirmations or write down words of gratitude
 - Use deep breathing exercises
 - Stretch or take a brief walk
 - Engage in mindfulness practices, such as meditation
- 



Take care
of
yourself

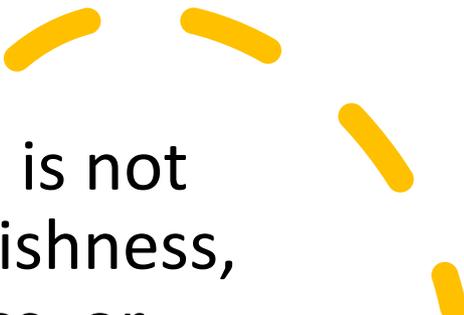


"If I am not for myself,
then who will be for me?
And if I am only for
myself, then what am I?
And if not now, when?"

Rabbi Hillel (70 BC – 10 AD)



Self-
compassion
is in!

- 
- Self-compassion is not the same as selfishness, self-centeredness, or narcissism
 - It simply means giving yourself the attention and care that you so selflessly give to others

A large orange circle on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Take care of yourself

- Look inside – if you have a history of better self-care, then try to reclaim it – if you don't, it is never too late to start
 - Truism – the happiest folks are individuals who take good care of themselves
 - Truism – many residency coordinators take better care of their residents than themselves
- 
- A decorative yellow dashed line graphic in the bottom right corner, consisting of several short, curved segments.

Take care of yourself

- Rest
- Sleep
- Diet
- Exercise
- Monitor use of alcohol
- Time for reflection
- Spirituality and religion



Boundaries

- Erect and sustain boundaries between your work and your personal life
- Don't let your kindness be exploited
- When you're not at work, remember that most email responses can wait
- But avoid absolute rigidity
- Expect that both your program director (and assistant/associate directors) will not call your cell outside of office hours unless it's time-sensitive



Take care of yourself

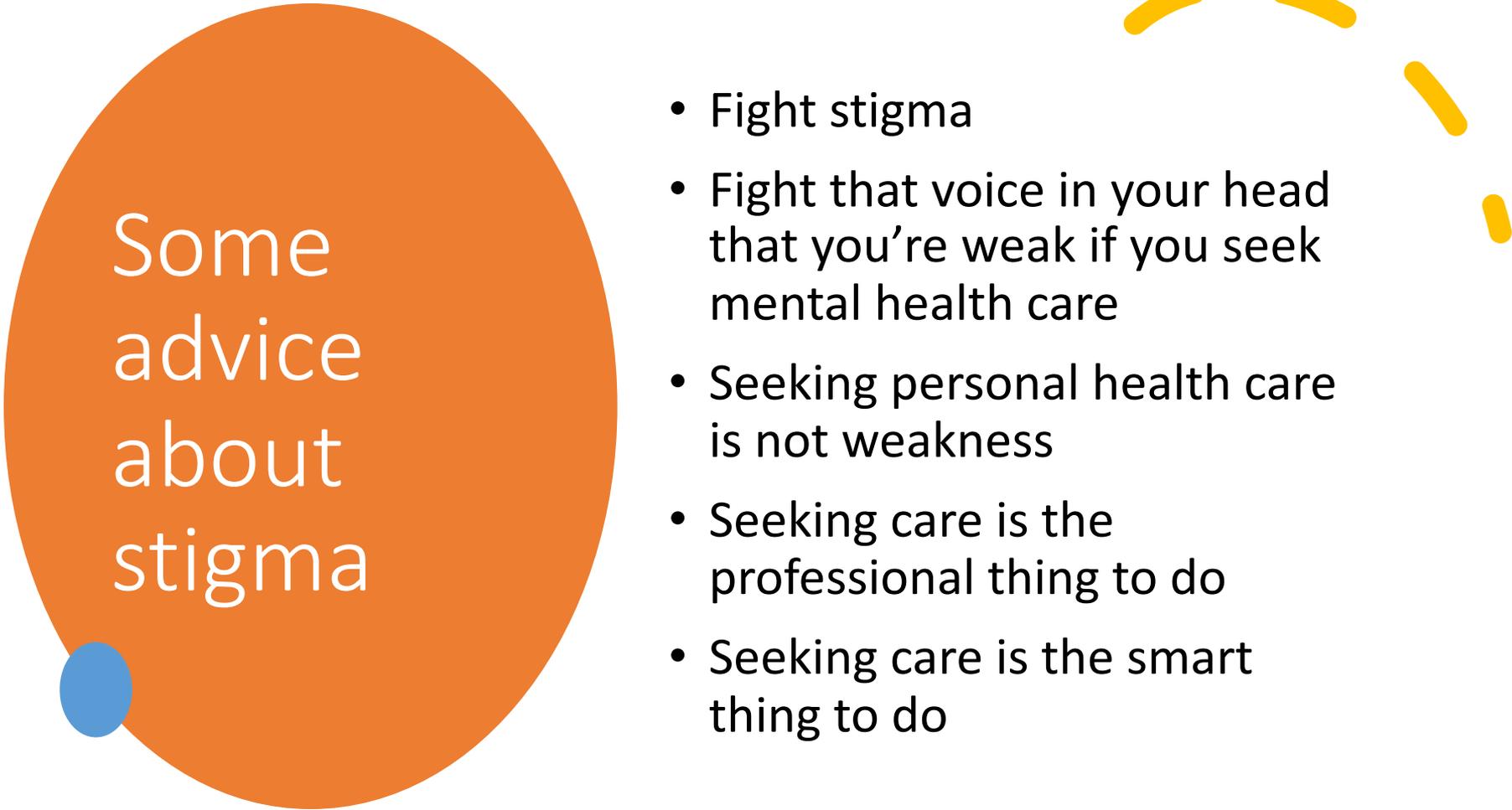
- Save time in your life for community involvement
- Build laughter into your life
- Take up a new hobby
- Music and art appreciation
- Reading? - poetry, mysteries, biographies, philosophy, plays, junk
- Netflix, etc
- Protect alone time





But if
things
don't
ease
up....

- 
- Deny, deny, deny leading to worsening Sx; unnecessary suffering; impairment at work and home; self-Rx with alcohol and/or other drugs; errors; suicide.
 - Go to your primary care health professional – thorough assessment and appropriate Rx
 - Call EAP – Dr Magda Alliancin (718) 270-1489
 - Call a mental health professional



Some advice about stigma

- Fight stigma
- Fight that voice in your head that you're weak if you seek mental health care
- Seeking personal health care is not weakness
- Seeking care is the professional thing to do
- Seeking care is the smart thing to do

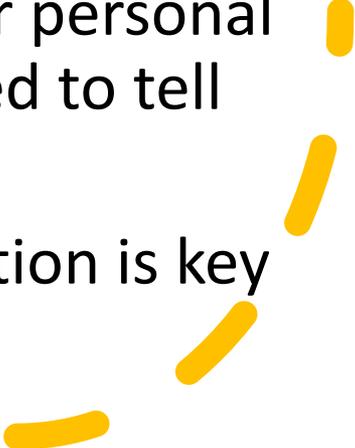
Stigma

- Any attribute, trait, or disorder that marks an individual as being unacceptably different from the 'normal' people with whom he/she routinely interacts
- A mark of disgrace or infamy; a stain or reproach, as on someone's reputation; a characteristic mark or sign of defect, degeneration, or disease
- A 6 letter word for frustration, anguish, or loss of prestige

Stigma

- Stigma reinforces denial
- Stigma reinforces delay in getting help, compounds Sx, increases refractoriness, and contributes to relationship strain and demise
- Stigma affects Rx adherence
- Stigma in family members enhances marital Sx and isolation

What about culture?

- We are proud of our diversity at Downstate
 - But remember that for some of you or your colleagues seeking mental health care is foreign or seen as a blemish on you (and your family) so you feel “less than”, a failure or embarrassed
 - Remember that seeing a mental health professional is your personal business – you do not need to tell anyone
 - Culturally sensitive education is key
- 
- A decorative graphic consisting of several thick, yellow, curved lines arranged in a partial arc on the right side of the slide.



"I think we're about to fill an embarrassing-ailment prescription."

Taking care
of your
immediate
family



Extended family





GAY COUPLES



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Take care of
your
spouse/partner

- Like gardens, all relationships require care, patience and nurturing to flourish
 - ‘Marriage 101’ is not taught in school
 - And unfortunately, not all of us come from backgrounds where our parent or parents had the skill set or good health to model loving behaviors and actions
 - Myers MF. *“How’s Your Marriage?: A Book for Men and Women”*. American Psychiatric Publishing Inc. Washington, DC
- 

Relationship strategies

- Don't bury your head in the sand!
- Take risks when you talk - isn't this one of the basic responsibilities of a committed relationship?
- Be honest and direct – you can still be kind
- Apologize when you're wrong, at fault, or have hit below the belt and said nasty, nasty things

Relationship strategies

- Read articles and books on basic communication skills
- Go to the library together or to a bookstore and browse
- Go on-line, lots of programs/options are available
- Role play each other to gain a sense of what your spouse's frustration feels like

Relationship strategies

- Talk about the basic issues that are affecting your trust, interest, respect, and sense of safety with each other
- Work on restoring romance – what were some of the things that made your courtship or early years together so interesting?
- Simple thoughtful gestures speak volumes

Relationship strategies



Get in motion with each other
– walking, running, biking,
dancing



Watch some funny
films/videos or go to a
comedy club



Don't use the demands of
work as an excuse for
problems – sometimes we use
work as an escape from home



Protect time together – dates?

Benefits of Therapy

You may need some individual therapy to begin to look at what you bring or aren't bringing to the relationship

These insights, and the wisdom and support of a good therapist, can help you to know yourself better

A menu of options may become clear to you through this process

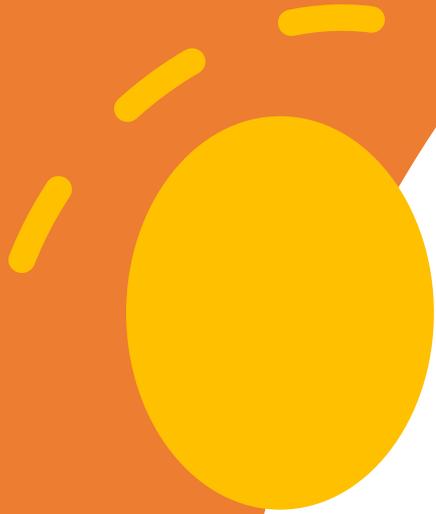
Benefits of Therapy

Couples' therapy can be very helpful in identifying the key areas of discord and unhappiness of your relationship

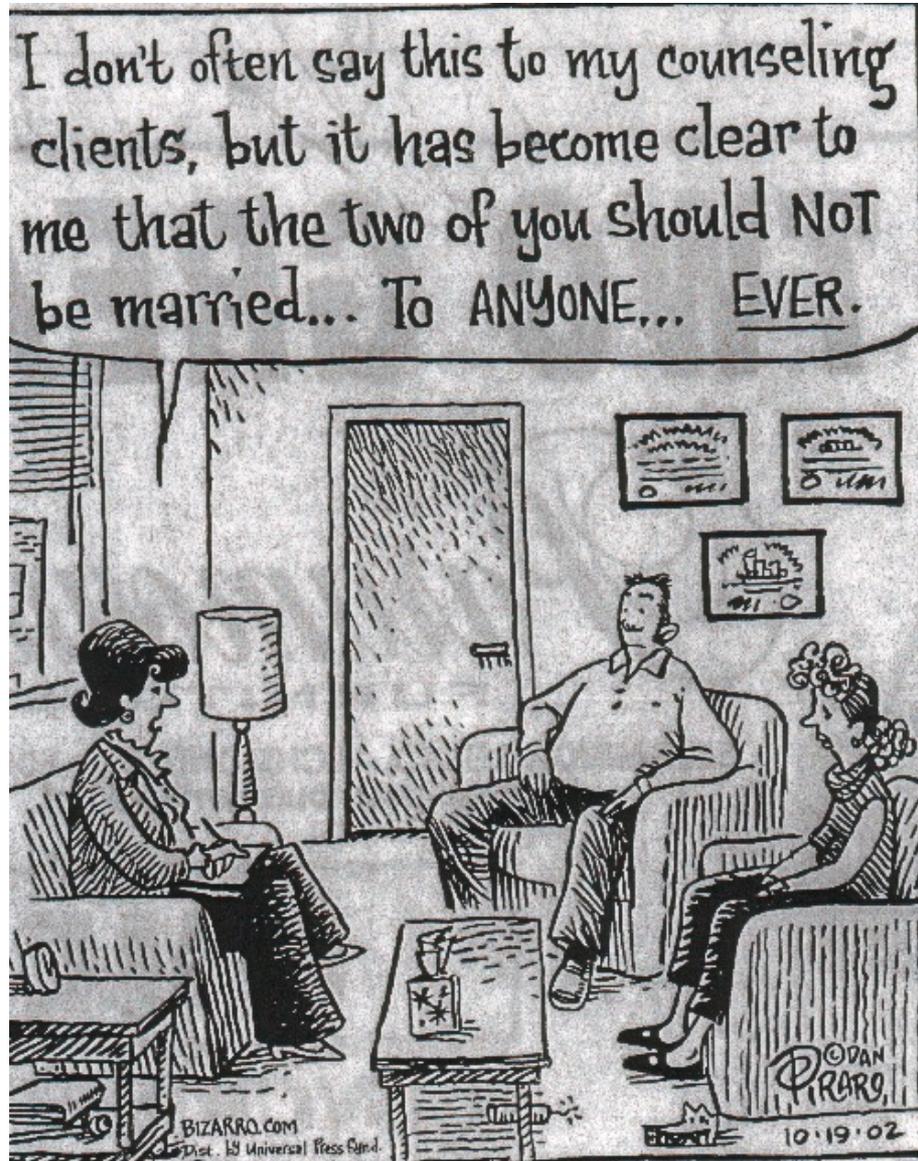
Couples' therapy gives a wholesome message: "I care enough about you (and the children) to go to see someone with you – and reveal my insecurities and things I'm not very proud of to a complete stranger"

Benefits of Therapy

- Each of you should feel heard and respected by the therapist who will help clarify the issues and challenges, facilitate talking about tough subjects between the two of you, invite and modulate feelings, and generally create a safe place to be together
- You should expect suggestions, tips, recommendations, and a sense of hope



How do you know
if you're with the
wrong therapist?



Take care of your children

Protect time for them as a group and as individuals (if you have more than one child)

What you don't have time for during the week, try to make up for on the weekend

It's not how hard you work that is the culprit, it's what you do with family time that's wholesome and healthy for children

Take care of your children

If you have children from a previous relationship or marriage, make sure that they don't feel displaced by their half-sibs

If you are divorced, aim for the most progressive settlement that you can re time with your children, including cutting back on work if necessary

This enables you to be a more complete parent

Take care of your children

Keep

As with your spouse, keep good boundaries with your children – don't let work intrude on their time with you

Remember

Always remember that you are their mom or dad, not their friend – make sure that they have a pediatrician or PCP for their health care needs

Keep

Keep good lines of communication open

Sandwich generation?

- Pay attention to yourself and what you can humanly cope with
- Again, protect your boundaries
- Say 'no' when you have to, don't be a martyr
- Ask for help
- Ask siblings and your kids to share responsibility
- If you have any extra funds, pay for some assistance or research what's available through the state

Watching out for each other

Working with or know someone who seems out of sorts?

Don't hesitate to reach out in a private, confidential and engaging way

Don't leave it to someone else if there does not seem to be anyone else

Most individuals welcome a caring and kind overture like this

You will not only ease someone's burden and aloneness but you may actually save a life

What do I say?

- “I’ve noticed that you don’t seem your usual self the last few weeks. Do you feel like talking about it at all? Can I help in any way?”
- If the person opens up a bit, listen carefully and with attention
- Most important, listen more than you talk
- Ask if they’re getting some professional help
- If you yourself are seeing a therapist, or did in the past and found it helpful, share this with them
- This is an intimate self-disclosure and reduces stigma

A night view of a dense city skyline, likely a modern metropolis, with numerous high-rise buildings illuminated by lights. The lights are primarily blue and white, creating a vibrant, glowing effect against the dark night sky. The buildings are packed closely together, and the overall scene conveys a sense of urban activity and modern architecture.

Time for reflection and more..

Chloë Bass's
Outdoor Art
Show 2020
"Wayfinding" St
Nicholas Park
in Harlem



Chloë Bass's
Outdoor Art
Show
"Wayfinding"
St Nicholas
Park in
Harlem



Chloë Bass's
Outdoor Art
Show
"Wayfinding"
St Nicholas
Park Harlem



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Chloë Bass's
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Vaccine
happiness.....



Thank you!!

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