SELF-CARE AS YOU CARE FOR OTHERS

Hans Selye is rightly given accolades for his work in identifying what we now know as “stress.” Born in Vienna, Selye later became a physician and researcher who recognized the negative influences on lives which accumulated and did not manage stressors. As a physician, he saw the outcome of distress on the human system and its functions. The importance of identifying and managing stress, especially for those who support others, is obvious. Taking responsibility for our own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health are self-gifts we can aim for as we continue to support others.

- Be realistic about your limitations. Identify those things that feel overwhelming to you. Learn to say “no” as needed. Be willing to listen to suggestions of others while retaining the right to make your own decisions.
- Acknowledge when you are attempting to play the part of “superman/superwoman.” Don’t be afraid to ask for help; there is no shame in being human.
- Follow the same advice we give to children: eat and sleep well, take time out for quiet, exercise and play in a balanced manner.
- Monitor your eating and drinking habits. Too much caffeine may increase anxiety symptoms, i.e. physical symptoms and over-worked thought processes (worrying, racing thoughts, persistent thoughts). Use moderation with alcohol, salt, and food additives. Talk with your doctor about special diets, medication interactions and any individual needs.
- Avoid worrying about what is beyond your control. Take charge of what is in your control.
- Take one day/one hour/one minute at a time.
- Breathe deeply. Inhale and exhale fully and practice doing so on a daily basis.
- Increase your self-awareness of things that bring you joy and relaxation and spend time, even if briefly, on a daily basis in these activities. Examples: walking, listening to or making music, jotting a journal note including what you are thankful for this day, gardening (or enjoying the gardens of others), praying, talking with someone you trust, trying a new activity, reading, enjoying time with friends and family members.
- Learn to visualize. Children know how to use their imaginations and can teach us. Close your eyes and imagine using all of your senses to visualize the sight, sound, smell, feel, and taste of this imagined place. This place may be from your childhood-your grandparents’ back yard with green grass, and shady trees and lilies. It may be a place you have seen or hope to see in your adulthood-a beach or a porch swing, an art gallery or a winding country road with the colors of Autumn around you. Visualize a place that holds inspiration or consolation for you.
- Share your feelings. Be courageous enough to accept the help and support of others. Avoid isolating.
- Draw on spiritual support from others and from your beliefs about a higher power.

St. Mary’s Grief Support Services 407 East Third Street, Duluth, MN 55805
(218) 786-4402, GriefCenter@essentialhealth.org