

Self-care for Advocates for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

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By Amber Johnson, See the Triumph Guest Blogger

Being an IPV survivor advocate can be a rewarding experience, as advocates give selflessly and provide encouragement for those who may not have any form of support. However, survivor advocacy can be quite stressful.

Many times, advocates can become overwhelmed when there are so many things to do with so little time in the day. Particularly during the holiday season, advocates may feel more moved to ensure the needs of survivors are met. Consequently, this may place an emotional toll on advocates who feel they are unable to meet those needs.

During the holidays, it is important for advocates to take a step back and take time for themselves, physically and mentally. This may be hard for advocates initially because advocates may believe that any time for themselves is taking time away from their responsibility as an advocate. However, an advocate who practices self-care and relaxation is in a much better place to advocate for survivors effectively.

One way to identify when an advocate is in immediate need of self-care is when symptoms of burnout begin to occur. Though burnout can present with a wide array of symptoms, there are several main symptoms that advocates can experience:

Emotional Exhaustion: Advocates can feel tired, drained and exhausted. They may feel lethargic and have a lack of motivation due to decreased energy. Advocates can also experience digestive pain and problems due to emotional stress.

Alienation: Advocates may become increasingly frustrated and cynical when encountering numerous obstacles while supporting survivors. This may lead to feelings of disengagement, emotional distancing, and increased effort to reach advocacy goals.

Performance Reduction: When advocates experience burnout, symptoms may affect every aspect of their lives. Advocates can view tasks in the home and on their job negatively, leading to increased procrastination. Further, burnout can make it harder for advocates to concentrate, leading to decreased ambition and creativity.

If you observe these signs of burnout, there are several things you can do help cope:

1. Set boundaries: As an advocate you can say “no”. As advocates give so selflessly, this may be difficult to say. You should always remember that you have permission to say no simply because overextending yourself does not allow you to give quality effort to the survivors you

serve.

2. Find a relaxing hobby: Advocates can take on a hobby to slow down and release some of the daily stress that they may experience. Some good hobbies that advocates include meditation, journaling, yoga, or blogging. It is important that you take time away from advocacy just to focus on yourself.

3. Adopt healthier lifestyle habits: Whether you're experiencing symptoms of burnout or not, it is always good for advocates to adopt healthy eating, exercising, and sleeping habits. This will help increase your energy levels and resiliency when facing the obstacles experienced as an advocate for IPV survivors.

4. Find support: Advocates can reach out to other advocates for support and encouragement. Sharing feelings to someone who can relate can be beneficial to reducing stress. You can also find support in friends who you can confide in and tend to be good listeners. It is important that advocates be able to vocalize their challenges to others for support.

5. Reassess your goals and priorities: Advocates should take the time to reevaluate their goals and priorities. Determine what goals you want to reach as an advocate and how they should be prioritized. Try to discover which goals are ideal for you to obtain and how much time you believe it will take to reach them. Try to put them in context with your personal goals so that you can find a balance between advocacy and your own personal goals.

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