

The conversation:

Practitioner wellbeing

The red light flashes on my phone – more voicemails. Text messages pile up in my mobile. Urgent emails build up. I have multiple clients in crisis. My ‘to do’ list is impossible to complete before five o’clock and I still have one last outreach appointment. It’s not possible to get everything done, I’ll have to stay late again. I turn to my colleague to debrief, but remember she recently changed teams. My fingers unconsciously reach for my temples. I don’t know where to start.

Sound familiar? You’re not alone.

Whether you’re a seasoned worker or new to the work, being a specialist family violence practitioner is tough; dealing day in and day out with risk assessments, traumatic cases, advocacy, providing emotional support, safety planning and keeping up to date with all of your specialist knowledge in a constantly changing sector. You wear multiple hats in your work – housing, financial, mental health, alcohol and other drugs; while assessing the risk of clients in life and death situations. We’re all here for different reasons, but we share the drive to help keep our clients safe.

Our wellbeing needs to be prioritised because of the ongoing exposure to distressing stories and the high responsibility we hold. This is the key to being the best practitioner possible and to keeping our personal lives happy and safe.

How do we do this? We’re so busy!

Vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burn-out are real possibilities in this sector. On top of that, we are experiencing unprecedented and rapid change, which is creating pressure and uncertainty.

A wellbeing plan is key for our ongoing self-care as well as when we’re in crisis mode or we’ve had a bad day. A personal wellbeing plan can help keep you emotionally and physically safe and is based on your individual needs. It should be a work in progress so review and change it whenever you need to.

To get started on designing your wellbeing plan, think about these questions:

- What brings me joy?
- What energises me?
- What activities will be helpful and sustainable for my wellbeing?
- Who can I involve in my wellbeing plan? Who can I talk to?
- What changes do I need to make when I’m experiencing crisis?



Exercise? Meditation? Nutrition? Socialising? Pets? Reading? Alone time? It’s all about you, and what you need.

It’s important to be as detailed as you can and ensure that the strategies are realistic and accessible. You might already be using some strategies that work for you – how you can build on these? What else might be helpful to include? Which activities can you do every day, compared to a few times a week? Try a few different options to see what works for you.

After my wellbeing plan is done, what else can I do?

If you feel comfortable, involve your workplace. Organisations should help their employees to achieve sustainable work practices and your wellbeing plays a huge part in this. Don’t forget the powerful impact of informal debriefing with your colleagues. Is there an activity that you and your team can do together at work to maintain wellbeing? It’s important to remember that your wellbeing doesn’t just sit with you – individuals, teams and organisations can assist with collective sustainability.

You also have alternative options such as contacting your Employee Assistance Program or 1800 RESPECT who offer debriefing for practitioners twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

With the incredible change in the sector at the moment, it’s understandable that we’re all feeling the impact. We need to focus on how to look after ourselves and each other to help achieve this once-in-a-generation reform. ■

If you need further support, please contact **1800RESPECT (24/7)** or your Employee Assistance Program. DVRCV also offer a one-day **Worker Wellbeing, Self-care and Sustainability training** designed for specialist family violence workers – check the DVRCV website for more information and training dates.