

Practical Strategies for Collective Care Full Explainer Guide



Trauma Informed
Stoke-on-Trent
and Staffordshire

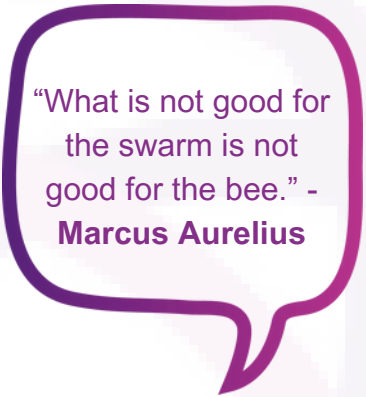
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Introduction

In recent years, the phrase ‘mental health is everyone’s responsibility’ and ‘mental health is everyone’s business’ have been ringing through policy documents, mass media and more. But what do these phrases really mean? How can we embody these messages in our organisations when we are working with those who have been affected by trauma.

So, what does this have to do with the title of this guide?

Collective Care means that we all must share the responsibility for the wellbeing of those in our communities. This spans across both our personal and professional lives. This concept recognises that for us all to thrive, we need to think about every individual. Irrespective of role, whether we have qualifications in mental health or not, each and every one of us is capable of contributing towards Collective Care.



“What is not good for the swarm is not good for the bee.” -
Marcus Aurelius

What does Collective Care look like?

As for many other elements of Trauma Informed Practice, Collective Care is multi-layered.

On a larger scale, this might include things like speaking up about injustices or advocating for organisational change when we know perhaps we aren't hearing all the voices in our organisation.

On a smaller yet equally important scale, Collective Care could be illustrated by stopping by a colleague's office to check on them or personally, doing something thoughtful to help a loved one.

The link between Self and Collective Care

Collective care and self-care are concepts which are dependent on one another. We need to ensure that we are looking after our own self-care, putting our boundaries in place and staying aware of our own needs. In turn, this means that we can then have the energy and empathy required to support others. You may find it useful to consider the self-care strategies in the **Vicarious Trauma guide** which discusses how we can look after ourselves in more depth. This is especially important when we are supporting people in our work who might be experiencing difficult, distressing situations.

Understanding the connection between collective and self-care will enable of culture where wellbeing is prioritised to occur in time, supporting ourselves to prioritise our own wellbeing so we can role model this to others. Self-care is far from selfish. Self-care actually means that we are boosting the health of the whole.

Collective Care can positively impact on self-care

It may seem like common-sense to say that self-care is important. However, what we hear time and time again is that many of us feel that there is not enough time, that our jobs are lives are too full to plan a daily reset or something for ourselves. This is where Collective Care comes in...

Creating an organisational culture which champions Collective Care contributes to minimising the barriers that individuals may face in making time to practice self-care by:

- Integrating wellbeing into the daily functioning
- Resources and support are shared
- Prioritising wellbeing becomes a norm rather than a luxury

Ultimately, the interlinking of collective and self-care creates a harmonious relationship which equates to each of us being more well and in turn, giving rise to more resilient communities. This demonstrates that we need both self and collective care.

Reflection: As you begin to explore the concept of collective care, think about a community or group you are part of. What are some ways you might contribute to a culture of collective care within this group? Reflect on the challenges and opportunities you foresee in integrating collective care practices, especially considering your own experiences with self-care.

Principles of Collective Care

Collective care is based upon some principles to help to guide how we might work towards environments which are inherently supportive and respectful. The result? The 4 principles listed below work towards every member of the organisation feeling a sense of belonging, security and that they are valued.

1. Empathetic understanding

- Everyone can listen to the feelings and needs of another person and receives the same in return.
- The values possessed by each individual are open-mindedness and an ability Empathy involves active listening, open-mindedness, and the willingness to see things from another person's perspective.
- Each individual's experiences and emotions are valued contributions.

2. Respect

- A positive culture is driven by mutual respect irrespective of each individual's background
- Respect supports thoughtful communication which reduces the likelihood of conflicts.

3. Inclusion

- Diversity is celebrated on all levels e.g. all genders and sexual orientations, races and ethnicities, age groups, abilities.
- Organisational policies and processes also promote diversity in every strand, providing equality of access to all.

4. Sharing responsibility

- This principle highlights again that care and wellbeing for each other and ourselves is a mutual responsibility.
- It is not only the responsibility of leadership and management, but all individuals.

- This can be demonstrated through the fair sharing of work tasks or considering how our conduct impacts on others for example.
- If behaviour which goes against the caring ethos or collaborative responsibility for wellbeing, there are appropriate channels to safely report this without the reporter feeling a sense of reprisal.



Strategies

Within this section, we have detailed some of the strategies which contribute towards collective care. These sit alongside the self-care strategies in the Vicarious Trauma guide and help us to meet the principles above. These are just a sample of the many ways that we can work towards organisational that foster collective care.

Feedback mechanisms:

- Anonymous feedback will support in transparent, honest feedback which will support those who may otherwise be reluctant to express their views.
- Feedback will be reviewed regularly and acted upon.
- Work towards open feedback forums which are respectful once anonymous feedback is working well and the trust has been built between members of the team.
- Community meetings could support children and young people to provide their feedback which can close the loop, reinforcing the fact that they will be part of the decision-making process and in turn, providing them with a sense of agency.

Regular Check-ins:

- Individual (if this is not practical then revert to groups) check-ins will support all organisation members to discuss their wellbeing and to review any adaptations/adjustments required. This ensures that they feel supported as well as valued.

Set up support systems/buddy groups:

- Support networks or buddy groups are another way of promoting collective wellbeing as peer support has been found consistently to be a protective factor.
- Individuals should be encouraged to discuss what they are comfortable with and line managers will recognise that our personal life can impact on our professional life and vice versa. Therefore, discussing personal challenges should be permitted.
- Social events can also support in fostering connections and promoting belonging but these should not be compulsory.

Accessing to mental and physical wellbeing resources:

- As far as budgets will allow, there should be access to resources such as counselling, supervision, health education, lunchtime walking groups... there are plenty of other free but highly beneficial resources that could be provided.
- Regular training on how to practice self and collective care e.g. workshops, promotion of self-help apps etc.

Flexible scheduling:

- This isn't possible in every role, and in some roles this may require some abstract as to how it could work, but flexible scheduling could allow members of the organisation to seek a better work-life balance.
- This could be planning in advance to attend a family event, being able to adjust working times one day a week to attend an activity they enjoy... this can decrease the chance of fatigue and burnout.

The strategies and any others you find that you might like to try will only work if everyone is on board. This can take time and that's ok but encouraging a supportive, inclusive environment where people feel they belong is a great starting point.

Conclusion

Collective and self-care are fundamentals in everything organisational but especially those who support those who are experiencing the effects of trauma. For us to continue to do excellent work with children and young people, we must start to plan how we can look after ourselves and others.

Wider reading

Mitchell, P., and Burns, A. (2020). *Leading with Heart: Enacting Self-Care, Collective Care, and Justice*. Word and Deed Publishing Incorporated.

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<https://www.sddirect.org.uk/resource/tip-sheet-collective-care> [Accessed: 4.04.2024].

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