

**REPLENISH THE WELL:
AN EXPERIENCE IN SELF-CARE**

SOCIAL SUPPORT WORKSHEET

Introduction: People working in the helping field are subject to conditions that can lead to depletion or even impairment, such as the emotionally intense nature of the helping relationship and increasingly heavy case loads. Receiving support from others can replenish us and reduce our vulnerability to professional stress (White, 1986). In addition, social support has been positively correlated with improved health and mental health outcomes (Cobb, 1976), and shown to be a positive factor in making healthy lifestyle changes (Hanna, 2002; Prochaska et al, 1994).

Four types of social support have been identified (Salzer, 2003; Cobb, 1976):

Emotional support - refers to demonstrations of empathy, love, caring, concern. Emotional support bolsters one's self-esteem and confidence. An emotional supporter serves as a confidante, offering acceptance, care, and understanding.

Informational support - refers to assistance with knowledge, information, and skills. Can include providing information on where to go for resources or teaching a skill.

Instrumental support - refers to concrete assistance in helping others to do things or get things done, especially stressful or unpleasant tasks.

Companion support - refers to companionship, feeling connected, people in whose company you enjoy being, especially for recreational activities.

The exercise on the following page will help you assess your current level of social support and think about areas in which you may need to extend your network. As you consider those who offer social support to you, it is also useful to think about the people for whom you play support roles, and to assess your level of comfort in those roles.

References:

Cobb, S. (1976). Social support as a moderator of life stress. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 38(5), 300-314.

Hanna, F. (2001). *Therapy with difficult clients: Using the precursors model to awaken change*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Prochaska, J., Norcross, J., DiClemente, C., and Crawley, B. (1995). *Changing for good: A revolutionary, six-stage program for overcoming bad habits and moving your life positively forward*. New York: William Morrow.

Salzer, M. (2002). Consumer-delivered services as a best practice in mental health care delivery and the development of practice guidelines. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills* 6(3), 355-382.

White, W. (1986). *Incest in the organizational family: The ecology of burnout in closed systems*. Bloomington, IL: Lighthouse Training Institute Publications.

ASSESSING YOUR CURRENT SOCIAL SUPPORT

List at least three people who provide each of the types of social support described on the previous page. (It is OK to put the same person in more than one area.)

Emotional	Informational	Instrumental	Companion

Now reflect on the following questions. (You could write out your answers and/or share your responses with a friend or colleague. If you discuss your answers with a friend, you will be putting social support into action.)

- In general, how do you feel about your social support network?
- Does your current support network meet your needs for social support?
 Are all of different types of social support (emotional, informational, instrumental, companion) covered adequately?
 Do you have enough people in your social support network? Do you think anyone in your support network might be feeling overextended?
 Do the people in your network provide the quality of support you would like? If not, what could you do to make the situation better?
 Have there been any recent changes in your support network? If yes, what has been the impact? In what area(s) are you most feeling the change?
- Do you have “job openings” in your support network? If yes, how will you go about filling these? Try to come up with at least three ideas for ways to expand your social support network in the areas where you perceive a lack.

Exercise developed by Catherine D. Nugent, for *Replenish the Well: An Experience in Self-Care*, workshop presented at *Peer Services: A Life in the Community for Everyone*, Fifth Annual Conference of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment’s Recovery Community Services Program, Washington, DC, July 13, 2004.