

The Weight We Carry: Protecting Mental Health in Affordable Housing

Presented by: Sloane Cerbana | Washinton Multi Family Housing Association

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Sloane Cerbana

Vice President of Operations, WMFHA

Wife

Mom

Daughter

Sister

Aunty

Friend

Neighbor

Citizen

Mental Health Advocate

HUMAN



Raise a Hand If....

- I had at least one difficult conversation this week
- I am currently experiencing some personal challenges that make me feel stretched
- I have felt threatened (verbally or physically) at work in the last year
- I feel deeply for the challenges my residents face



Let's Talk About It!

Why This Work
Feels Different

The Hidden
Stressors of
Affordable Housing

Burnout Isn't Just
Being Tired

Boundaries That
Protect You and
Residents

Building Everyday
Resilience

Fostering a Healthy
Team Culture

Toolkit

WHY THIS WORK FEELS DIFFERENT

2021 – Seattle, Washington



2024 – Anchorage, Alaska



2026 – St. Paul, Minnesota





*The work is
meaningful.
It's also
emotionally
expensive.*





The Hidden Stressors

- Compassion fatigue
- Secondary trauma
- Moral distress
- Constant crisis mode
- Resident aggression
- Limited resources
- Staffing shortages
- Being expected to solve problems beyond your control

Burnout Isn't
Just Being
Stressed

Stress

Chronic Stress

Burnout

Compassion Fatigue

Signs Include



Physical

Fatigue
Headaches
Poor Sleep



Emotional

Irritability
Cynicism
Feeling Numb



Behavioral

Avoiding residents or staff
Losing patience
Checking Out
Taking work home Mentally



Boundaries to Protect You and Your Residents

Boundaries are not about saying "no" to people.
They're about saying "yes" to sustainable service.

**RECOVERY IS A
LEADERSHIP SKILL,
NOT A LUXURY!**



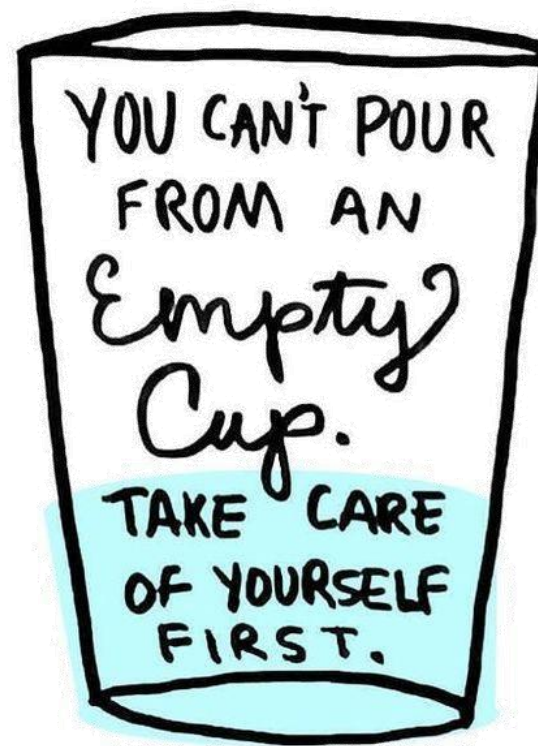
Building Everyday Resilience: Self Care Through Micro-Recovery

BEFORE WORK

- Proper rest and nutrition
- Setting intention and tone

AFTER DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- Debrief with co-worker or supervisor
- Write down what you can control



BETWEEN RESIDENTS

- One-minute reset
- Box breathing
- Short walk (inside or out)

END OF DAY

- Shut down ritual
- Gratitude practice
- Transition before going home

Creating a Healthy Team Culture

- Normalize asking for help
- Check in beyond productivity
- Celebrate wins
- Share difficult cases *appropriately*
- Reduce isolation



How Do We Show Support?

Emily was recently diagnosed with a physical health condition and was in the hospital for a short period of time.

- What might *individuals* do and say to show support to Emily?
- What might people in Emily's *workplace* do and say to show support?

Carlos was recently diagnosed with a mental health disorder and was in the hospital for a short period of time.

- What might *individuals* do and say to show support to Carlos?
- What might people in Carlos' *workplace* do and say to show support?



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

for Affordable Housing Professionals



Protecting Your Well-Being While Serving Others

“ You can’t control every situation,
but you can control how you care for
yourself while navigating it. ”



ARE YOU APPROACHING BURNOUT?

Burnout rarely happens overnight.
It develops gradually.
If you recognize several of these
signs, it’s time to pause and
evaluate your workload and
recovery habits.



**1 You feel emotionally
exhausted before the
day even begins.**
You wake up already feeling
depleted or dread checking
your email and voicemail.



**2 Your patience has
become shorter.**
Residents, coworkers, or even
family members seem to irritate
you more than they used to.



**3 You can’t “leave work
at work.”**
You’re replaying difficult
conversations while driving
home, lying awake thinking
about resident situations, or
checking emails after hours.



**4 You’ve become numb
or cynical.**
You find yourself thinking:
• “Nothing I do matters.”
• “Why bother?”
• “People are impossible.”
Compassion fatigue often shows
up as emotional detachment.



**5 You’re neglecting your
own needs.**



Skipping
lunch



Working
through
breaks



Ignoring
exercise



Poor
sleep



Feeling guilty
when taking
PTO

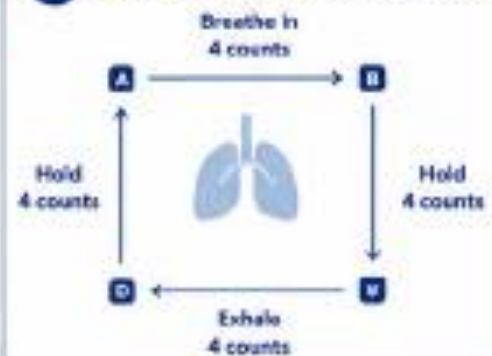


Reflection: Which of these feels
most familiar today? _____

THREE GROUNDING TECHNIQUES FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS

Use these after a tense resident interaction, difficult phone call,
or emotionally charged meeting.

1 BOX BREATHING (60 SECONDS)



Why it works:

It activates your
parasympathetic
nervous system and
signals to your brain
that you are safe.

Repeat four times.

2 THE “NAME FIVE” RESET



This interrupts the stress response and brings
your attention back to the present.

3 CIRCLE OF CONTROL

WHAT CAN I CONTROL?

- ✓ My response
- ✓ My professionalism
- ✓ My communication
- ✓ Following policy



WHAT CAN'T I CONTROL?

- ✗ Someone else's choices
- ✗ Their emotions
- ✗ Their financial situation
- ✗ Every outcome

Focus your energy where you have influence.

Build Your Mental Health Toolbox!

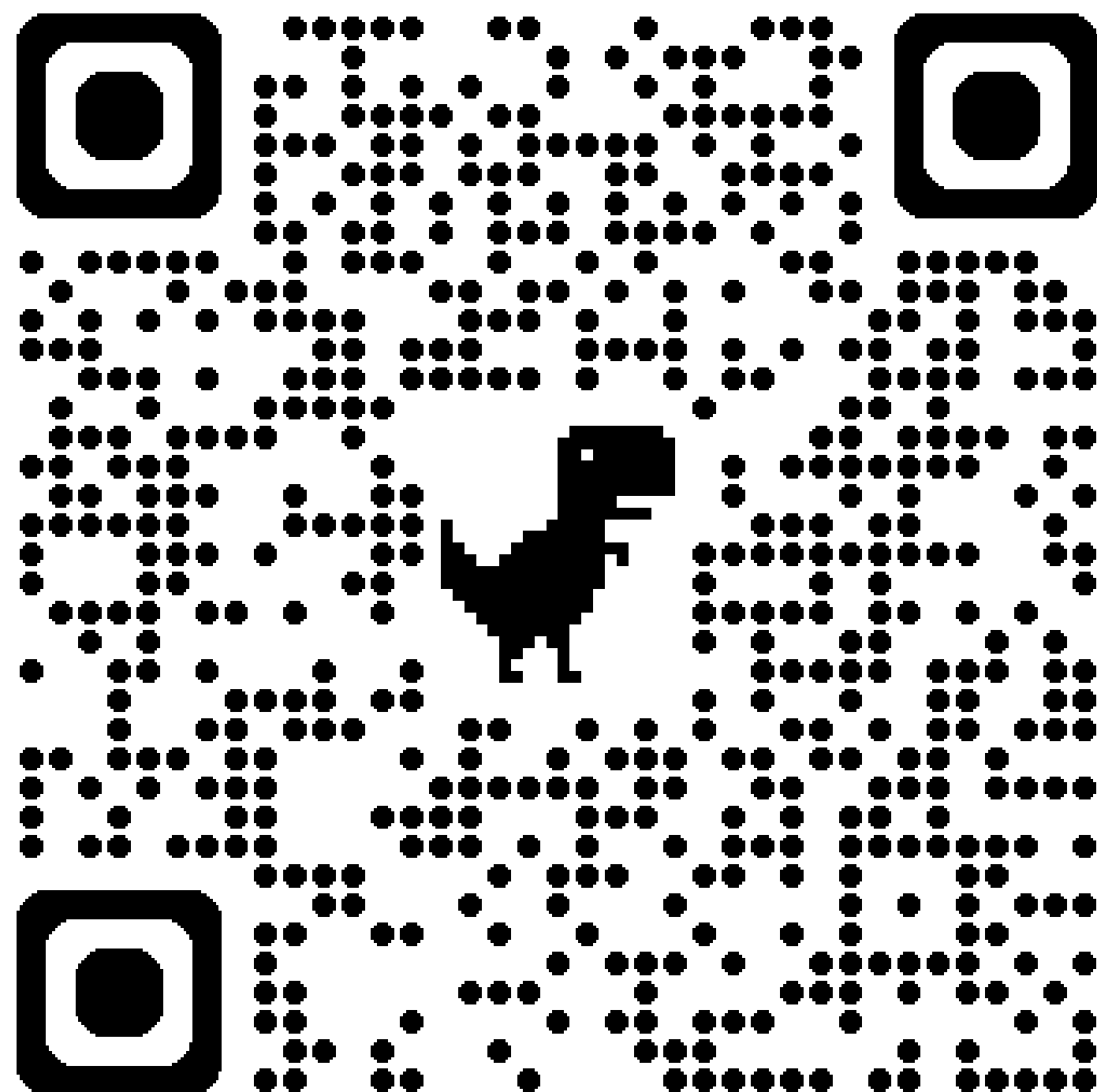


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