The Sustainable Clinician

A ten-day self-care journey for SUD clinicians — from depletion to a practice that lasts a career

10-Day Challenges

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Part 1 · About this challenge

A ten-day guided journey for SUD clinicians and supervisors to take their own wellbeing as seriously as everyone else's — moving from depletion to a self-care practice that lasts a career. One day at a time.

Helpers Helping Helpers · Recovery Made Simple

Your Journey

Baseline Strain

Before You Begin

Self-care for clinicians is not a retreat from the work — it is what makes the work possible for a lifetime. This is a private space. Move through one day at a time. You are not just completing exercises — you are restoring the person who does the work.

Clinician Wellness Self-Assessment

Take it on Day 1 · Return to it on Day 10

The 10-Day Pathway

DAY 1 · HONEST INVENTORY

Running on Empty

Telling the truth about where you actually are

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DAY 7 · SUPPORT

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You Cannot Do This Alone

Mapping the support a sustainable career requires

DAY 8 · RECEIVING

Letting Yourself Be Helped

Building the capacity to receive support

DAY 9 · MEANING & JOY

Why You Chose This

Reconnecting with purpose, joy, and what sustains you

DAY 10 · SUSTAINABLE RENEWAL

Building a Life That Lasts

Integrating everything into a renewal you can sustain

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Part 2 · Clinician Wellness Self-Assessment

Clinician Wellness Self-Assessment

Rate each statement: 1 (Not at all like me) to 5 (Very much like me). Higher scores = more depletion. Take it on Day 1 as your baseline, and again on Day 10.

Burnout & Depletion

I feel emotionally drained by my work more days than not

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I struggle to recover my energy even on days off or weekends

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I notice a shorter fuse, more irritability, or less patience than I used to have

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I dread going to work, or feel a heavy sense of Sunday-night anticipation

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I push through exhaustion rather than rest, telling myself I have no choice

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have stopped noticing my own warning signs until they become a crisis

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel like I am running on empty in the very part of me that cares about this work

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I cannot remember the last time I felt genuinely replenished

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Compassion Fatigue & Secondary Trauma

I carry specific clients or cases home with me and cannot set them down

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have noticed more emotional distance or numbness toward client pain than before

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

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I feel more cynical or detached about the work than I did a year or two ago

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I find myself going through the motions with people I used to feel deeply for

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I am affected by the trauma and crisis I witness in ways I do not fully process

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I lose sleep, ruminate, or feel intrusive thoughts about cases

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel guilty when I am not thinking about or available to my clients

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I sense my capacity for empathy is wearing thin from overuse

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Boundaries & Work-Life Separation

My work consistently bleeds into my personal time and space

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have no clear ritual or firm end that marks the close of my workday

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I answer after-hours contact even when it is not truly necessary

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I say yes to work demands when my honest answer is no

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel guilty or anxious when I am unavailable to work

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

When I am physically home, my mind is still at work

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have let go of activities and relationships that used to matter to me

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○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

My closest people get the leftovers of my energy rather than the best of it

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Support, Connection & Receiving

Few people in my life actually know how I am really doing

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I do not have a colleague who understands what this job truly costs me

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I am not in any honest peer consultation relationship right now

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I am not engaged in my own supervision, consultation, or personal therapy

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I deflect, minimize, or redirect when someone offers me care

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I find it far easier to give support than to receive it

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I rarely ask for help, even when I clearly need it

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I feel isolated in my work despite being surrounded by people

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Meaning, Purpose & Renewal

I have lost touch with why I chose this field in the first place

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

The work feels more like obligation than calling most days

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

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I struggle to recall recent moments that reminded me the work matters

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Joy and aliveness occupy very little of my actual week

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have normalized surviving rather than expecting to thrive

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I do not have a plan for what to do when my self-care collapses

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I treat rest and joy as rewards I have not yet earned

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

I have no clear personal commitment to protecting my own wellbeing

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Scoring guide

Each group gets its own score, as a percent.

Higher scores indicate greater depletion and strain in that area. This is a map, not a verdict — the highest-scoring domains are your priority focus areas.

Score: 0–25% — Sustainable: This area is in good shape. Keep protecting and reinforcing what is working here.

Score: 26–45% — Early Strain: Some strain is showing, but you have real strengths to build from. Stay attentive here.

Score: 46–65% — Active Risk: This area is depleting faster than it is replenishing. Make it a deliberate focus this pathway.

Score: 66–80% — High Depletion: This domain is significantly compromised. Prioritize concrete change and bring it to your support system.

Score: above 80% — Critical Focus Area: This area needs immediate, sustained attention. You are not alone — name this to someone you trust.

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Part 3 · Day 1 · Running on Empty

DAY 1 OF 10 · HONEST INVENTORY

Telling the truth about where you actually are

Today's Reading

The first and most essential step in any genuine self-care journey is radical honesty about where you actually are — not where you think you should be, not where you tell other people you are, but where you truly are right now. Clinical supervisors and counselors in substance use disorder settings are among the most at-risk professionals for invisible burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress. The very skills that make you effective — empathy, tolerance, absorbing other people's pain, pushing through — are the same ones that mask your own deterioration until it becomes a crisis.

This is not a character flaw. It is an occupational hazard, as real as any injury a first responder carries home. The trouble is that depletion in helpers is quiet. It does not announce itself. It shows up as a shorter fuse, a heavier drive home, a Sunday-night dread, a slow draining of the thing that first drew you to this work. Most people in the helping professions rate their depletion higher the moment they stop and actually ask the question — because the honest answer has been waiting underneath the busyness all along.

This day is your mirror. You are not solving anything yet. You are simply looking — honestly, without flinching and without minimizing — at the level you have been running at. You cannot find your way back to yourself if you have never admitted how far you have drifted. Over the next ten days you will not wait to feel better. You will do the active, deliberate work of restoring the person who does the work.

Reflect

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how depleted do you feel right now — not physically, but at the level where you care deeply about your work and your people? When did you last feel genuinely replenished?

2. What are your earliest personal warning signs that burnout is gaining ground — in your body, your thoughts, your patience, your relationships — before it becomes obvious to others?

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3. If one of your staff came to you in exactly the condition you are in right now, what would you say to them? Why are you not saying it to yourself?

Today's Work

If you had to describe how you are really doing right now — as a person, not a professional — what would you honestly say?

Not how the work is going. How you are...

My current depletion level (1 = fully replenished, 10 = completely empty) and what that number is based on:

The number, and the evidence behind it...

What is still keeping me going — the part of me that has not been extinguished?

Even one thing counts...

Set Your Baseline

Before going further, take the Clinician Wellness Self-Assessment. It maps where depletion is most acute across five domains. On Day 10 you will return to it and measure how far you have come.

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 4 · Day 2 · What You Carry Home

DAY 2 OF 10 · COMPASSION FATIGUE

Naming the weight of caring too much for too long

Today's Reading

Compassion fatigue is not caring too little. It is what happens when you care too much, without replenishment, for too long. It is the predictable cost of sitting day after day with other people's trauma, relapse, grief, and crisis — of being the steady one in rooms full of pain. The cases you carry home, the clients living rent-free in your mind, the ones you lose sleep over or think about in the shower — that weight is not a sign that something is wrong with you. It is a sign that you are doing the work with your whole self.

But weight that is never set down accumulates. Over months and years it begins to change you. You may notice more emotional distance, a creeping cynicism, a shortened patience, or a sense of going through the motions with people you used to feel deeply for. You might catch yourself becoming numb to stories that once moved you, or dreading the very clients you entered this field to serve. These shifts are not evidence of a hardened heart. They are symptoms of an occupational injury — secondary traumatic stress — and naming them is not weakness. It is clinical wisdom applied, finally, to yourself.

Today is about putting that weight on the table where you can see it. Not to wallow in it, and not to fix it yet, but to acknowledge honestly what this work has cost you and what you have been carrying alone. The helpers who last are not the ones who feel less. They are the ones who learn to recognize the weight, name it, and set it down — so they can pick it up again tomorrow without being crushed by it.

Reflect

1. Which clients or cases are living rent-free in your mind right now? What does that weight feel like, and how long have you been carrying it?

2. How has your relationship with clients and their pain changed over the past year or two — more distance, cynicism, shortened patience, going through the motions?

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3. Where do you currently set this weight down — and if the honest answer is "nowhere," what does that cost you?

Today's Work

Tap every compassion-fatigue sign you have noticed in yourself.

Emotional numbness

Cynicism

Shortened patience

Dread of certain clients

Intrusive thoughts

Sleep disruption

Going through the motions

Hypervigilance

Loss of empathy

Irritability at home

Difficulty disconnecting

Feeling nothing matters

The clients or cases living rent-free in my mind right now:

Name them, or describe them...

What that weight feels like, and how long I have been carrying it:

The physical and emotional sense of it...

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How my relationship to client pain has changed over the past year or two:

Distance, cynicism, numbness, going through the motions...

Where, if anywhere, I currently set this weight down:

And if the answer is nowhere — what that costs me...

Reframe:

"This weight is not a flaw in me. It is an occupational injury from caring fully. I can name it and set it down — and still return to the work tomorrow."

In my own words, what do I most need to acknowledge about what I carry?

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 5 · Day 3 · The Stories We Tell

DAY 3 OF 10 · SELF-CARE STORIES

Examining the narratives that block self-care

Today's Reading

When helpers do not take care of themselves, it is rarely because they lack the time. It is because of the story they tell about what self-care means. "I'll rest when things slow down." "Other people need me more." "Taking time off is selfish." "I can push through — I always have." "If I stop, everything falls apart." These stories feel like simple facts about reality. They are not. They are narratives — usually about shame, role identity, and worth — disguised as logistics.

For people in the helping professions, the deepest story is often this: that your value lives in your usefulness to others, and that turning that care inward is somehow a betrayal of the people who depend on you. So you work through lunch, skip the exercise, cancel the time off, and put everyone else first — and you call it dedication. But dedication that is destroying the person doing the work is not sustainable, and it is not actually serving anyone well. A depleted clinician cannot give what they no longer have.

Today you will examine the specific stories running underneath your own neglect of yourself. Not to judge them — they came from somewhere real, often from training, family, or culture that taught you to equate self-sacrifice with goodness. But stories can be examined, and once examined, they can be rewritten. The advice you would give a struggling staff member is almost always the exact advice you most need to hear yourself. This day is about finally turning that wisdom around to face you.

Reflect

1. What do you tell yourself — or others — when you do not take care of yourself? What is the internal narrative that justifies it?

2. Where did that story come from? Who taught you, directly or indirectly, that your needs come last?

3. Is the story actually true — or is it just familiar? What evidence in your life contradicts it?

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Today's Work

For each story that runs in you, name where it came from and write the truer version underneath it.

"I will rest when things slow down"

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Training, family, culture...

THE TRUER VERSION

What is actually true?

"Other people need me more than I need rest"

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Training, family, culture...

THE TRUER VERSION

What is actually true?

"Taking time for myself is selfish"

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Training, family, culture...

THE TRUER VERSION

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What is actually true?

"I can push through — I always have"

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Training, family, culture...

THE TRUER VERSION

What is actually true?

"If I stop, everything falls apart"

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Training, family, culture...

THE TRUER VERSION

What is actually true?

"My value comes from how useful I am to others"

WHERE IT CAME FROM

Training, family, culture...

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THE TRUER VERSION

What is actually true?

The advice I would give a struggling staff member in my exact condition — now written to myself:

If you were sitting across from me right now, I would tell you...

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 6 · Day 4 · Who Comes Home

DAY 4 OF 10 · WORK & LIFE

Seeing how the work bleeds into your life

Today's Reading

Work-life imbalance is not only about hours. It is about whether the person who comes home at the end of the day is still present — or just a tired, preoccupied shell of the person your family and friends know. You can be physically home and emotionally still at the office, replaying a session, worrying about a client, half-listening to your own kids while your mind is somewhere else entirely. The work does not stay at work. It rides home with you and sits at your dinner table.

In a substance use disorder setting, the demand never runs out, the need is bottomless, and the guilt about leaving never fully goes away. So the boundary between professional and personal life erodes quietly: sleep gets thinner, presence gets shallower, the activities you used to love feel like more effort than they are worth, and your closest relationships get the leftovers of your energy instead of the best of it. None of this happens through a single decision. It happens through a thousand small surrenders, each one reasonable on its own.

Today you will look honestly at the specific ways your work is currently showing up in your personal life — in your sleep, your relationships, your body, your presence, your capacity for joy. This is not about guilt. It is about seeing the pattern clearly enough to interrupt it. The people who love you do not need a perfect version of you. They need the real one — present, available, and not entirely consumed by everyone else's emergencies.

Reflect

1. In what specific ways is your work showing up in your personal life right now — your sleep, your relationships, your health, your presence with people you love?

2. When you are physically home, where is your mind? What percentage of you actually arrives?

3. What did you used to enjoy that you have quietly stopped doing — and when did it slip away?

Today's Work

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For each domain, be specific about how the work is showing up — and what you want it to look like instead.

Sleep & Rest

HOW WORK SHOWS UP HERE NOW

Be honest and specific...

WHAT I WANT IT TO BE

The version worth working toward...

Closest Relationships

HOW WORK SHOWS UP HERE NOW

Be honest and specific...

WHAT I WANT IT TO BE

The version worth working toward...

Physical Health

HOW WORK SHOWS UP HERE NOW

Be honest and specific...

WHAT I WANT IT TO BE

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The version worth working toward...

Presence & Attention

HOW WORK SHOWS UP HERE NOW

Be honest and specific...

WHAT I WANT IT TO BE

The version worth working toward...

Joy & Aliveness

HOW WORK SHOWS UP HERE NOW

Be honest and specific...

WHAT I WANT IT TO BE

The version worth working toward...

When I am physically home, what percentage of me actually arrives — and what is holding the rest of me at work?

The honest percentage, and what keeps the rest occupied...

Carry Forward

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One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 7 · Day 5 · Building the Container

DAY 5 OF 10 · BOUNDARIES

Boundaries as the architecture of a sustainable life

Today's Reading

Boundaries are not walls. They are the architecture of a sustainable life. The most common barrier to self-care is not a lack of desire — it is the absence of boundaries that protect your time, energy, and identity from the constant pull of clinical demand. Without a container, care leaks out everywhere and you are left running on fumes by Wednesday. With one, the work has a shape, an edge, an end — and the rest of your life finally has room to exist.

The hardest thing to make peace with is this: healthy boundaries are not a failure to care. They are the prerequisite for continuing to care well across a full career. The clinician who answers every after-hours call, takes every extra case, and never logs off is not more committed — they are simply closer to the burnout that will eventually take them out of the field entirely. Boundaries are not how you abandon the work. They are how you stay in it for the long haul without being consumed.

Today, work-life balance moves from aspiration to architecture. You will define what healthy boundaries actually look like across the specific domains of your life, identify where the erosion is worst, and design the structure of an ideal week — built around your flourishing rather than carved out of an already overfull schedule. End-of-day rituals, protected time, a clear edge to the workday: these are not symbolic luxuries. They are neurological resets your brain genuinely needs to know that, for now, the work is done.

Reflect

1. What are the top three ways work bleeds into your non-work time right now — the specific habits, expectations, or patterns that most erode the boundary?

2. What would a firm, healthy end to your workday actually look like? What time does it end, and what ritual marks the transition?

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3. What standing commitment or recurring obligation would you remove if you genuinely believed you had permission to do so?

Today's Work

Design the container. For each domain, name the boundary you need and the structure that protects it.

Work Hours & The End of the Day

The boundary I need here:

Specific and concrete...

What currently erodes it:

The habit, expectation, or pressure...

The structure or ritual that will protect it:

What makes it real and repeatable...

After-Hours Contact

The boundary I need here:

Specific and concrete...

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What currently erodes it:

The habit, expectation, or pressure...

The structure or ritual that will protect it:

What makes it real and repeatable...

Emotional Availability

The boundary I need here:

Specific and concrete...

What currently erodes it:

The habit, expectation, or pressure...

The structure or ritual that will protect it:

What makes it real and repeatable...

Protected Personal Time

The boundary I need here:

Specific and concrete...

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What currently erodes it:

The habit, expectation, or pressure...

The structure or ritual that will protect it:

What makes it real and repeatable...

My ideal week — designed around my flourishing:

Not my current week — the one built around sustaining me...

One boundary I will implement this week — not next month:

The one concrete boundary, and who I will tell so there is accountability...

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 8 · Day 6 · The Power of No

DAY 6 OF 10 · LIMITS

Declining, after-hours limits, and protecting your time

Today's Reading

Every unconscious yes to something that depletes you is an unconscious no to something that restores you. Both choices are active, even when one feels automatic. The helper who cannot say no — who answers yes out of guilt, fear, or role expectation — slowly hands away the time and energy that their own wellbeing depends on. Learning to decline without over-explaining, without apology, and without abandoning the boundary the moment guilt shows up is one of the most protective skills in this entire field.

After-hours availability is where this gets concrete. A stated policy that is never enforced teaches everyone — your staff, your clients, and most of all you — that your time and rest are negotiable. The anxiety that comes up when you imagine turning the phone off after a certain hour often reveals more about how entangled your identity has become with the work than about any real operational necessity. Very few crises actually require you specifically, in this moment, at the cost of your recovery time. Most can wait, be delegated, or be handled by the systems that should exist for exactly that reason.

Today you will practice the discipline of the boundary you set on Day 5. You will look at the times you said yes when your honest answer was no, examine your real after-hours pattern, and rehearse what a clean, guilt-free no actually sounds like. The guilt and anxiety that come with healthy limits do not mean the limit is wrong. They mean it is new. The work is to sit with that discomfort rather than resolve it by surrendering the boundary.

Reflect

1. Think of the last three times you said yes when your honest answer was no. What drove the yes — guilt, fear, role expectation? What would a no have looked like?

2. What is your real after-hours policy — not the stated one, the actual one? Where is the gap, and what does that gap cost you?

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3. What fear comes up when you imagine turning the work phone off after a certain hour — and what does that fear tell you about your relationship to the work?

Today's Work

The Three Yeses

Three recent times you said yes when your honest answer was no.

Yes #1

What I said yes to:

The request...

What drove the yes:

Guilt, fear, role expectation...

What a clean no would have sounded like:

No over-explaining, no apology...

Yes #2

What I said yes to:

The request...

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What drove the yes:

Guilt, fear, role expectation...

What a clean no would have sounded like:

No over-explaining, no apology...

Yes #3

What I said yes to:

The request...

What drove the yes:

Guilt, fear, role expectation...

What a clean no would have sounded like:

No over-explaining, no apology...

My after-hours reality — the actual pattern, not the stated policy:

When and how I am really available...

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The fear that comes up when I imagine turning the phone off after a set hour:

And what that fear reveals...

My rehearsed no — the exact words I will use this week:

Write the sentence you can actually say out loud...

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 9 · Day 7 · You Cannot Do This Alone

DAY 7 OF 10 · SUPPORT

Mapping the support a sustainable career requires

Today's Reading

There is a particular irony in the substance use disorder field: the professionals most skilled at building therapeutic alliances, fostering peer support, and teaching the importance of connection are often the most isolated in their own lives. Helpers learn to give, not to receive. They become fluent in everyone else's vulnerability and illiterate in their own. The result is that the very people who preach connection all day can go home to a support network thinner than any they would accept for a client.

A real support network is not the people who would show up if something catastrophic happened. It is the people who show up in the ordinary weight of a hard week. It is the colleague who knows what this job actually costs you, the peer consultation relationship that is honest rather than performative, the supervisor or therapist who holds space for your humanity and not just your competence, and the professional community that reminds you your work is part of something larger than one organization's dysfunction. The helpers who survive this work for the long haul are the ones who let themselves be helped.

Today you will map your support honestly — professional and personal — and look without judgment at where it is deep and where it is dangerously thin. Peer consultation that only addresses your best clinical thinking is supervision theater; the protection is in bringing the hard cases, the doubt, and the struggle. Connection is one of the strongest predictors of sustainability in this work, and isolation is one of the most reliable predictors of burnout. This day is about building the infrastructure that keeps you standing.

Reflect

1. Who actually knows how you are doing — the real version, not the professional presentation? If you struggled this week, who would you call?

2. On the professional side, who knows what it actually costs you to do this job — not just the clinical content, but the human toll?

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3. Where is the most dangerous gap in your support network right now, and what is one step toward closing it?

Today's Work

Inner Circle — The People Who Know the Real You

Those who show up in the ordinary weight of a hard week, not just a crisis.

Who currently fills this for me?

Names or descriptions — or "no one yet"...

How deep and honest is it, really?

Surface, performative, or genuine...

One step to build or deepen it:

Specific and actionable...

Trusted Colleague / Peer Consultation

Honest, mutual, structured — not venting, not performance.

Who currently fills this for me?

Names or descriptions — or "no one yet"...

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How deep and honest is it, really?

Surface, performative, or genuine...

One step to build or deepen it:

Specific and actionable...

Supervision, Consultation or Therapy

Space held for your humanity, not only your competence.

Who currently fills this for me?

Names or descriptions — or "no one yet"...

How deep and honest is it, really?

Surface, performative, or genuine...

One step to build or deepen it:

Specific and actionable...

Professional Community

Connection beyond your organization that sustains identity and purpose.

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Who currently fills this for me?

Names or descriptions — or "no one yet"...

How deep and honest is it, really?

Surface, performative, or genuine...

One step to build or deepen it:

Specific and actionable...

The most dangerous gap in my support right now — and the single step I will take this week to close it:

The gap is... and this week I will...

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 10 · Day 8 · Letting Yourself Be Helped

DAY 8 OF 10 · RECEIVING

Building the capacity to receive support

Today's Reading

The difficulty of receiving care is one of the most underexamined occupational hazards in the helping professions. You may be excellent at offering support and deeply uncomfortable accepting it. When someone offers to help, asks how you are actually doing, or expresses concern about your wellbeing, what happens internally? For many helpers, the instinct is to deflect, minimize, redirect the focus back outward, or reassure the other person that you are fine. But if you cannot receive, you will eventually run dry — because giving without replenishment has only one ending.

This is also where your own process matters. The most effective helpers are in their own — supervision, consultation, or personal therapy — not as a luxury or a sign of weakness, but as a professional and ethical commitment. If you would not accept the story "I don't need it" from one of your own staff members, you should be suspicious of it when you tell it to yourself. Being in your own process is not a contradiction of your competence. It is the practice of the very thing you ask of everyone you serve: the willingness to be honest about struggle and to let someone help carry it.

Today is relational work. You will look honestly at how you respond to being cared for, examine the barriers that keep you from receiving, and name one specific thing you need help with right now that you have not asked for. Asking for help is not a transaction — it is a relational act that builds the very bonds that sustain you. Practice staying with the feeling of being supported rather than deflecting it. That discomfort is the muscle that needs strengthening.

Reflect

1. How do you respond when someone offers to help you or asks how you are really doing? What happens internally when you are on the receiving end of care?

2. Are you currently in your own supervision, consultation, or therapy? If not, what is the story you tell yourself — and would you accept it from your staff?

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3. What is one specific thing you need help with right now — professional or personal — that you have not asked for? What would it take to ask this week?

Today's Work

How well do I currently receive care and support?

1 = I deflect almost every time · 5 = I can genuinely take it in

○ 1 ○ 2 ○ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

Not at all · Very much

Tap the barriers that keep you from receiving support.

Fear of being a burden

Pride / self-reliance

Role identity as "the helper"

Fear of judgment

Belief I should be able to handle it

Discomfort being vulnerable

Not wanting to worry others

Habit of deflecting

What happens internally when someone offers me help or asks how I am really doing:

The instinct that fires...

Whether I am in my own supervision, consultation, or therapy — and the story I tell about that:

And whether I would accept that story from my staff...

One specific thing I need help with right now that I have not asked for:

Professional or personal...

This week I will ask for it — who I will ask, and the words I will use:

I will ask ___ for ___ by saying...

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 11 · Day 9 · Why You Chose This

DAY 9 OF 10 · MEANING & JOY

Reconnecting with purpose, joy, and what sustains you

Today's Reading

Connection to purpose is one of the most powerful buffers against burnout that exists. When the work begins to feel meaningless, it is not always because the meaning is gone — sometimes it is simply buried under depletion, too deep to reach when you are running on empty. Reconnecting with why you chose this field in the first place is not sentimental. It is restorative. The real answer — not the polished interview version — is usually still alive in there somewhere, and finding it again changes how the hard days feel.

Renewal is not only rest and recovery. It is also regularly returning to the sources of meaning that make the work worth doing: the conversation that mattered, the client's breakthrough, the staff member's growth, the moment that reminded you this is not just a job. And alongside meaning lives joy — the things outside of work and outside of self-improvement that make you feel genuinely alive and present. Joy is not a reward you earn by finishing all the work, because there is always more work. Joy has to be scheduled like an appointment, and treated like one.

This is also where you draw the distinction between surviving this work and thriving in it. Too many helpers quietly normalize survival as the goal and call it realism. But thriving is not naive — it is the sustainable alternative to slow deterioration. Today you will reconnect with your purpose, recall the moments that remind you why this matters, and look honestly at how much room joy and aliveness actually occupy in your week. The work is meaningful enough to deserve a version of you that is not merely enduring it.

Reflect

1. Why did you choose this field? Not the polished answer — the real one. Is that thing still alive in you, and what keeps it alive or has dimmed it?

2. Describe a moment from the past year that reminded you why this work matters. What does it tell you about what sustains you?

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3. What makes you feel genuinely alive outside of work — and when did you last do it? How much of your week does joy actually occupy?

Today's Work

Why I chose this field — the real answer, not the polished one:

What actually pulled me here...

Whether that thing is still alive in me — and what keeps it alive or has dimmed it:

Honest assessment...

A moment from the past year that reminded me why this work matters:

A conversation, a breakthrough, something I witnessed...

Surviving vs. Thriving — For Me Specifically

WHAT SURVIVING LOOKS LIKE

The version I have normalized...

WHAT THRIVING LOOKS LIKE

In my body, relationships, work, inner life...

Tap what makes you feel genuinely alive outside of work and self-improvement.

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Time in nature

Movement / exercise

Music

Cooking

Creative work

Time with friends

Reading for pleasure

Faith / spiritual practice

Play with kids

A hobby I dropped

Travel

Quiet / solitude

Laughter

Something physical with my hands

One joy practice I will schedule into my week like an appointment — when, and how often:

The practice, the day, the protected time...

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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Part 12 · Day 10 · Building a Life That Lasts

DAY 10 OF 10 · SUSTAINABLE RENEWAL

Integrating everything into a renewal you can sustain

Today's Reading

Phase IV of any real self-care journey is about permanence, not perfection. The question was never "How do I achieve the ideal self-care life?" It is "What is the version of this that I can actually sustain through the real conditions of my real life?" The goal is not a flawless routine or an absence of hard seasons. The goal is a person who knows what they need, has the structures and relationships in place to meet those needs, and has made peace with the fact that taking care of yourself is not optional in this work — it is the ethical foundation of everything you do.

Self-care relapse prevention uses the same logic you already teach: identify the high-risk situations, build the coping plan before you need it, and have people in place who will tell you the truth. You know by now what predictably erodes what you build — the organizational crisis, the workload surge, the personal loss, the season that swallows your structure whole. Naming those triggers in advance, and deciding now what the minimum viable version of your self-care looks like when everything is on fire, is not pessimism. It is the wisdom of someone who knows that life will test their commitments.

This is the final day of the pathway, but it is the first day of the rest of the practice. Today you will consolidate what changed, build your plan for when the structure breaks down, and write a Personal Wellness Commitment — a short, honest promise to yourself about what you owe yourself, what you commit to protecting, and what you will do when you lose your way. Not a policy. A relationship with yourself, held with the same care you extend to everyone else in your life. Then return to your baseline and see how far you have come.

Reflect

1. Looking back across these ten days, what actually shifted? What practice took hold, and what did you learn about yourself that surprised you?

2. What has historically caused your self-care to collapse — and what is the minimum viable version of it you will protect when the next crisis comes?

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3. Revisit your baseline self-assessment from Day 1. What has changed in how you see your own wellbeing?

Today's Work

Step 1: What Actually Changed

The practice or boundary that took hold over these ten days:

What is now different...

What I learned about myself that surprised me:

The unexpected insight...

What is still a work in progress:

Honest and specific...

Step 2: Self-Care Relapse Prevention

Same Logic You Already Teach

Identify the high-risk situations, build the coping plan before you need it, and have people in place who will tell you the truth.

What has historically caused my self-care to collapse — my high-risk situations:

Crises, workload surges, personal losses, seasons...

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The first three things I will do if I notice myself drifting back into depletion:

1... 2... 3...

Who I will call, and the minimum viable version of self-care I will protect when everything is on fire:

The non-negotiable floor...

Step 3: My Personal Wellness Commitment

Write It as a Promise, Not a Policy

A short, honest statement of what you owe yourself, what you commit to protecting, and what you will do when you lose your way.

My Personal Wellness Commitment:

I commit to myself that...

Consider sharing this with one person you trust, and returning to it in six months.

Revisit Your Baseline

You completed your baseline on Day 1. Return to it now and notice what has shifted.

Carry Forward

One thing from today I am carrying into the next 24 hours:

A single intention, boundary, or truth to hold onto today...

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