

?...I would have appreciated your waiting patiently for me. I know you're busy and have a lot going on, but it would have meant a lot to me."

### Sample statement #2:

"The last few times I was in your office talking with you, I felt somewhat diminished when you took phone calls, as if our conversation wasn't important. Were you even aware of that happening? I was thinking you might not be, and that's why I wanted to bring this up. I know you have a lot of demands on your time and are dealing with important matters, but it would mean a lot to me and my working relationship with you if I had your full attention when we meet."

### Listen respectfully

After you've shared your concerns, listen closely to your leader's response—and don't argue. If you can't resolve the issue, inform the other party that you'll need to go to his or her supervisor. (See *Case studies in conflict management*.) If you decide to do that, stay calm, state your concerns objectively, and be clear on what kind of resolution you want and the actions you'd like that person to take. Before the conversation ends, make sure you're both clear on the next steps and their timing. ■

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## How to love and care for yourself unconditionally

When stress brought her life to a grinding halt, the author was forced to learn how to truly care for herself.

By Yolanda G. Smith, MSN, RN, CCRN

Are you able to relax, have fun, and enjoy the simple pleasures of life? Or do you:

- have trouble falling or staying asleep?
- smoke, drink, or eat to reduce tension?
- have headaches, back pain, or stomach problems?
- get irritated or upset over insignificant things?
- have too much to do and too little time to do it?

Wound care clinicians are committed, compassionate, and conscientious about caring for patients, friends, colleagues, children, and significant others. Yet many have difficulty giving the same loving, unconditional care to ourselves, and they end up caring for others at our own expense. They're al-



ways putting oxygen masks on others, so to speak, while leaving ourselves deprived of the oxygen they need. Some clinicians may even think it's altruistic to care for others but selfish to care for oneself.

I was forced to start taking better care of myself when my mind, body, and spirit stopped me one day and said, "I can't let you continue." My typical day began at 4:00 A.M., when I'd wake up and start thinking about what I had to do. I'd get out of bed at 5:30 A.M., shower, grab a quick breakfast, and leave by 6:30.

By 8:00, I was ready to begin presenting my daylong nursing seminars. Midday, I rushed through lunch so I could get back to class before the nurses in my seminar returned from lunch break. By 4:30 P.M., my driver picked me up. By 6:30, I was in my home office reviewing medical records (I'm a legal nurse consultant). By 11:00 P.M., I was in bed.

That was my schedule the week of August 2, 2004. But on August 6 at 10:35 A.M., my life changed in a flash.

### **Grinding to an emotional standstill**

While teaching a critical-thinking workshop with 25 nurses, I became acutely confused and disoriented with memory loss. I was emergently hospitalized at the facility where I lectured, and went through 4 days of extensive neurologic testing, laboratory work, medication therapy, and sleep. When all the test results came back negative, I was diagnosed with sensory overload.

Subsequently, I realized that while I'd been busy growing my business, I'd lacked balance in my life—focusing my attention on meeting others' needs and running my business. Ultimately, I now see, I lost my identity to my business. I neglect-

ed self-care and self-nurturing. I didn't cherish and love myself first.

### **Surrendering**

So I surrendered. I saw that I could no longer rationalize or continue my unhealthy behaviors, and I sought to find out how to bring my life into balance. As a result, I made permanent changes in my life. I made a commitment to myself.

## **You have to make the decision to care for yourself.**

My sensory overload incident taught me that as clinicians, we're good at managing stress at work, at home, and in our personal lives. In fact, we're so good we don't realize when we're having our own emotional reactions to stress. Stress reactions have become our norm.

To minimize stress and bring my life into balance, I learned and implemented these five essential self-care principles and practices:

- 1. Accept that self-care isn't selfish.** It's vital to our happiness and our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. I do something for myself every day. I begin and end my day with self-care activities, such as meditation, breathing, Reiki, a StairMaster workout, journaling, t'ai chi, prayer, dance, gratitude, and eating healthy, nutritious meals.
- 2. Manage time effectively.** Time management is essential. I decided to establish

## Seven elements of a balanced life

The foundation for a balanced, integrated, healthy life hinges on the essential elements described below.

Element	Nurturing activities
Emotional and mental self.....	Get in touch with your feelings and express them more freely.
Finances .....	Believe you can create greater prosperity.
Intimacy.....	Experience more caring and trust in intimate relationships.
Physical body.....	Learn to love and care for your body.
Relationships .....	Commit to more authentic and honest communication.
Soul and spirit .....	Develop a vital and personal spiritual path.
Work and career .....	Balance the drive for success with your personal life.

Monday-through-Thursday business hours.

3. **Learn how to say no comfortably and confidently.**
4. **Set limits.** I came to see my clients' emergencies weren't my emergencies; they stemmed from their own failure to manage their time effectively. It wasn't unusual for my attorney clients to call me on Friday afternoon requesting information they needed Monday morning—which meant I'd have to work through the weekend.
5. **Live, love, and laugh every day.**

I used my experiences to develop stress management programs and a holistic self-care nursing wellness model to enlighten and empower others to live a happy, joyous life by loving themselves—mind, body, and soul. (See *Seven elements of a balanced life*.)

### No one can do it for you

Self-care means eating healthy foods, im-

proving your sleep habits, gaining more control over your time, getting adequate exercise, managing your stress, dealing with clutter, and learning to say no. It's about putting yourself first and investing time and effort into your own health and well-being.

No one can do this for you. You have to make the decision to care for yourself—and then do it. You must come to realize you deserve to live a healthy, balanced life. Only you can make that happen. An internal drive born of love and compassion for yourself will empower you to implement self-care practices every day.

### Planning self-care

The secret to self-care is planning. Virtually all the self-care changes I've made (including giving up fast and fried foods, caffeine, sugar, artificial sweeteners, and chocolate) came from making a plan and sticking to it.

You probably know what you'd like to improve in your own life. If I asked you to

## Self-care examples

Once you've committed to caring for yourself, search for activities that make you happy. Look at all the possibilities until you find those that really move you.

Physical realm	Emotional realm	Mental realm	Spiritual realm
Take a t'ai chi, yoga, or dance class.	Breathe deeply. Inhale calm and tranquility; exhale stress and worry.	Begin your day with a positive affirmation.	Meditate with incense and candles.
Reduce your intake of caffeine, fats, and sugar.	Be proud of yourself. Acknowledge your accomplishments.	Replace negative beliefs with positive thoughts.	Practice unconditional love and forgiveness of yourself and others.
Soak in a hot bath, with candles lit and music playing.	Listen to your favorite music.	Express your thoughts and feelings in a journal.	Pray, if you're so inclined.

name your most important self-care goal, I bet one would come to mind immediately. So why haven't you done anything to reach your goal? And if you have, why haven't you stuck with the effort? The three obstacles I hear about the most are:

- "I don't know how to get started."
- "I'm too busy."
- "I can't seem to follow through with what I start."

Can you relate to any of these? How about all three? A major barrier I identified was admitting I couldn't change other people, so I let go of the desire to do this. I can't change anyone else; nor is it my responsibility to convince anyone to change. The only thing I can change is myself.

### Work-life integration

The term *work-life balance* implies all aspects of your life should be in equilibrium. This suggests we're constantly juggling

to maintain a balance, and a sudden increased demand on one side throws everything off balance.

So I've shifted my focus from *work-life balance* to *work-life integration*, which implies a synergy among the various aspects of our lives, resulting in more productive energy expenditure. Work-life integration is about combining work and personal life—including family, relationships, and personal growth—in ways that are mutually supportive and rewarding. Work and personal life aren't independent aspects of life; we have to give ourselves permission to have both equally. By examining the role unhealthy beliefs and perceptions play in our lives, we can begin to reevaluate our choices and create a greater integration between our work and personal lives.

### Changing your life one step at a time

Once you've identified personal barriers to

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but was embarrassed to tell anyone. Even though the erection was painful, he waited so long to see a urologist that penis amputation was a possibility. He'd tolerated the pain (and risked possible amputation) out of fear of having someone examine, touch, or possibly make fun of an intimate body part. These two encounters provide insight into some of the issues related to intimate touch. (See *How male and female nurses feel about intimate touch*.)

### Putting knowledge into action

Now that you understand the issues around intimate touch, you're better prepared to perform it more adeptly and comfortably. Keep in mind your patients' statements or preferences about intimate touch. Watch others' behaviors during intimate touch care activities so you can deepen your knowledge base. ■

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positive self-care, you can start to change your behavior one step at a time. Now is the time to act. Set self-care goals and establish a self-care protocol. Then hold yourself accountable. Be creative. Let your inner child have fun by engaging in activities that make you feel good. (See *Self-care examples*.)

I've learned self-care is a way of life that enables me to truly love myself and to accept and respect myself for who I am. When I started practicing self-care daily, my energy soared and my mood changed. I developed an inner peace, tranquility, and calmness, plus a clarity of thought I'd never experienced before. I've learned self-care equals growth, self-love, and nurturance. I've chosen self-care and never looked back. I've completely trans-

formed my life and now live a life of balance, joy, happiness, pleasure, and wellness. I love myself mind, body, and soul, every day. ■

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