

**Marriage and Family Therapists Self-Care:
an Ethical Imperative**

By

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The practice of psychotherapy is unique, creative, and multifaceted (Carroll, Gilroy, & Murra, 2000). Conversely, at times the practice of psychotherapy may be extremely challenging. For therapists, professional and personal development is a dynamic process (Baker, 2003). Further, use of self is the tool in which a therapist's professional work is based on (Bowen, 1978; Satir, 1983). Although marriage and family therapist are trained to care for others, they often do a poor job caring for themselves. Moreover, failure to take proper care of themselves places therapists at risk of violating professional and ethical standards of practice (Norcross & Guy 2007). Both law and ethics govern the practice of marriage and family (AAMFT, 2001).

Raising awareness about therapist self-care through graduate training and continuing education workshops is congruent with AAMFT's (2001) code of ethics and COAMFTE (2004) core competencies. The ethical standards and competencies were created to "honor the public trust by setting standards for ethical practice" (AAMFT, p. 1).

Similarly, the core competences were created to "improve the quality of mental health services delivered by marriage and family therapist in the context of the broader behavioral health system" (COAMFTE, p. 1). It would be beneficial for accredited graduate programs to implement training processes that focuses on both professional and intrapersonal aspects of MFT trainees. Graduate training programs provide a unique forum for professional connections and discourse. By intertwining the importance of

self-care and capitalizing on connections inherent in the school context, graduate programs may generate discourse about self-care ideas and processes. The growth of the “self” is fostered through education, guidance, encouragement and above all, through respectful recognition and support (Bowen, 1978; Titelman, 1998). Raising awareness to licensed and associate licensed MFTs could be achieved through clinical supervision, peer consultation and continuing education workshops (Negash & Sahin, 2011; Rosenberg & Pace, 2006). Persistently advocating therapist well-ness and exploration of the self by attending to self-care could benefit the profession of marriage and family therapy. Encouraging the practice self-care may enable MFT’s to manage or prevent various forms of stress or impairment that may arise in the multifaceted contexts of their lives. Thus, from a legal perspective attending to self-care is essential for an MFT to staying in compliance with professional ethics. Similarly, from an individual perspective self-care is imperative to an MFT’s well-being and functioning (Bowen, 1978; Norcross & Guy, 2007). Therefore, continued inquiry and raising awareness about self-care is ultimately significant for both marriage and family therapists and the clients under their care.

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