

Hello, my name is Michelle Zechner, and I am faculty at the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions at Rutgers. Welcome to this online series about self-care for mental health professionals, and that's a topic that's really important for all of us, including myself.

Working in the field of mental health can be really challenging and rewarding at the same time because we face difficult work conditions at times, where we're exposed to people's feelings and emotions every day, and that can really put us at risk for experiencing compassion fatigue and burnout. This can be particularly true if the people we help experience trauma, difficult circumstances, and negative emotions. For many of us, myself included, balancing helping others with our own self-care isn't always easy. But, as the old adage goes, it's really important to put your own oxygen mask on first, before you help others. Self-care is very important to stay balanced and healthy for ourselves, the clients we help, and for our families.

This series of three courses will address topics on self-care that encourage self-reflection, and focus on strengths and practical strategies to try: things like remembering to check in with yourself, assess your professional quality of life, your lifestyle habits, eating, exercising, things like that; and, using reflective practice in mindfulness to approach your clients in your day.

I'm going to be guiding you through this series. I've got a lot of experience working in a variety of community and mental health settings and inpatient settings. Over 25 years, I've worked in nursing homes and state psychiatric hospitals. I've also been involved in training and consultation for mental health programs on the implementation of evidence-based psychosocial practices and testing health and wellness promotion interventions, teaching, and conducting research. My research is really focused on health and wellness and helping people of all kinds improve their wellness: people with serious mental illness, their caregivers, and people who support them. I've also been very interested in mindful movement and improving mental health conditions. I've been fortunate enough to be able to present my work at conferences and presentations, internationally and nationally.

So this course has been developed as part of the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center, or MHTTC, housed at Rutgers School of Health Professions' Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation. The MHTTC is funded by SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, to enhance the capacity of the behavioral health and other related workforces to deliver evidence-based and empirically supported practices to individuals with mental illnesses.

I really hope you enjoy this series focused on embracing your own self-care strategies, and that you continue to flourish and thrive in your professional and personal lives.