

## How can you cope with stress at work?

### Eight tips from social workers for social workers



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# Setup of powerpoint



1. Background of the coping project
2. Six tips on how to cope with stress, from social workers, for social workers
3. Summary and next steps



Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam

# 1. Background of coping project

# Project background: Understanding how frontline workers cope with stress



Working directly with clients can be stressful. You can have a high case load, can get involved into emotional situations with clients and there is also a life outside of work.

This research project, funded by the European Commission, analyses how frontline workers cope with stress in their job, and how this affects their clients. We are studying the following groups:

- Social workers in the United States and the Netherlands
- Teachers in the United States and the Netherlands
- Frontline workers in the United States implementing the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)

In this specific document, developed for social workers, we show tips social workers give to their fellow social workers on how to deal with stress.

# Interviewing 10 social workers about coping with stress at work

This document focuses on interviews with 10 social workers in the United States. Below, we show some background information about these social workers. To preserve anonymity, we will use not use specific names anywhere.

Subject	Description of sample
Type of social worker	Varies (child welfare workers, school social worker, eligibility officers, psychologist)
Average age	36
Gender	8 female, 2 male
Ethno-racial identity	Varies (Caucasian, Asian, African American, Hispanic)
State	All from California
Highest degree of education	University Master 7, University Bachelor 2, High School 1

***Thanks to all the participating social workers!***



# Analyzing tips from social workers, for social workers

In this document we show tips given by social workers for social workers on how to effectively deal with stress at work.

The specific question within the broader interview protocol is:

***“Do you have any tips for social workers about ineffective and effective coping strategies?”***

A general comment about the importance of this subject is shown by the following quote of an interviewed social worker:

*“Yeah, I think number one’s [coping strategy is] self care. We tend to preach that to our clients, and we forget about ourselves in that process.”*





How can you, as a social worker, cope with stress at work?

Eight tips from social workers for social workers

## Tip 1: Don't work too much extra time (especially from home)

### Hanna:

“If you can avoid bringing it home, that's the best... There are some agencies that give workers computers, laptops, smartphones, whatever, so that they can do their work outside of work, and I just don't... I just try to keep it so that the environment I have at home is in no way affiliated to my work environment”

### Cassie:

“I would say the most effective coping strategy I have is leaving everything at work. So, I don't bring notes to type up at home, even though I could.”



## Tip 2: Find something next to working you enjoy

### Allyson:

“Making sure you do have a life outside of your job will really keep you going. They want all your friends and your family members for your clients, because you need to be supported to just as much as the client needs supporting too, and if you if you don't have any time for you, then eventually your cup will run dry”

### Makda:

“Definitely take the time out for yourself. work out, ... actually doing things on the weekend, ... really just taking care of yourself.”



## Tip 3: Know that you can't save the world



### Makda

“The work will never be done, so they have to keep going until late hours, but now I learned the work will always be there no matter what. It will always be there. You spend five hours overtime, it'll still be there in the morning.”



## Tip 4: Find social support at your workplace

### Makda:

Social support from colleagues and supervisors, is that important for you? → “Oh, one hundred percent.”

### Cassie:

“I definitely talk to my colleagues at work while I’m at work about our current cases, and we both talk both ways. So, I hear about their cases, and they hear about mine when things are getting stressful.”



## Tip 5: Don't talk too much about work after work

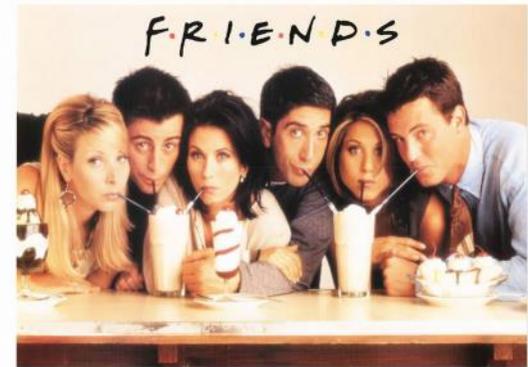


### Allyson:

“I actually kind of consciously choose not to spend time with social workers outside of work.... I lived with a social worker for a year when I was in graduate school... All we talked about was social work, and it just got to be so extremely stressful. So, I just kind of learned that for me, in my life outside of work, I don't want to even think about it at all.”

### Hanna:

“Being a part of some kind of community that's unaffiliated is helpful, because you can get stuck in thinking that the world you're working with is the whole world”



## Tip 6: Be reflective about how you spend your time at work



### Child welfare worker (female):

“I think part of being a successful worker in child welfare and managing all of that overtime and the work that you have to do is being efficient, and so if you’re going out to meet with a client and not trying to manage your time well so that you end up sitting there and chatting about their stuff for hours, then that can really get you later on in the week when you could’ve seen several clients that day.”



## Tip 7: Take breaks during your workday



### Anna:

“I think that one thing I also do that's coping for everyday, is I go for at least a forty minute walk at lunch. I have an hour, from twelve to one and I think going outside, out of the office, and just walking really helps me and come back and regroup and feel more energized.”

### Allyson:

“Oh, I do meditation. So, I would say that actually helps the most out of anything else, ‘cause I feel like yoga and meditations about kind of made my... It takes me out of the situation for a couple minutes, and then breathe again ... maybe just like walk out of the office for two to five minutes to do it if I really feel like I'm getting anxious”



## Tip 8: Check whether you work for the right organization



### Anna:

“I think when you're working for an organization where you feel like you're putting the organization before yourself, that that's a big red flag. If the organization is asking you to sort of make all these sacrifices to your health or to your sense of wellness or to your happiness ... that's probably an unhealthy organization.”





# 3. Summary and next steps

# Summary and next steps

**This document: Eight tips from social workers, for social workers on how to cope with stress**

Tip 1: Don't work too much extra time (especially from home!)

Tip 2: Find something next to working you enjoy

Tip 3: Know that you can't save the world

Tip 4: Find social support at your workplace

Tip 5: Don't talk too much about work after work

Tip 6: Be reflective about how you spend your time at work

Tip 7: Take breaks during your workday

Tip 8: Check whether you work for the right organization

**Next step: Large scale survey on coping, well-being and performance. Goal: to among else find which coping strategies are effective on a large scale**

For more information or questions, please visit [www.larstummers.com/coping](http://www.larstummers.com/coping) or email [Tummers@fsw.eur.nl](mailto:Tummers@fsw.eur.nl)

