

# PRACTICAL WAYS TO PROTECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH WHILE STILL DOING MEANINGFUL WORK

Coping with a psychologically demanding job is less about “toughing it out” and more about building **sustainable habits, boundaries, and support.**

## ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOAD (without self-judgment)

Psychologically demanding work—especially roles involving crisis, high responsibility, emotional labor, or constant decision-making—**costs real mental energy.**

- Feeling drained, irritable, detached, or overwhelmed is not a personal failure.
- Naming the strain (“This work is heavy”) reduces shame and helps you respond proactively.

**Reframe:** “This job requires recovery, just like physically demanding work does.”



## MANAGE COGNITIVE LOAD DAILY

Psychologically demanding jobs often overload the brain, not just emotions.

- **Single-task where possible:** Multitasking increases mental fatigue.
- **Decision batching:** Group similar decisions to reduce decision fatigue.
- **Micro-breaks (2-5 min):** Step away, breathe, stretch, or reset your eyes/attention. Small pauses prevent long-term burnout.



## STRENGTHEN YOUR SENSE OF CONTROL

Burnout increases when effort feels disconnected from outcomes.

- Clarify **what is within your control** vs. what isn't.
- Advocate for realistic workloads, role clarity, and resources.
- Identify what “good enough” vs. perfectionism looks like in your position.

## BUILD EMOTIONAL PROCESSING TIME

Unprocessed emotional material accumulates.

**Options (choose what fits you):**

- Reflective journaling (even 5 minutes)
- Talking with a trusted peer who “gets the work”
- Professional supervision or consultation
- Therapy or coaching (especially preventive, not only crisis-based)

## USE SUPPORT STRATEGICALLY (not only in crisis)

Reaching out early is a strength.

- Peer support groups
- Supervisory check-ins focused on wellbeing, not just performance
- Mental health professionals familiar with high-stress roles
- Your employer's Employee Assistance Program

## CREATE CLEAR PSYCHOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Even when you care deeply, boundaries are essential.

**Practical strategies**

- **Start/stop rituals:** A short routine that marks the workday's end (walk, music, journaling, changing clothes).
- **Containment techniques:** Write down unresolved thoughts before leaving work to signal “I'll return to this later.”
- **Limit emotional bleed:** Avoid replaying work conversations outside work; if they surface, gently redirect.

If your role involves others' trauma, boundaries protect **both empathy and effectiveness.**

## WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS OF BURNOUT OR SECONDARY STRESS

Early signals matter:

- Emotional numbness or cynicism
- Chronic exhaustion not relieved by rest
- Reduced empathy or increased irritability
- Physical symptoms (headaches, GI issues)
- Dreading work most days

If these persist, it's a signal to change supports, structure, or expectations, not push harder.



## MAINTAIN RECOVERY OUTSIDE WORK

Your nervous system needs replenishment—not just distraction.

**Protect the basics**

- Sleep consistency (even more important than duration)
- Regular movement
- Nourishing food and hydration

**Add joy into your day**

- Activities that absorb your interests
- Relationships that don't revolve around work
- Moments of play, humor, creativity, or stillness

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