

Self-care for mental health professionals

Caroline's story.

Caroline is a clinical psychologist and university lecturer. She is a mother of two young children, Scarlet (six) and Louis (three). Caroline has been in her current practice for 10 years and works three days a week, and another two at the university.

Five years ago the practice she works for (that employs many other allied health professionals) hired a practice manager who insists on her seeing eight clients a day. Caroline has found this work load very heavy, however has persevered. Over the last five years Caroline has seen several clients with personality disorders and a number of veterans experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Caroline's partner Nick used to work full time as a physiotherapist but he recently had a serious car accident and has required substantial rehabilitation. Nick's accident has meant many appointments, less time at work and a reduced household income. It's also limited his ability to help Caroline with the children.

Caroline was recently asked if she could do some additional weekend work at the university and due to her husband's reduced income, she felt she had no choice but to accept. This additional workload has meant more late nights working on student assignments, leaving Caroline feeling exhausted and not sleeping well.

Recently Caroline made a mistake around client confidentiality which has left her feeling stressed

about the possible consequences. She's afraid of telling a colleague due to mandatory reporting so she's avoiding discussing her concerns with anyone at work.

Caroline's colleague Maria, who is also a psychologist working in her clinic has approached her and asked if she is ok. When Caroline responded with "why do you ask that?", Maria said "because lately you seem very stressed out and preoccupied". Maria suggested that she arrange to see her supervisor but Caroline responded, "I just don't have the time". While she used to see her supervisor regularly, over the last two years contact has dropped to only three times a year. Caroline told Maria that she hasn't been sleeping well and was going to see her GP instead, so that she could get some sleeping medication to help give her some relief.