

Description

Taking Time

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Becoming a student midwife is far more than taking on a new course of education; it involves taking on a completely new way of life.

Although widely documented, honest conversations about burnout in midwifery students tend to be avoided, becoming a phenomenon that happens to other, less resilient people. However, every student midwife will struggle at some point throughout their journey, and resilience plays no role in reducing burnout.[1]

Pressure often stems from a student's perception of what makes a good student midwife. However, it is intensified through systemic failings, hindering midwives from providing the care they desire in a system that doesn't support them or the women, birthing people and families they look after.[2] Despite this, student midwives are particularly good at providing empathetic, compassionate care to the people they care for. They can give each other incredible peer support and guidance, which can help retention in midwifery programmes,[3] because who is a better cheerleader than a student midwife?

However, these intimate connections cannot be genuinely developed without the ability to be self-aware. The desire to do the best for the people in their care is understandable and admirable. Still, like the aeroplane analogy, the oxygen mask must be fitted to oneself before helping anyone else. Person-centred care begins with taking time to focus on oneself because only by learning to show self-empathy and self-compassion can the tools be developed to do this well for others.[4] Taking time to look inward is conscious work, which can be uncomfortable and requires constant practice. Nonetheless, it is vital to understand who you are, not who you have been told you are by other people. Taking time to listen to your needs, just as you do with the people you care for, is essential. There is no right way to achieve this, but reading, observing and reflecting will almost always help to find solutions to any challenges.[5]

Take this precious time to be a student, understand that being a learner is not a negative, and accept that being an experienced midwife will come later in the journey. The length of labour would never be expected to be precisely the same, and yet a baby will always be born – taking the time to consider student development in this way is wise. Everyone will ultimately achieve, but by doing it at their own pace, they can hopefully avoid some of the trauma that comes with forced processes.

Take time to remember how you felt the day you got your acceptance notification… take a moment to close your eyes, take a deep breath and just remember that feeling. Take time to be kind to yourself, remind yourself who you are, and remember that the title student midwife is only a tiny part of what makes you, you. Talk to your support network, join your midwifery society, be honest about your feelings because you are guaranteed to not be alone. And ultimately, take time to enjoy being a student because it is over before you know it. **TSM**

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