



MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS TO EVERYONE

# SELF-CARE

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**#breakthestigma #mentalhealthmatters**

In the modern world, it can be a real struggle to cope with life's demands. Taking care of yourself physically, mentally and emotionally will help you to build **the resilience to cope.**

Looking after yourself is not selfish. To function to the best of your ability, to have a happy and healthy relationship and family life and to be able to care for others, the practice of self-care is extremely important.

Self-care begins with being self-aware. Knowing what is normal for you enables you to notice when things aren't quite right. Those close to you might also be able to enlighten you to these signs. As much as each human being is unique, so is the self-care required. Self-care changes over time as your needs change.

As with everything we do, having a plan can make self-care much simpler and easier to maintain. Develop a self-care plan that includes strategies and activities that help your well-being, both physically and mentally. Mental illness might mean also developing a crisis self-care plan ensuring strategies to enable you to cope.

# THE SELF-CARE PLAN

In order to achieve anything, it is important to have a plan.

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Begin with an **evaluation** of what you do now to take care of yourself. Look at all the areas of your life, i.e., physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, professional, and relationships.

**COMPLETE  
THE SELF-  
CARE  
ASSESSMENT**

**Once you have completed the assessment**, you will be able to see the positive things you are doing for your overall well-being as well as the things that you could be doing better. **Consider what you regularly do** to look after yourself. Review your self-assessment, then **list activities and strategies** you can add to your plan. **Identify barriers** that might prevent you from implementing your new self-care plan and **identify ways to remove or manage them** when they are present. Consider how you might **turn your current negative strategies into positive ones**.

**COMPLETE THE SELF-CARE PLAN**

# STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CARE

## PHYSICAL

- Drink plenty of **water**.
- Eat a **healthy diet** that includes fresh vegetables, fruit, grains, protein. Avoid food that is high in sugar/saturated fats as well as processed foods. Eat regularly and try not to skip meals. It's hard to focus when you are hungry.
- Get plenty of **sleep** (approximately 6-8 hours is the average amount of sleep required).
- Regular **physical activity** in moderation - make it fun and something you can look forward to. Getting exercise doesn't have to mean slogging it out in a gym or running for miles. It might be going for a walk with a friend, dancing, swimming, gardening – it doesn't really matter as long as you are moving and increasing your heart rate.
- It is important to make sure you **consult your doctor** before commencing any new exercise program, and particularly if you have serious health conditions and/or are unsure if the exercise that you are choosing will exacerbate those conditions.
- Keep your home and workspace **organised**. Regularly declutter and sort things into designated spaces.



## EMOTIONAL



- Do something **fun**. Identify activities that bring you enjoyment and pleasure – read a book, catch up with a friend, go to the beach or the river, fly a kite, watch a feel-good movie.
- **Laugh** lots, **cry** when you need.
- Look for **positive affirmations**.
- **Socialise**. Spend time with family and friends.
- **Join a group** of people with similar interests (e.g., craft group, walking group, local view club, local men's shed).
- Identify and utilise your **support system**.
- Use **positive self-talk**.
- Do something **nice** for someone else. This will have a positive effect for you and them.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Keep a **journal**. Write about your positive experiences during the day.
- Focus on the **positive** rather than the negative. Be grateful for what you have.
- Talk to a **psychologist or counsellor** as well as the people in your **support system**. It is important to do this when you are well, and even more so when you are in crisis.
- Join a **support group**.
- Read **self-help books**.
- Know your **limits**.



## SPIRITUAL

- **Pray** and actively **practice your faith**. Join a church, mosque, temple, or other people of similar faith.
- Practice **mindfulness and meditation**.
- Spend time in **nature**, it has restorative powers.
- Be inspired by **like-minded people**.



## PROFESSIONAL

- Practice good **time management**.
  - Take **regular breaks** and enjoy them.
  - **Don't take work home**.
  - Take **vacations** and sick days when you need them.
  - Form a **support network**.
  - Continually seek new challenges and opportunities for **professional development**.
- Be **assertive** (as opposed to aggressive or passive). Learn to say “no” when it is getting too much or you need to stand up for yourself.
  - Have a good **stress management plan**.

## RELATIONSHIP

- **Listen** to your partner/family/friends.
- If you have a partner, **make time** each day to spend together.
- **Treat each other well.** Be affectionate and respectful of each other. Be kind.
- Set **healthy boundaries.**



Self-care is an ongoing process. Your plan needs to be reviewed and refined regularly. Make a note in your calendar to review your plan every three months. Whilst it might seem like a lot of work, having strategies in place will help you to cope with the challenges life throws your way.

**Remember to always be kind to you.**

# SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT

Use this assessment to assess your level of self-care. If there are areas that are not included, please add them in the space provided. Assess how often and how well you are taking care of yourself according to the following scale.

3 = I do this often  
2 = I do this occasionally  
1 = I rarely do this  
0 = I never do this  
? = This never occurred to me

Use this scale to rate how well you are taking care of yourself in the following areas:

## Physical Self-Care

\_\_\_ I eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)

\_\_\_ I eat healthily

\_\_\_ I get regular exercise

\_\_\_ I seek regular preventative medical care

\_\_\_ I seek medical care when I am unwell

\_\_\_ I take time off when sick

\_\_\_ I have massages

\_\_\_ I dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity

\_\_\_ I take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner



\_\_\_ I get enough sleep

\_\_\_ I wear clothes I like

\_\_\_ I take vacations

\_\_\_ Other:

### **Psychological Self-Care**

\_\_\_ I take day trips or mini-vacations

\_\_\_ I make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet

\_\_\_ I make time for self-reflection and mindfulness

\_\_\_ I notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings

\_\_\_ I have my own personal psychotherapy

\_\_\_ I keep a journal

\_\_\_ I read literature that is unrelated to work

\_\_\_ I do something at which I am not expert or in charge

\_\_\_ I try to minimizing stress in my life

\_\_\_ I look for new experiences, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre

\_\_\_ I am curious

\_\_\_ I say no when I need to

\_\_\_ Other:

## Emotional Self-Care

- \_\_\_ I spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- \_\_\_ I stay in contact with important people in my life
- \_\_\_ I give myself affirmations, praise myself
- \_\_\_ I love myself
- \_\_\_ I re-read favourite books, re-watch favourite movies
- \_\_\_ I identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- \_\_\_ I give myself permission to cry
- \_\_\_ I look for things that make me laugh
- \_\_\_ I express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- \_\_\_ Other:

## Spiritual Self-Care

- \_\_\_ I make time for reflection
- \_\_\_ I spend time in nature
- \_\_\_ I find a spiritual connection or community
- \_\_\_ I am open to inspiration, I read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
- \_\_\_ I cherish my optimism and hope
- \_\_\_ I am aware of the non-material aspects of life

- \_\_\_ I try at times relinquish control
- \_\_\_ I am open to not knowing and finding out
- \_\_\_ I identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- \_\_\_ I meditate
- \_\_\_ I pray
- \_\_\_ I sing
- \_\_\_ I have experiences of awe
- \_\_\_ I contribute to causes in which I believe
- \_\_\_ Other:

### **Relationship Self-Care**

- \_\_\_ I schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- \_\_\_ I schedule regular activities with my children
- \_\_\_ I make time to see friends
- \_\_\_ I call, check on or see my relatives
- \_\_\_ I spend time with my companion animals
- \_\_\_ I stay in contact with faraway friends
- \_\_\_ I make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
- \_\_\_ I allow others to do things for me

\_\_\_ I enlarge my social circle

\_\_\_ I ask for help when I need it

\_\_\_ I share fear, hope, or a secret with someone I trust

\_\_\_ Other:

### **Workplace or Professional Self-Care**

\_\_\_ I take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)

\_\_\_ I take time to chat with co-workers

\_\_\_ I make quiet time to complete tasks

\_\_\_ I identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding

\_\_\_ I set boundaries with clients and colleagues

\_\_\_ I balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is  
"too much"

\_\_\_ I arrange my workspace so it is both comfortable and  
comforting

\_\_\_ I get regular supervision or consultation

\_\_\_ I have a peer support group

\_\_\_ I am assertive about my needs

## Overall Balance

\_\_\_ I strive for balance in my work-life and workday

\_\_\_ I strive for balance with my work, family, relationships, play, and rest

## Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Look for patterns in your responses. Are there some areas of self-care that you neglect? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you feel could be included in your self-care.

*Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996).  
Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization.  
Norton.*

# SELF-CARE PLAN

In **Table 1** below, make a list of all the activities that you currently do to take care of yourself. Next, in **Table 2**, list any barriers that might prevent you from practising self-care and any ideas of how you might overcome them. Finally, in **Table 3**, list any negative coping strategies and how these might be turned into positive ones.

**TABLE 1**

*List the activities that you currently do to take care of yourself.*

| <b>SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES</b> |                                |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Physical</b>             | <b>Emotional</b>               |
| <b>Psychological</b>        | <b>Spiritual</b>               |
| <b>Professional</b>         | <b>Relationship and Family</b> |
| <b>Other</b>                |                                |

**TABLE 2**

*List the barriers that may prevent you from practising self-care and how you might overcome them.*

| <b>BARRIERS</b> | <b>STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THOSE BARRIERS</b> |
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**TABLE 3**

*List any negative coping strategies and replace them with positive coping strategies.*

| <b>NEGATIVE STRATEGY</b> | <b>POSITIVE STRATEGY</b> |
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