

What do we mean by self-care?

“Self-care” can be understood in many different ways. In its simplest form, the term refers to our ability as human beings to function effectively in the world while meeting the multiple challenges of daily life with a sense of energy, vitality, and confidence. Self-care is initiated and maintained by us as individuals, it requires our active engagement.

The term “self-care” spans a full range of issues: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. Some conceptualise this construct by considering the dimensions of mind, body, and spirit, or in terms of thinking, feeling, and behaving. It is referred to as “wellness”, a “healthy balance”, “resilience”, and simply, mental health. It is important to note, though, that no matter how one breaks down the dimensions of self-care, in the end, all of these different aspects are interconnected. Failure to take care of oneself in one realm can lead to consequences in another.

There is no formula for self-care. Each “self-care plan” will be unique and change over time. Ultimately, we must listen well to our own bodies, hearts, and minds, as well as to the voices and messages from trusted friends, as we seek resiliency and renewal in our lives and work.

To better understand what self-care is, here are three things it is not:

Self-care is not an “emergency response plan” to be activated when stress becomes overwhelming. Instead, healthy self-care is an intentional way of living by which our values, attitudes, and actions are integrated into our day-to-day routines. The need for “emergency care” should be an exception to usual practice.

Self-care is not about acting selfishly. Instead, healthy self-care is about being a worthy steward of the self – body, mind, and spirit – with which we’ve been entrusted. It is foolhardy to think we can be providers of care to others without being the recipients of proper nurture and sustenance ourselves.

Self-care is not about doing more, or adding more tasks to an already overflowing “to do” list. Instead, healthy self-care is as much about “letting go” as it is about taking action. It has to do with taking time to be a human being as well as a human doing. It is about letting go of frenzied schedules, meaningless activities, unhealthy behaviours, and detrimental attitudes such as worry, guilt, and being judgmental.

Source: NSW Department of Family and Community Services, “Fact sheet 9: What is self-care?”. Retrieved October 29, 2014, from http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/media/lib100056/fact_sheet_09_what_is_self_care.pdf

Assessing your own self-care

Self-care is a personal journey, with each individual's needs being different from the next. Your self-care needs may change over time so it's worth pausing to reflect on your self-care regularly.

The following self-care assessment tool provides an overview of effective self-care strategies. Work through the list of self-care strategies and rate how frequently you use each strategy.

Scoring is simply a way for you to gain a sense of the amount and diversity of self-care strategies you draw on. Noting the balance

and interconnections of different strategies between the different areas can help you identify new potential self-care strategies. Each time you revisit this tool, try choosing one item from each area that you will actively work to improve.

5 = Frequently

4 = Occasionally

3 = Rarely

2 = Never

1 = It never occurred to me

Use the "Other" space in each area to note additional self-care strategies you are aware of and give these a rating too.

| ✓ <i>Physical Self-Care</i> | ✓ <i>Psychological Self-Care</i> |
|---|---|
| Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast and lunch) | Make time for self-reflection |
| Eat healthfully | Go to see mental health professional or counsellor for yourself |
| Exercise | Write in a journal |
| Lift weights | Read literature unrelated to work |
| Practice martial arts | Do something at which you are beginner |
| Get regular medical care for prevention | Take a step to decrease stress in your life |
| Get medical care when needed | Let others know different aspects of you |
| Take time off when you're sick | Practice receiving from others |
| Get massages or other body work | Be curious |
| Do physical activity that is fun for you | Spend time outdoors |
| Take time to be sexual | Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes |
| Get enough sleep | Notice your inner experience-your dream, thoughts, imagery, feelings |
| Get away from stressful technology such as papers, telephones, e-mail, Facebook | Engage your intelligence in a new area-go to an art museum, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event |
| Take day trip, or mini vacations | Other: |
| Wear clothes you like | |
| Other: | |

| ✓ Emotional Self-Care | ✓ Spiritual Self-Care |
|---|--|
| Spend time with others whose company you enjoy | Make time for prayer, meditation, reflection |
| Stay in contact with important people in your life | Spend time in nature |
| Treat yourself kindly (supportive inner dialogue or self-talk) | Participate in a spiritual gathering, community or group |
| Feel proud of yourself | Be open to inspiration |
| Reread favourite books, review favourite movies | Cherish your optimism and hope |
| Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places | Be aware of non-tangible (nonmaterial) aspects of life |
| Allow yourself to cry | Sing |
| Find things that make you laugh | Express gratitude |
| Express your outrage in constructive ways | Celebrate milestones with rituals that are meaningful to you |
| Play with children | Have experiences of awe |
| Other: | Contribute to or participate in causes you believe in |
| | Read inspirational literature |
| | Listen to inspiring music |
| | Other: |

| ✓ Workplace/Professional Self-Care (can include volunteering) |
|--|
| Take time to eat lunch |
| Take time to chat with co-workers |
| Make time to complete tasks |
| Identify projects or tasks that are exciting, growth-promoting and rewarding for you |
| Set limits with clients and colleagues |
| Balance your caseload so no one day is "too much!" |
| Arrange your workspace so it is comfortable and comforting |
| Get regular supervision or consultation |
| Negotiate for your needs |
| Have a peer support groups |
| Other: |

Adapted from: *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization*. Saakvitne, Pearlman & Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton, 1996)