

## Self-Care Resources

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10447-019-09382-w>

**Self-Care:** those practices and activities that keep us healthy and happy

- Self-care refers to the “ability to refill and refuel oneself in healthy ways” (Gentry 2002, p. 48), including “engagement in behaviors that maintain and promote physical and emotional well-being” (Myers et al. 2012, p. 56) and that “lessen the amount of stress, anxiety, or emotional reaction experienced when working with clients” (Williams et al. 2010, p. 322).
- The term self-care refers not only to an engagement in various practices but also to having a caring attitude or ‘being’ caring toward oneself (Kissil and Niño 2017).
- Self-care involves self-reflection and action in terms of knowing one’s needs and making a conscious effort to seek out resources that will foster health and well-being (Colman et al. 2016; Pakenham 2017).
- Self-care is not a luxury but is a clinical and ethical imperative in the mental health professions (Norcross and Guy 2007) And so, it is important to understand the potential effectiveness of various forms of self-care practices.

**What works when it comes to self-care?** That which promotes awareness, balance, flexibility, physical health, social support, spirituality

### Awareness:

- Knowledge about what it means to be a mental health helper, including an understanding of risks/symptoms of burnout & professional impairment
- Noticing and reflecting on one’s internal and external experiences, and monitoring one’s own needs (Skovholt et al. 2001; Wityk 2003)
- Evidence-based practices to build **awareness**: professional education re: compassion fatigue, self-reflection, mindfulness and meditation training, creative writing

### Balance:

- Distributing attention to various aspects of life, ensuring not to neglect important facets, and to maintaining a sense of equilibrium in both personal and professional realms (Sirgy and Wu 2009)
- Evidence-based practices to achieve **balance**: leisure time, non-work-related passions, interests, and relationships; having a holistic view of well-being, limiting scope of practice when coping with significant personal life events, maintaining good work and personal life boundaries, time management, taking breaks, flexible work hours/locations

### Flexibility

- Ability to utilize effective coping strategies; ability to adapt to and grow from life stress (Kashdan [2010](#))
- Evidence-based practices to achieve **flexibility**: emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal, attitude of self-compassion, professional development, setting and reappraising goals, journaling

### Physical Health

- Self-care in relation to physical health encompasses a focus on issues of sleep, exercise, and diet (Harrison and Westwood [2009](#))
- Evidence-based practices to maintain **physical health**: sleep hygiene techniques, exercise, and diet; equally critical components of self-care

### Social Support

- Resources and interactions provided by others and/or the connection to others that help one cope with stressful circumstances; can come from a variety of sources, including family, friends, co-workers, supervisors (Clark et al. [2009](#), p. 582).
- Evidence-based practices to build **social support**: personal support (i.e., friends, family, personal therapy); professional support i.e., clinical supervisors, mentors, advisors, professional colleagues/peers, and professors) and peer support and collaboration (i.e., fellow volunteers, classmates)

### Spirituality/Connection

- encompasses aspects of connection with self, others, and the divine, as well as purpose and ultimate meaning (Pargament [1999](#), p. 12).
- Evidence-based practices related to spirituality: mindfulness, meaning-making in work, prayer, and spending time in nature
  - Meaning-making serves as another pathway to self-care for mental health practitioners. This process encourages practitioners to situate their stressors within their overarching values and belief system, recall their purpose of working in this field, and connect with the transcendent or the ultimate meaning of their work (Park [2010](#))
  - Revisiting what initially led helpers to choose a career in mental health, to reawaken their sense of purpose & revitalize their spirit for this field of work (Norcross et al. [2005](#))

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## Self-Care Macro Practices for Helpers

Macro self-care: overall habits, attitudes, and mode of living we adopt to support our wellbeing

Below are self-care macro practices helpers might try that address areas of awareness, balance, flexibility, physical health, social support, spirituality

### **Awareness**

Education re: compassion fatigue

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-and-Managing-Stress/SMA14-4873>

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4873.pdf> [Tips for Disaster Responders: Preventing and Managing Stress]

<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/emotional-wellness-toolkit-more-resources>

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2020/07/how-to-create-your-own-self-care-plan/>

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2021/02/a-practical-guide-to-self-care-when-working-from-home/>

Self-monitoring/reflection

- Mindfulness Exercises: Body Scan (Therapist Aid, 2015)
- Wheel of Emotions (Therapist Aid, 2015)

Mindfulness and meditation

- Headspace: Mini-meditation Breathe [1 minute, 10 seconds] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEqZthCaMpo>
- Reset: Decompress Your Body and Mind 10:08 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHkXvPq2pQE>
- 10-Minute Meditation to Reframe Stress 10:10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sG7DBA-mgFY>
- Headspace: Mini-meditation Let Go of Stress [1 minute, 7 seconds] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1Ndym-IsOg>
- Sunday Scaries: A Mini-meditation for Wellbeing [4 min: 38] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNHLhHyjbd0>
- Calm: 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zilmiTO5i9Q>
- Calm: Breathe Bubble <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxayUBd6T7M>
- Calm: 1-Minute Meditation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7PxEy5lyV4>
- Calm: take a deep breath <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92xTPH7OtLs>

Creative writing

### **Balance**

Leisure time focused on non-work-related passions, interests, and relationships

- Hobbies: astronomy, board games, cycling, dancing, embroidery, fishing, guitar, hiking, ice skating, juggling, kayaking, Legos, mountain biking, needlepoint, orienteering, pottery, quilting, rock climbing, singing, trivia, ultimate frisbee, video games, weight training, Xbox, yoga, Zumba

Maintain boundaries

- Boundaries (Therapist Aid, 2016)
- Tips for Healthy Boundaries (Therapist Aid, 2017)

Time management



- Tips for Time Management (Therapist Aid, 2016)

Take a break when coping with significant personal life events

### **Flexibility**

Develop coping strategies such as emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal

- Gratitude Exercises (Therapist Aid, 2021)
- Tips for Stress Management (Therapist Aid, 2017)
- Cognitive Reframing Exercises (Therapist Aid, 2016)
- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>

Attitude of self-compassion

- <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/emotional-wellness-toolkit>
- <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2021/09/self-care-where-do-i-start/>

Journaling

- Positive Journal (Therapist Aid, 2017)

### **Physical Health**

<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/physical-wellness-toolkit>

Sleep hygiene

- Sleep Hygiene Handout (Therapist Aid, 2016)

Regular exercise

- American Heart Association infographic <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-infographic>

Nutrition

- Healthy Eating PDF [https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2021-01/DGA\\_2020-2025\\_StartSimple\\_withMyPlate\\_English\\_color.pdf](https://myplate-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/2021-01/DGA_2020-2025_StartSimple_withMyPlate_English_color.pdf)

### **Social Support**

Personal support

- friends, family, personal therapy
- support groups

Professional support

- supervisors, mentors, advisors, professional colleagues/peers, and professors
- employee resource groups
- professional associations

Peer support and collaboration

- fellow volunteers, classmates

### **Spirituality**



#### Mindfulness

- How to Practice Mindfulness Meditation (Therapist Aid, 2017)

#### Meaning-making in Work

- *(revisiting what initially led us to choose a career in mental health to reawaken our sense of purpose and revitalize our spirit for this field of work; practicing gratitude to internalize the rewards of working in mental health)*
- Dawn: I have not found a good resource for this. I may create some...

#### Spending time in nature

- <https://www.nps.gov/index.htm>

#### Spiritual practices

- e.g. prayer, attending services, etc.



## Self-Care Micro-practices for Helpers

### Roots: Balancing Exercise

Roots is a self-care micro practice to stay grounded and rooted in the present moment, when we feel ourselves taking on traumatic stress, to help us reduce our own reactivity and to radiate a sense of tranquility and confidence to the person we are helping.

Stand tall, or draw yourself up tall in your chair, and imagine you are a tree. Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. As you do this, become aware of your feet and how they connect your body to the ground beneath you; feel yourself rooted to the earth. Let your sensations and emotions rise up as you imagine the earth's nutrients rising through your feet and up into your body. Feel your trunk resonate with energy. Now lift your arms upward, as if they are swaying branches and imagine the sun's energy joining you to the sky above, connecting you in a vertical pillar of energy. Trees are graceful images of change, strength, transformation, and regeneration. Be a tree.

### The Butterfly Hug: Flexibility Exercise

The self-embrace with alternate shoulder tapping, called the "Butterfly Hug", is a self-care micro practice to comfort ourselves during these emotionally fraught connections, when we feel ourselves taking on traumatic stress, to help us reduce our own reactivity and to radiate a sense of comfort and safety to the person we are helping. It was first devised as a modified EMDR intervention (eye movement desensitization reprocessing therapy, a form of treatment for trauma) by counselors working with traumatized survivors after Hurricane Pauline in Acapulco, Mexico. The bilateral stimulation triggers a soothing effect in the brain and body. The simple act of offering a hug to yourself reduces pain, provides contact comfort and a feeling of safety and self-compassion that reduces the nervous system's reactivity to distress and threat. It's a simple, effective, self-care "micro skill" you can use when you're feeling anxious or unsettled before, during or after a challenging connection.

Begin by crossing your arms in front of your chest, and then simply make a butterfly with your hands by interlocking them at the thumbs. Gently bring your "butterfly" to your chest and place your middle fingers just under your collarbone. Take a deep breath in through your nose, and now slowly exhale through your mouth. Gently tap the wings of your butterfly against your chest, left to right, alternating the movement of your hands, like the flapping wings of a butterfly. Continue breathing slowly and deeply, tapping from left to right, as you find the pressure that's right for you. You might find it's light or a little bit heavier... whatever is right for you. And just keep tapping and breathing and noticing the calming effect of this butterfly hug on your body. When you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed, this exercise can help to ground you in the present moment, calming your body, calming your nervous system. And when you're finished, just gently allow your wings to settle on your chest, and take another deep breath in and exhale.



### **Circle of Care: Connection Practice**

Circle of Care is a self-care micro practice to help us find a sense of connection with self and our larger community of helpers, to sustain our belief that we are a part of something larger, meaningful, and good, and that we are not alone in our efforts.

Take a circular object and hold it in your hand. You could use a coin, a marble, or even an orange. Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose. As you do this, say, "I am a part of a vast circle of helpers around the world." Visualize helpers all across the world: on helplines and hotlines, in therapist offices, in support groups, in hospitals, in fire stations and police stations and ambulances, in schools and counseling centers, all contributing to the healing of people all across the globe. As you imagine helpers in your city, state, country and around the world, summon a sense of connection to this vast circle of healing energy.

### **Peace Out: Flexibility Practice**

Peace Out is a self-care micro practice to help us send help seekers off with well wishes, especially those help seekers whose weighty stories we tend to carry with us. Wishing them well offers us the opportunity to reframe a difficult experience as a healing one, and to safeguard our most important helping tool: ourselves.

Place your hand on your heart. Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose and then exhale. Take another slow, deep breath in through your nose, hold out your hand and imagine that you are blowing the help seeker a breath of peace as you say, "May you go in peace; be well". Relax into the moment of farewell as you lower your hand and allow it to gently rest in your lap.

### **Air Dancer: Balancing Practice**

Air Dancer is a self-care micro practice to release fresh energy and rebalance dual awareness, our ability to process our external circumstances and internal feelings. The resilient helper is one who can maintain a sense of equilibrium between caring for others and caring for self, who balances empathy and groundedness. This energetic movement brings you out of a post-connection focus on inner awareness by activating your external senses.

Stand up and swing your arms to the right and left. Twist the core of your body from one side to the other, letting your arms add momentum. Allow each arm to flap to the alternate side of your body as you twist from side to side. Become aware of the sensations in your arms and spine as you experience a burst of energy flowing across your body. Notice how your body naturally rebalances itself, distributing its attention where needed to maintain a sense of equilibrium.



### **Chain of Care: Flexibility Practice**

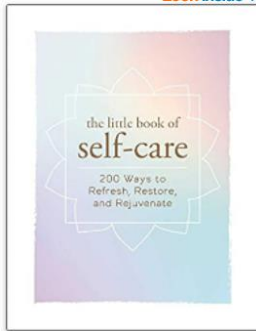
This is a self-care micro practice that helps us visualize our work as a chain of care and strengthens our boundaries, so we stay strong and ready to help. When we feel ourselves taking on traumatic stress of the individuals we are helping, we come back to our belief in people's own capacity to be resourceful and their own ability to heal.

Draw yourself up tall in your chair. Holding your right hand out in front of you, touch the tip of your right index finger to the tip of your right thumb to form a circle. Now put your left thumb through the center of that circle and touch the tip of your left index finger to the tip of your left thumb, to form a shape like the links of a chain. Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, then slowly exhale. As you do this, gently pull the links of this chain against each other, and become aware of the strength of each link and its connection to the next. Imagine yourself adding your link and connecting your help seeker to an endless chain of care, one that resonates with vital, sustaining energy and joins them to others who can be a source of healing. Chains are dynamic images of continuity, connection, and strength. Be a chain.

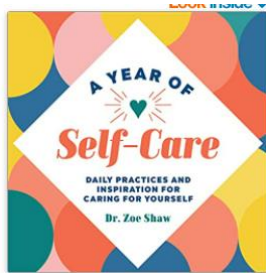


## BOOKS ON SELF-CARE

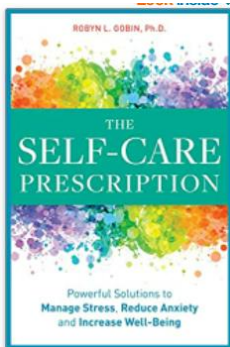
<https://www.amazon.com/Little-Book-Self-Care-Refresh-Rejuvenate/dp/1507204914>



[https://www.amazon.com/Year-Self-Care-Practices-Inspiration-Yourself/dp/1648765092/ref=sr\\_1\\_12?crid=1OCOUG8P7D3OZ&keywords=self+care+exercises&qid=1652812228&s=books&prefix=self+care+exercises%2Cstripbooks%2C52&sr=1-12](https://www.amazon.com/Year-Self-Care-Practices-Inspiration-Yourself/dp/1648765092/ref=sr_1_12?crid=1OCOUG8P7D3OZ&keywords=self+care+exercises&qid=1652812228&s=books&prefix=self+care+exercises%2Cstripbooks%2C52&sr=1-12)



[https://www.amazon.com/Self-Care-Prescription-Solutions-Wellbeing/dp/164152393X/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_img\\_sccl\\_1/133-5199285-1554564?pd\\_rd\\_w=cxKsz&pf\\_rd\\_p=6b3eefea-7b16-43e9-bc45-2e332cbf99da&pf\\_rd\\_r=3DZBX94C4SST5VFYTHN2&pd\\_rd\\_r=dc5f567a-d47f-460d-bfda-14a45b9a89cc&pd\\_rd\\_wg=trDad&pd\\_rd\\_i=164152393X&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/Self-Care-Prescription-Solutions-Wellbeing/dp/164152393X/ref=pd_bxgy_img_sccl_1/133-5199285-1554564?pd_rd_w=cxKsz&pf_rd_p=6b3eefea-7b16-43e9-bc45-2e332cbf99da&pf_rd_r=3DZBX94C4SST5VFYTHN2&pd_rd_r=dc5f567a-d47f-460d-bfda-14a45b9a89cc&pd_rd_wg=trDad&pd_rd_i=164152393X&psc=1)





## VIDEOS ON SELF-CARE EXERCISES

Headspace: Mini-meditation Breathe [1 minute, 10 seconds]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEqZthCaMpo>

Reset: Decompress Your Body and Mind 10:08

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHkXvPq2pQE>

10-Minute Meditation to Reframe Stress 10:10

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sG7DBA-mgFY>

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Calm: Breathe Bubble <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxayUBd6T7M>

Calm: 1-Minute Meditation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7PxEy5JyV4>

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