

Emotional Health, Wellbeing and Self Care



**WALKING ALONGSIDE
THOSE WHO HAVE
EXPERIENCED
ABUSE AND TRAUMA
WITHIN FAITH.**

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1. Self Care

“Self-care is daily nourishment that helps us to restore, replenish and heal. Central to self-care is the idea that taking care of yourself is not selfish, it is essential to your health and wellbeing.”¹

Self-care is a vital part of your journey as there is no getting away from the fact that at times your journey will be difficult and uncomfortable. At these difficult and uncomfortable times we often don't feel like doing self-care, that self-care is most important. We therefore have to be intentional and proactive in planning for these times. Having a broad toolkit or a list of self-care activities that work for is really important. Preparing by making sure that you have any materials that you may need a head of time is really important.

Understanding situations or experiences that may trigger anxiety, difficult memories, flashbacks or other responses from your experience is really important in planning and managing your emotional health and self-care.

Qualified practitioners can work with you through a variety of methods to develop coping mechanisms for these responses or to deal with the experience you have been through. It is important to access professional help with these aspects of emotional and mental health.

There are however self-care activities that you can do without professional help.

“Please do not equate self-care with pampering: it can be pampering but it is not limited to luxurious practices. Sometimes a restorative act is just what you need; in other moments, the true act of self-care might be the last thing you actually feel like doing, something that challenges you or requires you to step up, like sitting to meditate when your mind is whirring or heading out for that jog when the sofa is calling.”²

A framework or set of categories can help bring self-care to life, making it easy down an accessible soothing practice when we need it.



¹ Suzy Reading 2019 The little book of self-care: 30 practices to soothe the body and mind Aster: Octopus Publishing Group London.

² Suzy Reading 2019 The little book of self-care: 30 practices to soothe the body and mind Aster: Octopus Publishing Group London.

Suzy Reading developed the Vitality Wheel and this is informed by Positive Psychology, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy amongst other things. The Vitality Wheel shows you eight different ways in which you can nourish yourself and can be used to plan self-care activities that you enjoy or find useful. This helps prevent confusion or indecision in the times when we need self-care but don't feel like it.

Some things that are useful in effective self-care:

- Print out a copy of the vitality wheel and fill in some activities that will be useful to you.
- Keep a self-care journal
 - Describe yourself when you are well nourished and are having a good day. What does this facilitate in your life? What does this allow you to be?
 - Describe yourself when you are depleted, empty or fatigued. How does this affect your life and the people around you?
 - What are the triggers or situations that deplete you? (These will be times when self-care is really important!)
 - Write out a few statements of why you personally want to commit to taking better care of yourself – for you and anyone your life touches.
 - Keep a log of what has worked well and has met your self-care needs in different situations.
- Turn to your self-care journal on a regular basis and ask what do I need today? Use the vitality wheel you have filled in and previous entries to help you.
- Put together a self-care box with all the things you might need.

Self-care ideas:

- **Take a gratitude walk** – movement is great for lifting mood, use a walk to count your blessings, notice nature around you, if you have time walk to somewhere that is special to you. Notice the beauty of your surroundings. Spending time in nature, green areas and parks is linked to overall health benefits.
- **Run a bubble bath with an essential oil to suit your mood.**
- **Light a scented candle or wax melt**
- **Savouring Scent** – notice scents throughout the day and how these make you feel. Think carefully here about what scents you use. We are aware that some scents can be associated with memories and can therefore trigger anxiety or flashbacks. Different scents have different effects a good starting point if you are interested in aromatherapy is www.healthline.com/health/essential-oils-find-the-right-one-for-you
- **Make a vision board** – pick an area of your life which you want to make changes in. What does the vision look like? Sift through magazines, brochures, photos and

gather some ideas that inspire you. Express yourself with a collage of colours, images and words which speak to you. Once complete pause to reflect. What does your vision board say to you? Does it bring some clarity around what is important to you? What action steps will bring your vision closer to reality?

- **Buy two bunches of flowers** – one for yourself and one for someone else
- **Connect socially with others** – Social Connection is so important and we are not talking social media but face to face contact with other people. Be intentional about being present, making eye contact, smiling at others (even though you may not feel like it!) and lookout for opportunities to show kindness and care to others.
- **Breathing exercises** – focussing or meditating on your breathing is a quick exercise to reduce stress and anxiety.
- **Kindness Stones** - use some smooth pebbles and permanent markers or waterproof paints and get creative. Make the pebbles into characters, qualities such as hope, strength, and peace or write affirmations that speak to you.
- **Outer order Inner Harmony** – The environment we live in has a tangible impact on our inner world. Have a look around you and note what areas make you feel good and which deplete your energy. What action can you take today? This can be getting on top of life's admin or simply tidying and decluttering an area.
- **Be your own cheerleader** – every time your inner critic pops up or you face a challenge be intentional on cheering yourself on. Be supportive, give yourself a kind word and think about your personal strengths.
- **Give yourself permission** – to stop and rest, to put yourself first, to have an early night, to dream big and let the how come later, to stand firm and honour my boundaries, to speak my truth.
- **Look up and take in the stars** – when there is a clear night, head out to a space away from artificial light and just sit and look up at the stars. Print out a map of constellations and tick the ones you have seen. Allow yourself time to be filled with awe and wonder at their beauty.

And finally remember that self-care is not selfish. It's not "me first" it's "me as well!"³⁴

2. Healthy Eating for Emotional Health

Whilst Tea, Cake and Chocolate are the cornerstones of self-care we do need to include some other food groups in our diet!

Knowing what foods we should and shouldn't be eating can be really confusing, especially when it feels like the advice changes regularly. However, evidence suggests that as well as affecting our physical health, what we eat may also affect the way we feel.

³ Suzy Reading 2019 The little book of self-care: 30 practices to soothe the body and mind Aster: Octopus Publishing Group London.

⁴ Dr Rangan Chatterjee 2019 Feel Better in 5: Your Daily Plan to Feel Great for Life Penguin Random House UK.

Improving your diet may help to:

- improve your mood
- give you more energy
- help you think more clearly.

The following aspects of healthy eating are useful for mental health:

- Eating regularly
- Staying Hydrated
- Getting your 5 a day
- Looking after your gut – fibre, fluid and exercise (Healthy gut foods include: fruits, vegetables and wholegrains, beans, pulses, live yoghurt and other probiotics.)
- Getting enough protein.
- Managing Caffeine
- Eating the right fats. Our brain needs fatty acids (such as omega-3 and -6) to keep it working well. So rather than avoiding all fats, it's important to eat the right ones.
- Healthy fats are found in: oily fish, poultry, nuts (especially walnuts and almonds), olive and sunflower oils, seeds (such as sunflower and pumpkin), avocados, milk, yoghurt, cheese and eggs.⁵

If you are interested in reading further around this topic the Mental Health Foundation: Food for Thought is a very useful report.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/food-for-thought-mental-health-nutrition-briefing-march-2017.pdf>

We hope to add some emotional health recipes here in the near future!

⁵ <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/food-and-mood/about-food-and-mood/>