



Self-Care Planning

**[Remember to take
care of yourself]**

As a term, self-care can seem vague and a little fluffy for what we're really talking about when it comes to being able to sustain ourselves for this work. Once we move past social media's version of self-care — candles, motivating mottos in swirly font, and dried lavender bunches — there's some serious complexity to be explored. That exploring inspired us to think about a new way to conceptualize self-care. One which answers the question: Are my strategies effectively addressing what I'm actually needing?

Sometimes it can be hard to find time for self-care. As you lead students at school or children at home through their self-care activities, try to join them!

Self-care can help us to:

- A** Attend to thoughts and feelings
- N** Nurture and nourish the body and brain
- D** Distract from intensity (aka: take a break)

The **AND** acronym is fitting because we like the idea of being able to do this work AND still have energy, presence, and eagerness for life.

Why is self-care important?

Supporting grieving students is no small endeavor. It requires intense concentration, flexibility, the ability to withstand emotional intensity, and sometimes the patience to listen to stories that we find moving, worrisome, or even boring. All of this can lead to fatigue, impatience, a sense of overwhelm, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and even hopelessness or helplessness. It's a LOT. It's also why a well-balanced AND plan for self-care can support us in this vital work.

Self-care is as unique as grief. What one person does to take an emotional or mental break might be the same thing someone else turns to for nourishment. There's no right or wrong way to categorize your self-care strategies. What's more important is working towards balancing the three realms.

A

Attending to thoughts and feelings

This can ask us to shift how we think about self-care. Focusing attention on our thoughts and emotions can be challenging, the opposite of the pop culture concept of self-care as relaxation. Give yourself time to adjust to the idea of self-care as actual work.

Ways to Attend

- Ask someone you feel comfortable with to listen without comments to the thoughts and feelings you're carrying.
- Once or twice a week set aside 10-20 minutes to write or draw the feelings you've had lately. Let yourself feel the emotions and notice any thoughts or judgments that come up about them. *Ex: I'm frustrated that I've been sad lately. I should be over this.* Then write or draw a way to shift that negative judgment. *Ex: I am allowed to feel sad. This sadness is just one way I feel, not the only way I feel.*
- Do some movement while consciously connecting with your thoughts and emotions. This could be a walk, stretching, riding your bike, hiking, sitting in a chair while moving your arms and legs, or taking steady, focused breaths. With each movement, acknowledge the thoughts and emotions you'd like to learn more about or discharge in some way. *Ex: Hello anger, what are you trying to teach me today?*

N**Nourishing and nurturing your body and brain.**

Since self-care can be hard work, nurturing and nourishing your physical, emotional, and mental self is essential.

Ways to Nourish**• Quality sleep**

There are many ways to improve your quality and quantity of sleep. A few ideas include: going to bed at the same time each night, ensuring your sleeping space is dark, cool, and quiet, and limiting screen time before bed.

• Stay hydrated

Hydration is necessary for every system in the body including your heart, brain, and muscles. There are some great phone apps that prompt you to drink water at intervals throughout the day.

• Remember to eat

Nourishing food is a great way to support both your body and brain. Try to eat as healthy as possible.

• Exercise and movement

There is plentiful research showing that regular and consistent movement is one of the best ways to keep not only our body, but also our brain healthy. Check out [Wendy Suzuki's TED Talk](#) about how exercise changes our brain function.

D**Distracting from the intensity (aka: taking a break)**

A distraction can be anything that takes your focus away from whatever is creating intensity or discomfort. How often do we find ourselves mindlessly scrolling through our phones? To make the most of your distraction strategies, it's helpful to do them consciously rather than in a haze of habit. It's also helpful to notice if your distraction strategies are attempts to numb out from an experience — these can include substances like alcohol, THC, nicotine, caffeine, and sugar.

Ways to Distract

- Watching TV and movies
- Reading a book
- Creativity (painting, playing music, writing, coloring)
- Playing video games
- Planning for the future
- Spending time with family, friends, and pets

Remember, there is a lot of overlap with these categories. What is listed as a distraction could also be your way of attending to your feelings or nurturing your body and brain. It's the intent behind the strategy that means the most. If you're going to paint, pause and notice your intention — are you painting to shift your focus or to deepen an understanding of your emotions?

With these suggestions in mind, it's important to note that many factors go into whether practicing self-care is more or less accessible for people. If making a self-care AND plan seems overwhelming, we invite you to pick just one of these options (or one you create) to focus on for a month. Can you find 15 minutes each week to try out that particular strategy? If you're having a tough time coming up with self-care options, or you find yourself struggling while practicing self-care, please reach out for help.

If you or a child you're supporting needs immediate assistance, you can call the 24/7 National Crisis Line at 1.800.273.8255 (TALK) or text HELLO to 741741.