

What Kind of Self Care Do You Need?

by Katy Bishop and Kalima Young | Originally created for the FORCE Leadership Team

We all talk about the importance of self-care, but exactly what kind of self-care do you need? To focus in on what needs attention, take a few moments to feel around yourself from the inside out. Here are some common indicators that self-care may be needed, and a few suggestions to spark your intuition about what remedies will help.

BODY SCAN – Are you hungry, dehydrated, achy, under-rested, sluggish, wired? Are you holding excess tension in your muscles (shoulders, jaw and butt are common sites to check)?

BODY CARE – Eat protein and food that grew in the ground. Sleep, take a stretch break and/or brisk walk, wear fibers that feel good, moisturize.

Try This! – Do a body blessing. Touch each part of your body and thank it for what it does for you. Especially concentrate on the parts you sometimes have mean or conflicted thoughts about.

MIND SCAN – Are you distracted, dealing with racing or intrusive thoughts, having trouble concentrating, slow to find words, concentrating on the mountain of things undone or tunnel visioning the ugliness of injustice?

MIND CARE – Do creative expression of any/every kind, read for pleasure, make a list of every detail in your head, take frequent work breaks, use the Pomodoro system (work feverishly for 20 minutes, rest for 10), look at pictures of beautiful places

Try This! – Reset your brain by letting it rest while you color a mandala and listen to music that makes you feel serene.

HEART SCAN – Are you moody, manic, weepy, numb, feeling heavy in your chest? Are your emotional and verbal responses defensive, avoidant, furious, are your feelings outsized to the question at hand?

HEART CARE – Talk to a friend or a comrade, write journal-style for 15 minutes, repeat an affirmation (I am safe, I am loved, I am enough), watch a sad and tender movie to stimulate release, make something tangible like a cake or a craft to increase your sense of self-efficacy (ability to accomplish life tasks), make small promises to yourself and keep them, get hugs

Try This! – Write a letter to a former self, tell your kiddo how awesome you turned out after all.

SPIRIT SCAN – Are you depleted, pessimistic, feeling powerless, disembodied, not quite solid matter, disconnected from whatever word you use for The Bigness (God/Goddess/Creator/Nature/Spirit/The Force)? Are you having a hard time imagining a future where justice and healing are real?

SPIRIT CARE – Trees. Get yourself to some trees STAT. Sing, pray, chant, breathe (in 4, hold 7, out 8 is a good breath to reset your cellular chemistry), worship, meditate, have loving sex, dance, talk with your ancestors, seek guidance from a Source you trust

Try This! – Get quiet and comfy, breathe deep for several minutes. Place your hands on your heart. Imagine your heart beginning to glow, slowly opening like a flower, creating a warm pulse coming from the center of you. Let the pulse grow until you are surrounded by a bath of light like a force field around your body. Imagine the field holding you, cradling you like a child who needs comfort. Tell yourself who you are and name 5 spiritual gifts you have, talents you can offer that make you feel amazing about yourself. Rock yourself gently and breathe. When you are ready, let the image go and come back to your body here and now, knowing you are safe and loved. Drink some water and do a stretch.

Activities for Processing:

Dear Friends - Are you finding yourself feeling low, anxious, unable to process? Too many emotions resonating and not enough time? Here are some tips/perspectives that may help move the needle just a little forward towards feeling replenished.

1. WRITE A CHAOS LIST.

Ask yourself: If your world were perfect, utopian even - what would it look like? Examples: laundry would be done, house would be clean, dissertation would be written, mom would be alive, cat would be healthy. Write all of these things down - from the small, inconsequential things to the big, heart wrenching stuff. After you've purged it all on paper - start crossing off the things that you have NO CONTROL OVER AT ALL! You can't bring your mom back from the grave. You can't make your cat ten years younger BUT - you can do your laundry, balance your check book, check in on that friend you've been meaning to call. Control what you can - it makes things much more manageable.

2. STOP RUNNING BASES.

Scenario: an emotionally triggering thing has occurred and you have to deal with it. You DON'T WANNA so you process logically what happened, say you forgive them/self/it and move on. Feel like an adult now, right? Guess what? It hasn't gone away. You ran bases - from home to first to second to third and back. You didn't linger on a plate. That will cause so many problems in the future. Here is what you do: spend 30 minutes a day for a week or month sitting in the muckety muck - the not so good places. Interrogate how it feels, what thoughts cross your mind, allow yourself to feel sad and take up space in that sadness. Allow others to comfort you. Don't run bases around your emotions or they will come back and bite at the most inopportune moments.

3. MOVE YOUR BODY.

Endorphins are good. Serotonin is sexy. Exercise generates both of them. Caring for your body is a revolutionary act - especially when your body is constantly being challenged. 30 minutes a day can do wonders for the mind. Here is quickie: when you wake up, lay in the bed and stretch each part of your body. Rotate your wrists and ankles in one direction, then the other. Pull your knees up to your chest, place your palms on each and rotate them in circles or back to back, caressing your lower back. Get out of bed and bend over. Touch your toes (inspect your manicure). Lace your palms around your ankles/calves - whatever you can touch. Stay there and breath. Small, simple stretching 30 minutes a day can loosen up even the most recalcitrant activist's tensions. Do what you can with your body - no matter where you are in your fitlife - your body is serving you. Work out because you love it - not because you hate it.

SHORE UP YOUR ART SPACES.

List the creative activities that move you and commit to doing them at least once a week. Art is simply ritual practice. Cooking is art. Writing is art. Facilitating is art. Moving your body is art. Speaking with intent not to harm is art. We are all artists - embrace it.