



Be Kind to Your Mind

Self Care Resource Guide

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We must be kind to our minds

We must put a consistent effort into having physically and mentally healthy habits. Self-care is the phrase used to describe any activity we do with the intent of it benefiting our well-being. Although simple, this concept cannot be overlooked or misinterpreted. Self-care creates resilience.

What is self-care?

Self-care is not selfish, not expensive, not labor-intensive. Self-care is not for times of weakness, sadness, or hopelessness. Self-care is being aware of what times and methods help us feel our best.


"Start with a hot shower. Or a face-mask, shave, style your hair. You deserve these daily things for your personal hygiene. There are times where you need to "spoil" yourself with the simplest daily tasks, especially when feeling overwhelmed. You deserve to feel good. When you feel good, you do good."

But how?

We are busy. School, work, activities, clubs--the to do list can grow before we even have the chance to catch up. We must try to make time, every day, or at least a few days a week, to do something we love. What if we took ten minutes, to write, or dance around the kitchen, or play with the dog, or try a new recipe, or drive aimlessly, or listen to music--whatever it is that makes us most glad to be alive.

"Would that be a waste of time? Or would it be time well spent? Would it make you smile? Laugh? Breathe? Would you return to your next to do list item feeling a little more grateful and a little less tense? Self-care is something that brings joy...Something that reminds us of who we are on the inside."

Try self-care for a day. See if it's a welcome reprieve from the normal routine. If it is, consider doing it--or something different!--every day for a week. A month. A year. Establishing a self-care routine like this is ideal in forming--or breaking--habits. Prioritizing these habits increase self-esteem, self-awareness, and overall self-improvement.



Mental wellness = mental fitness

Exercise has profound effects on the brain and the body. Specifically, exercise is essential in regulating the chemicals released in the brain. Mental wellness is possible when the chemicals in our brains are at optimal levels.

Benefits of exercise:

- Increased self-efficacy.
- Improves mood.
- More cognitive control.
- Promotes positive relationships.
- Strengthens the heart.
- Improves self-esteem.
- Manages levels of stress.

Where do we start?

- Make a schedule - weekly or daily - that tracks progress. Incorporating a few goals into a schedule serves as motivation. Achieving goals is a way we all hold ourselves accountable.
- Start small & slow.
- Overcommitment often leads to soreness, inconsistency, and feeling discouraged.
- A weekly workout should include resistance training, aerobic training, and flexibility training.

Here are some examples of exercises you can try:

- Playing sports
- Hiking
- Dancing
- Strength training
- Martial Arts
- Running
- Riding a bike
- Walking
- Yoga

Healthy food for a healthy mind.

Recent studies have linked nutritional deficiencies to the onset, severity, and duration of mental health issues. Our bodies may have an obvious response to how food impacts our health. It's more difficult to sense what foods will benefit our minds, which is why we gathered the following information.

Our bodies need whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, raw, unsalted nuts, lean red meats, chicken, fish, eggs, and olive oil.

A healthy diet includes foods high in iron, zinc, and vitamin B12. It's also rich in antioxidants that prevent cell damage, "smart" carbs like potatoes and squash which have a calming effect on the brain, and protein-rich foods that boost alertness.

Try to avoid sweets, refined cereals, fried food, and processed meat. Limit sugar-sweetened beverages to two per week. Such foods put our blood sugar, insulin, hormones, and neurotransmitters on a dangerous, invisible, roller coaster. This destabilizes mood.

If we eat a well-balanced diet, our brain and body will be happier and healthier, and we will flourish.

Rest your mind

Sleep plays a vital role in your mental and physical health. Sleep gives the body's cells and neurons a chance to shut down and repair themselves.

What happens during those restless nights we've all had? Sleep deprivation acts as a chronic stressor that impairs brain function and contributes to an overload on the body's system, which can lead to memory loss, confusion, and depression. Additionally, it creates a hormone imbalance and boosts adrenaline levels in the body, which can drive anxiety even higher.

Here are some techniques you can implement to help you get those eight rejuvenating hours.

1. Set a sleep schedule.
2. Eliminate napping.
3. Power down electronics.
4. Set a bedtime alarm.
5. Exercise in the morning as opposed to late at night.
6. Eat dinner a few hours before bed.
7. Avoid caffeine, drugs, and alcohol.
8. Create a relaxing bedtime routine.
9. Make your bedroom a sanctuary.
10. Write down your worries.
11. Try lavender or chamomile aroma therapy.

Breathing for relaxing

When anxious, we constrict our bodies and take short, shallow breaths. This cuts off a steady supply of oxygen to our brains, which exacerbates feelings of anxiety and can lead to panic attacks. We can trigger the body's natural relaxation response to calm down. Breathing—slowly, deeply, for an extended time period—is the first step in doing that.

Below you'll find a seven-step process you can use to develop the practice of deep breathing on a daily basis (which will help keep your body in its natural, relaxed state).

1. Time of Day: Determine a time of day to practice deep breathing. Morning is ideal—it sets the tone for your entire day—but any time works. The key is consistency!
2. Setting: Select a setting for breathing practices. This should be a quiet place free of distractions (especially electronic devices!).
3. Timer: Set a timer for 5 or 10 minutes.
4. Position: Sit on the floor with a pillow in a meditative position, like the lotus position, or in a chair with your spine straight and feet planted on the floor with hands resting gently in lap.
5. Inhale: Inhale slowly through your nose until your lungs are filled to capacity, allowing your stomach to push out.
6. Pause: At the end of the inhalation, pause for three seconds.
7. Exhale: Exhale slowly, smoothly, and completely, until you're empty, allowing your stomach to return to its natural position. Pause again. Then repeat!

And for those inevitable moments of breathless, pent-up panic, here are some tried-and-true breathing techniques you can implement to help calm you down immediately.

Other breathing techniques to help during breathless moments of panic:

- **Ocean Waves**: Close your eyes and imagine you are an ocean wave. Breathe in and out deeply as if you are an ocean wave crashing on the shore. Alternate the frequency of your breath to become shorter and longer waves.
- **In/Out Breath**: Breathe deeply in and out, focusing on keeping your breath at a slow, controlled pace. Breathe in a positive word. Breathe out a negative word.
- **Finger Breathing**: Practice deep, slow, and controlled breathing while using your thumb to press each finger, one at a time, in accordance with your breath.



Stability. Safety. Support

It's important to establish a support system of people we love and trust with whom we can share our innermost feelings and process our experiences in a healthy way.

"It may seem easier and more natural to isolate yourself during tough times, but supportive people can act as safety nets to hold you up emotionally and help guide you through the turbulence."

What is a support system?

A support system looks different for each of us. It may consist of family members, friends, counselors, coaches, mentors, or any other individuals we feel safe with. It is especially important to reach out to others when we are feeling alone, helpless, or without hope.

Questions to ask yourself when looking for support from someone in your life:

Will they judge or shame me?

Who do I feel myself with?

Who do I trust?

Who makes me feel heard?

Who can I cry with?

Who can I laugh with?

Who makes me feel understood?

Who gives good advice?

Who makes me feel safe?

The power of boundaries

Setting boundaries for ourselves and honoring the boundaries of others is very important yet not hard. Boundaries allow us to take charge of our life.

Things we can set boundaries for:

- Emotions and thoughts
- Stuff & possessions
- Time & energy
- Sexuality
- Personal space
- Culture, religion, & ethics

Having boundaries is prioritizing ourselves, whether that's in self-care, work, or within relationships.

Benefits of boundaries:

- Improve our self-esteem
- Improve our relationships
- They can be flexible
- Allow us to conserve our emotional energy—boost our mental health
- Gives us the opportunity to be vulnerable

Boundaries are a personal choice and are different for every person—depending on our culture, introverted or extroverted personality, life experiences, & family dynamics.

How to determine boundaries?

- Be aware of rights. We each have the right to: say no, be treated with respect, prioritize personal needs, be accepting of mistakes & failures, and not meet others' unreasonable expectations.
- Give attention to instincts. Check in with the body: heart racing, sweating, heavy breathing can all be signs of when/where a boundary should be drawn
- Listen to values. Try to identify personal morals and values. If we are letting those be challenged in a way that feels uncomfortable, then set a boundary.

Creating boundaries

- Try to be assertive while using kind, effective communication like "I feel... when...and what I need is..."
- It's okay to say no! An excuse is not necessary, no matter how hard it is to say no without giving one.

Honor other boundaries!

- Watch for social cues such as: avoiding eye contact, no response, nervous gestures, turning away. *Social cues look different for everyone.
- Ask! Ask before giving a hug, ask if a conversation is uncomfortable & ask to change the subject.
- Do not be offended if someone requests setting a boundary. This is not about hurting feelings, this is about voicing their needs. We all deserve respect.

Practice creativity on purpose

Why? The average person has ~60,000 thoughts in a day. These thoughts are the foundation to psychological stress, anxiety, depression, pain, and mental illness. Acts of creativity help the mind organize and process thoughts.

When? For those times we don't want to let it out in someone else's presence. Letting it out is much better than emotional suppression or containment, which can be detrimental to our mental and physical wellbeing.

How? Lucky for us, there are many ways we can productively release our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. All we have to do is be creative, and listen to our intuition. What will serve us best in this moment?

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Theatre
- Doodling, calligraphy, & coloring books
- Dancing
- Painting
- Cooking, baking & creating recipes
- Crafting
- Singing & song writing
- Gardening & flower arranging
- Puzzles
- Story & poem writing
- Photography & photo editing
- Scrap-booking
- Journaling
- Playing an instrument
- Decorating, organizing & cleaning
- Pottery
- Filming & video editing
- Sewing & knitting

Mindfulness is meaningful

Mindfulness can be lots of things; simplified, it is nothing other than awareness of the present moment & willingness to understand what is going on in & around us.

Mindfulness means being fully engaged with the present moment and reconnecting with the immediate experience—the sensations in the brain and body, as well as the sounds, sights, smells, tastes, and feel of the world around us.

Mindfulness also requires us to notice our thoughts, feelings, and emotions, but not react to them.

"Imagine being a detached observer watching a movie of your brain. I see that thought, but that thought isn't me."

There are many exercises and activities available to help practice mindfulness. Here's an example:

1. List five activities you engage in everyday, particularly those you do without thinking about them: taking a shower, eating dinner, doing the dishes, or driving to and from school or work.
2. Each day, focus on a different activity. You are not going to change what you do, but you are going to change the way you experience it. When doing each activity, try using all of your senses to fully immerse yourself rather than letting your mind roam or rushing on to your next activity.
 - a. For example, while folding the clothes, you might pay attention to the different fabric textures on your hands or the smell of the freshly-cleaned laundry.
3. At the end of the week, reflect on how mindfulness changed your experience of the activity. If you find mindfulness helps you feel more present, awake, and alive in your everyday life, you might benefit from implementing this exercise more regularly.



It's the small things

When we are in an extreme heightened-state of stress or have a long-term activated stress response, we need stability & safety. Our bodies & minds are constantly telling us that something is wrong. These signals cause an automatic response and neurochemical surge to happen. We must regulate our nervous system to keep negative thoughts from taking control over our moods. To do this, we can practice mindfulness to help us find we are able to appreciate the small joys in life and be grateful for them.

Gratitude increases levels of dopamine and serotonin, our "feel-good" neurotransmitters. Gratitude has been linked to lower rates of depression and helps buffer against future depressive moods.

Here is a simple gratitude practice for you to try:

1. Each night for the next week, before you go to bed, take a few minutes and write down three things you are most grateful that you experienced that day.
2. These can be big or small—as simple as your morning cup of coffee or as grand as a surprise visit from your childhood best friend.
3. At the end of the week, reflect on how doing this exercise might have changed your outlook. If you find you were more aware of the good things in your life, you might benefit from continuing this practice.

Speak kind to ourselves

We must be aware of our inner voice. — the one that is sometimes cheerful and supportive, and other times negative and self-defeating? This internal chatter is referred to as self-talk. We all engage in self-talk. Sometimes it is helpful, but other times it is harmful.

Humans are storytellers. This means that the stories we tell ourselves navigate our lives. The internal narrative determines how we see the world and how we see ourselves.

Imagine if we said *"be kind to yourself"* as much as we said *"be kind to others."*

Where to start?

Try making a list of positive affirmations to repeat on a daily basis. A positive affirmation is a statement you say out loud to yourself to make it easier to believe. This will feel weird at first but the more you say it, the more you'll believe.

Examples of positive "I" statements include:

I am beautiful.
I am aware of my needs.
I am worthy of joy.
I can handle this.
I am loved.

Seeking Help

Seek help if thoughts, feelings, or emotions are taking control or causing too much discomfort. These factors do not have to interfere with daily schedules, relationships, or overall happiness.

Mental health professionals are trained to help you understand what might be beneath your overwhelming thoughts and feelings so you can create a plan that will help you feel better. They provide unbiased emotional support and teach healthy coping mechanisms so you feel empowered to handle your complex emotions.

Treatment plans vary according to unique needs and experiences, but a likely first step is to create a *Self Care Plan*. Even if you aren't seeing a professional, it's a good idea to create your own *Self Care Plan* for moments of feeling hopeless or alone.

Example of *Self Care Plan* here: <https://speakfreeellingtonorg.files.wordpress.com/2020/12/self-care-plan.pdf>

ALWAYS REMEMBER THE FOLLOWING:

- The best thing for our mental health is getting support from others.
- Treat mental health like physical health.
- Asking for help will not threaten safety or cause weakness.
- You are SO strong to have the courage to do what is best for you.
- We must be kind to our minds.

Resources

Ellington Youth Services is here to start or walk through a referral process with you. Please contact EYS at (860) 870-3130 or kcondron@ellington-ct.gov for support.

A referral will lead to treatment options like: psychiatric, inpatient & outpatient, in-home & community based support. Treatment referrals are meant to benefit anyone affected by: eating disorder, substance abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, & other mental health disorders.

Crisis #'s & Hotlines

911 - Emergency

211 - Infoline & Suicide Hotline

National Suicide Prevention
Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Connecticut Sexual Assault
Crisis Services
1-888-999-5545

Domestic Violence Crisis
Service
1-888-774-2900

Teen Dating Violence
866-331-9474

Crisis Text Line
Text HOME to 741741

LGBTQ+ Support Line
1-866-488-7386 or text START
to 678678

Human Trafficking
1-888-373-7888 or text HELP
to 233733

Local Counseling Agencies

Family Resource Services, LLC
860 375-4060

Institute of Living 860-545-7200

Community Health Resources (CHR)
1-877-844-3571

Stafford Family Services 860-684-4239

Child and Adolescent Behavior Health
Services, ECHN
860-647-6827

The Village for Families and Children
860-236-4511

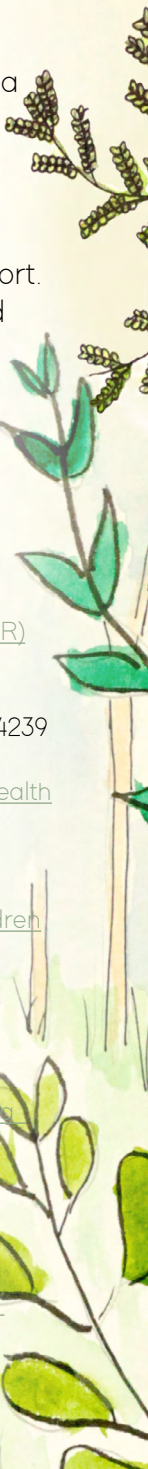
Community Child Guidance Clinic
860-643-2101

Mary's Place-A Center for Grieving
Children 860-688-9621

The Bridge Family Center
860-870-2543

West Meadow Counseling Center
860-454-0520

Walden Behavioral Care
860-533-4672





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