

Introducing Self-Care



Mindful
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CENTER

The Mindful Counseling Center, LLC, 2022.

Introducing Self-Care is a compilation of the 3-part blog on self-care from the Mindful Counseling Center. See [Mental Health Blog | Mindful Counseling Center LLC | \(mindful-counseling-center.com\)](https://www.mindful-counseling-center.com/mental-health-blog).

These articles were written by Kristin Littel, with content adapted in part from West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services (WVFRIS), *Self-Care Module* (which Littel contributed to and edited). It was also inspired by a 10% Happier meditation by J. Lingo, *Growing the Good*.



Taking Care of Yourself

This is the first of three articles in a self-care blog series from the Mindful Counseling Center.

“How we care for ourselves gives our brain messages that shape our self-worth. So we must care for ourselves in every way, every day.” – Sam Owen, Author (as cited at [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com))

YOU ARE WORTH THE EXCELLENT CARE YOU CAN GIVE YOURSELF, REALLY AND TRULY.

A well-cared-for you, one in which the positives in life are nourished alongside of coping with life’s struggles, nurtures not only you but also the world around you. It’s a win-win all around.

No doubt, we are living through times of significant stress and upheaval. These factors can contribute to increased stress-related illnesses, personal struggle and difficulty finding meaning and joy in every-day life. Yet ... this unsettling fact in no way means you must simply endure an anguished life.

You have a choice—every day, every moment—about how your life is lived, even in hard times. You can stay in default mode, perhaps languishing in misery ... or you can choose over and over again to be mindful about your self-care. Being mindful in this context means that you are, consciously and with great intention, striving to cultivate a better, more balanced way of being for yourself.

Caring for yourself by letting the positives in and being nurtured by them doesn’t ignore or erase the struggles in your life. Rather, making room for and nourishing the positives in your life can offer some relief from the hardships you face, so that you can grasp inner peace.

Admittedly, purposefully caring for yourself takes thought, planning and effort. It requires looking within yourself to determine how to best foster what is positive in your life, and then creating routines that allow you to feel OK and even contented on a regular basis, rather than eternally stressed out.

“Nourishing yourself in a way that helps you blossom in the direction you want to go IS attainable, and you are worth the effort.” – Deborah Day (as cited at wellbeing.gmu.edu)

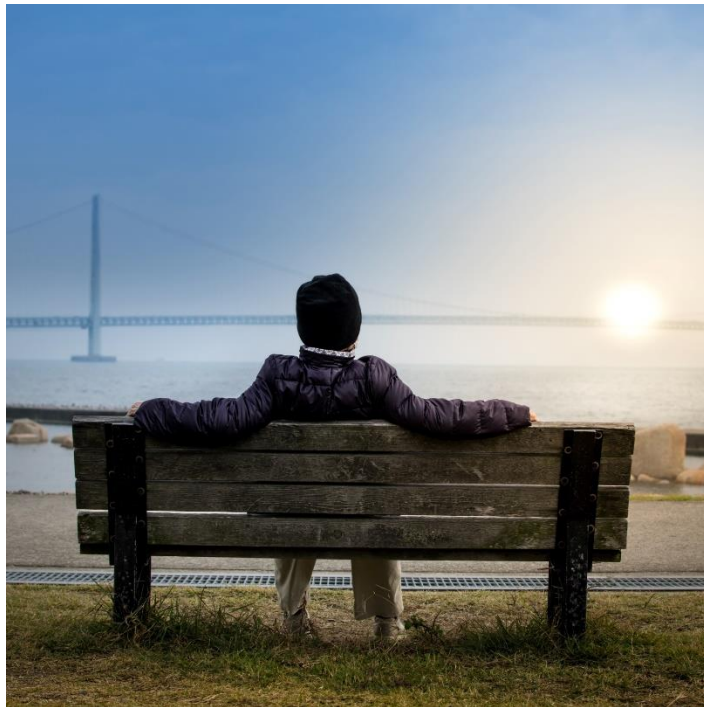
HOW DO I CULTIVATE SELF-CARE?

(Drawn in part from MindPeace, 2020)

Cultivating care of yourself necessitates that you make self-care a priority, no matter what is going on around you.

It is significant to note that the “radical” idea of being able to care for oneself, of having the time and adequate resources to do so, was born out of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and its demand for respect for the basic human rights for those being oppressed in society ([*A Guide to Practicing Self-Care with Mindfulness-Mindful*](#)).

“Caring for myself is an act of survival...” — Audre Lorde (as cited at goodreads.com)



Self-care can be thought of as the activities and routines you practice regularly to benefit all aspects of your well-being.

Self-care speaks to the need to manage and prevent stress, exhaustion, burnout and apathy in yourself. A few examples of self-care strategies:

- Tapping into your curiosity by learning something new or giving yourself an opportunity to “stretch” in new ways (e.g., by attending a class, seeking out therapy, reading a book or listening to a podcast)
- Doing contemplative activities such as focusing on breathing (e.g., to calm you), or sitting on a bench or blanket looking out over water or a mountain vista (e.g., to feel the awe inspired by nature)

- Mindfully moving your body (e.g., stretching after waking up or taking a walk)
- Expressing your creativity (e.g., by taking photographs or journaling or dancing)
- Giving yourself time to enjoy your morning cup of coffee or tea, as a start to the new day
- Reflecting on what you are grateful for in your life as part of your night-time sleep routine
- Giving yourself permission to relax and have fun, whether alone or in the company of supportive people in your life and pets (e.g., by going to a movie, watching a show at home, playing a game, showering attention on your partner, your children, your pets, etc., attending a symphony or play, or going out or ordering in from a favorite restaurant)

The best way to take care of yourself is to create self-care routines that are based on what works best for YOU, what YOU believe is most reasonable and what YOU are most likely to maintain.

It is easy to get caught up in the chaos of the day and neglect your own needs. Yet, not caring for yourself compromises your ability to function properly. Remind yourself that it is NOT selfish to take care of yourself! (Adapted from The Healing Trust, 2019)

“Self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch.” — Parker Palmer (as cited at goodread.com)

Mindfully caring for yourself, all the time but especially in challenging situations, is often a goal in counseling and wellness efforts. The Mindful Counseling Center can assist you in taking concrete steps towards mental well-being, in a way that fit your needs and hopes. Contact us today at 609-377-5859 or mindfulcounselingcenter@gmail.com.

References

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The Case for Self-Care



This is the second of three articles in this self-care blog series from the Mindful Counseling Center. The first blog stressed the importance of being mindful about your self-care, consciously and with great intention, to cultivate a better, more balanced way of being for yourself.

WHY DOES SELF-CARE MATTER?

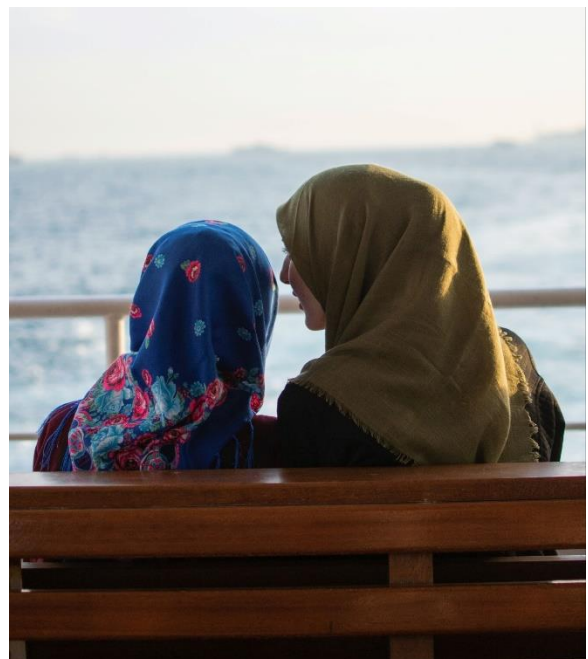
(Drawn/adapted in part from Goldberg, 2017)

Self-care calls for you to mindfully tend to your well-being (adapted from Jacobson, 2019):

- Every act of self-care is a way of respecting yourself. Each act recognizes your self-worth and can help you move out of periods of low moods, anxiety, depression and other types of suffering.
- Taking care of yourself can also help you build and maintain healthier relationships. It shows others that you expect them to treat you with respect. When practicing self-care, you naturally lean towards those relationships that nourish your well-being, rather than those fraught with destructive behaviors.

“With every act of self-care your authentic self gets stronger, and the critical, fearful mind gets weaker. Every act of self-care is a powerful declaration: ‘I am on my side, I am on my side, each day I am more and more on my own side.’” – Susan Weiss Berry (as cited at wellbeing.gmu.edu)

If you are not taking care of yourself physically, mentally, spiritually or otherwise, it can lead you to feel imbalanced, burned out, anxious and depressed. Developing self-care routines, practicing them and



periodically reevaluating them can help you avoid these conditions.

- A key reason self-care matters is that aids you in heightening your mental wellness and stress resiliency (adapted from The Healing Trust, 2019).
- When stress and anxiety hit, self-care habits can be “like a buoy, keeping you afloat when you feel low and ensuring at least a certain level of self-esteem.” These habits can also possibly mitigate some negative impacts of stress and anxiety, such as feeling self-critical, sleep problems and the development of other adverse health conditions. (Adapted from Jacobson, 2019).

“Feeling good feels wonderful! You owe it to yourself to feel good.” -David Burns (as cited at feelinggood.com)



WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RESILIENCY AND SELF-CARE?

Resilience can be defined as the ability to adapt in the face of tragedy, trauma, adversity, hardship and ongoing significant life stressors (American Psychological Association or APA). Resilience can be built and increased (Newman, 2002; APA, 2012). It develops when people experience moderate levels of manageable stress and, over time, become better able to cope with it, physically and mentally. It involves a combination of behaviors, thoughts, actions and connections that work together to help people grow and adapt to life’s challenges.

The bottom line is that self-care supports your resiliency.

Contact the Mindful Counseling Center at 609-377-5859 or mindfulcounselingcenter@gmail.com for assistance with mindful self-care.

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Stepping into Self-Care

This is the last of three articles in this self-care blog series from the Mindful Counseling Center. The first and second blogs provided a basis for what self-care is and why it is so important.

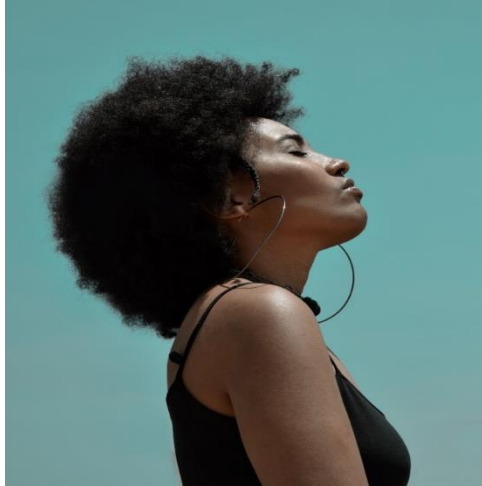
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MINDFULLY CARE FOR YOURSELF?

To mindfully create self-care routines that you will be likely to sustain:

- Explore and then select strategies that work for you AND you will actually do on a regular basis.
- Expect some trial and error as you explore different self-care strategies. Try them out and find out if they work for you ... or not ... and if you like certain strategies better than others.
- Once you are satisfied with your initial selection of self-care activities, just start! Your initial plan in no way needs to be perfect or cover all aspects of self-care (mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, etc.). To begin, it may be just one or two practices. You can review and revise it anytime. The key is to simply get started and stick with what works.

“When you recover or discover something that nourishes your soul and brings joy, care enough about yourself to make room for it in your life.” -Jean Shinoda Bolen (as cited at [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com))





EXAMPLES OF SELF-CARE STRATEGIES

Below are just a few possibilities of the endless ways you can care for yourself. It is critical to purposefully craft a set of activities that work for you specifically, that support your well-being.

“Caring for your body, mind, and spirit is your greatest and grandest responsibility. It’s about listening to the needs of your soul and then honoring them.” –Kristi Ling (as cited at selfcarewellbeing.wordpress.com)

Mindfulness Practices

You can tend to your self-care with mindfulness practices! Mindfulness is essentially the art of paying attention to present moment experiences, with openness, curiosity and the willingness to be with what is.

- Mindfulness calls for directing your focus to the present moment. When you get caught up in emotions or get lost in thoughts about the past or future (as you will, given that the mind naturally wanders), you can intentionally bring yourself back to the present.
- Mindfulness involves noticing thoughts and feelings as they arise, allowing them to be there and letting them pass by (sort of like surfing waves).
- Mindfulness helps you to pause, breathe, observe and choose a response to a situation, rather than reacting to it.

The more you practice mindfulness, the better you can get at staying present and being less reactive. For more on mindfulness, see the Mindful Counseling Center [blog](#), *Why is Mindfulness Important?*

“When we are able to moment by moment realize and live into a life of truth, beauty and love, we are free and nothing can disturb the peace at the core of our lives. What would our lives be like if we were able to be fully conscious of the truth of each moment and our decisions were based on, “What is the most loving thing to do and the most loving way to be in this moment?” —Joy Nur (as cited at goodreads.com)

Here are a few examples of simple mindfulness activities:

- Begin each day with deep breathing exercises, focusing attention on your breath and perhaps also quietly repeating a word or phrase that brings you peace or calm.
- Take time during the day for meditation, whether it be quiet, reflective alone quiet time, a visit to a beloved spot such as your garden, a park or a beach, a contemplative walk, guided talk/imagery found in a book, audio or podcast or from a live teacher, etc.
- Eliminate distractions at meals. Focus on tastes, textures and smells. Strive to fully enjoy eating.
- Actively listen when having a conversation with someone and tune into the person, instead of thinking about what you want to say.
- When you feel stressed, try this STOP practice: Stop what you are doing. Take a deep breath, and then several more. Observe what you are experiencing (what you are feeling, thinking and sensing, and what is happening around you). Proceed by choosing a reasonable response to what is happening.



The Mindful Counseling Center [blog](#), *Riding the Wave of Anxiety*, offer examples of integrating mindfulness practices to help ride the wave of anxiety rather than get sucked into it.

Other Strategies and Activities

- Give yourself permission to say “no” or opt out of activities or events. Whenever possible, practice saying no to those things and activities that do not align with your plan to nourishing your care of you.
- Incorporate art, music, writing, gardening, crafts or other creative activities you enjoy into your routine. For example, if you enjoy writing, you may consider starting or ending your day by writing in a journal,

noting things for which you are grateful. Routine journaling could also serve as an outlet for thoughts and feelings, to externalize them and help you let go of the stresses of the day.

- Begin and maintain routines that support you in mindfully moving throughout your day and healthy eating (meaning eating intuitively to satisfy your hunger rather than dieting). These activities can reduce stress, increase immunity, improve energy and sleep, and boost mood.
- Implement a bedtime and wake-up time that you stick to each day. Incorporate avoidance of caffeine later in the day. Also, put away the electronics at least an hour before bedtime. Establishing good sleep habits is crucial to managing stress and building good self-care.
- Establish routines that help you regularly connect with supportive people and pets in your life. You might call this strategy sustaining positive connections.



I believe that you take the action, and THEN the insight follows—I do loving things for me, stroke my own shoulder, put myself down for a short nap, and the insight follows: that I am a wild precious woman, a human merely being, as E. E. Cummings put it, deserving of respect, tenderness, protection, delight and solidarity.” —Anne Lamott (as cited at www.inhersight.com)

Contact the Mindful Counseling Center at 609-377-5859 or mindfulcounselingcenter@gmail.com for assistance with mindful self-care. In the [Self-Care Support](#) pages of the website, you can also find material that may aid you in your self-care. For example, there is an article, [Writing for Self-Care](#).

This booklet was created from the 3-part blog on self-care from the Mindful Counseling Center. See [Mental Health Blog | Mindful Counseling Center LLC | \(mindful-counseling-center.com\)](http://www.mindful-counseling-center.com). These articles were written by Kristin Littel. Article content was adapted in part from West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services (WVFRIS), *Self-Care Module* (which Littel contributed to and edited). It was also inspired by a 10% Happier meditation by J. Lingo, *Growing the Good*.