

## Theme of the Week: Self-Care

The strategies below are applicable to families, young people, and professionals, whether at work or at home

### Self-Care



We are living through a global pandemic. None of us have done that before, and every day is going to be different. Through all the change, one factor remains key and that is the **importance of self-care**. Many of you will be caring for other adults, children, families – all whilst managing your *own* personal reactions to the ever-changing situation. That's a lot! It's therefore essential to find small but helpful ways of making sure you **take care of yourself**, so that you can keep taking care of others and maintain your own wellbeing too.



During times of uncertainty and change, our minds and bodies are likely to be running high on stress and anxiety. This is because we have evolved to detect threats so that we can defend ourselves, so it is a totally natural response. The trouble is that if we stay in this mode long-term, it has a chronic impact on our bodies and brains, and also **makes it harder to experience positive emotions, compassion for others** and to be able to **think things through and reflect**. So, even though we might be focused on helping others, we are actually less likely to be able to go on doing this unless we pay some care and attention to ourselves too.



At times when it seems so vital to help others, we can be incredibly **self-critical at the thought of taking care of ourselves**. However, **positive self-care** keeps us **going for longer**, allows us to access **more compassion and reflection**, helps us to **emotionally regulate**, and **reduces the likelihood of burnout and trauma**. We think that's a pretty good reason for making some time for yourselves that is **restorative**, no matter how small the actions. The idea here is not to burden you with more demands, but to think about what could realistically be included in your routine – or in the routines of people and families you live and work with.

To come out of '**survival mode**' for a few minutes and activate your **emotional soothing system** (we all have one, even if it gets little attention), you could try:

- **Closing your eyes and checking in with how you're feeling for a few minutes.** Notice what's going on for you right now, in your mind and in your body. Be curious and accepting of whatever you find there. Take a few long, deep breaths whilst you do this. It doesn't have to take long, and you can do it as often as you like. Allowing yourself a space to feel your own feelings will give you the capacity to help other people you live or work with to feel theirs.

- **Closing your eyes again and taking yourself to a place you have felt happy, calm or safe** – this could be a real or imaginary place. Spend five minutes there, thinking of the different sights, smells, sounds around you in that place, and notice what happens to your body as you give yourself permission to stay there for a little while. Having this place to visit can act like a really restorative shelter for our minds and bodies – it’s a good one to try before going to sleep.
- **Sleeping enough** – we all know sleep is important for physical and mental functioning but can be a real challenge when there is worry, stress and uncertainty around. What would make a bedtime routine more soothing? Perhaps a warm bath, smelling lavender oil or another smell you find relaxing, drinking warm milk, rubbing on body lotion...these are all soothing and nurturing gestures that can quieten down the threat system and start to activate our self-soothing system instead. Work with your senses – what can you touch, see, smell, taste, listen to?
- **A gratitude journal** – the idea of gratitude here is not intended to sound patronising, we know there are a lot of challenges going on right now! Science has shown that if we can tune in to a few small things every day that we are grateful for, no matter how challenging our day has been, we create mental shifts in our outlook (and our bodies respond to this too). If you’re interested in this approach keep a notebook by your bed and try 3 bullet points a day.
- **Personal care** – A 10 minute walk, a relaxing hot shower or bath, changing into fresh clothes, being in a room on your own for a while. These are small gestures that help you to look after yourself. Physical activity is really important for health and mind, and being outside can be very restorative too, even within the limits of current government guidelines.
- **Keeping connected** – speaking to people who help us feel understood, rejuvenated and cared for is crucial right now. Could you increase your contact with friends or family who make you feel good? And notice whether you are currently having more interactions that leave you feeling drained. Also, if you’re talking to too many people and feel too in demand then carve out 30 minutes per day when you’re disconnected from technology to be with yourself.
- **Notice what makes you feel good (and what doesn’t)** – is being glued to the news feeding worry and anxiety? If so, try limiting your exposure and notice what happens...your brain might have chance to think about something else. What have you enjoyed previously that you could incorporate in a small way into your daily or weekly routine?

**Practicing wellbeing – can you think and help others to think about the following?**

- **Positive Emotion:** Identify 3 events that you feel grateful for today
- **Engagement:** Can you reach out to someone who makes you laugh, feel cared for, or restored in some way?
- **Relationships:** Share ideas for activities that make you feel relaxed and calm. Show a family or child how to do something calming that you find effective.
- **Meaning:** Could you extend an act of gratitude to someone else? E.g. sharing how they helped you feel good, doing something kind for them.
- **Accomplishments:** How have you managed to show yourself some care today in a way that is new, effective or beneficial?