

Self-Care in Difficult Times

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When there is a lot going on out there in the world and in our lives, it can be tempting to let go of the things that are most important to us, especially the things that keep us healthy. Now more than ever, it is important that we focus on those things that are going to keep us healthy and well, both physically and mentally as we transition into a post-pandemic world and the many challenges it has in store for us. While we cannot control outside forces that can interfere with our lives, it is vital to give attention to things that are in our control and within our sphere of influence. Self-care is taking the time for personal reflection and is a conscious act that one can take to promote your own well-being.

SELF-CARE AS SELF-AWARENESS

The Canadian Mental Health Association indicates that engaging in a self-care routine has been clinically proven to assist in reducing or eliminating anxiety and depression, reducing the negative psychological and physical effects of stress, preventing burn out, improving concentration, minimizing frustration and anger, increasing happiness, improving energy, and so much more. But most consequentially, it is vital for building resilience towards those external stressors in our lives that we cannot control or completely eliminate. Self-care can be achieved with basic activities such as:

- Taking time to exercise when you can. It could be as simple as going out for a walk, and getting some fresh air.
- Eating healthy to ensure that your diet is fueling your body.
- Obtaining the optimal amount of sleep as it is important to our immune system and cognition. We compromise different aspects of our health when we do not get enough rest.

It is important to research outwardly and inwardly what self-care methods work for you. Everyone is unique so figure out and experiment with what actions make you feel better. Social connection with friends and family can invigorate some, while others feel recharged when taking time alone. Psychology Today recommends adding journaling to your self-care routine, as it is a proactive method to help recognize warning signs that you could use self-care before things get worse as you can then easily recognize patterns in your behavior. Perhaps you will notice bleaker moods or disturbed sleep when doing certain activities, which you will know to avoid. For some, it can mean minimizing Internet usage when the news cycle gets depressing and overwhelming, as the news cycle tends to do.

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ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF SELF-CARE

During pandemic times when so many people are suffering or when people close to us are facing difficult times, feeling even a sense of joy can feel so far removed, and feel perhaps even unnecessary in our life. Finding something that brings you a sense of joy, has a very real impact not just on our mind, but also in our body. According to Harvard Health, from a physical-health standpoint, self-care can be a necessity as it has also been proven to assist in reducing risk of heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Self-care can not only be just for you; it can benefit the people around you as well. Engaging in self-care increases not only your productivity, but your capacity to give more to others. Self-care can be a communal activity when we practice open conversations with those in our network. Considering the needs of our family members, friends, co-workers, etc., showing them moral support, and making an offer of help when you are able to allows you to be not only attuned to the needs of other people, but enlightens you to your own personal needs.



LIMITATIONS OF SELF-CARE

As previously mentioned, self-care can vary from person to person, but it can also be situational. Curating a self-care routine based on your own limitations is certainly a positive step forward. But the self-care that helps you when you are overwhelmed with work, may not be the same care that you need when you are depressed. In such cases, it can be helpful to speak to a professional counsellor who can help identify these issues and guide you toward essential tools in building resilience and improving your overall well-being.

**For confidential assistance, contact your EFAP
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