

# Self care

When we decide to pay attention to our self care, the world doesn't magically open up to make it easy for us. The reality is that improving our self-care can be a challenge.

Lifeline corporate training along with Heart and Soul Coaching produced a webinar <https://vimeo.com/411326613/6dbbf099b1> to help you understand and build your self-care.

I've put together these notes and workbook to build on the concepts and ideas we covered. I hope that together with the video they help to breathe fresh life into your self-care, and help to make self-care more real, relevant and meaningful to you. The video and workbook covers 3 areas;

- Frameworks for self-care
- Self-care strategies
- Putting self-care into action

The video was made during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the information is timeless and is relevant across all times in your life.

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## Noticing your self-care needs

Most people start paying greater attention to their self-care because they notice that their wellbeing is beginning to drop. I begin the webinar by asking people to stop and pause. It's difficult to take notice of what's happening 'on the run'. In the space we create by stopping, pausing and stepping back, we can pick up what's happening for us, and are much more able to effectively take notice of what we pick up. By noticing and tracking what's happening, we can make better self care responses.

In the webinar participants spoke of some of the impacts of COVID-19 and their needs for self care because of this. People in the video noticed things like anxiety, the roller coaster of emotions, difficulty planning when you don't know what the future is going to be like, and the speed and number of changes.

Here's some things to think about when you're noticing what's happening. Think of something that's happening for you and see if you can identify any of the below.

What are you noticing?- physical signals, emotional, mental, beliefs and values, things you are doing.

How strong is it?

Is it there all the time or does it come and go?

What level does it affect you on? Is it a slight irritation on the surface, or does it hit deeper?

Is there a metaphor that helps explain what's going on?

How do you react or respond to what you notice?

One of the things Holly mentioned was that she found that her normal self care strategies weren't effective in meeting the circumstances she was now in. This has been a common comment I've heard in the last few months. It can particularly happen when change is out of the ordinary, but you might also notice this at any time. A useful question is *Do you need to look at new ways of self care that might better meet what is going on?*

Two resources that you might find useful to help you notice and be aware of what's going on, are

[Self care tracker](#)

[Understanding your self-care needs](#)

### **Load and Capacity (7:30min)**

I often refer to these as your bucket and cup.

**Your bucket** – the load that's on you. All the pressures you feel, the stresses, the amount you have to do, things that draw on your resources whether they be stressful or positive things.

**Your cup** – this is your capacity and all the things that input into it. It is your level of wellbeing and what you can bring to any situation.

It can be really useful to gauge the level of both of these. If the load is higher than your capacity, then you begin to struggle or suffer, if they are even you are holding your own, and of course if capacity is higher then you're travelling well.

**Hold both your hands out with one being your capacity and the other being the load. Lift or drop your hand to represent the level of capacity and load you have at the moment.**

Physically representing your wellbeing and load in this way can help make real what is happening.

### **Why Self Care (9:21)**

The load and capacity concept highlights two of the reasons why we do self care;

1. To get away from something that makes us uncomfortable
2. To move towards something better. Something we want

There are other important reasons that we'll cover as we go along in the webinar.

### **Self care strategies**

In the webinar we cover 4 different ways we can go about self-care. They are all options and you might prefer one over another or find some easier than others. The first we cover is steadiness.

## 1. Steadying ourselves (10:00)

How do you maintain steadiness, and how do you return to steadiness when you lose your inner equilibrium? There are 4 main ways to move towards greater steadiness. It's great to have a range of things you can do.

**Calming** – doing things to settle. For example yoga, meditate, breathing exercises, having a cup of tea, watering the garden.

**Release** – getting it out of your system through something active. Some examples are talking and venting, exercise, journaling, cleaning the house

**Containing** – puts boundaries and structure around what's happening. Examples include problem solving, conceptualising the issue, mind mapping, compartmentalising.

**Tuning out** - those things that distract and take us away from what's going on for example, watching TV, hobbies, focussing on something else.

### What do you do to help yourself steady?

Ideas that came from the group were

- looking outside for a moment especially at nature like a tree
- having interim steps that help move you towards a steadier place
- stop and pause, and take a breath
- cup of tea
- art work
- structured and sequential things
- going for a walk

### Activity - Breathing to both build and regain steadiness (17:25) – NEEDS

Through our breathing we can steady our physiology and nervous system. The NEEDS acronym is useful in helping us do this. Don't worry too much about the order, it's just a memory tool and the main thing is that you find something that works for you.

**Notice**– just notice your breathing. This is a really useful thing to pay attention to during the day. Try paying attention over time and see what you notice. You'll find that your breathing will naturally shift over time without you trying to change it.

**Even** – make your breathing more even. Over time see if you can breathe the same in as the same out. Some people have a system like breathe in for a count of 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4, hold

for 4. There's lots of different ways, but the main thing is to find something that works for you. No matter what method you use it's the evenness that we are looking for here.

**E**ase – relax your breathing and breathe with flow and rhythm. Think of the waves coming in on a beach and then going out, think of a pendulum, or a relaxing, rhythmic song.

**D**eepen – this isn't to take a big breath, it is to breathe from the bottom of your lungs. If you put your arm across your tummy and your hand on to the bottom of your ribcage, you are looking to feel your hand move in and out. This will show that you are activating your diaphragm and as you do you will be breathing in a way that settles your nervous system. Note: this can take some practice.

**S**lower – Over time slow your breathing down. 6 breaths a minute or a bit less is ideal, but if you can't do that don't stress, the important thing is to just slow your breathing a bit. If you go too slow it becomes stressful, but you'll find your sweet spot.

When participants did this along with me on the webinar, they noticed they started to calm.

## **Sustaining ourselves (20:25)**

These are the things that 'fill your cup', nourish you, and add to your capacity.

*An important point that is highlighted here is that if we are low in our capacity and reserves, we are fundamentally different to when we have high capacity. We can't do the things we would normally do, we can't access our capacities as we normally would. The way our brain works, our emotions, and our physiology, all function differently when we have low capacity. In these situations we often need to change our self care to meet where we are at, not where we would like to be at, or as if we are functioning like we do when we are well in ourselves.*

We often think of nourishment and increased capacity as the bigger things – when the stress is over, when I win lotto, when someone changes the way they are behaving. Yet it is the small every day, moments of nourishment that form the foundation of our wellbeing. Barbara Fredrickson describes them as 'heartfelt positive moments'.

How do we know when things are nourishing? We feel them, we light up inside; we have an inner response to them rather than just feeling them on the surface. It is those experiences that connect you to life, or to put it another way, those life giving and enhancing moments we experience. There are lots of different experiences of nourishment

**Activity - What have been some of the small enjoyable moments you've had recently? Think of as many different types as you can.**

Participants on the webinar identified these examples of things that nourished them.

- sharing lunch with my husband – calming and connected
- a good sing along in the car - connectedness, love and enjoyment. My whole body smiles
- stop and noticing. Listening to sounds – calming and stopping the chatter

To increase nourishing experiences we can

- Notice them
- Savour them
- Increase the amount and range of experiences.
- Remember them – it reactivates the experience
- Share them – when people join in with the experience it adds another layer to it

If the positive experience comes easily that's great, but don't force the experience. It's more about 'opening the door' to them. Allow them to let them come in, in their own time and way.

## **Caring (27:00)**

How do we care for ourselves and be kind to ourselves? Like nourishment, caring is an internal experience. We can describe caring from our head, but it is when that caring place is activated inside of us that caring becomes real. The focus of caring is 'how can we be there for ourselves in ways that are kind and supportive'. In the webinar we covered 3 things that can help us be more caring towards ourselves.

1. Recognize and understand your humanness. As humans we have a range of experiences. We laugh, we cry, we feel steady, we feel unsteady, we struggle, we do well, and the list goes on. When we are struggling and doing it tough, caring is about being able to find a part of us that can acknowledge that it's tough and hard work. That might be all we can do at the time. Similarly, we can recognize when we are feeling good and having positive experiences.
2. Self talk – this is about how we relate to ourselves and the language we use towards ourselves. Can we introduce more positive communication? For example, just acknowledging your experience from a place of caring, self encouragement and support like "you can do this". Try speaking to yourself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person rather than 'I'. See what works for you.
3. Providing a supportive space for the part of you that is hurting. For example when you see a parent pick up a child who has fallen over and hurt themselves and the first thing they do is provide comfort to the child. The place in us that is struggling sometimes needs our support and comfort before we can mobilize our resources. This often does not come intuitively, and sometimes people see it as being self centred or in some way weak. It's not. Research finds that it is a more useful response than being harsh or critical towards yourself.

## Values and Boundaries (31:50)

Both our boundaries and our values are ways in which we support and strengthen ourselves.

**Boundaries** are like fences. Sometimes our boundaries are like brick walls and its difficult for anything to get in or out. Other times our boundaries are more like a dilapidated picket fence with holes and gaps all over the place. Some people have naturally more clear and definite boundaries, whilst other have more 'porous' boundaries.

We have a whole range of boundaries for example, between work and home, between 'my stuff' and 'your stuff', what's not ok and what's ok, personal time and family time.

### How would you describe your boundaries?

**Values** are the things that are important to us and that we hold on to as we go through life. Examples of values are; I believe in the value of people and want to do good towards others, or family is important and comes first, or I'm going to give this a go even though the outcome is uncertain and I'm not sure what I'm doing.

Values that the participants thought of were

- How we have come together collectively as a community and do what we can for each other
- Seeing how my own values are shared by others has kept me going
- Appreciating what I already have in my life
- The autonomy to make decisions around my own safety

**Activity – what are the values that have been there for you. It can take some time to identify them.**

**Activity – 3 Words. What are 3 words that you can hold on to as you go through things at the moment.**

## Part 3 Self Care in Action (37:05)

What makes self care difficult?

- Prioritising self care is difficult. We are creatures of habit and changing our patterns can be difficult. We can so easily drift back to the 'old ways'.
- Multiple things that are impacting. Not just one issue we are facing so self care needs to be there moment to moment.
- Time pressures and too much to do
- We don't know how. We haven't learnt
- We are stressed and exhausted

An important point that came up in the discussion was that we often see self care as something we need to do. However, remember how we talked earlier about self care as caring? One of the things about caring is "how can self care come to meet me at this moment, without me having to change". So it's not about doing something extra, or putting in some behaviour, which can seem like another burden on top of everything else. As Holly said in the webinar, that becomes anxiety provoking in itself. She spoke further about this and said sometimes it seems we have to do self-care 'right'. I think there's a cultural influence around this which emphasises that we do self care so that things are better. The assumption is that if we aren't better, somehow we haven't done self-care properly or good enough. This can get in the road of caring for ourselves as we are and in the midst of our struggle or difficulty.

Sometimes self-care is as simple as acknowledging that we are tired or haven't got the motivation or capacity to do much else, or 'how can I hang in there for the time being', or to just take a breath. Holly went on to say how maybe when self-care seems like a burden, what's useful to consider is that maybe the self-care approach isn't right for the place she's in, and remembering why she is doing the self care.

### Having a self-care plan (42:57)

1. Why do I need self care? / What am I noticing?
2. What's my current strategy?
3. Is it working?
4. What are the simplest first steps I can take
5. What might get in the road?
6. Review date

The [Wellbeing tracker](#) is another great way to help you focus on your self-care efforts.

Simple first steps need to be very achievable. 'If nothing else I can do this.....' An example might be to notice my breathing for 20 seconds a day, or to have a cup of tea/coffee and appreciate 1 sip, or to move or stretch for 30 seconds a day. Simple things that participants thought of as first steps were;



- Smile to myself
- Self compassion – talking to myself and treating myself the same kindness I afford to others
- Varying my self care

### **What are the simplest first steps you could take over the next week?**

A useful approach is to try something out for a limited time period, and then see what the results are. It picks up two other reasons for self care. One is that it is interesting to see what works and what doesn't. The other is that we do self care because we can. We actually don't have to have a big reason to do it. It's ok to do self care just because you feel like it and want to.

Sometimes you need to step back even from specific self care actions. I call it 'the hokey pokey' approach. It's where you try something for a bit and then pull back if it's not working. You then try again a bit later if it's not working. You need to judge if you would like to persevere or to pull back because it will be counterproductive or a waste of energy to keep on trying. It is ok to stop and to come back to it when you are more able. That in itself is an act of self care. Sometimes when things are tough our self care strategy is damage control, and when things ease up either in our self or in the situation, then we can put in more specific self care strategies.

## **Conclusion (48:20)**

### **Activity – Answer one or more of the following**

**A positive moment .....**

**Something I've achieved .....**

**A value that's been there .....**

**Something I appreciate .....**

**A hope I have .....**

The webinar concluded by participants sharing their hopes for the future.

The Self-care webinar is proudly brought to you by Heart and Soul Coaching and Lifeline Training Queensland. The notes are produced by me.

Thank you for your time in looking at these resources and I hope you can take away some things that are useful for you. Further resources can be found at [www.selfcareproject.com.au](http://www.selfcareproject.com.au).

Go well and take care of yourself and each other

Peter

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