



Self-care

For survivors of sexual abuse and
harassment



Self-care — what
does it mean to
me?






Self-care — what it is?

Self-care needs to be both the practices we do or engage in, like movement, therapy, and doing activities that make you feel physically, emotionally and mentally better.

Self-care also means ways of being with ourselves that are kind, patient, and compassionate, even when — especially when — we have fallen far off our self-care track.




Self care



Self-care activities can be small things, such as drinking a glass of water, stretching or taking some deep breaths.

Or they can be more challenging activities that involve more effort or time – for example, getting fit enough to run a 5K, sorting out a messy room or learning how to s

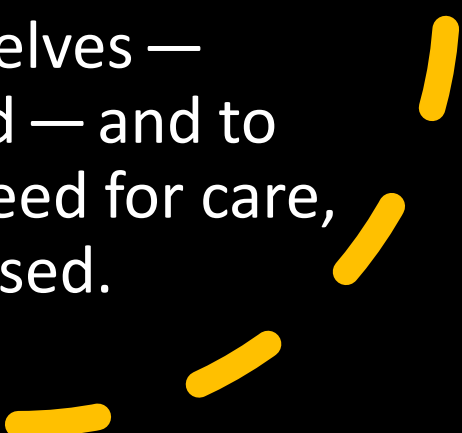


Why is self-care important for victims and survivors?

To engage in self-care is the ultimate counterbalance to the way in which sexual trauma attempts to steal agency, autonomy, self-worth, vitality

To say I will care for myself by engaging in soothing or energising practices is a way in which we can reclaim our right to exist, take up space, be seen, be heard, and be valued.

It is empowering to show up for ourselves — messy, wounded, hurting, and flawed — and to unapologetically communicate our need for care, regardless of how much time has passed.



Why can self-care be hard?

Lots of people find self-care really hard. It can be difficult to remember to make time for it. Many of us find ourselves challenged to establish regular patterns of care. However, life often interrupts routines, and our motivation to expend precious resources towards healing waxes and wanes.

If you're a victim or survivor of rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse or other sexual violence, you might also find self-care challenging for the following reasons:

- You might be used to other coping methods that are less safe or healthy – for example, drinking lots of alcohol or self-harming. These coping methods might give you short-term relief or happiness, however they can cause you more harm in the long term.
- You might feel shame or blame yourself for what happened and how you feel – which can cause you to feel that you 'don't deserve' self-care.
- If you're feeling low, anxious or finding it hard to cope, you might feel like you don't have the energy for self-care. If that's the case, try breaking bigger tasks or activities down into smaller ones, or finding other things to do that better suit your energy levels.
- Although self-care can be hard, it's important to remember that even steps that seem small will still help. So, make sure to choose activities that work best for you. And if there's anything that makes you feel worse, stop doing it and try something else.

Self-care activities to try - Look after your body

Stay hydrated. Try and drink 5-8 glasses of water or sugar-free drinks every day.

Eat healthy food. You could try to eat an extra portion of fruit or veg a day, cut down on unhealthy snacks or make sure you eat breakfast in the morning.

Sleep. Sleep is one of the most important things for our physical and mental health. Lots of victims and survivors experience sleep problems –here is the link to some of the sleep tools <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/tools-for-victims-and-survivors/sleep-problems-nightmares/>

Exercise. Regular exercise can improve your health, help you sleep better and reduce feelings of sadness and anxiety. It can also make you feel stronger and more in touch with your body. It's important to choose something that you enjoy – if going to the gym isn't your thing, maybe try walking, skipping, gardening or dancing to your favourite music. Also might want to try yoga - victims and survivors and researchers have found that yoga can be very helpful for people who have experienced trauma. If you can't make it to a physical class, there are lots of free online sessions available.

Take a shower or bath. Taking a shower or bath can be really relaxing, as well as being an important part of personal hygiene. If it seems like a huge task, think about what you enjoy about it – for example, the warmth or how you feel afterwards.

Pamper your body. Choose whatever works for you – whether it's applying a nice moisturiser, using a face pack, getting a new haircut, painting your nails or maybe putting on a favourite scent. Whatever makes you feel looked after and relaxed.

Self-care activities to try - Look after your mind

Do an activity you enjoy. It's really important that you make time to do things that you find interesting, relaxing or fun. It doesn't matter what it is – it could be watching a boxset, doing a jigsaw, knitting, cooking, playing a game, scrapbooking, colouring, gardening or DIY.

Breathe. Deep breathing can be an effective way of reducing feelings of anxiety and stress. <https://www.webmd.com/balance/types-of-breathing-exercises>

Try grounding activities. Grounding activities can help you feel calmer, more in control and more connected to what's happening around you. They can be especially helpful if you have flashbacks, panic attacks or feelings of dissociation. We have more information on grounding further on

Remember that it's okay to not be okay. Sometimes we try to hide, ignore or avoid negative emotions. But, often, it's actually more helpful to recognise these emotions or express them. If you're feeling low, anxious, sad or angry – let yourself know that it's okay to feel like that. Sometimes we all need a big cry or a duvet day.

Write it down. Writing down your thoughts and feelings can help you to feel better. It can help you to express your feelings, explore patterns and reflect. Maybe try keeping a journal, either in a notebook or by using a special app.

Say kind and positive things to yourself. Instead of saying negative or critical things to yourself, try saying positive affirmations (for example, 'I am a survivor', 'I am strong', 'I am a good person'), or soothing statements (for example, 'this will pass', 'I am doing my best', 'I am safe here').

Try to notice the good things. Our brains are hardwired to notice bad or negative things. That means we focus on these things more than the positive. You can try to balance this out by making an effort to notice the good things around you. Even noticing small things, like a nice cup of tea or a good song on the radio, can make a difference. Some people do this regularly in a gratitude journal.

Self-care activities to try - Look after your living space

Get some fresh air. If you can, try to go for a walk or spend some time outside every day. You can also open a window to get fresh air into your room or home.

Do some cleaning and tidying. Although housework can feel like a chore for most people, having a clean and tidy living space can help you feel much better. If it seems like too much effort, focus on one small job – maybe wash some dirty dishes, put some clothes away or make your bed.

Smell something nice. This could be a candle, a room spray, essential oils, baking or fresh laundry – anything that smells good to you.

Get cosy. Get snuggled on the sofa or wrapped in your favourite blanket.

Self-care activities to try - Connect with other people

Send a message. Send a message to a member of your family or a friend. It doesn't have to be about how you are feeling – it could be a silly joke, a meme or a question for them.

Make plans with family or friends. You could make plans to have a long phone call, go for a walk, go bowling, go for a coffee, play a game online... It doesn't really matter what the activity is, the aim is to connect and have fun.

Talk about how you feel. If there's someone who you trust, it can help to talk to them about how you feel. You only have to share what you're comfortable with – for example, you could focus on how you feel now rather than past experiences if that feels better for you. You can also talk to us.

Connect online. If you have a particular interest (maybe it's a band, a hobby, a game or an activity), you might be able to meet other people online who share that interest – either on social media or on a forum.

Self care: Techniques - grounding

Grounding is a technique you can use when you feel strong emotions. It can help you feel calmer and more in control.

Grounding can help when you feel like strong emotions, such as panic, fear or sadness, are getting out of control. It can help you refocus your thoughts to feel calmer. It can be a useful technique for people who've been through trauma.

Some of the things grounding can help with include:

- nightmares
- flashbacks
- tension
- feeling anxious

More information can be found about grounding here:

[Grounding techniques for survivors of sexual violence | Rape Crisis England & Wales | Rape Crisis England & Wales Anxiety | Sheffield Hallam University \(shu.ac.uk\)](#)

Self care: Techniques - meditation,

Meditation offers different techniques which encourage, through regular practice and patience, the development of attention and awareness of our state of mind and sense of being. There is a lot of research-based evidence to say that meditation has many benefits to our wellbeing and physical health.

There are lots of different approaches to meditation so it might take a while to find one that feels right for you. It is not for everybody so don't worry if it doesn't fit for you there will be something out there that does!

Here are some suggestions for you to take a look at:

- [Michael Sealey You Tube](#)
- [Jason Stephenson Meditations You Tube](#)
- [Dr Kristin Neff Self compassion guided meditations and exercises](#)
- [Fragrant heart](#) offers free guided meditations that cover a whole range of topics

Self care: Techniques - mindfulness

Mindfulness:

Mindfulness can be a really helpful way to manage wellbeing.

It works on the principle of being present in the moment to acknowledge thoughts, emotions, the body and surroundings.

By becoming more aware of how these factors relate to each other can help us to notice when we are becoming anxious, overwhelmed or stressed and how we may choose to respond.

More information about mindfulness can be found here:

- [NHS :Mindfulness - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#) offer mindfulness courses and guidance on how to find a teacher
- [MIND](#) information includes: exercises and tips and how to learn mindfulness
- [Mindfulness-and-meditation | Sheffield Hallam University \(shu.ac.uk\)](https://www.sheffieldhallam.ac.uk/mindfulness-and-meditation)

You don't owe anybody your story

It can be one of the most difficult self-care lesson to learn.

Sometimes, people aren't open to listening or compassion and it can cause you more harm than good to engage in these situations. It's OK to walk away from a situation or conversation that feels triggering.

Resources

https://caraessex.org.uk/downloads/4630_synergyselfcareguideweb.pdf

<https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/complexities-self-care-after-sexual-assault>

<https://www.victimfocus.org.uk/free-caring-for-yourself-after-sexual-violence>