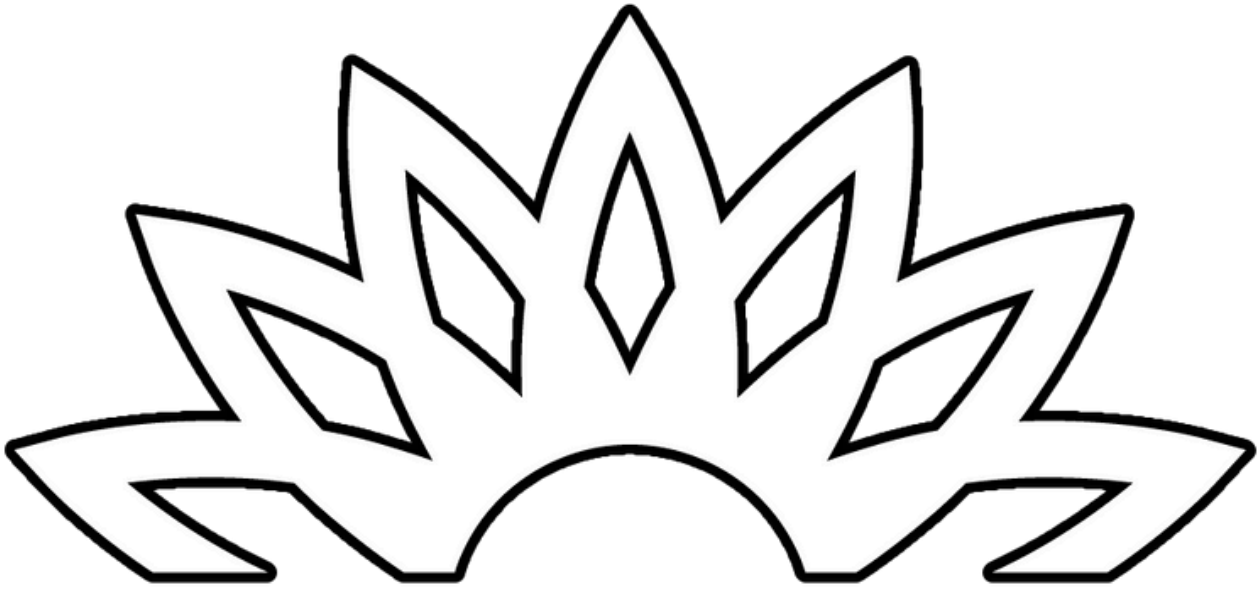
SELF-CARE FOR BEGINNERS



SURVIVOR SPACE OXFORDSHIRE

Colour in our logo to be featured on our website!

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Survivor Space Oxfordshire
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GETTING STARTED

When you've experienced any kind of traumatic event, including sexual abuse or assault, it can leave you feeling pretty awful.

Even if it happened a long time ago, feelings of shame, anger, fear, anxiety and isolation can stay with you.

And for some survivors, life feels dangerous a lot of the time, and it can be difficult to switch off.

You've probably come across the idea of self care before. Maybe you've even been told to do it by some well-meaning loved one or health care professional.

And maybe you wonder where on earth to start.

This booklet was put together by Survivor Space staff and volunteers to share what self care is, why it's important and how to get started.

The illustrations may be printed to colour in. Send us a picture of your front page's coloured logo to **admin@survivorspace.org.uk** to have it featured on our website!

SELF CARE BASICS

WHAT IS SELF-CARE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Self care is a bit of a buzz phrase at the moment, and it can mean different things to different people. But when it comes to our physical and emotional health, it's pretty important.

When people talk about self care, they're usually referring to doing things that help maintain a sense of safety and well being, or that provide space to relax, reflect and recharge our batteries. These can be things that are specifically aimed at improving your mental health, but they can also be things that affect us physically.



The world can be a stressful place sometimes, and we all struggle from time to time to get the balance right. Families, jobs or school, or just the necessities of everyday life make demands on us, and it's easy to put ourselves last.

SELF-CARE BASICS

If you've ever been on an aeroplane you'll have heard the flight attendant say that if the air pressure drops in the cabin, you should put your own oxygen mask on before helping others. That's because you can't do anything for anyone (including yourself) if you're flat out from lack of oxygen.

Think of self care as your oxygen mask. By doing it, you're making sure that you're in the best possible shape to go about your life.

SELF CARE IS SELF PRESERVATION!

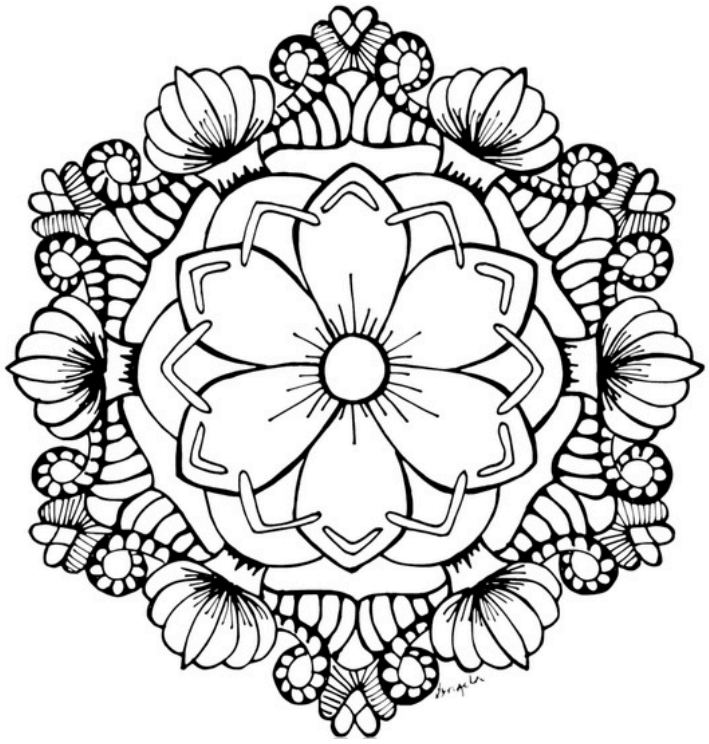
Feminist and US civil rights activist Audra Lorde once wrote, "Caring for myself is not self indulgence. It is self preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." For Lorde, self care was a powerful statement about her worth as a woman and a human being in a society that often didn't honour that. it was key to survival in a world that was sometimes hostile.

Although most people probably don't think of self care so much as a political act these days, caring for ourselves is still one of the most powerful statements we can make (both to others and to our own inner critics) that we deserve to be loved, nurtured and respected.

SELF CARE ROADBLOCKS

WHAT CAN GET IN THE WAY OF SELF CARE?

We already know that trying to take care of others or just do the day-to-day stuff of life can get in the way of self care if we let it, but lots of other things can stop us, too.



Changes Outside of Our Control

When we asked staff and volunteers what gets in the way of their self-care, many of them pointed to Covid-19. It was unexpected, worrying and brought with it changes to the way we live, work and connect with others, and it made it difficult to do any of our regular activities, self care or otherwise. And it's not just big dramatic things like a pandemic that can get in the way.

Health conditions, hormonal cycles, natural biorhythms, the weather and family or work responsibilities can all affect our opportunities and appetite for self care.

SELF-CARE ROADBLOCKS

Mixed Messages

The hash tag #selfcare is associated with everything from bubble baths and manicures to learning a language. If we're not sure what counts as self care, it's sometimes easier to just not do anything! Self care has to be right for you. It can be big or small, indulgent or challenging. And sometimes not doing something is self care!

Shoulds

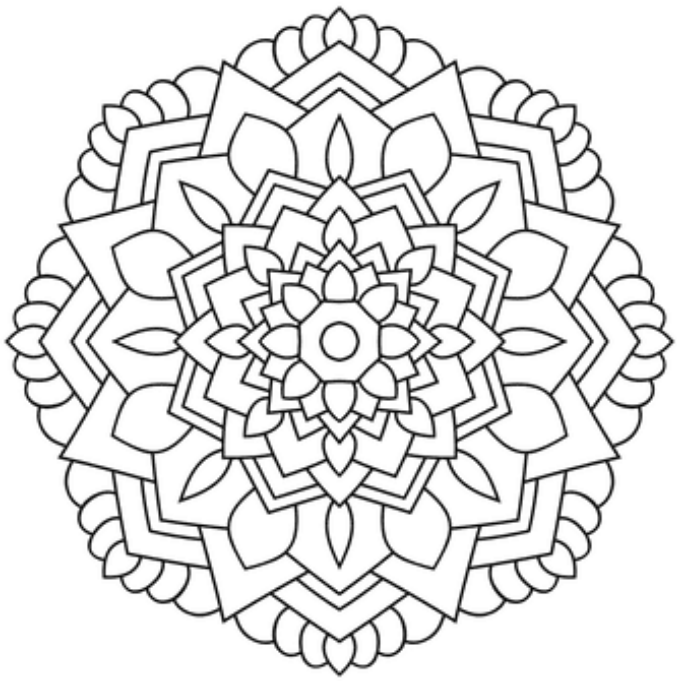
We tend to judge ourselves (sometimes very harshly) if we don't meet our own standards. We can tell when we're doing that because we use the word 'should'. I should exercise more. I should make all those recipes I saved. I should go out like I planned. I should tidy up the house.

When we don't do a 'should', we end up feeling guilty and wrong, which reinforces some of the very feelings that trauma has created. And far from pushing us to take action, it's actually more likely to result in a sort of post-traumatic freeze response, where we feel unable to do anything.

Perfectionism

We all know that nobody's perfect, but some of us grow up with a belief that we need to be perfect in order to be safe and loved. And that can wreak havoc when it comes to self care. Perfectionism may make us think that our self care has to be self improvement, or that something pleasant is only worth doing if we can do it flawlessly.

And since we know that nobody's perfect, we procrastinate, or rationalise our decision not to engage in the activity.



SELF CARE BASICS

WHAT WORKS FOR YOU?

Self care isn't one size fits all. Here are some ideas to help you think about what sort of self care is best for you.

Treasures and Triggers

We all have things that make us feel good (treasures) and things that feel bad or may even trigger difficult emotions or flashbacks. Knowing yours (or figuring them out) is important. Self care can be something that helps you cope with triggers. One Survivor Space counsellor recommends thinking about what activities help you to calm down when you're stressed or feel more energised when you're low.

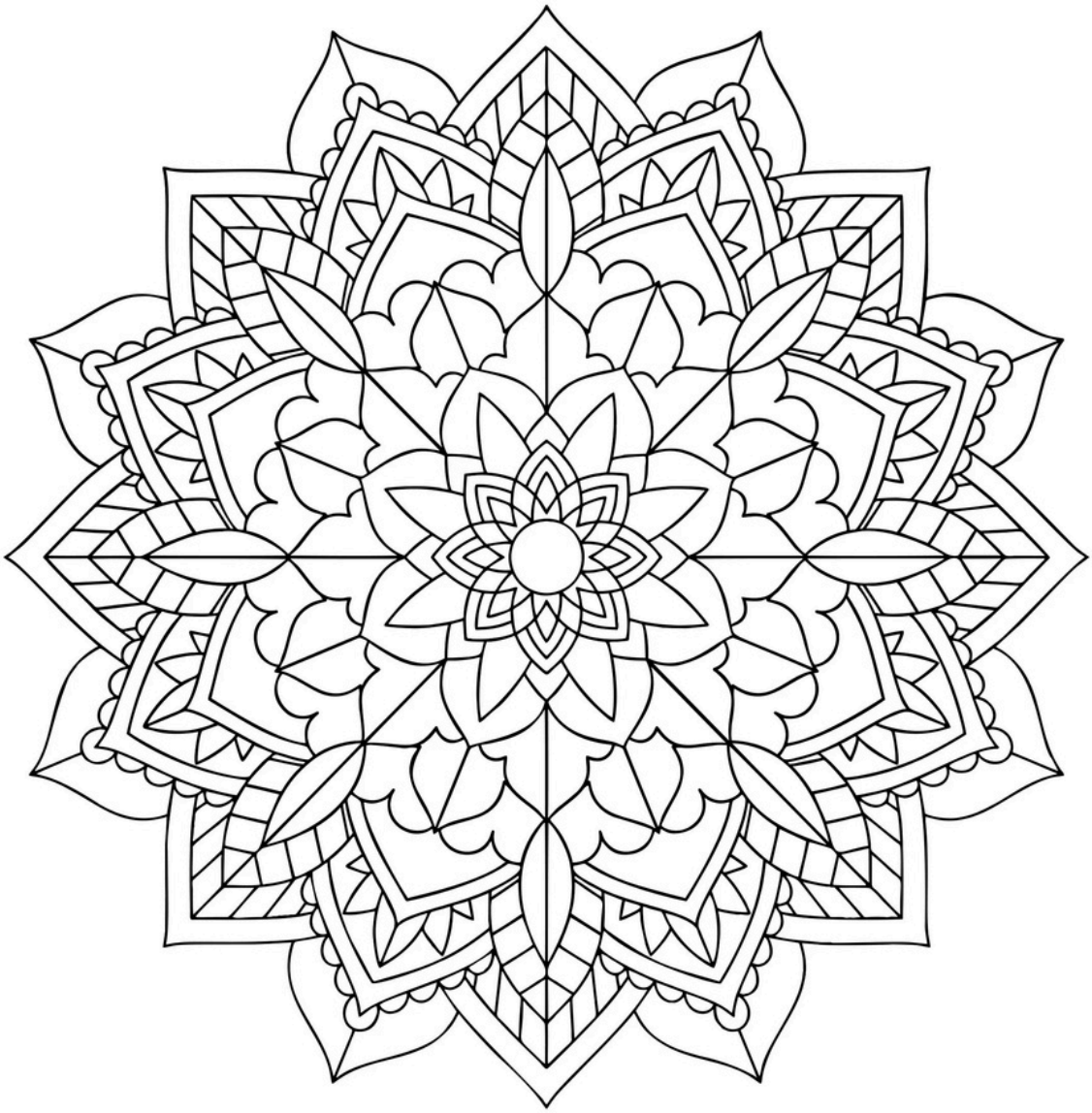


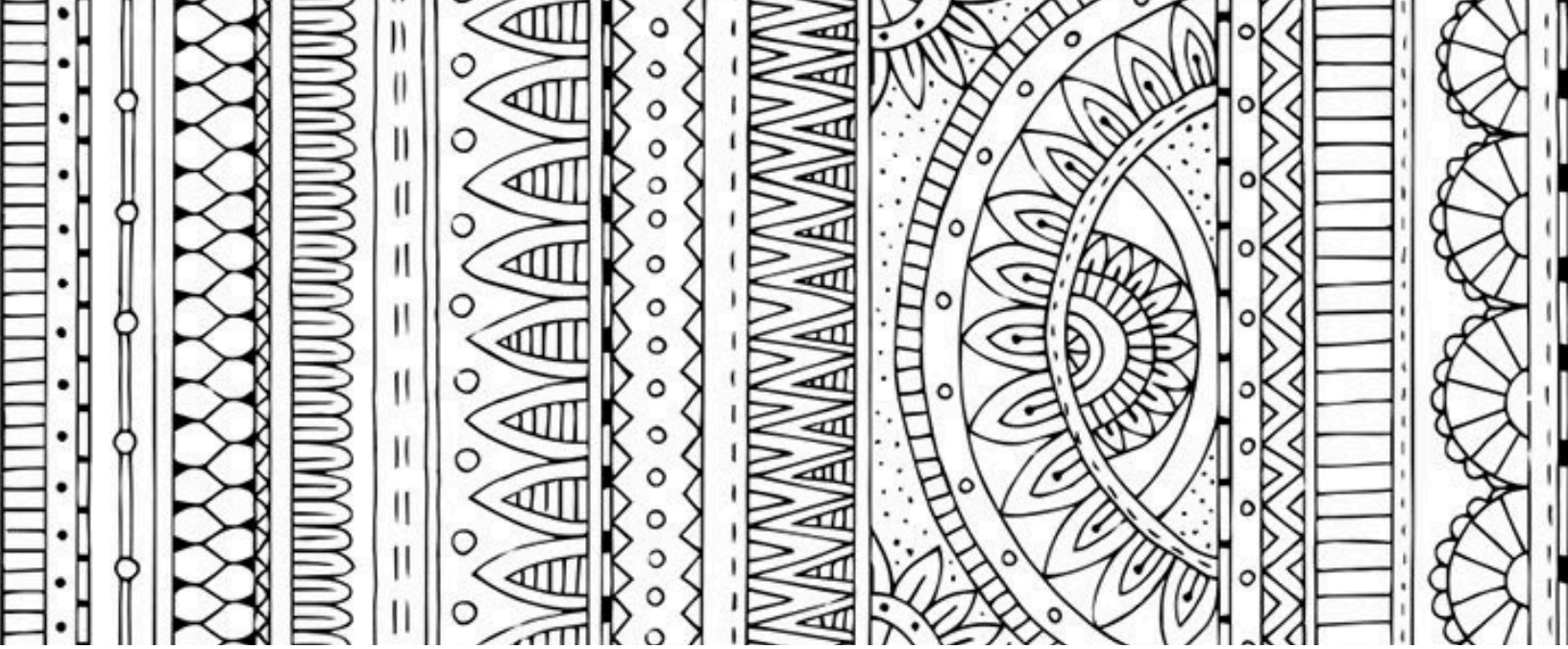
SELF-CARE CHOICES

Connecting with Your Inner Child

We all have one and they all have needs that, as adults, we tend to push aside.

A Survivor Space counsellor suggests starting each day by considering what your inner child might need or enjoy. It might simply be nutritious food or being wrapped up warm, or it may be something playful or creative. Children love the chance to express themselves!





Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed that all human behaviour was an attempt to get our needs met. But it was impossible, he said, to meet some needs, without first meeting others. In his Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow said that some needs can't be met unless our basic needs are met first.

Basic needs include the need for food, safety and rest. Self care that prioritises these is important in itself, and creates more space for self care that meets psychological needs (like the need for love and acceptance, close relationships, and learning and accomplishment) and self actualisation needs (finding your purpose, using your talents and creativity, and exploring spiritual practices or philosophies that connect you to a higher power or good).

Your Comfort Zone

Our nervous system's job it is to help us react to cues of safety or threat. When we're safe and supported, we spend most of our time in a comfort zone where we feel connected, secure, and able to react to the world in helpful, positive ways.

When we're stressed, our fight, flight or freeze instinct takes over and we feel overwhelmed (like a speeding car) or we shut down (like a car that has stalled). Self care is having ways to put on the brakes or rev the engine to get back to the comfort zone.

A SELF CARE MENU

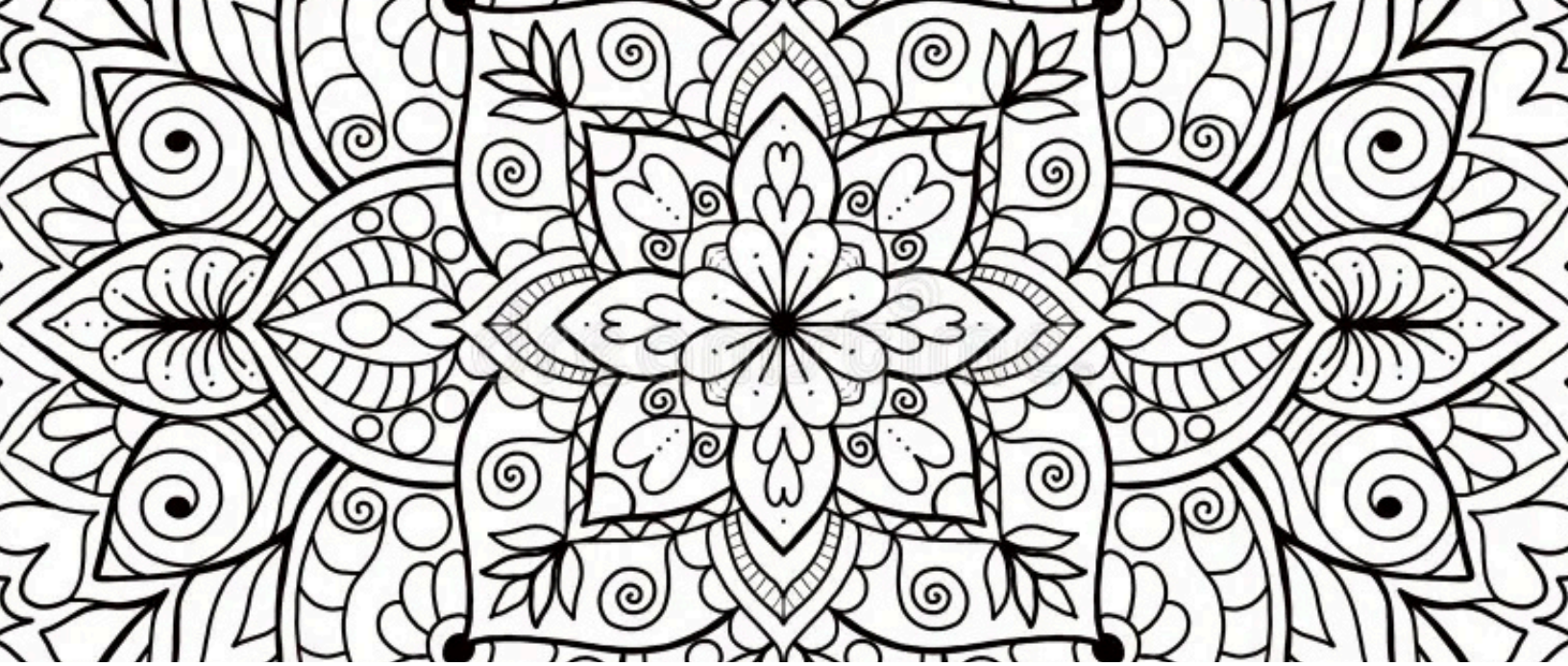
There's no such thing as a comprehensive list of ideas for self care. Although we all have similar needs simply because we're human, the way we get those needs met is unique to us. But the list below might give you some ideas or help you think about what will work best for you.

Tips for Planning Self Care

- Think about whether you prefer a structured routine or having flexibility. There's no right answer; it's what you feel most comfortable with.
- If you think you may forget about self care, you could try using an app that will prompt you, e.g. *HeadSpace* for meditation or a *Couch to 5K* app.
- Decide if you'd like self care to be 'you time' or with a group. Or perhaps a bit of both!
- Doing an activity every day can help build self care into a habit. It doesn't even have to be the same thing every day.

Ideas for Basic Self Care

- Take a walk, ideally out in nature. Research shows that gentle, rhythmic movement like walking helps to reduce stress, and improve mood and sleep.
- Find recipes and cook your favourite meals.
- Create a space just for you. A calm environment helps switch off the fight, flight or freeze mode.
- Wrap up in a warm blanket or duvet and spend time doing something that helps you feel secure.



Soothing Self Care

Some activities are great for calming the nervous system. For example:

- Activities using your hands, such as knitting, crocheting and cross stitch. Painting and drawing, sculpture, pottery, scrapbooking, etc.
- Writing stories, poetry or a journal.
- Having a hot drink or something rich and nourishing to eat, like soup.
- Listening to music, singing or playing an instrument.
- Wearing a soft jumper or wrapping up in a soft blanket.
- Mediation or breathing exercises.

Energising Self Care

If you're feeling numb or shut down, you can choose self care that energises you:

- Moving, e.g. dancing, running, etc.
- Meeting friends
- Learning something new
- Teaching someone something
- Watching a fast-paced movie
- Listening to music with a fast beat
- Using invigorating essential oils
- Playing a game (especially with a child!)

Connecting With Others

Spending time with trusted others can be a source of deeply rewarding self care. You can start small if it feels more comfortable.

- Call or meet up with a friend. Video conference platforms make this possible even if you can't go out.
- Spend time with family or loved ones who make you feel loved and secure.
- Join a social group or club, online or in person.
- Read about people you admire. This can often help us think about things we want to do or experience.

Things to Remember

- Go at your own pace
- Sometimes doing nothing is self care
- Find a balance between short- and long-term benefits. Something that feels good right now might cause problems later and vice versa.
- Take pleasure in small things. Self care doesn't have to be big. But...
- Don't make the mistake of thinking self care is just bubble baths and candles. It can be radical!



SELF-CARE MENU

Self Care and Current Events

Sometimes it seems like the world is on fire, figuratively and maybe even literally! Lots of us like to stay informed, we may even pride ourselves on it, but the steady diet of doom and gloom in the news can be upsetting. Self care can be things that help you balance staying informed with staying healthy:

- Try setting aside one time each day to look at the news. Outside of that time, steer clear.
- Or you could have specific days of the week where you don't take in any news or current affairs.
- It can also be self care to be picky about which sources you get your news from. Some outlets like to get clicks by highlighting the worst.

Self Care and Social Media

Social media is a wonderful tool for self care, helping us stay in touch with people and providing an endless source of entertainment. But it can also feed our fears and insecurities, especially when our news feed is full of people who see to have perfect lives.

- Some people find it helpful to switch off for an hour or even a day.
- Self care can be choosing to follow people who lift you up, and keeping others out of view.
- Remember that no one is perfect!

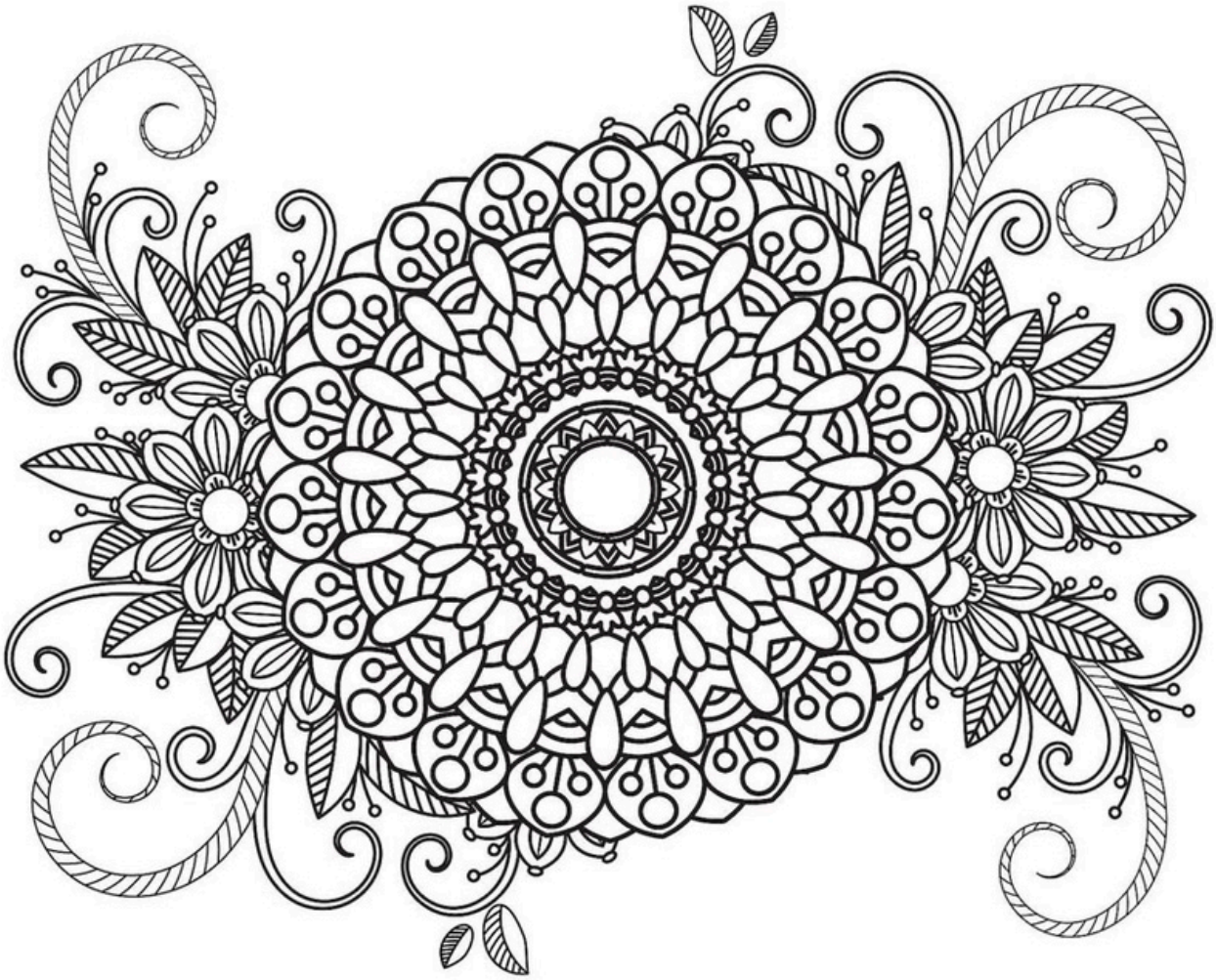


SELF-CARE MENU

Self Care at Work

You can practise self care at work even if your employer doesn't have an official policy or programme:

- Take regular breaks, and use the time to get away from your workstation or area, ideally out into the fresh air.
- Some people find it helpful to have set times when they check their emails so they don't get distracted.
- Bring healthy food with you to help keep your blood sugar stable and help you concentrate.
- Get to know your colleagues. You may find some people help you to feel less stressed and more engaged!



SELF-CARE MENU

Self care is an important part of recovering from trauma.

Trauma shrinks your world. When it happens, your focus on the danger and nothing else. In that moment, everything is trauma and trauma is everything. Afterwards, some survivors find that this sense of danger stays with them. And it can be a bit like the saying: "When all you've got is a hammer, everything looks like a nail". Your nervous system reacts with intense fear, anxiety and anger, just as it would if you were in danger. As far as your nervous system in concerned, you are in danger!

Self care is a way of first noticing our responses to stress and then actively finding healthy, sustainable ways to help our nervous systems cope. It may feel challenging at first. Some survivors even carry with them a belief that they don't deserve self care. And the best antidote to that is to practise it anyway.

Over time, you'll start to retrain your brain to put on the brakes or rev the engine. You'll be better able to spot your triggers and know how to access the treasures that defuse them. And you'll begin to see the benefits of understanding and meeting your very human needs for security, connection and growth.

Self care is your right. Enjoy it!



“SELF CARE IS GIVING THE WORLD THE BEST OF YOU INSTEAD OF WHAT’S LEFT OF YOU.”

- Katie Reed

RESOURCES FOR SELF CARE

RESCUE REMEDY

Many of our staff, volunteers and service users swear by Bach's Rescue Remedy. It comes as a spray or drops and claims to calm and support your emotional balance. Note that it contains alcohol. Consult your GP before use.

COLOURING BOOKS

Mandalas, flowers and even swear words, grown-up colouring books are a quick way to still a racing mind. Check Pinterest for downloadable pages. You don't even have to stay in the lines.

BLURT

The Blurt Foundation offers resources for people who are experiencing depression. Sign up for their newsletter or download a sensory self care kit. https://www.blurtitout.org/

RECIPE BOXES

If you struggle to eat well, a recipe box might help. Mindful Chef boxes can be ordered as a one-off, no need to subscribe. And for every meal sold they donate a meal to a child living in poverty. https://www.mindfulchef.com/

JOURNALLING

Explore your feelings, hopes and fears by keeping a journal. There are even online journals, like Penzu, which is password protected and encrypted for security. https://penzu.com/

READING GROUPS

You can find a range of reading groups in the UK on https://readinggroups.org/. There are even virtual ones. Many Oxfordshire libraries also run groups: https://tinyurl.com/oxonread.

PAUSE

Did you know mental health charity Mind does subscription boxes? For £8 a month you can get a wellbeing box delivered to your door and support Mind's work. https://pauseformind.org.uk/

LEARN ONLINE

Open University offers free courses, and sites like Udemy and Coursera have a range of low cost courses.

“BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF. SELF-GROWTH IS TENDER; IT’S HOLY GROUND. THERE’S NO GREATER INVESTMENT”

- STEPHEN COVEY

Have you been affected by rape, sexual assault or abuse?

Don't know what to do or where to turn?

Survivor Space can help

We can provide specialist practical support for children, young people and adults in Oxfordshire who have experienced sexual violence at any point in their lives.

MAKE A REFERRAL USING OUR ONLINE FORM
OR GET IN TOUCH FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

www.survivorspace.org.uk/make-a-referral

SURVIVOR SPACE
OXFORDSHIRE

We provide:

- Independent advocacy
- Counselling and Psychoeducation
- Facilitated group work
- Children's & young people's services
- Outreach with schools, colleges and universities

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