



MULTICARE HEALTH SYSTEM  
SELF-COMPASSION AND SELF-CARE

## The Art Self-Compassion

Dr. Kristen Neff Ted Talk: <https://youtu.be/lvtZBUSplr4> and [www.self-compassion.org](http://www.self-compassion.org)

### What is Self-Compassion?

Having compassion for oneself is no different than having compassion for others. Think about what the experience of compassion feels like. First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. If you ignore that homeless person on the street, you can't feel compassion for how difficult his or her experience is. Second, compassion involves feeling moved by others' suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to "suffer with"). When this occurs, you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way. Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly. Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience. **"There but for fortune go I."**

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a "stiff upper lip" mentality, you stop to tell yourself "this is really difficult right now," how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?

*Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with personal failings – after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?*

You may try to change in ways that allow you to be more healthy and happy, but this is done because you care about yourself, not because you are worthless or unacceptable as you are. Perhaps most importantly, having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness. Things will not always go the way you want them to. You will encounter frustrations, losses will occur, you will make mistakes, bump up against your limitations, fall short of your ideals. This is the human condition, a reality shared by all of us. The more you open your heart to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it, the more you will be able to feel compassion for yourself and all your fellow humans in the experience of life.

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Test how self-compassionate you are:

<https://self-compassion.org/test-how-self-compassionate-you-are/>

Please read each statement carefully before answering. To the left of each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following scale:

| Almost Never | Occasionally | About Half The Time | Fairly Often | Almost Always |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1            | 2            | 3                   | 4            | 5             |

Score interpretations:

Average overall self-compassion scores tend to be around 3.0 on the 1-5 scale, so you can interpret your overall score accordingly. As a rough guide, a score of 1-2.5 for your overall self-compassion score indicates you are low in self-compassion, 2.5-3.5 indicates you are moderate, and 3.5-5.0 means you are high.

Remember that higher scores for the Self-Judgment, Isolation, and Over-Identification subscales indicate less self-compassion, while lower scores on these dimensions are indicative of more self-compassion (these subscales are automatically reverse-coded when your overall self-compassion score is calculated.)

### Exercise: Taking Care of the Caregiver

Sometimes our time is limited, and we aren't able to take care of ourselves as much as we'd like. Also, one limitation of self-care strategies is that they're "off the job," and can't be done while you're actually caregiving. **Thus, it's important to also engage in "on the job" self-care.** When you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed when with the person you're caring for, you might try giving yourself soothing words of support (for example "I know this is hard right now, and it's only natural you're feeling so stressed. I'm here for you."). Or else you might try using soothing touch or the self-compassion break (see below). This will allow you to keep your heart open, and help you care for and nurture yourself at the same time you're caring for and nurturing others.

### Exercise: Supportive Touch

One easy way to care for and comfort yourself when you're feeling badly is to give yourself supportive touch. Touch activates the care system and the parasympathetic nervous system to help us calm down and feel safe. It may feel awkward or embarrassing at first, but your body doesn't know that. It just responds to the physical gesture of warmth and care, just as a baby responds to

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being cuddled in its mother's arms. Our skin is an incredibly sensitive organ. Research indicates that physical touch releases oxytocin, provides a sense of security, soothes distressing emotions, and calms cardiovascular stress. So why not try it? You might like to try putting your hand on your body during difficult periods several times a day for a period of at least a week.

### **Hand-on-Heart**

- When you notice you're under stress, take 2-3 deep, satisfying breaths.
- Gently place your hand over your heart, feeling the gentle pressure and warmth of your hand. If you wish, place *both* hands on your chest, noticing the difference between one and two hands.
- Feel the touch of you hand on your chest. If you wish, you could make small circles with your hand on your chest.
- Feel the natural rising and falling of your chest as you breathe in and as you breathe out.
- Linger with the feeling for as long as you like.

Some people feel uneasy putting a hand over the heart. Feel free to explore where on your body a gentle touch is actually soothing. Some other possibilities are:

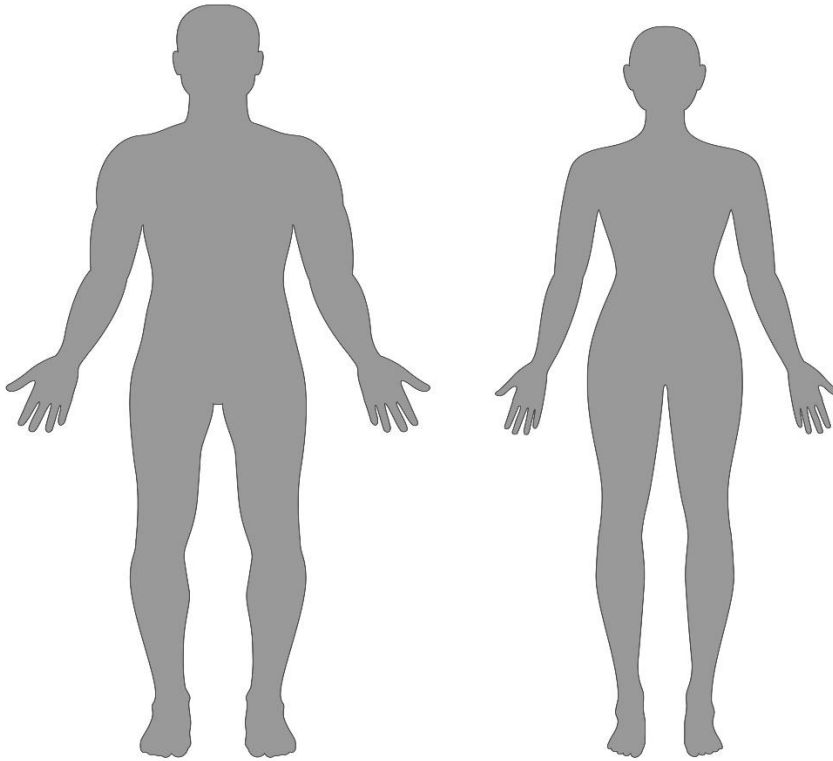
- One hand on your cheek
- Cradling your face in your hands
- Gently stroking your arms
- Crossing your arms and giving a gentle squeeze
- Gently rubbing your chest, or using circular movements
- Hand on your abdomen
- One hand on your abdomen and one over heart
- Cupping one hand in the other in your lap

*Hopefully you'll start to develop the habit of physically comforting yourself when needed, taking full advantage of this surprisingly simple and straightforward way to be kind to ourselves.*

### Exercise: Self-Compassion Break

Think of a situation in your life that is difficult, that is causing you stress. Call the situation to mind and see if you can actually feel the stress and emotional discomfort in your body.

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As you scan your body to feel the discomfort, draw on one of these images where you feel it. Learning to identify where emotional discomfort resides in your body is an important tool for self-compassion and self-care because your body can alert you to the need for these practices as discomfort arises.

Now, say to yourself:

**1. This is a moment of suffering.** That's mindfulness in action. Other options include:

- This hurts.
- Ouch.
- This is stress.

**2. Suffering is a part of life.** That's common humanity in action. Other options include:

- Other people feel this way.
- I'm not alone.
- We all struggle in our lives.

Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest. Or adopt the soothing touch you discovered felt right for you.

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Say to yourself:

**3. May I be kind to myself.** You can also ask yourself, “What do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?” Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation, such as:

- *May I give myself the compassion that I need*
- *May I learn to accept myself as I am*
- *May I forgive myself*
- *May I be strong.*
- *May I be patient*

In the moment when you become aware of stress or emotional discomfort, this practice can be used any time of day or night. It will help you remember to evoke the three aspects of self-compassion when you need it most.

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### Self-Care: A Foundation for Resilience

At the heart of self-care is your relationship and connection to self. As part of your job as a nurse or nurse leader, it means that you're attuned to and understand what you need to be your most constructive, effective, and authentic self. Therefore, rather than narrowly defining self-care as just physical health (which is an important piece of the equation), we need to pay attention to a wider set of criteria, including care of the mind, emotions, relationships, environment, time, and resources.

#### Take Out the Word "Should"

Self-care can feel daunting or unattainable. But the intention is not to add more to your already full plate or create a reason to beat yourself up. For example, you might find yourself annoyed when someone suggests that you need to take better care of yourself, especially when it seems they don't understand how much you've already got on your plate. Self-care doesn't originate from judgment and isn't reactive to judgment (both are forms of self-sabotage). Instead, self-care flows from an intention to stay connected to oneself and one's overall mission: *Who and what can support and be in service of the positive contribution I hope to make?*

Rather than having self-care be something "outside" of work, it's important to weave it naturally into the course of your workday. Below are some ways we can take purposeful action. Self-care is highly personal, though, so this is not an exhaustive list; these ideas are meant to get gears turning:

#### Healthy Boundaries

Healthy and supportive relationships are a critical part of self-care. Take notice of who feeds your energy and who drains it. Invest in those who inspire and support you and who understand what it means to have a healthy give and take. Avoid cultivating personal relationships with those who drain your precious energy.

**Recharge and reboot.** Stay attuned to your energy levels. For most busy healthcare professionals, getting eight hours of sleep every night is (sadly) not realistic. But it's important to at least try to refill your gas tank during the week.

**Notice When You've Slipped Out of Self-Care Mode.** In times of stress, self-care can get especially off-balance. Be aware, with self-compassion, of when you've lost touch with your authentic self in one of the following ways:

**Self-neglect.** With demanding workloads and overly full plates, self-neglect can become a familiar pattern for many of us. It feels like we're always running on a hamster wheel. As feelings of anxiety and being overwhelmed increase, it becomes harder to maintain composure and say no to the daily fire drills, interruptions, and demands of others. We end our workdays feeling completely burned out.

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**Self-management.** Maintaining a professional and competent persona is an important leadership skill, but in some cases, we can take it too far. When you overly manage yourself, you suppress or deny emotion, working hard to uphold a professional game face you end up feeling exhausted from keeping up the act, and risk being perceived as inauthentic.

**Self-sabotage.** Sometimes, we don't achieve our mission or highest priorities because we have gotten in our own way. Notice (without judgment) when you have slipped into unproductive habits of procrastination, rumination, or distraction to avoid the anxiety or fear of completing your most important tasks.

**Self-preservation.** In healthcare, it's easy to succumb to a scarcity mindset (e.g. not enough staff, equipment, time, etc.). When we're overly focused on a lack of resources, we can sometimes lose touch with what's best for ourselves, our patient's and our team.

In each of these cases, we are no longer in the driver's seat. Instead, anxiety, control, disdain of vulnerability, or fear is running the show. Notice, without judgment, when you've slipped into one of these places, and then gently reach for a self-care action to come back to yourself more fully.

Self-care has become an important part of being authentic and having a positive impact without sacrificing our health or relationships. By incorporating self-care in our daily work and personal lives — and coming back to it in times of stress — we can all become our most constructive, effective, and authentic selves.

**Exercise:        Honoring your time as a valuable resource**

Spend 10-15 minutes first thing each morning to jot down the three things you hope to accomplish that day. Then, as requests come in, consider the impact on your priorities before offering a knee-jerk automatic yes. Self-care means honoring the value, impact, and contribution you bring.

**Exercise:        Carve out time to nurture positive relationships**

Use breaks during the day, or perhaps your commute time, to call friends and loved ones. Don't let work cause you to neglect the most important people in your life. and carve out plenty of time outside of work to nurture relationships.

**Exercise:        Make a deposit in your Sleep Bank**

Designate a Wednesday or Thursday night to get in some extra sleep. **It's equally important to build restoration breaks into your workday.**

**Exercise:        Schedule a walking meeting or have lunch with a colleague or friend.**

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### Template for Plan of Self-Care

Based on 4 main domains of Self-Care (Physical, Emotional, Cognitive and Spiritual) + Workplace and Personal.

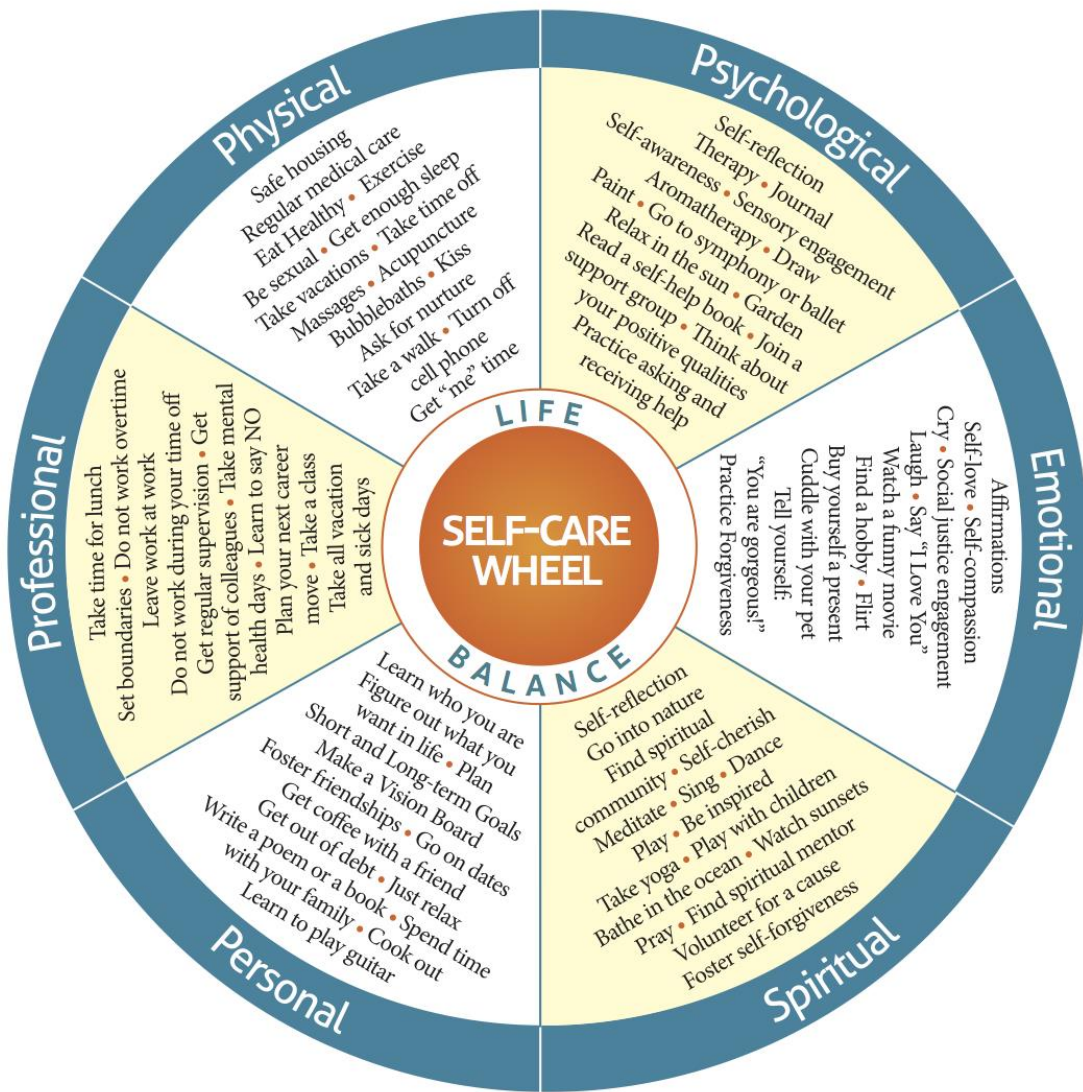
|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Physical Domain:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch and dinner)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make healthy food and drink choices</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Exercise regularly for strength and flexibility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get regular medical care for prevention</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get medical care when needed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Take time off when needed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Indulge in guilty pleasures such as massages, pedicures, manicures</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other physical activity that is fun</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get enough sleep</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Wear clothes you like</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use vacation time away from work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Take day trips or a mini vacation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make time away from cell phones and technology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Limit exposure to nicotine and recreational drugs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Drink alcohol in moderation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Limit exposure to synthetic chemicals in your environment i.e. choosing organic food, limiting soda intake, using natural cleaning products, limiting fragrance, pesticides</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintain a clean, clutter free environment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</li> </ul> | <p><b>Emotional Domain:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with others whose company you enjoy</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Stay in contact with important people in your life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Practice loving kindness and self-compassion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places and seek them out</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow yourself to cry</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow yourself to ask for what you need</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Practice mindfulness and/or staying present in the moment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cultivate an awareness of negative self-talk</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Find things that make you laugh</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Express your outrage in social action, letters and donations, marches, protests</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Try new experiences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Name your purpose or calling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Set clear boundaries</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Manage conflict</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Cognitive/Psychological Domain:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make time for self-reflection regarding who you are, strengths, personality, likes and dislikes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Write in a journal</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Read literature that is unrelated to work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do something at which you are not expert or in charge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Let others know different aspects of you</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Notice your inner experience—listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Engage your intelligence in a new area, e.g. attend an art museum, history exhibit, sports event, auction, theater performance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Practice receiving from others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cultivate a growth mindset with curiosity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Listen to understand rather than reply</li> </ul>   | <p><b>Spiritual Domain:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Make time for reflection about the day and about your greater purpose or calling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time in nature</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with others through a spiritual connection or a sense of community</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Be open to inspiration</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cherish your optimism and hope</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Be aware of nonmaterial aspects of life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Try at times not to be in charge or the expert</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Be open to not knowing and honor the path of being a beginner</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meditate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pray</li> </ul>   |



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|   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase awareness of evaluation and judgment thinking<br><input type="checkbox"/> Say “no” to extra responsibilities sometimes<br><input type="checkbox"/> Identify your values and review how they relate to your choices regularly<br><input type="checkbox"/> Practice gratitude<br><input type="checkbox"/> Practice forgiveness<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other:   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sing<br><input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with children and/or animals<br><input type="checkbox"/> Have experiences of awe<br><input type="checkbox"/> Contribute to causes in which you believe<br><input type="checkbox"/> Read inspirational literature (talks, music, etc.) ___<br>Other:  |
| <b>Professional (Workplace) Domain:</b><br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Take a break during the workday (e.g. lunch, coffee, tea)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Take time to chat with co-workers<br><input type="checkbox"/> Make quiet time to complete tasks<br><input type="checkbox"/> Offer and accept help in the form of task assistance to and from colleagues<br><input type="checkbox"/> Take deep breathing and stretch breaks<br><input type="checkbox"/> Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding<br><input type="checkbox"/> Set clear boundaries<br><input type="checkbox"/> When possible, balance your workload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”<br><input type="checkbox"/> Negotiate needs<br><input type="checkbox"/> Have a peer support group<br><input type="checkbox"/> Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other: | <b>Personal Domain:</b><br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize self-care, play and rest as an integral part of both family and work routines<br><input type="checkbox"/> Reflect on ways to manage energy and time while realizing both are internal resources that you allocate in alignment with your values and goals<br><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule annual or routine medical, dental, and vision checks<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other: |

# SELF-CARE WHEEL



This Self-Care Wheel was inspired by and adapted from "Self-Care Assessment Worksheet" from *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization* by Saakvitne, Pearlman & Staff of TSI/CAAP (Norton, 1996). Created by Olga Phoenix Project: Healing for Social Change (2013).

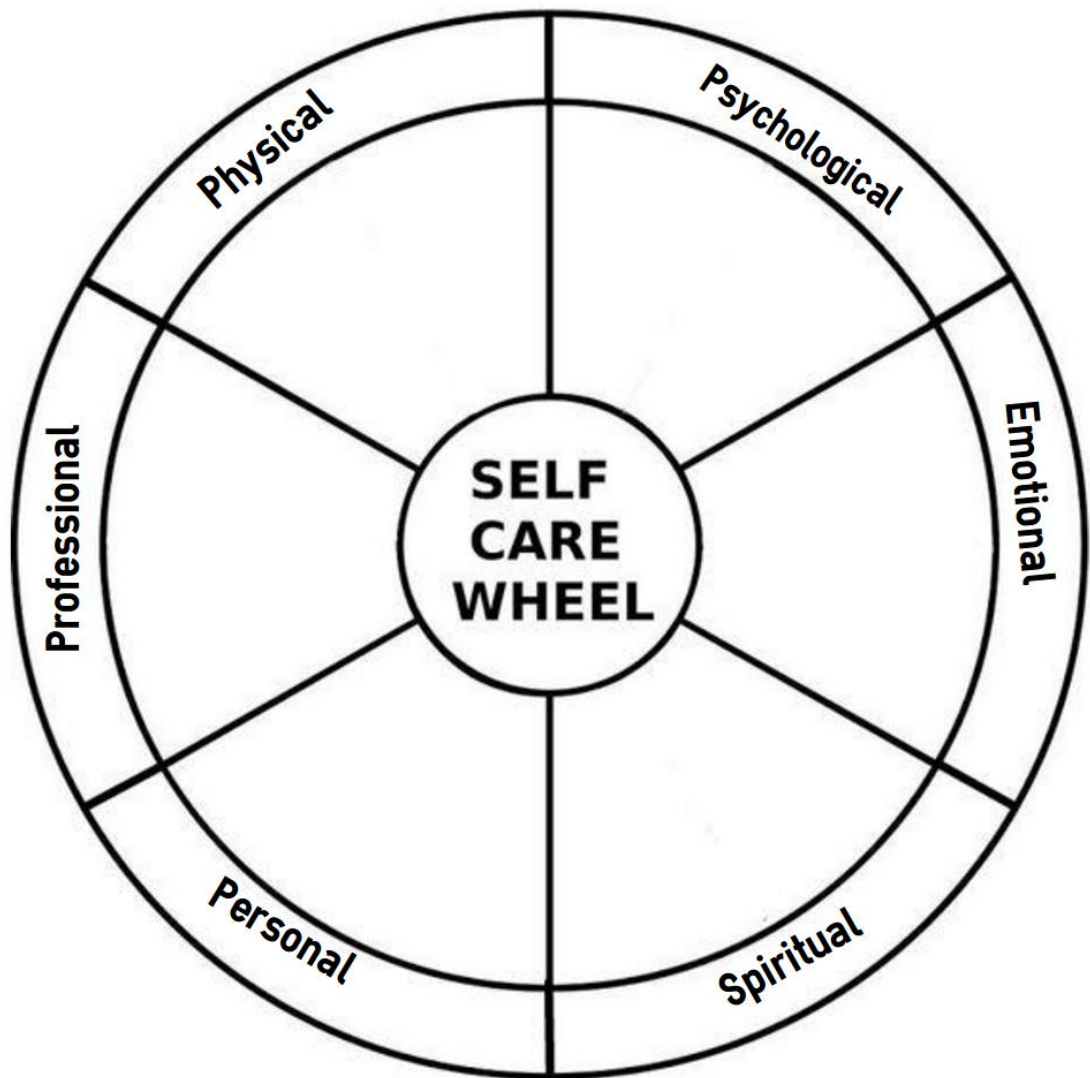
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**Exercise: Create a Personal Plan of Self-Care**

|   |                                       |                        |
|---|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Physical Domain<br>1.                   | Emotional Domain<br>2.                | Spiritual Domain<br>3. |
| Cognitive or Psychological Domain<br>4. | Professional (Workplace) Domain<br>5. | Personal Domain<br>6.  |



**Exercise:** Make a Self-Care Wheel (<https://www.sarrigilman.com>)

Take a blank piece of 8.5x11 paper or card and draw a large circle. Draw another circle about half inch from the first circle (outside or inside, depending on the size of the first circle). Draw a small circle in the center and divide the main circle into 6 sections, labelling each section per the diagram. Finally, divide each section inside the main circle with 5 lines drawn horizontally from the outer to the inner circle.

Within each line, write a goal, tactic or activity that you are willing to try to increase that specific aspect of your self-care. Color/decorate the inner circle and outside of the wheel with pens or crayons. Leave the lines uncolored; color each line as you complete the tactic, activity or goal.

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### **Exercise:      Make A Vision Board** ([www.positivepsychology.com](http://www.positivepsychology.com))

This exercise involves creating a self-care vision board. A vision board is a visual representation of a particular concept using images, illustrations, and/or words. Thus, a self-care vision board is a collection of images and words that reflect ideas for self-care. Self-care activities are things we do to take care of our mental, emotional, and physical health. Follow the following three steps to create your self-care vision board.

#### Step 1: Brainstorm self-care activities

Come up with a list of as many potential self-care activities as possible. Be bold and creative, allowing yourself to consider new and different potential activities. Only include activities that you would genuinely enjoy doing and that fit your lifestyle and your values.

#### Step 2: Collect images for your vision board

Come up with a list of as many potential self-care activities as possible. Be bold and creative, allowing yourself to consider new and different potential activities. Only include activities that you would genuinely enjoy doing and that fit your lifestyle and your values. Refer to Appendix for inspiration.

#### Step 3: Collect words for your vision board

You can decide to keep your vision board completely visual or to add words and phrases to it. The words and phrases you choose should reflect or relate to your chosen self-care activities. You might like to cut words out of magazines or print them from the Internet. Choose words and fonts that resonate with you and inspire you.

#### Step 4: Put your vision board together

Once you have gathered your images and inspiring phrases, get creative with your arrangement.

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