

SELF-CARE

A guide for taking care



Creating a Practice of Self-Care

By Essex County VOICES Chapter - Essex County Family Justice Center

A warm welcome from the members of the Essex County Family Justice Center VOICES Chapter. It is our hope that this message finds you in a space of ease. As members of the VOICES Chapter we are a powerful group of **survivors and thrivers** of interpersonal violence. We have made a commitment to serve our communities and to support victims of domestic violence. By lending our voices, creating initiatives and sharing our experiences, we are able to advocate for victims and directly impact legislation that serves to protect survivors.

Our chapter came together during a time that has been difficult for our families, our communities, our country and the world at large. These times are unprecedented and we know many are experiencing a lot of shifts and changes in their lives. We are too. We created this toolkit to share some self-care practices that have served to reinforce us. We share this with the intention that it will spark some joy within you and inspire you to develop or further strengthen a self care practice of your own. No matter where you are in your healing, we've created this toolkit for you.

Every act of self care is a commitment to filling up our own unique cups. When we fill our cups, we're better able to show up for those around us and give from our overflow. When we heal and tend to ourselves, those in our families and communities benefit too. As you explore this newsletter, we ask that you hold on to what works for you and leave what doesn't. You get to choose how you care for you. You may come up with ideas of your own. Write them down. Practice them. Remember: no act of self-care is too small and every act is a step towards healing ourselves.

With love and care,
Essex County VOICES Chapter

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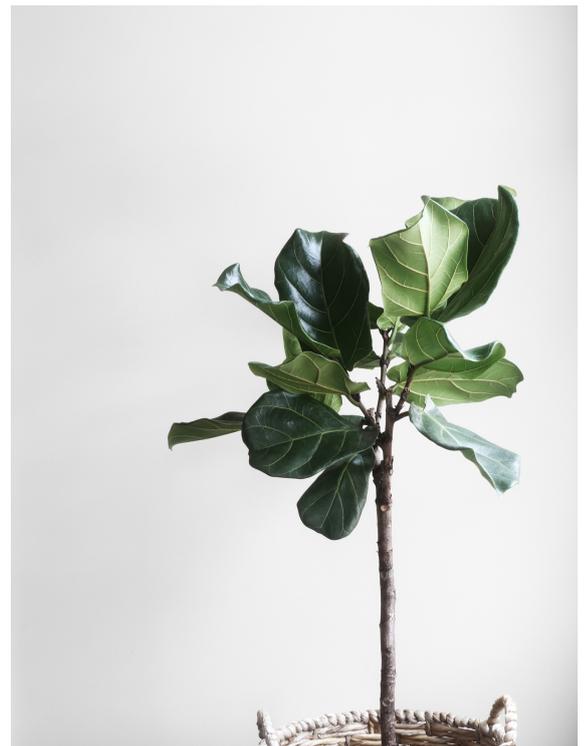
This guide is intended to be a jumping off point in your intention towards caring for yourself. Whether you already have a practice and you're coming to learn more tools to put in your kit or you are just starting off. Everything in this guide is an offering. Pick and choose what works, leave what doesn't, and always start by asking yourself "what do I need right now?"

At the bottom of each page are exercises you can use, intended to take only a few moments of your day. The intention of this toolkit is to be as easy and accessible as possible.

Why Do We Practice Self Care?

Have you every heard the phrase "**you can't fill from an empty cup**"? Self-care aims to fill your cup, the vessel that is you. If we work in the helping field or not, the people that we support rely on us for our expertise and knowledge, but also for our compassion and presence. At home, our family depends on us for care, love, and safety. Even if we don't have a partner or children, there are people who need us; pets, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and most importantly, ourselves. We rely on ourselves.

We rely on ourselves to show up fully so that we can be the best version of ourselves that we want to and can be. If we are running on low or even on empty, we cannot show up the way we want to for others and we simply cannot show up for ourselves. We practice self-care in order to be full for our whole Selves.



MINDFULNESS MINUTE

- Take a breath
- Inhale and exhale
- Relax your jaw
- Give space between your shoulders and ears
- Relax the belly
- Notice 5 things that you can **see**
- Notice 4 things you can **feel**
- Notice 3 things you can **hear**
- Notice 2 things you can **smell**
- Notice 1 thing you can **taste**



Journaling:

Journaling is a great tool to process thoughts, feelings, and emotions. In multiple studies, journaling has been reported to reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, and increase feelings of optimism and gratitude. There's a lot of different ways to journal and it can take some time to get into a practice of it. Some people like to journal in the morning or right before bed. Some use journaling prompts, others free-write. As with anything else in the toolkit, find a journaling practice that fits your preference and ability. One thing that is recommended is that you get an actual journal and a pen that you will enjoy writing with. If you are a more visual person, you can try drawing or painting more than writing.

Journal Prompts/Ideas:

Goals for the week

Intentions for the day i.e. "I intend to eat nourishing food today"

Things I'm grateful for

*What do you appreciate most about yourself?
What brings you joy? How can you incorporate more joy into your life?*

Besides prompts you can try something called a Brain Dump. This is where you write non-stop what is on your mind. The idea is to get thoughts out. Most of time after we do so, we feel a little lighter and whatever has been on your mind feels more manageable and we can take the steps towards resolving any issues and moving on from it. Don't worry about grammar or time, write until you don't want to write anymore or if you need more structure, you can set a timer for 5, 10, 15, or 20 minutes.

After each journaling session, there's an invitation to take a deep breath in and out and reflect on what you wrote and how you feel. You don't need to read what you wrote if you don't feel like that is the right thing for you in the moment - you can always come back to it at a later time.

Emotional Self-Care

How can we take care of our emotional self?

Therapy:

Finding a trusted and affordable therapist is the key to self-awareness and healing from past traumas or to simply have someone to help you with day-to-day experiences. Therapy can be accessible, but sometimes you need to do a little digging. At the end of this toolkit, there are listed resources and tips on finding a therapist in your area.

Meditation:

The purpose of meditation is not to turn off our thoughts - that's impossible. The purpose of meditation is to **notice and be present** with the moment - with our thoughts, feelings, memories, worries - and then to let it go. Meditation promotes inner peace, the ability to sit in the present, and reduces anxiety.

So how do we mediate? The most accessible thing to notice is our breath. You can read through this first and set a timer for a minute if you'd like:

- Take a moment, settle into your seat.
- Relax the shoulders, relax the belly, close your eyes if you want.
- Notice your breath. Feel the rise and fall of the front of your body. Where is your breath? Is it in your chest? Belly? Nose? Throat?
- Do this for a minute, slowly breathing in and out.
- When your mind wanders, notice that it's wandering, and gently **come back to your breath**.
- When the minute is up, gently come back to the room and open your eyes. Notice how you feel - is it different from before you meditated?

MINDFULNESS MINUTE

Body Scan Meditation

You can do this meditation lying down or sitting up

- begin by noticing the sensations at the top of your head
- start to move down to your face and notice any sensations there
- notice any coolness, tingling warmth, etc.
- move down to your chest, belly, arms, hands, and fingers
- continue to notice the body's sensations all the way down to your toes

repeat as many times as you'd like, as often as you'd like



Physical Self-Care

Taking care of our physical selves

Are you sleeping enough? Eating well? Exercising? It's hard and these questions might make you realize that you might not be doing those things the way you'd want to. That's ok. It's hard sometimes. Maybe you're busy, maybe you're working longer hours, maybe you have a newborn at home and you're juggling ALOT! We don't have to do it all, but what are some ways we can support ourselves physically?

In this section we provide some ideas around eating well, exercising, and sleeping and resting, understanding that there could be barriers to meeting these goals such as work, income constraints, and time. *Try to do your best and work with what is in your control.*

The idea of self-care is asking yourself "**what would benefit my future self?**" What can you do today that will benefit yourself physically in the future? Here is a list of some ideas. Again, take what resonates and leave what doesn't, but notice if there is something on the list that you've been putting off doing. What would it feel like to do that action you've been thinking about doing, but haven't yet?

- Setting up a bedtime or morning routine.
- Getting 6-8 hours of sleep a night.
- Setting up appointments for annual medical exams and tests. *Most of these preventative tests are fully covered by health insurance plans.
- Exercising at least 2-3 times a week for 30 minutes. This could be walking around the neighborhood or a park for 30 minutes.
- Eating a diet that incorporates large portions of fruits, veggies, and lean protein while limiting fats, sugars, and processed foods.
- Cooking with family or partner.



MINDFULNESS MINUTE

Mindful Eating

- After preparing your food sit in front of your plate
- take a deep breath into your belly
- slowly release
- send gratitude for the meal you have and the resources available to you to enjoy this food
- as you eat take notice of the taste, texture, and smell
- breathe deeply as you eat



Social Self-Care

How are we supporting our social selves?

Ways that we can focus on our social self-care is to make sure that we are doing activities with people we feel safe with and that leave us feeling fulfilled.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, our social ties have suffered. This section encourages you to be creative in finding ways to deepen your relationship with friends and loved ones while also keeping your health and the health of others a priority. Because we have all been impacted by the public health protections, it's even more important now to make sure you try to connect with your community, even virtually.

Ideas for social self-care:

- Set up Zoom or FaceTime dates with friends or family.
- Schedule weekly walks around a park or accessible neighborhood with a friend.
- Do something with a friend of which you have similar interests (hike, grab food outside, cook virtually together).
- Host a virtual game night or dance party.
- Reach out regularly to family to talk on the phone.
- Reach out to a trusted person if you need help.
- Check in on neighbors.
- Practice healthy engagement with social media i.e. limit your screen time if you notice yourself needing a break.

Setting Boundaries

Setting boundaries is a great and very important way to not feel drained by friends and family. How do we set boundaries?

We need to check in with ourselves first about what we need and what we're comfortable with and then expressing those needs. That might sound like "I would love to see you tonight, but work was busy today and I think I just need a night to myself. Are you free another night?" or "So, I'm not taking off my mask inside public places yet so if we can do something outside that would be great."

Don't be afraid to ask for what you need. Boundaries are there to show your closest friends and family how to support and love you.

MINDFULNESS MINUTE

Intuition Meditation

Take a moment to find a comfortable seat
Close your eyes or invite a soft gaze
Take a deep breath in and slowly release

- Begin to think of when you feel a **"yes"** to something
- **Notice** how that feels in your body. What emotions are attached to a "yes" and where do you feel it in your body?
- Now think of how you feel when there's a **"no"**.
- What **body sensations** do you notice and where are they in your body?

Take this knowledge with you after the meditation. Oftentimes we know what feels safe and comfortable to us, we're just sometimes not listening to our body's cues.



Spiritual Self-Care

How do we connect to our spiritual self?

Spiritual self-care involves activities or practices that give a sense of meaning to your life. Taking care of our spiritual needs is a great way to connect with ourselves and our community. Beyond meditation and journaling, some other actions we can do to connect with our higher self depends on if you identify with or want to identify with a more organized religion. Spirituality doesn't have to be about going to temple or church, although it could be. Some ideas for spiritual self-care are explored here.

Actions that support your spiritual care:

- Spending time alone.
- Spending time in nature.
- Volunteering with your congregation/ local house of worship or a nonprofit.
- Joining a church, temple, synagogue.
- Prayer, which could be nondenominational.
- Meditation.
- Creating a sacred space or altar in your home.
- Read inspirational work, books, or scripture.
- Social justice activism (marches, peaceful protesting, educating on social issues).
- Practicing yoga.
- Journaling.



MINDFULNESS MINUTE

Loving Kindness Meditation

Find a comfortable seat

Notice your breath

Close your eyes or invite a soft gaze

bring to mind someone you **love**, someone you are **neutral to**, someone who you are **having difficulty** with and repeat the following for each:

**"may you be happy
may you well
may you be at peace, be free, and full of ease"**



Working From Home Strategies

During the pandemic a lot of offices closed and employees were able to work from home. While a lot of people have been grateful for this opportunity to stay home to be safe, this transition can be difficult for some. With protections being removed and vaccines being made available, people are returning to the office.

However, some employers are realizing how practical and helpful it is to allow their workers the option to work from home and it seems that this cultural shift is here to stay in some variation.

In this section, we cover some ideas for working from home effectively, while also maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Morning Routine:

Have a solid and consistent morning routine:

- Move (yoga, exercise, walk)
- Write (daily schedule, journal, set intentions for the day)
- Read something enjoyable (don't scroll through social media first thing in the morning)
- Write down a to-do list for work or daily/weekly schedule
- Shower and get dressed in a way that will make you feel productive

During Work Hours:

Focus on batch work such as scheduling and dividing workflow into different days/hours to focus on one topic at a time. Other things to consider:

- Practice self-awareness and ask "when do I work best?" and plan your work within those hours ex. 11am-3pm
- Segment your day by tasks and time
- Pomodoro technique (work in 25 minute increments)

Make sure you are intentional about taking breaks:

- Feed yourself without distraction
- Walk around the neighborhood
- Use one of the Mindful Minutes in this toolkit
- Drink water

Create boundaries with people you live with and colleagues/supervisor

- Communicate with who you live with about your work schedule and what you need to work efficiently
- Designate work spaces in the home
- Be flexible, things happen during the day
- Be mindful of your work hours - do you *really* need to send or respond to that email past 5pm?

End of Day Routine:

How you end your day is just as important as how you start it:

- Have a hard stop time - log off, shut down computer, clear workspace, etc.
- Be gentle with transitioning from work to after work. Take a moment to move away from the screen to go for a walk or do something enjoyable before continuing on with your day.

MINDFULNESS MINUTE

Walking Meditation

This can be practiced anywhere at anytime but is done best with minimal distractions

- Go outside and as you walk begin to notice your breath.
- As you walk, try to slow your pace and as you do, bring your attention to the feel of the ground beneath you.
- What does it feel like?
- Try to feel each part of your foot touch the ground - from heel to toe - for each step you take.
- Come back to your breath when your mind wanders.
- Bring your attention back to the feeling of walking slowly, with intention.



Mindful Parenting

Being a parent is a full-time job which is very rewarding but also very stressful. Parenting can lead to different levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and even relationship problems. However, we want to share with you how mindfulness parenting can prevent these problems.

Mindful parenting is when you allow your conscious to pay close attention to what is happening around you. In this technique, parents are setting an intention to be present when needed. This awareness can happen in many forms whether it is aiding the needs of your children, tuning in to your own emotions about a specific situation, embracing your child's worldview, and being an active listener and more thoughtful responder.

The goal of this practice is to channel what exactly is being communicated by your children and respond in an efficient and meaningful manner.

Parenting Tips

- With your inner self - pay close attention to what triggers you.
- Lead by example - model behaviors that you desire.
- Take a break - it is okay to unplug and take a moment to reset.
- Give thanks - take time to express gratitude once a day.
- Accept challenges - resiliency is key to all setbacks.
- Teach and practice bouncing back.
- Pause - routines are important but listen to the little voice in your head. It will tell you what it needs.

5 Daily Affirmations

- I am a great parent/caretaker.
- I am willing to learn and grow.
- I have patience when I need it most.
- All my children feel safe and cared for by me.
- I take time to care for my own needs which makes me a better parent.

MINDFULNESS MINUTE

4-6-7 Breathing

Breathing is an excellent way to reduce stress and promote calm. This is an accessible exercise you can do whenever, for as long as you like. If holding your breath is not accessible, simply skip that part.

- Find a comfortable seat or lying down.
- Begin by exhaling out.
- Next inhale into the belly for the count of 4.
- Hold your breath for the count of 6.
- Exhale for the count of 7.
- Repeat as many times as you wish.

TIPS ON FINDING A THERAPIST

Adopted from the American Psychological Association and Psychology Today.

Search for a therapist using [findapsychologist.org](https://www.findapsychologist.org) or [psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com) or ask a friend or loved one

- Make sure the therapist is licensed
- Ask if they specialize in the type of treatment you're seeking i.e. depression, grief, anxiety, (C)PTSD, trauma, etc.
- Do they take insurance and are they covered under your insurance?
- Find out what fees, if any, you are responsible for (are you expected to pay just the copay or full price of the session?)
- What kind of therapy does the therapist suggest and how long do they recommend? (weekly, short-term, long-term, etc.)
- Ask if they've worked with LGBTQIA+ communities (if relevant)
- Ask how they interpret their privilege and whiteness (if relevant)
- Think of which gender, age, identity, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture you feel more comfortable with. Do you want a therapist that identifies the way you do or is that not important to you?
- Notice how you feel when you talk to them. Do you feel safe, heard, supported, and understood? Do they address your concerns? Do you feel validated during your time with them?
- Do they offer virtual sessions?
- Do their session hours work with your availability?

Remember, if after a few sessions you don't feel like it's a good match, you don't have to continue seeing them and you can look for other therapists who will better suit your needs.

You control this journey.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER PRACTICE

*THIS IS NOT AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST

Books on Mindfulness

- Wherever You Go, There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Lessons of The Lotus by Bhante Y. Wimala
- You Are Here by Thich Nhat Hanh
- The Book of Awakening by Mark Nepo
- No Mud, No Lotus by Thich Nhat Hanh

Exercise Apps/Videos

- Asana Rebel
- Yoga with Adriene
- Kait Hurley: Move and Meditate
- Fitness Blender (YouTube)
- Blogilates (YouTube)
- PopSugar Fitness (YouTube)

Meditation Apps

- Headspace
- Calm
- ChaniApp
- UCLA Mindful
- InsightTimer
- Ten Percent Happier
- Buddhify
- Unplug
- Simple Habit

Podcasts on Mindfulness

- On Being with Krista Tippett
- Mindfulness for Beginners
- Mindfulness in Eight Weeks
- Mindfulness Meditation Podcast
- The Rubin Museum: Mindfulness Meditation Podcast
- The Joy Factor

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Essex County VOICES Chapter provides support to survivors of domestic violence. The goal is to educate the public about domestic violence and bring awareness about resources. Essex County VOICES Chapter seeks to break the silence that enables people who use domestic violence and to empower survivors to take a stand by finding their voice.

To learn more, please visit www.essexcountyfjc.org

