

Take Good Care

Self-Care isn't a new buzzword, nor a new age idea, it's essential and necessary for healing and living. We constantly talk about self-care in our support groups, and every counselor, therapist, and author emphasize its crucial importance. Many of us grew up learning that if you focused at all on yourself, you were selfish, self-centered, or narcissistic, and so the concept of self-care may go against our grain. But let me ask you a question, if you don't take care of yourself, who will? Our primary responsibility in life is to take care of ourselves. Self-care is about taking proactive steps to improve our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It's about filling our tank so that we can move forward, because if our tank is empty we can't move anywhere; we can get very stuck or worse. We need to love ourselves but quite often, especially in early grief, it's extremely difficult to give a crap about anything, including ourself.

When grief really gets a hold on us, it can try to steal our self-worth, self-esteem, and our desire to take care of ourselves. We very much need to show ourselves self-compassion. It's much easier to be kind to others than to ourselves for some reason. But we need to treat ourselves with kindness and acceptance by not judging our feelings or emotions, by being gentle with ourselves.

When we take care of ourselves we are taking care of those around us. In grief, there isn't much we can do for anyone else, our energy is too low, and often our abilities are diminished from sorrow and the preoccupation of the loss. Grief is not a fixable thing; we can't fix it for ourselves or anyone else. The best thing we can do for all the other people in our lives is to take care of ourselves, and, perhaps in seeing that we are resourcing, they will do the same. If I don't have a dollar in my pocket, I can't give you a dollar. If we don't love ourselves we can't love anyone else. We can't give away what we don't have.

Try treating yourself as you would your best friend. Stop listening to your inner saboteur. If your inner narrative is self-defeating, try changing it up with something more compassionate and loving. You deserve it.

If we can distract our thought pattern, even for just a moment, we can change the way we are feeling for that moment. Self-care can help to reduce some of the anxiety we may be feeling, it can help improve our mood and enhance our physical and mental health. Part of self-care is establishing healthy boundaries in our relationships and work environments to protect ourselves emotionally and energetically.

When my sister died from suicide in 2000, I started to walk. I needed alone time to process the loss, to think, to pray, and to wrestle with all the whys and the woulda, shoulda, couldas. I would go to the beach or a boardwalk or a park every day and just walk. I didn't realize that simply walking was one of the best things I could do for myself. Walking helped me more than anything else. I am still a walker until this day; it has carried me through a myriad of sorrow and loss. I didn't realize at the time that walking incorporated a bunch of the tools that are helpful in grief. When I walked I was moving, - any movement is good for the body, and I was meditating -often while listening to music or the waves or the wind, and I was getting fresh air and vitamin D while practicing mindfulness. All of which I was unaware, I just knew it helped more than anything else.

Because our grief changes, and our emotions and feelings change, self-care is a trial and error thing, and it's ongoing. Try to find what works best for you and try to make it a priority, put yourself at the top of your to-do list.

Kevin J. Keelen

Stephy's Place Reflection – March 2025

THE TOOLBOX FOR GRIEF

I believe that if we can care for ourselves in **mind, body, and spirit**, we are tending to ourselves in the fullness of who we are. It's a balancing act for sure, but well worth the effort for caring for and loving ourselves.

Mind- reading, listening, sharing, talking, writing/journaling, gratitude practice, meditating to relax and calm the brain, therapy, support groups, knitting, games, puzzles, distractions, movies, comedies, hobbies, art, crafts, book clubs, creating, writing, painting, woodworking, gardening...

Body- exercise, healthier eating, rest, walking, yoga, naps, exercise classes, stretching, massage, pedicure, manicure, getting enough sleep, sports, teams, spending time in nature, grooming, hygiene, getting regular checkups...

Spirit- prayer, meditation, reading, writing/journaling, gratitude practice, walking, yoga, religious services, Bible studies, prayer groups, talking with a spiritual director or clergy, spending time in nature, talking about where you are spiritually with someone who is open and caring, mindfulness, listening to music, opening ourselves to connect with our loved one...

Some of the things we do may nurture us in mind, body and spirit at the same time.

It's ok if you just aren't there yet. It's ok to be exactly where you are. But at some point, make the effort, make the choice, choose to take care of yourself. Some of the tools may seem unattractive to you, and that's ok, but If you have not done so already, perhaps it's time to explore even just one new opportunity to say yes to yourself and to life. All of this and much more can nurture hope and healing.

TOOLBOXLIST

Breath -don't underestimate the importance and power of breathing

Talk to a friend- one who listens and doesn't want to fix you
Share with a group, counselor or therapist
Spend time in Nature- nature nurtures us like nothing else can
Take time out- "Almost everything works again if you unplug it for a few minutes, even you." Anne Lamott
Feel your feelings unapologetically
Lean in and lean out of grief- many one day at a time books are helpful
Allow yourself to time and space to mourn
Cry/sob/release
Watch TV or a Movie- mindless TV or movies can distract the brain
Gardening – tending to Creation nurtures the soul
Listen to music- don't let grief steal music from you forever, take it back
Pray- even if you yell at God its ok
Attend a religious service- if you are up to it and when you are able
Read- if it's still difficult, try it again in a few weeks
Enjoy a favorite food- allow yourself some simple enjoyment, its ok
Take a dance or exercise class- being with others may help in loneliness
Join a Meet-Up group www.meetup.com
Be alone in a quiet space- most of the work of grief needs to be done alone
Knit
Puzzles
Word games
Exercise/stretch
Yoga
Mediate- apps such as Calm and insighttimer.com can be very helpful
Sit on the beach or the boardwalk
Go to a park
Adopt a pet
Get a massage or pedicure
Be mindful- go to your five senses and be in the present moment
Play a sport
Go for a walk
Pet an animal
Journal/write
Sing
Dance
Go to a comedy club or show
Take a nap
Take a bath
Draw/paint/color
Volunteer where you feel comfortable

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