



Self-Assessment Tool: Self-Care

Using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is *Not on my radar* and 5 is *Frequently*, rate how often you practice the following self-care activities. Note: there are no right or wrong answers. This is your personal self-assessment and is meant to indicate how you could incorporate more wellness into your life.

- 5 = Frequently
- 4 = Sometimes
- 3 = Rarely
- 2 = Never
- 1 = Not on my radar

Physical Self-Care

- ☐ Eat regularly (that is, not skipping meals)
- ☐ Eat healthfully
- ☐ Exercise, go for walks, garden, workout at the gym, lift weights, practice martial arts
- ☐ Get regular medical care for prevention

- ☐ Get medical care when needed
- ☐ Take time off when you're sick
- ☐ Get massage or other body work
- ☐ Do physical activity that's fun for you
- ☐ Take time to be sexual
- ☐ Get enough sleep
- ☐ Wear clothes you like
- ☐ Take vacations
- ☐ Take day trips or mini-vacations
- ☐ Take breaks from technology, such as smartphones, email, social media
- ☐ Other:

Adapted from Saakvitne, Pearlman, and Traumatic Stress Institute Staff, *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization*, 1996

Psychological Self Care

- ☐ Make time for self-reflection
- ☐ Go to a psychotherapist or counselor for yourself
- ☐ Write in a journal
- ☐ Read literature unrelated to work
- ☐ Do something at which you are a beginner
- ☐ Take a step to decrease stress in your life
- ☐ Notice your inner experiences—dreams, thoughts, imagery, feelings
- ☐ Let others know about your different aspects
- ☐ Engage your intelligence in a new area—go to an art museum, performance, sports event, exhibit, or other cultural event
- ☐ Practice receiving from others
- ☐ Be curious
- ☐ Say *no* to extra responsibilities sometimes
- ☐ Spend time outdoors
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ Other:



Emotional Self-Care

- ☐ Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- ☐ Stay in contact with important people in your life
- ☐ Treat yourself kindly (using supportive inner dialogue or self-talk)
- ☐ Feel proud of yourself
- ☐ Reread favorite books, watch favorite movies
- ☐ Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, relationships, places
- ☐ Allow yourself to cry
- ☐ Find things that make you laugh
- ☐ Express your outrage in a constructive way
- ☐ Play with children
- ☐ Other:

Spiritual Self-Care

- ☐ Make time for prayer, meditation, reflection
- ☐ Spend time in nature
- ☐ Participate in a spiritual gathering, community, or group
- ☐ Be open to inspiration
- ☐ Cherish your optimism and hope
- ☐ Be aware of non-tangible, nonmaterial aspects of life
- ☐ Be open to mystery, to not knowing
- ☐ Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life
- ☐ Sing
- ☐ Express gratitude
- ☐ Celebrate milestones with rituals that are meaningful to you
- ☐ Remember and memorialize loved ones who have died
- ☐ Nurture others
- ☐ Have awe-filled experiences
- ☐ Contribute to, or participate in, causes you believe in
- ☐ Read inspirational literature

- ☐ Listen to inspiring music
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ Other:

Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- ☐ Take time to eat lunch
- ☐ Take time to chat with coworkers
- ☐ Make time to complete tasks
- ☐ Identify projects or tasks that are exciting, growth-promoting, and rewarding
- ☐ Set limits with colleagues and the people you serve
- ☐ Balance your caseload so no one day is "too much!"
- ☐ Arrange your workspace so that it is comfortable and comforting
- ☐ Get regular supervision or consultation
- ☐ Negotiate for your needs
- ☐ Be part of a peer support group
- ☐ Other:
- ☐ Other:

Eliciting the Relaxation Response

Care providers in social services encounter multiple sources of stress, including the “cost of caring.” Over time, this stress can take a significant toll on one’s being. It can lead to what is variously called compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, exhaustion, or burnout.

Just as we have the *stress reaction* as one of the body’s built-in response systems, there is also an innate *relaxation response*. The relaxation response undoes what stress has been doing. Relaxation techniques are helpful tools for coping with stress and promoting long-term health by slowing down the body and quieting the mind.

Think of the relaxation response as the mental and physical “sigh of relief” like what occurs when you put down a heavy load or when you recover from a narrow escape. It brings about decreased muscle tension, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, a deeper breathing pattern, a calming of the belly, and a peaceful, pleasant mood.



We must engage in an intentional practice of creating the relaxation response.

Unfortunately, it is easier to elicit the stress reaction than it is to elicit the relaxation response. The stress reaction happens immediately without any effort on your part. A loud noise at this moment would startle you, for example, and the stress reaction would speed through your body. A stress reaction happens automatically, while the relaxation response must be purposefully sought and brought under control.

While the relaxation response does occur naturally—as when we sit on the beach watching the ocean—our hectic daily lives do not give us many chances to produce the response naturally. To control our stress, we must engage in an *intentional practice* of creating the relaxation response.

Here are three relaxation techniques that can help you to reduce your stress-related symptoms and gain a better sense of control and well-being in your life.

Deep Breathing

Breathing exercises are the simplest path to inner calm. Practicing 15 minutes a day can achieve a significant reduction in your stress-related symptoms. Breathing is one function controlled by both the voluntary and involuntary nervous system, forming a bridge between our inner and outer selves. To use the technique, take several deep breaths and relax your body further with each breath. That’s all there is to it!

- **Videos: Mindful Breathing for Stress Management** <https://hhrctraining.org/knowledge-resources/article/1820/videos-mindful-breathing-for-stress-management>

Progressive Muscular Relaxation

One of the most popular and easy-to-use methods to relax is by doing progressive muscular relaxation. This approach is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense. The key is to become aware of *tension* and its corresponding state, *relaxation*, in each of the body’s muscle groups.

First, tense a group of muscles so that they are tightly contracted. Hold the muscles in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then, let the muscles relax normally.

Next, consciously relax the muscles even further so that you become as relaxed as possible. By tensing your muscles first, you will find that you are able to relax your muscles more than you could if you simply tried to relax your muscles directly.





Experiment with this method by forming a fist and clenching your hand as tightly as you can for several seconds. Relax your hand to its previous state, then consciously relax it again so that it is as loose as possible. Following this practice, you should feel deep relaxation in your hand muscles.

The Relaxation Response

The relaxation response, first developed by Herbert Benson, MD, is a simple form of meditation that anyone can use. Follow these steps for 10 to 20 minutes daily to decrease stress in your life and help you focus.

1. Sit quietly and comfortably.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Start by relaxing the muscles of your feet and work your way up to your head, relaxing the muscles.
4. Focus your attention on your breathing.
5. Breathe in deeply and then let your breath out. Count your breaths to yourself. Or pick a word, phrase, image, or prayer on which to focus. You might also choose to simply focus on your breath moving in and out.



Learn More

We gleaned this information about the relaxation response from these websites:

- *Relaxation Response for Reversing Stress* by Elizabeth Scott, 2020
<http://mentalhealth.about.com/od/selfhelp/ss/relaxresponse.htm>
- *Physical Relaxation Techniques: Deep Breathing, PMR, and Centering* by the Mind Tools Content Team
http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_05.htm



We have been called to heal the wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way. —Francis of Assisi

Mindfulness and Self-Care for Care Providers

Several modest proposals ...

- When you awaken, express gratitude for the new day—for your home, health, friendships, work, and the individuals you will have the opportunity to serve
- Offer the gift of hospitality by “creating a free and friendly space” (Henri Nouwen) for those you meet throughout the day
- Practice new ways of seeing: “You can look at a scar and see hurt, or you can look at a scar and see healing” (Sheri Reynolds)
- Talk aloud (preferably with someone else!) about your daily experiences
- Express appreciation to support staff—cleaning staff, security, receptionists, administrators—for the work they do in your organization
- Reflect on the root meaning of the word care: “to lament, to grieve with, to cry out with”
- Identify the ways in which your work both depletes and nourishes you
- Before you pick up that ringing phone or dial to make a call, take a deep, renewing breath
- Choose things that inspire you—art, flowers, fresh fruit, sayings, pictures of people—to put in your workspace
- Do one thing at a time
- Consider that “a rose withholds its scent from no one . . . a tree does not discriminate to whom it provides shade” (Anthony DeMello)
- Be forgiving
- When you go to bed at night, express gratitude for the day you had—for your home, health, friendships, work, and the individuals you had the opportunity to serve

Learn more about the Homeless and Housing Resource Center

Providing high-quality, no-cost training for health and housing professionals in evidence-based practices that contribute to housing stability, recovery, and an end to homelessness.

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