

Dr. Catherine Wikholm

# SIMPLE SELF-CARE

5 STEPS TO RESET & RECHARGE



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Hello and welcome to Simple Self-Care: 5 Steps to Relax and Recharge...

I have designed this 5 day series to help you get back into balance and feel your best again by making self-care a priority.

Self-care is in no way indulgent or selfish - Looking after your own wellbeing not only helps you get through challenging times, but it also enables you to better care for others.

Each day I will guide you through effective self-care practices that can help you to recharge your mental wellbeing, create more space in your life, and cultivate systems of social support.

Self-care practices look different for each person, and what works best for one person may not suit another, which is why in this series, I will be introducing you to a wide range of self-care techniques so you can discover what works best for you.

Self-care is central to living a happy, productive and fulfilling life - yet so many of us don't make it a priority.

This program is to help you find more balance in your life and be the best version you can be for yourself and those that you care about.

I am really looking forward to working with you over the next 5 days and sharing with you a range of simple and effective techniques to better care for yourself each day.

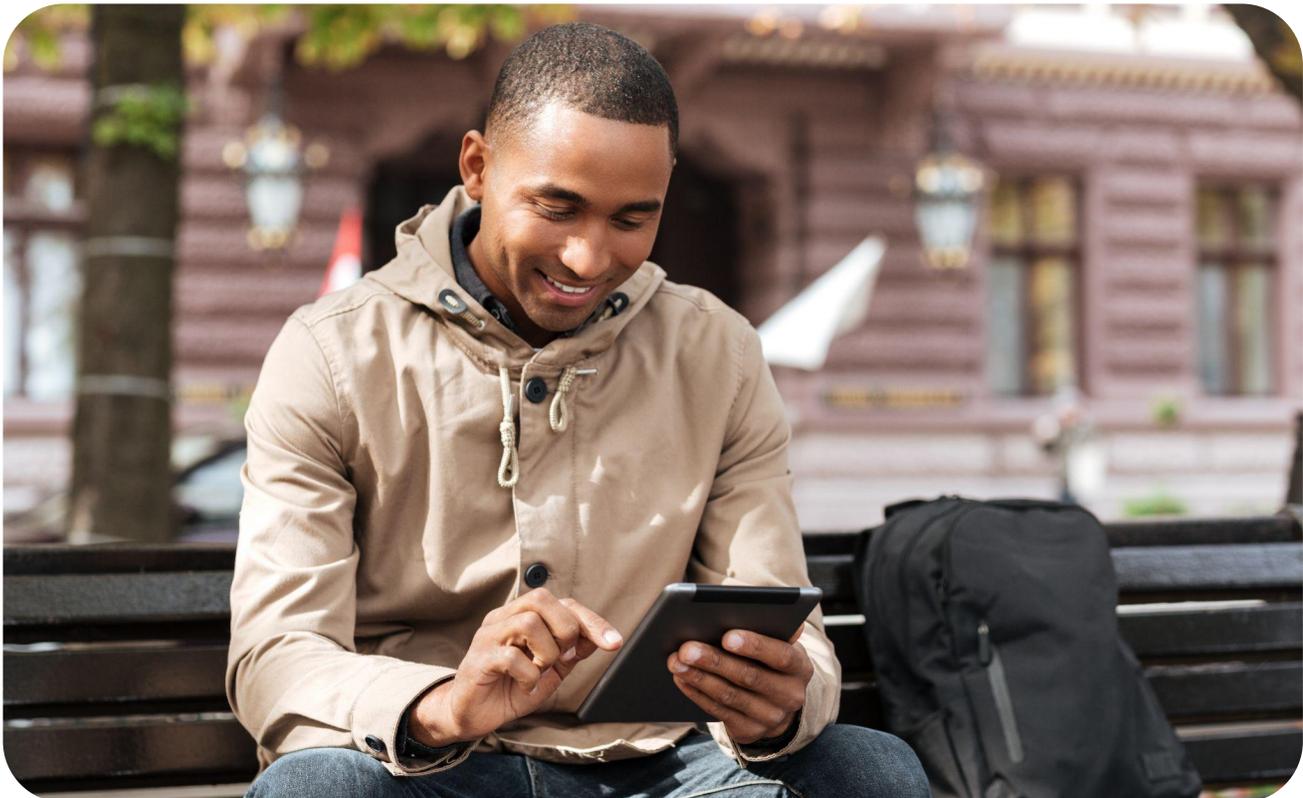
**Dr. Catherine**

### HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook can be completed on its own or alongside the audio program. It can be helpful to do both if you have time in order to ensure you practice and fully understand the key learnings of each section. The program has been designed for you to complete one exercise per day over 5 consecutive days. However if you take longer to complete the program that is also fine. You will find a summary of the key learnings at the end of this guidebook which you can go back and review.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

Over the next 5 days you will be introduced to a number of new concepts and ways of understanding the experience of burnout and your mind. If at first you don't understand an exercise or grasp the meaning of a practice you can repeat the exercise via the audio guide or in this workbook.



## WHAT IS SELF-CARE?

Self-care is central to living a happy, productive and fulfilling life - yet so many of us don't make it a priority. It's difficult to be a productive and happy person if you are not taking care of your physical and mental wellbeing.

### So what exactly is self-care?

*Self-Care can be defined as the activities and practices that we engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance our health and wellbeing.*

These practices can range from practical activities like exercising, eating healthy food, sleeping well, and spending time with friends, to ways of thinking and being that nourish our psychological and emotional needs.



The benefits of integrating self-care practices into your daily life are wide ranging, but some of the most important include:

- More ability to cope with and manage daily stressors
- Better sleep and recovery
- Increased energy and motivation
- Improved relationships with others
- Increased resilience - the ability to bounce back from challenging situations

In this era of uncertainty, unprecedented change and instability around the world, taking care of your mental and physical well being is more important than ever.

### SIGNS YOU MAY NEED MORE SELF-CARE IN YOUR LIFE

- You feel tired and worn out all the time, no matter how much sleep you get
- You feel stressed and overwhelmed by the pressures and demands of daily life
- You are constantly putting the needs of others before your own
- Your life is so busy that you run on autopilot and barely get a moment to yourself

Do any of these sound familiar to you? If yes, then it may be time for you to start making self-care a priority in your life.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Are you currently making self-care a priority in your life?

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What activities are you currently doing on a regular basis that support your wellbeing?

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Who are the people in your life that would benefit, if you were a more energised, happy and calm version of yourself?

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## **THE POWER OF CHECKING IN**

### **What comes to mind when you think of self-care?**

For many people, self-care is considered to be an occasional luxury - getting a massage, taking a long relaxing bath or a holiday away to escape the daily stresses of life.

However, self-care really is actually a very necessary and basic component of living a well balanced life and it can also be practiced in simple ways that can be easily integrated into your day.

Today, I am going to share with you a simple yet powerful self-care practice that can be done anywhere and at any time, no matter how busy your day may be.

### **This practice is known as **SELF-CHECK-IN**.**

It's the first step in practicing better self-care, because in order to start making positive changes in our lives, we must first be aware of our physical, mental and emotional needs. Becoming more self-aware is an important part of self-care and we can start to cultivate greater self-awareness through a daily self-check-in.

### **So what does a self-check-in look like?**

In essence, a self-check requires you to press pause, become present and tune into how you are feeling both physically and mentally. From this place you can more accurately assess what you need to take care of yourself.

## DAY 1 EXERCISE: SIMPLE SELF-CHECK-IN

Here is a simple step-by-step guide for practicing self-check-in. Find a place where you won't be disturbed for a few minutes.

1. **Pause** work or other tasks and allow yourself to take in a few deep breaths.
2. If it is suitable to do so, you can **close your eyes**, but it is also ok to keep them open if you need to
3. Start to **notice your breath**, and then take in 3 deep breaths inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.
4. Give yourself permission to be still and relaxed for just a few minutes.
5. **Tune into how you are feeling** in your physical body. Do you feel tightness, tension or pain? Do you feel energised? Or tired? How does your body feel today?
6. Take a few moments now to just scan through your body and notice anything else you can feel.
7. As you continue to breathe and relax, gently **reflect on thoughts or feelings** that are coming for you.
8. Try to identify what kind of action or change would improve any negative thoughts.
9. Try to identify **one simple thing** you can do to care for yourself today.
10. When you are ready, gently open your eyes and return your attention back to the space that you are in.



## DAY 1 EXERCISE: SIMPLE SELF-CHECK-IN

This is just one example of how you can practice self-check in. There are many other ways that you can practice a self-check in these include:

- Having quiet time on your own to relax and reflect
- Journaling your thoughts or writing about your day
- Taking a few deep breaths to ground yourself in the present

It is so easy to get lost in the business of life, and practicing a daily self-check-in is a really effective way of getting clear on what you need to feel your best and get the most out of each day.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What did you notice or observe about yourself during the self-check in practice?

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What are some other ways that you can practice self-check in?

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What is one need you have that you feel is not currently being met?

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.....

## CREATING SPACE IN YOUR LIFE FOR YOU

One of the most common excuses people have for not incorporating self-care into their lives is that they simply don't have enough time

So many of us are rushing through life, just trying to keep our head above water - taking our children to school, meeting work deadlines, cooking meals and paying our bills. The idea of adding in self-care activities into our already busy daily routines can feel like an unrealistic expectation.

However, self care does not have to be about adding more activities to your to-do list. It can also be about doing less, slowing down and simplifying your life.

Today's session is all about fine-tuning the relationship we have with time and our priorities so that we can find space in our lives for self-care and enjoyment.

A good first step towards creating more space in your life is to identify the non essential activities that drain your time and your energy. These may be things you do automatically, things you do because others do, or that you feel you *\*should\** do, but aren't necessary or of much benefit.

Today I am sharing with you a simple self-reflective exercise that will help you get clear on how you spend your time over the course of a day, to help you identify what you may be able to limit, change, or eliminate completely from your life.

## DAY 2 EXERCISE: IDENTIFYING WHAT IS NOT ESSENTIAL

Take some time to reflect on the following questions and write your answers below.

There are no right or wrong answers, this is simply an opportunity for you to reflect and build awareness around where you are directing your focus, attention and energy.

1. What is the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning?

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2. How do you spend the first hour of your day?

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3. What do you usually try to get done in the morning?

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4. How do you spend your lunch break?

.....

5. What household tasks feel most important, and which less so?

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6. What are your opportunities for movement or exercise on a daily basis?

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7. How much screen time do you have per day and what kind (for example, social media, scrolling on your phone, TV)?

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8. What do you do for leisure or relaxation on an average day?

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9. How much time do you spend with others over the course of a day?

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10. What do you do before you go to bed?

.....

## DAY 2 EXERCISE: IDENTIFYING WHAT IS NOT ESSENTIAL

Now you have an awareness of how you are spending your time during the day, I would encourage you to consider what practical changes you might now make to your day.

With a few subtle changes, you might be surprised by how you can free up some space for activities that have more potential to nourish and recharge you.



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When do you feel most productive and energised?

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2. When do you feel most depleted?

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3. What non-essential activities in your day add least value, that you could limit or let go of?

.....

.....

4. What would you like to have more space for?

.....

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## DAILY PRACTICES FOR MENTAL SELF-CARE

Mental Self care encompasses anything you do to **stimulate or soothe your mind in a positive way** and cultivate a sense of mental wellbeing. This can include doing things that keep your mind sharp, like playing games, practicing a musical instrument, or learning about a subject that fascinates you.

Mental self-care also involves doing things that help you stay mentally healthy. For example, practicing relaxation techniques can help you to reduce your stress levels, while mindfulness and self-compassion practices can help you to quieten the inner critic and nurture a kinder inner voice.

Taking care of your mind can also include building awareness of things that may impact you negatively, and taking steps to mitigate this impact. Ideally, we want to limit the time we spend on non-essential activities that drain us or make us feel negatively, and make space for more of what makes us feel hopeful, soothed, interested or energized.



## DAILY PRACTICES FOR MENTAL SELF-CARE

Another important part of mental-self care is **the attitude and relationship we have with ourselves**. For many of us, there may be some initial obstacles to overcome in order for us to improve our self-care.

If we tend to be self-critical, or tend to put others' needs ahead of our own, we may feel that we are 'undeserving' of spending time on self-care, or feel guilty for prioritising our own needs. So a great starting point for cultivating mental self-care is to begin with a practice of **self-compassion**.

Practicing self-compassion involves showing acceptance and understanding towards yourself when you are struggling. For example, rather than engaging in self-criticism or self-blame that only makes you feel worse, you would try to respond to yourself with the same kindness as you would show a close friend. This practice can help to reduce anxiety, stress and depression, and improve self-esteem and resilience.



## DAY 3 EXERCISE: SELF COMPASSION AFFIRMATIONS

**Recite this list of self-compassion affirmations when you are going through a difficult time and feel overwhelmed by your inner critic.**

- 1.** I deserve to take care of my mind and body
- 2.** It is okay to be kind to myself
- 3.** I am worthy of things that bring me joy
- 4.** I aim for progress, not perfection
- 5.** I deserve compassion and empathy from myself
- 6.** I won't put pressure on myself to feel a certain way
- 7.** I will reward myself with time to rest and relax
- 8.** I aim to respond to myself the same kindness as I would show a close friend
- 9.** I appreciate my mistakes and failures and what I've learned from them
- 10.** I deserve to prioritise my own wellbeing

After reading through these affirmations for self-compassion I invite you to think about one action you can take today to show yourself more self-compassion and attend to your own mental self-care.

Here are a few ideas to get you started if you're stuck:

- Do something creative like drawing a picture, painting or writing a story.
- Spend 15 minutes learning about a topic that interests you but has nothing to do with your work.
- Take some time out of your day to go outside into nature without your phone. Walk, observe and experience the environment around you without any distractions.
- Do a guided meditation to calm and focus your mind

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

In simple terms, an emotion is a feeling such as happiness, fear or anger, which can be activated by a situation that you are in or your interactions with others. Often, our thought processes have a considerable impact on our emotional experience, in terms of how intensely we feel an emotion and how we react or respond.

Emotional self-care is a process by which we bring our awareness to our emotions and take proactive steps to improve the way we manage them. Developing our emotional regulation skills can have a big impact on our wellbeing.

Part of being human is that we experience difficult life situations which can lead to emotional distress, such as feelings of anger, frustration and grief. While these are normal human emotions, these emotional states can sometimes feel challenging and overwhelming, and we might find we automatically react in ways which are unhelpful or make us feel worse.

So how can we stay in control and better manage these types of difficult emotions when they arise?

Knowing effective strategies to regulate emotions is important because it can help to prevent us from making poor decisions, harming ourselves or others or saying something we will later regret.

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

Here is a simple 4 step process that can help us to regulate and respond to difficult emotions, rather than automatically react:

1. **Recognise your emotion:** The first step is to notice the feeling and simply give a name to your emotion. Are you feeling anxious? Frustrated? Angry? Worried? Labeling our emotions can help us get a handle on what we're feeling and make it feel more manageable.
2. **Accept your emotion:** By doing this we remind ourselves that we are only human and we do not have to blame ourselves for experiencing it. Frame your emotion using the technique '... and that's okay'.  

"I am feeling anxious - and that's okay."
3. **Press pause:** Rather than reacting immediately, take a few moments to simply pause, breathe slowly and deeply, and ground yourself in the present moment. This simple pause can help to enable you to respond, rather than react, by giving you a chance to get over the initial peak of the emotion before taking any action.
4. **Consider your options:** Once you've given yourself some time to regulate, you will be in a better mindset to be able to consider your options and decide what choice you would like to make, as your ability to rationalize will be improved.

## DAY 4 EXERCISE: USING YOUR BREATH AS AN ANCHOR

**Breathing techniques are one of the most effective tools we have to deactivate our body's stress response and elicit the relaxation response. This is a simple breathing exercise that works to reduce emotional overwhelm and encourage feelings of calm, safety and peacefulness.**

1. Take a slow deep breath in and out breathing in through your nose, and out through your mouth. Just bringing attention to your breath and how it moves through your body.
2. Place a hand on your abdomen. Notice how your hand moves as you breathe slowly and deeply... in and out...
3. Think of your breath as like an anchor of a ship, an anchor that keeps you grounded despite whatever waves of emotions may be present. Even if big waves of anxiety, stress, or fear are present, you can use your anchor breath to calm your mind and body.

4. Whenever you notice your thoughts floating away somewhere else, just allow your anchor to gently pull your awareness back to your breath. Continue to breathe slowly in and out.
5. Just sit for a little longer keeping your attention on your anchor simply feeling your breath as you inhale, and exhale. Take a moment to notice how the anchor of your breath soothes you and grounds you as you inhale and exhale.

**You can use your breath as an anchor any time you experience big waves of anxiety, stress or fear, and want to ground and soothe yourself.**



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of a time or circumstance when you felt it difficult to manage your emotions?

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2. What is one thing you might do differently if this happens to you again?

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3. What changes did you notice after practicing today's breathing exercise?

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## SOCIAL-SELF CARE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Social connection is an important part of mental health, and studies show that extensive isolation and loneliness can increase risks for developing mental health conditions like depression, insomnia and anxiety.

We know that healthy relationships play a vital role in our sense of happiness, fulfilment and overall well being. Spending quality time with people who care about you is important.

However, **not all relationships and social interactions are good for us.**

Practicing self-care in our relationships means that we can identify which relationships and interactions are meeting our needs in a positive and meaningful way as well as knowing when we need to create boundaries or limits around interactions with certain people or social situations that impact us negatively.

The best way to judge the quality and quantity of social interaction that helps you to feel at your best, is to take note of how you are feeling after spending time with others. Notice if you feel energised or depleted, over or under stimulated, feeling positively or negatively about yourself.

If you notice that some interactions can make you feel drained, angry or disempowered, this can indicate a need to uphold boundaries in these relationships. Healthy boundaries are important in all relationships.

Recognising and honouring your own needs in relationships is not selfish - as well as improving your own wellbeing, it often leads to strengthening of relationships. When you prioritise self care and uphold healthy boundaries, relationships stay healthy and balanced.

## DAY 5 EXERCISE: SETTING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Here is a simple step by step guide to setting healthy boundaries in your relationships.

1. **Self-Awareness:** You need to be aware of your feelings and notice who and what makes you feel uncomfortable. When you are self-aware you are better able to identify what needs to change. A simple way to build self-awareness in your relationships is to take notice of how you feel before and after interactions with other people.
2. **Affirm your rights:** Remind yourself that boundaries are part of being a normal healthy person. You are entitled to your own thoughts and opinions, feelings, space, and needs. You have a right and a responsibility to yourself to set and enforce them when you feel compromised.



3. **Communicate with confidence:** The best way to communicate a boundary is with a simple, clear and assertive statement. Here are some simple examples:  
  
“I would prefer not to speak about this right now”  
  
“Thank you but I won’t be able to attend”  
  
“I would prefer if you did not speak to me with that tone of voice”
4. **Release the need to ‘people please’:** A people pleaser goes out of their way to please someone, to the extent of taking *too much* of their own valuable time or resources away from themselves. A simple practice for overcoming people pleasing is the ‘self-check in’ that we learned about in our first session. Put the focus back on taking care of yourself first.
5. **It Takes Practice:** Enforcing healthy boundaries in your life may not come naturally to you, but you will get better with practice. Start by taking small steps and build the confidence to enforce stronger boundaries and apply them to more complex social situations.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What types of social situations do you find most enjoyable?

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2. What types of social situations do you find difficult to navigate?

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3. What social boundaries do you need to put in place to care for your own wellbeing?

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## FINAL NOTE

### **Well done for completing this series!**

I hope you have enjoyed this series and have been able to take action on many of the key learnings we have covered over the past 5 days.

I also hope the techniques I shared with you will be ones that you continue to use in your daily life and that you will experience many positive changes.

Finally, remember that self-care is not selfish - it is self-preservation. When you put yourself first and take care of your own wellbeing, you are in a much better position to care for others

All the best for your self-care journey. I look forward to working with you again soon.

**- Dr. Catherine**

