

Take care now

Taking care of yourself isn't selfish: It allows you to be your best—for yourself and others. *by Karen Giles-Smith*

When saying goodbye to someone we care about, we may add: "Take care, now." These three words convey a very powerful message. It doesn't mean, "My wish is that you take care of others." It means, "My wish is that you take care of yourself."

Consider this: *If you don't take care of yourself, who will?* The person who knows you best is you, so you're the only one who knows what you need and how to best meet your needs.

Taking care of yourself, or self-care, is important to optimal wellness. Self-care is living in a way that cultivates personal health and life balance in order to maintain energy and grow as a person. Self-care includes nurturing your body, mind, spirit, relationships and environment.

In the book, *The Art of Extreme Self-Care: Transform Your Life One Month at a Time*, Cheryl Richardson lays out the basic principles of self-care and devotes one chapter to each principle:

- Discover areas of deprivation and decide how to meet the need, express the emotion or fill the void
- Love yourself unconditionally, accept your imperfections and embrace your vulnerabilities
- Learn to say no; Learn to manage the anxiety that arises when other people are disappointed, angry or hurt
- Establish a balanced and healthy (daily/weekly) routine
- Let go of control; Ask for help when you need it
- Create an "absolute no" list of things you no longer want to do (*for example: rush, spend time with negative people, answer the phone during meals, participate in gossip, deal with difficult life situations alone, get caught up in others' dramas, allow your mind to be on work when you're not working*)
- Create a soul-nourishing environment at home and work
- Protect your sensitivity (*for example: be present in the moment, turn down the noise, limit violent and sensationalistic media, put limits on toxic people, manage technology*)

- Take charge of your health
- Speak the truth with love and grace
- Incorporate interests and passions into your life

You've probably heard the analogy that relates self-care to airplane emergency landing instructions: Place the oxygen mask over your own nose and mouth before you assist others. On a deep level, we know we need to take care of ourselves first so we have the energy to live a rich and fulfilling life. But how?

The first step is to discover areas of deprivation in your life and decide how you want to fulfill your needs.

Feeling deprived is one of the first warning signs of self-neglect and burnout. The challenge is to become conscious—more keenly aware—of how, when and where you feel deprived.

Richardson suggests carrying a notebook for 30 days and jotting down "notes to self" when feelings of deprivation strike. Notice the ways, big and small, that you deprive yourself of what you need. Every day for a month, whenever you feel overwhelmed, frustrated, burdened or resentful, stop and ask yourself these questions and answer them with specificity and detail:

- Where do I feel deprived?*
- What do I need more of right now?*
- What do I need less of?*
- What do I want right now?*
- What am I yearning for?*
- Who or what is causing me to feel resentful and why?*
- What am I starving for?*

Rather than feel like a victim to something or someone outside of yourself, explains Richardson, when you realize that you are responsible for how you spend your time and energy, you can empower yourself to do something about it. After all, no one else says yes when you'd rather say no, overbooks your schedule, or makes the needs of others a priority, but you.

To start with, focus on just one way that you deprive yourself. You certainly don't want to feel overwhelmed about self-care! For example, if you are feeling deprived of sleep—your energy is low, your mind is foggy and your temper is short—make a plan that details exactly

how you will get to bed one hour earlier twice a week. Once this becomes a habit, choose another deprivation and make another plan. Take care!

Signs of Burnout

Emotions such as anger, frustration, depression

Impatience, feeling tired, fatigued

Melancholy, Ambivalence

Lack of interest, Short term memory loss

Dreading an event, Anxiety or panic

Self-medication, Nightmares

Health issues, Difficulty making decisions

Working at 120%, then dropping to nothing

Not caring

Burnout Prevention Strategies

Watch for signs: Know your particular signs of burnout and develop strategies for relief

Have a support system: Engage friends, family and others to help you avoid or manage burnout

Schedule time for yourself: Maintain a calendar that includes time and activities that recharge your battery

Learn to say no: Practice responding to requests in a gracious yet firm manner, for example, "No, I'm not able to help this time but thank you for thinking of me."

Set boundaries: Teach people how you want to be treated and gently let people know when they've crossed the line

Get into flow: Challenge and stretch yourself to learn and try new things—as long as it doesn't generate stress

Rejuvenate: Take breaks during the workday to take a walk, socialize, breathe

Take time off: Take mini-vacations and longer vacations where you can totally unplug

Get 15 minutes of sunshine every day

Include things in your day that give you pleasure

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