



Seven Simple Self-care Strategies

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RAW Mind Coach supports thousands of essential workers, including doctors, nurses, paramedics, aged care workers, firefighters, correctional officers and numerous not-for-profit service providers. In normal times their work can be difficult, busy and stressful. Add a pandemic and the demands on them can suddenly reach an entirely different level.

If you are providing an essential service, we would like to thank you. We would also like to offer a few simple strategies that will help you to maintain your mental wellbeing, while looking after what's important.

1. Don't continually put yourself last

In an airplane emergency we're told to put on our own oxygen mask first, before tending to others – with good reason. We can only look after others if we are in a condition to do so.

Many in service to others roles are incredibly generous givers. They are passionate and caring and frequently go above and beyond to be of service. While these are admirable traits, without clear boundaries and good self-care, these habits can lead to burnout and struggle.

No one can serve from an empty vessel, so it is important to prioritise your own wellbeing and do those things which top you up. Remember, self-care is not selfish. If you wish to be at your best and honour your important life values, it is 100% essential.

2. Set your Intention for the day

While we have little control over how things unfold around us during a time of crisis, we do have the ability to choose our response. One simple way to reconnect with this sense of self-agency is by taking a few mindful breaths and setting a simple intention at the beginning of the day.

Your intention may reflect an inner value of how you choose to move through the world and may also reflect qualities that you cherish and wish to cultivate in your daily life. For example, "no matter what unfolds today, I move through my life with clarity, warmth and kindness" or "today, I will make eye contact and smile at each person I meet". Your intention may be to take regular mindful pauses throughout the day, e.g. "throughout the day, I will pause and take small mindful moments to recharge my mind and body" or to respond to events with certain qualities, e.g. "may I meet each moment and situation today with compassion, openness and authenticity". Your intention may also simply be to refuel and restore; "today I will stop to eat lunch and take a little time for me".

Whatever your intention, make it real and authentic to you. You can honour this practise by coming back to the statement throughout the day as an anchor. Some people like to choose a different intention for each day. Others choose to work with one intention for an entire week or month. Each morning, check in and see what is workable for you and allow yourself the flexibility to alter your intention however you see fit. Intentions help us to honour self-care and our most important values in life.

3. Ask for practical help

Many of us take pride in being highly capable and self-sufficient, with the skills to get by wholly independently in the field of 'adulting'. Perhaps we don't want to be a burden, or perhaps we just feel super-awkward asking for a hand. Whatever the reason, it may be time to act differently.

If you are working long, exhausting shifts or trying to manage a challenging situation, it's very likely that you won't have the time, energy or brain space to look after everything else. Rather than exhaust yourself attempting to do it all, review your to-do list and ask if someone else can take care of that little thing you really need done. Whether it is having someone walk the dog, pick up some essentials from the shops or drive you home when you are feeling wrecked, do not be afraid to ask. Asking can bring us closer, strengthening relationships and building community.

Right now, there are a great number of people who want to help but don't know how. Asking allows us to share the burden and may also allow others to take actions that will honour their personal values of friendship and caring. Engaging this type of support helps to reserve your resources and bolster resilience.

4. Set boundaries and pause before saying 'yes'

For many of us, the natural instinct is to be helpful and say 'yes' no matter what is asked of us. Rather than rush straight in, it is important to take a moment to consider what is your own capacity and what you may have to sacrifice in order to take on that extra thing. When we take a pause, we can assess what the real priority is. Often, we may be able to find a different solution, or delegate tasks that are less important.

At times it is perfectly acceptable to say "no" or "sorry, I can't now" or "I'd love to, but...". Doing so, can allow us to concentrate on what matters most and be a real act of self-care which fosters resilience and wellbeing during challenging times.

The value of “being of service” is so strong that it can override other values. For proper self-care we do however all need a few non-negotiables. These may be something as simple as a morning walk, a regular meditation session or a long lie-in on your day off. By setting protective boundaries around these precious things, we can guard against competing priorities taking over.

You deserve to take care of your own mind and body. When you do this, you fill your cup and can honour your work and all other values with greater clarity and commitment.

5. Sleep, diet and exercise

Every doctor will tell you of the importance of sleep, diet and exercise. They will be able to reel off all sorts of facts regarding how essential these are for your brain, your mood, your immune system and countless other things you will be relying on. But even armed with this knowledge, not all doctors manage to heed the advice.

Right now, most essential workers will need to prepare themselves to be under stress for a number of months, if not longer. During this period, it is critical to provide your brain and body with the absolute best care.

Make sure you are getting enough good quality sleep. If you are having trouble getting to sleep, you will find a selection of guided mindfulness exercises in RAW Mind Coach, specifically tailored to help you relax, release tension and move in to a sleep state.

Remember to eat regularly and try to fuel yourself with the most nutritious food possible. Cut down on alcohol to aid recovery and make sure to exercise regularly to give your body and mood a boost.

6. Take a mindful moment

When you are incredibly busy and your mind is racing, it can be important to pause, take a mindful moment and re-centre, before moving on to the next critical task.

Practising mindfulness can be as simple as taking a few slow, deep breaths. During this time, you may bring your focus to the feeling of your chest rising and falling. You may also register any areas of tension in your body and take a moment to breathe into and relax tight muscles. You may choose to offer yourself words of encouragement and support as you do this e.g. “you’re doing the best you can right now”.

Try to incorporate short, mindful moments throughout your day. This may be something you do every time you wash your hands, take a shower or sit down for a meal.

You will find a selection of short guided mindfulness exercises within RAW Mind Coach. Learn the basics and you will be able to call upon these skills whenever you are feeling stressed or require a small dose of self-care.

7. Reach out for support

There is nothing brave, heroic or tough about trying to “tough it out” on your own when you are struggling. The most resilient action you can take is always to reach out for support.

Some people will find it easiest talking with a trusted friend, colleague or peer supporter. For professional advice, many people will also contact their employee assistance program, speak with their GP or ask for a referral to a psychologist.

Having these conversations should not be saved as a strategy of last resort. By instead making it part of our self-care plan, we can regularly top ourselves up, develop resilience and feel better resourced to take on challenges.

