



## **Self Care**

# **Information for Healing after Loss**

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### Self Care

Self-care sounds so simple and yet most of us need to be reminded over and over what it means and how to do it. How we take care of ourselves, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, shows up in how we live our lives. It is the single most important factor in how we meet the challenges of illness, dying, grieving and supporting others through difficult times.

Self-care is not selfish or self-indulgent. It promotes greater strength and resilience and enables us to offer our best to ourselves and to those we love and support.

## Wellness Wheel

When we think about our self-care, it is helpful to think about the whole self and the parts that make it up, our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual sides. To maintain good balance in our lives it is important to keep each of these aspects equally active and healthy.

We are familiar with the benefits of physical fitness, of keeping the body active. Besides making us feel good about ourselves, it makes us stronger and gives us greater resilience in the face of illness or accident. It even helps us to think more clearly. When we activate our physical side like this, it aids the whole self.

Although it is not as common to hear about emotional fitness, mental fitness or spiritual fitness, the very same principles apply. In other words, when we activate any of these areas in healthy ways, we help to strengthen and balance our entire structure.

Emotional fitness is about *feeling deeply* and finding some expression for those feelings. Having a heart to heart talk with a friend, being artistically creative, having a good laugh or cry – this is all great exercise for the “heart”.

Mental fitness is about toning up our *thinking*, flexing the muscles of the mind by learning, by teaching, by exploring ideas, by figuring things out.

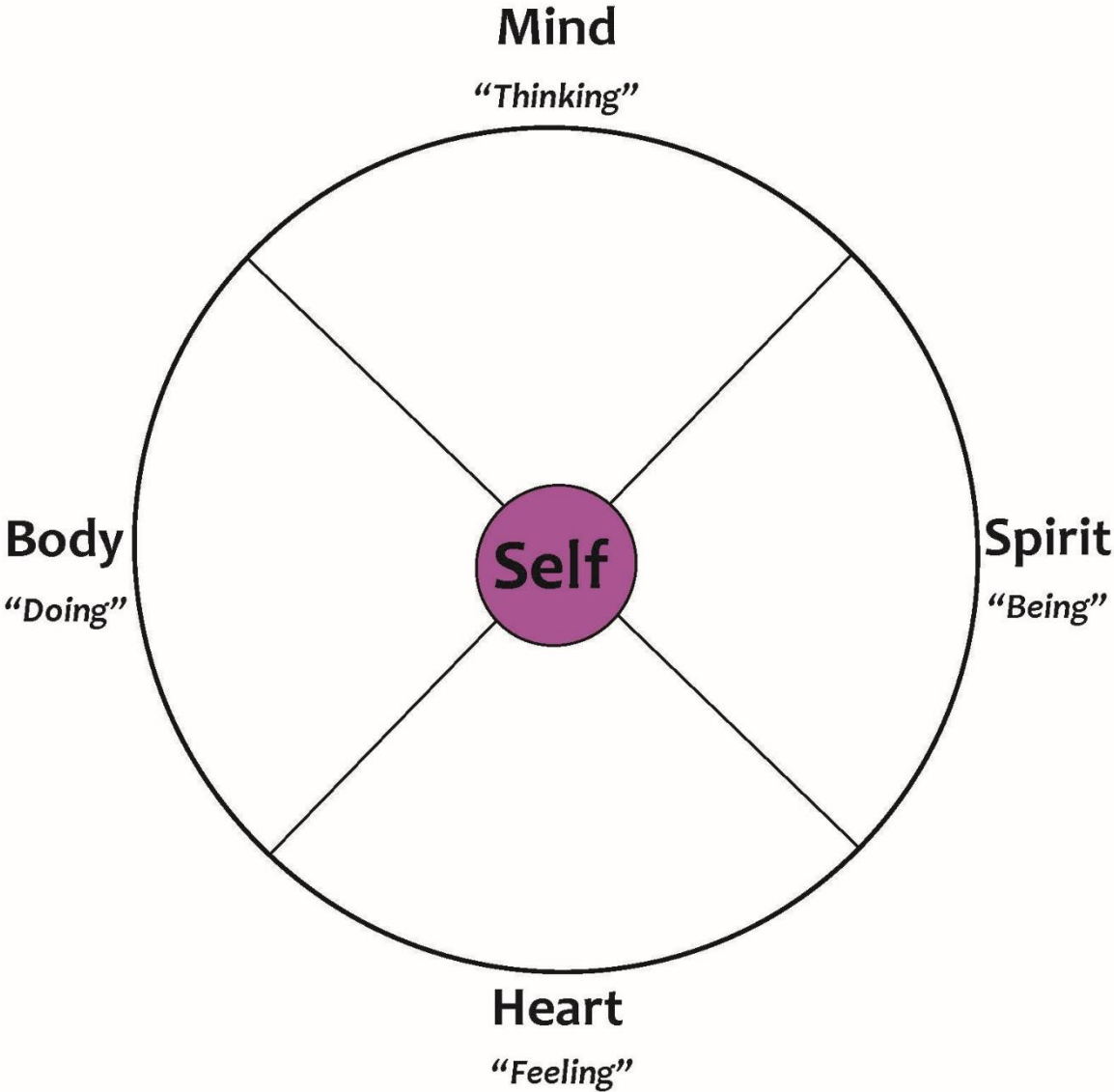
Spiritual fitness is about deep *connection*, to our self, to God, to nature, to our life force. Meditation, prayer, walking the dog, being in nature, finding time to rest in the midst of things – these are all good “cardio” for the spirit.

Often when we find ourselves practicing self-care it is in response to a crisis in our lives. But another way to approach our wellness and balance is to pay attention to it on a daily basis. In this way, not only are we stronger and more prepared if a crisis does come our way, but also the overall quality of our life is enhanced.

Use the Wellness Wheel as a guide to come up with activities in your life which you can use in each of the areas. Think about what you may already do for your self-care and pay special attention to those things that fall into more than one of the

areas. You may find, for example, that art or gardening or walking your dog may touch all four categories for you. Activities like this promote very healthy and holistic balance.

So, on a blank wheel, jot down your ideas in each of the four areas, and then use these ideas daily to stay equally active in all aspects of your life. Put your wheel somewhere you can see it to remind yourself of your own personal program for holistic fitness – the healthy balance of heart, mind, body and spirit.



## Tips for Self Care

### **Take time for yourself**

No matter how busy, how needed, remember that an empty cup cannot fill other cups. Learn that it is OK to say no. That means putting yourself first, some time, every day. Just taking five minutes to close your eyes and focus on yourself can help you feel better.

### **Take care of your body**

A healthy body is good for a happy heart, and a healthy mind. That means, exercise every day, eat healthy, and get enough sleep.

### **Pamper yourself**

Soak in a hot bath with Epsom salts, get a massage, ask someone for a hug, or just stand up and stretch.

### **Find some comfort**

Recognize when you need extra comforting. Call a friend, make yourself something warm to drink, wrap up in a blanket, hold a pillow or teddy bear, write in your journal, eat some comfort food, listen to music.

### **Practice meditation and relaxation**

Such a simple, and powerful way to take care of your mental health. You can start with just a few minutes a day sitting quietly. Guided meditations or relaxing music can help.

### **Cultivate good friendships**

A few good friends can make all the difference in how you experience the inevitable ups and downs of life.

### **Practice gratitude**

Notice all that is given to you, even the small things, and say thanks.

**Connect with nature**

Sometimes we forget to notice the world around us. Reconnecting with nature can help us feel more grounded and calm. Go for a walk, look at and feel the trees, really notice the sky, and breathe.

**Engage your creativity**

You need not be an artist to be creative and play. Cooking, collages, painting, dancing, quilting, woodworking, programming, gardening... find what you love to do and celebrate it!

**Enlist help from a guide**

Mentor, counsellor, Elder, spiritual teacher, life coach... find someone in whom you can trust, who can help you grow and be happy.

**Don't take life too seriously**

Cut yourself and others some slack. Make room for your 'imperfections'. Relax, smile and remember laughter is the best medicine.

## Self-Care for the Caregiver

The work of a caregiver is deeply fulfilling, rich, challenging, complex, difficult and draining. If we are to truly care well for others we must first care for ourselves. Here are some suggestions for navigating this special role.

### **You deserve to lead a joyful, whole life.**

No matter how much you love and value your work, your life is multi-faceted. Family, friends, and your other interests deserve your time and attention. **You** deserve your time and attention.

### **Your work does not define you.**

You are a unique, worthy person outside of your work life. While relationships can help you feel good about yourself, they are not what is inside you. Sometimes you need to stop “doing” and focus on simply “being”.

### **You are not the only one who can help.**

When you feel indispensable, you tend to ignore your own needs. There are others in your community who can fill your shoes.

### **A balanced diet, enough sleep and regular exercise keep you at your best.**

You know how important these are for those you support, but may neglect them for yourself.

### **If you have been over-involved in care giving for too long, you may have forgotten how to take care of yourself.**

You may need to rediscover ways of caring for and nurturing yourself. You may even need to relearn how to explore your own feelings instead of focusing on everyone else's.

### **Maintain healthy boundaries in your helping relationships.**

As a caregiver, you cannot avoid getting emotionally involved. Nor would you want to. Active empathy allows you to be a good companion. However, you are

responsible to others, not for others. Healthy boundaries serve to keep you balanced.

**Cultivate your time-management skills.**

Set practical goals for how you spend your time, including holistic self care.

**Don't expect yourself to be perfect.**

Our helping efforts are not always successful. Even when we offer compassionate, "on-target" help, the recipient isn't always prepared to receive it. Mistakes are an integral part of learning and growth, not measurements of self-worth.

**Practice setting limits and alleviating stresses you can do something about.**

You should enjoy what you accomplish in helping others but don't berate yourself for what is beyond you. Cultivate a clear sense of expectations, setting realistic goals.

**Listen to your inner voice.**

As a caregiver, at times you will feel overloaded. When your inner voice begins to whisper its fatigue, listen carefully and allow yourself some down-time.

**Express your personal uniqueness in both your work and play.**

Don't be afraid to demonstrate your special talents and abilities. Take time each day to remind yourself what is important to you. If you only had three months to live, what would you do?

**You are a spiritual being.**

Spending time alone focusing on self-understanding and self-love, you can become more present to those you work with. Appreciating the beauty of life and living, we renew our spirit and open more genuinely to those we companion.



## **Loss, Grief and Anxiety in Difficult Times**

Sometimes life just seems like too much. We feel that we are just barely coping and then something else comes along: the loss of a loved one, illness, the inability to make ends meet, or in these times a pandemic.

It is overwhelming and we grieve. Grief isn't just reserved for loss through death. We feel grief for all of the ways life doesn't turn out the way we want it to. It is actually a normal part of being alive; part of what makes us human. We have inherited the ability to feel and express a wide range of emotions from ecstasy to despair and it is important to feel the emotions that arise moment to moment.

So the first step in finding a way through life's challenges is to acknowledge this pain we are feeling, to acknowledge the losses and the fears. Our tendency is to avoid hard feelings and there is a mountain of ways we find to distract ourselves from them. But grief impacts the whole being: emotional, physical, mental and spiritual. It can be buried but it claims us in one way or another, draining our energy and our ability to see clearly. Meeting it head on actually makes us stronger.

When life is challenging we often feel out of control and there is this odd thing that we do with our minds. We begin to think about all of the worst case scenarios as a way of somehow feeling in control but the results are the opposite. The more the mind winds up, the more it creates agitation, anxiety and fear resulting in the experience of being more and more out of control. The mind winds us up so tight it is like being caught in a trap with nowhere to go.

What can we do? We can begin to calm down by moving our attention from the mind and its ramped up thoughts about the future down into our body. This creates some space and ease in our mind and body and we are able to be more present in this moment.

Let's start with hand washing. The next time you wash your hands look at them. Make a switch from mechanically washing while lost in thoughts to really seeing your hands, giving them your full attention. As you are washing you may even feel grateful for having these hands that work so hard for you all day long and this might lead you to consider something else for which you are grateful. If you do this once you will likely feel a little shift in your sense of wellbeing. If you do it ten times a day it could change your life.

Gratitude is considered an antidote to stress and anxiety. While the overactive mind creates tightness and fear, gratitude is expansive. It opens us up and moves us to look around, right here and right now. We certainly don't have to be grateful for everything that's happening. The simple things, like our hands or our next meal, are a good place to start. It is important to note that this being grateful is not just a mental exercise. We have to *feel* grateful which usually means feeling it somewhere in our body.

In this unprecedented time of social isolation we can feel extremely grateful for the internet's ability to connect us together. Technology is a wonderful gift as are our brilliant minds. But like our minds this information gatherer can turn on us; inundating us with information that is overwhelming and anxiety provoking. What starts out as a way of informing ourselves to gain a sense of control quickly becomes a form of self-sabotage, spiralling us into fear and agitation. Consider what a reasonable amount of time to spend with disturbing information would be and set a timer to limit yourself. You have a choice.

If this doesn't work then while you are on the internet become aware of your breathing ~ the time-honoured practice for calming mind and body. Simply breathe more intentionally; take your breath a little deeper and a little slower, feel the calming rhythm of your breath. Like the hand washing exercise, the more you bring your awareness to your breath throughout the day the less anxious you will feel. (It is not just for when you are on the internet!)

To summarize this primer on navigating grief, loss and anxiety, remember to:

- Acknowledge the difficult emotions
- Become aware of the mind's role in anxiety
- Become more present in your body
- Celebrate the things you are grateful for
- Remember to breathe

Last but not least, please treat yourself and those around you with kindness, care and compassion.

## Self-Care Quiz

Here's a simple exercise to get you thinking about things you can do for self-care. Rate yourself 0-3 to see how much you are doing now.

Never-0    Rarely-1    Sometimes-2    Often-3

### Physical Self care

- Eat regularly (breakfast, lunch & dinner & healthy snacks)
- Eat healthy foods
- Exercise regularly (30 minutes aerobic 3 X times per week)
- Preventative medical, dental & psychological care
- Medical care when needed
- Take time off work when ill
- Receive massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run and play sports, sing/other enjoyable activity
- Take time to be sexual
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes you like
- Take vacations

**Maximum 36**

### Mental Self Care

- Engage in personal therapy to resolve past & present traumatic stress
- Maintain non-anxious presence at work
- Maintain non-anxious presence at home
- Maintain self respect in work
- Maintain self respect in personal life
- Make time away from demands
- Write in a journal
- Read literature for pleasure

- \_\_\_ Do something at which you are not an expert or in charge
- \_\_\_ Let others know different aspects of you
- \_\_\_ Be curious
- \_\_\_ Say no to extra responsibilities
- \_\_\_ Decrease stress in your life

**Maximum 39**

### **Emotional Self Care**

- \_\_\_ Connect with others whose company you enjoy
- \_\_\_ Stay in contact with the people that matter in your life
- \_\_\_ Laugh
- \_\_\_ Cry
- \_\_\_ Play with animals
- \_\_\_ Play with children
- \_\_\_ Identify & seek comforting activities, people, relationships, places
- \_\_\_ Express anger in social action (letters to media, donations, gatherings)

**Maximum 24**

### **Spiritual Self Care**

- \_\_\_ Spend time in nature
- \_\_\_ Find spiritual connection or community
- \_\_\_ Cherish optimism and hope
- \_\_\_ Be open to not knowing
- \_\_\_ Sing
- \_\_\_ Pray
- \_\_\_ Spend time with children/pets
- \_\_\_ Be open to inspiration
- \_\_\_ Have gratitude
- \_\_\_ Meditate
- \_\_\_ Listen to music
- \_\_\_ Engage in artistic activity
- \_\_\_ Yoga

- Dance or other body movement
- Have experiences of awe
- Be mindful of what is happening in your body and around you
- Make meanings from the difficult periods of life
- Practice forgiveness & reconciliation
- Seek truth

**Maximum 57**

### **Workplace Self Care**

- Take time to eat lunch away from desk/work space
- Take time to connect with co-workers
- Make quiet time to complete tasks
- Identify projects or tasks that are exciting/rewarding
- Set limits with clients and colleagues
- Balance your workload so that you are not overwhelmed
- Arrange your workspace so that is comfortable and comforting
- Get regular supervision & consultation
- Negotiate for your needs (benefits, pay raise, mental health days)
- Have a peer support group or individual

**Maximum 30**

**Total: \_\_\_\_\_**  
**(out of 186)**



*Compassionate end-of-life and grief support for Yukoners*

Hospice Yukon offers grief support for individuals and families, including children and teens. Our services include counselling (in person, by telephone, or online), Healing Touch, a variety of grief groups, educational workshops, and a lending library. Please contact us for information about current offerings.

**Hospice Yukon is open**

**Monday to Friday**

**11:30am - 3:00pm**

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