

My Self-Care Plan

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COUN-5543: Crisis Trauma Counseling Intervention

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October 12, 2025

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From my perspective, developing a personalized self-care plan is essential as I enter the counseling field because I need to be able to keep myself in balance. Balance is a theme in my life that I always turn to when I am feeling dis-regulated. I strive to be in a place where my own personal comforts allow me the capacity to share, care, and practice gratitude. In kind, I envision my own personal discomforts being a source of growth, open-mindedness, and resilience. For me, caring for myself and staying balanced has been a life-long practice built around guidelines that help me adapt as I navigate life's challenges and experiences.

Assessment Reflection

When taking the self-care assessment I was not surprised to find that I was lacking in personal free time. I am naturally someone who thrives on exploration and creativity, however because of the phase of life I am currently in, I do not always have the time to carry them out in the ways I have in the past. My choices have led me to a place where I am currently working full-time, taking on additional side jobs, all while completing my masters. This tilts the balance of my life into a space that is heavily work oriented.

Although I recognize this balance is off, I also understand that it is for the short term, and have been able to make adaptations in my life that simultaneously make up for some of the losses I feel from the absence of free-time. One of the biggest examples of a self-care switch I made that helped me regain balance was switching jobs from a behavioral technician to a florist. Although it pays less, this switch allows me space to be creative, exercise doing daily tasks, get better sleep, etc. Although it is still work, it fills my cup enough for me to have energy to put toward my main goals like completing school and staying on top of budgeting. I am proud of the changes I have made to adapt to my own needs, and although at the moment I am not able to care

for myself in the ways I have in the past, I get meaning out of where I am at now, and knowing that I am on track toward a place where I will be able to have more freedoms to diversify the ways I care for myself in the future.

Current Self-Care

The first step I take when caring for myself is to take time to remember my “whys”. My partner and I refer to our current stage as a metaphorical gardening phase. Right now we are doing the hard work of tilling our soil and pulling weeds, so that we can eventually plant seeds and grow a better future for ourselves. When we are having hard days, we remind ourselves that we are gardening; why? Because it reminds us why we are working hard. Working on our garden will help us get to a place where we can be stable and have the capacity to share our “crops” with the people around us. The “why” provides meaning, and meaning is tied to motivation and resilience, especially when things get challenging.

Right now, my time is limited, so caring for myself comes from attention to details in my routine. For example, if I have a hard week, I will often times treat myself by going to the local farmers market instead of the grocery store. This gets me outside, allows me to support my local farmers, and improves my meals for the week which has a lasting impact.

An area I specifically struggle with right now is getting exercise. My job as a florist has helped me in this area, however I don’t always have time to get outside and participate in the sports or activities I usually would. A compromise I have found for this is disc golf. Disc golf has been an asset for me because it simultaneously satisfies multiple needs of mine at once. Disc golf is close to my house so I can run there, it gets me outside, has an element of play, is free, and is something I can do with my partner when he is in town. It is a multifaceted love that I have come to appreciate during this phase of my life.

Another thing I have noticed about myself as I have been in a constant state of work and task completion is that I struggle to engage in activities that involve resting my mind. I am almost always planning or problem solving, and if there is a lull in to-do's, I usually have an educational podcast on. I recognize the importance of resting my brain so I have been pushing myself to find alternatives and take rest. For example, instead of an educational podcast I will listen to a fantasy book. Another example is I have been trying to be better about allowing myself slow mornings where I do not wake up and immediately start to complete tasks. Instead I take space to sleep in, go for a morning un-plugged walk, and enjoy my coffee.

Self-Care Goals

Right now, I feel like I am doing a really good job with self-care given the situation I am in. That being said, there is still a part of me that is excited to expand on my self-care as I obtain more financial and time freedoms. When my finances are in better standings, I will be able to incorporate more self-care in the form of massages, nutrition, memberships, classes, and gifts for others. When I complete school I will have the freedom to take more time to adventure, unplug from technology, engage in sports on a routine basis, volunteer, and visit my out-of-state family.

Right now, all of those forms of self-care are luxuries that I rarely get to engage in. They are all privileges that I have temporarily traded in while I delegate my income and time to my current goals, with the end goal of having more overall time and recourses to incorporate those privileges back into my life. As I move forward and achieve my goal of completing school, I will be able to gain a steadier income, be able to cut back on work hours, and start to incorporating those privileges back in. In some ways I am grateful for the absence of my old self-care tools because it has taught me how to be resilient and care for myself without them. As I add them back I will also hold more gratitude for being able to have those privileges to lean on.

Steps to Self-Care

Creating self-care steps feels monotonous to me. I am someone who runs on tasks and self-improvement, and I know from experience how debilitating the feeling of striving toward adequate self-care can be. As someone who has a task-oriented brain, if I list out all of the self-care methods I should do, my brain automatically defaults to feeling to need to completing them all; the consequence of this is that I feel guilt or disappointment when I can't. Even scheduling them or prioritizing them can feel like more of a task than self-care.

I do not want to be chasing self-care (or as I think of it, balance) I want to be continually practicing it. Therefore my steps do not take on a "take more bubble baths" format, but rather the form of personal guidelines I try to follow. The top six guidelines I hold for balancing my life are: Remember my "whys", listen to my body, maintain my boundaries, be pragmatic, have the guts to make change, and embrace gratitude.

- Remembering my "whys" is first on my list because as discussed above, it connects me with meaning and intention. Remembering why I am doing what I do keeps me on track and helps me stay resilient when things get tough.
- Listening to my body is second on my list because it connects me with my autonomy. Personally, I have learned to pay attention to the physical signs and somatic signals that come from my body when I am making decisions. Listening to my body in addition to my mind has helped me understand my own needs and find the confidence to say no, which has in turn helped my life feel more like my own.
- Maintaining boundaries is one of my most powerful guidelines because it gives me control over my life. Creating boundaries whether they be with work, relationships, tasks, etc.. helps keep my personal space authentic. Boundaries keep me safe, keep out the riff-

raff, and free up time. They empower my self-worth and self-respect because boundaries are created to help me navigate my own needs and actions, which can help me avoid my bad habit of trying to control things that I can't; i.e. others.

- Being pragmatic is one of my favorite practices because it empowers me to get creative with life instead of sulking. For example, right now I do not have time or money to see my family out of state, but that doesn't mean I can't find ways to connect with them using technology. Another example was when I wasn't making ends meet working retail so I started intentionally pre-staging events for one of the companies branches, which they took notice in hired me on at a higher wage with easier hours. Pragmatism is remembering that just because things are not the way I envisioned them to be, does not mean I can't find a way to turn it into something I want it to be.
- Sometimes pragmatic solutions fall short, and the situation is not going to work. In situations like these, I need to have the guts to make a change. Previously I was working in genetics. The position was stable, but I knew that if I stayed, I would be capped out in pay and use of my skills. I am someone who thrives on change and growth, so I had to have the guts to change my career which led to me making the decision to go back to school. The changes I make like this are calculated, however they often require me to be put into a vulnerable position for a certain period of time. These changes are hard, but are ultimately the leaps that keep me on a path that is filled with meaning.
- My last guideline is gratitude. In life, it can be easy to become caught up in the future which takes away from the present. Gratitude helps me appreciate what I have accomplished and where I am at. Gratitude is connecting with what I have, and provides a space of abundance where other things can be invited in. Gratitude is feeling the breaths

I get to take each day. It is appreciating the moments I have gotten to spend with the people in my life who have now passed. It is cooking a meal for the ones that I love.

Gratitude in many ways is love. While sometimes it can be hard to find it, it is important to practice it, so that even when I am in a dark place I can still find a way to hold it.

None of these guidelines really incorporate specific self-care tasks. Yet, I know all of them will help me maintain an equilibrium where I will have the self-awareness and energy to care for myself. This is the way that I practice self-care. It is meditative, intuitive, and adaptable. Life inevitably gets hard, and when it does I do not want a to-do list, I want to know that I have an engrained practice that I can lean into that allows me to rely on myself for love and navigation of my authentic needs.

Summary

Caring for myself requires an ongoing awareness of how the balances in my life interact with each other. In order to navigate burnout and the challenges life brings I have created six main guidelines that I continually practice. Practicing the guidelines helps me stay in a space where I can monitor and care for my own needs without the feeling that caring for myself is a task to be completed. Furthermore these guidelines help me derive meaning and gratitude for where I am at. Using these guidelines I can enter the counseling field with confidence because I know that wherever I am at I will be able to move forward in sustainable way.