

Self-Care



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Practising self-care

Self-care is any action you take to support your physical, emotional, or spiritual health and well-being. You are not being selfish or self-centred when you engage in self-care. Rather, you are equipping yourself to fulfil your personal goals, care for others, and meet your professional obligations.

Self-care is especially important for those who work in jobs with high levels of stress, worry, or anxiety and for those who are directly or indirectly exposed to violence or abuse.

1. Set aside time every day for self-care.

Remember, you can't give to others if you have nothing left to give.

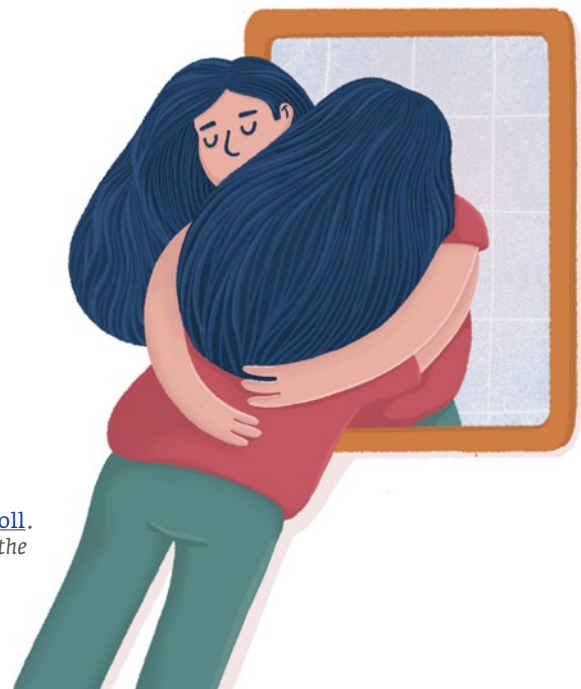
2. Regularly check in with yourself to recognise common signs of distress:

- Avoiding relationships and pleasurable activities, including physical activity
- Overthinking, worrying, and feeling anxious or afraid.
- Experiencing unexpected memories of past traumatic events
- Experiencing sleep disturbances
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Experiencing noticeable weight changes
- Having emotional outbursts
- Forming unhealthy habits
- Overworking

3. Engage in healthy strategies for each NURSE⁽¹⁾ area that make you feel better:

- **Nutrition**--eat as healthy a diet as possible (fruit, vegetables, whole grains) as regularly as possible and stay hydrated.
- **Understanding yourself**--pay attention to how you are feeling, thinking, responding, and behaving (journaling, therapy, meditation, mindfulness activities).
- **Relaxation**--get regular rest, sleep 7-9 hours a night, engage in activities you enjoy (friends, music), and take time to recover from illness.
- **Spirituality**--practise your personal beliefs, values, and principles (prayer, collective worship, honesty, compassion)
- **Exercise**--move your body regularly (stretching, walking, running, gardening, sports)

4. Get extra help when you need it. Our life experiences and circumstances can overwhelm our bodies and minds. If distress symptoms interfere with your ability to complete daily tasks, consider talking to a mental health specialist who can give you extra support.

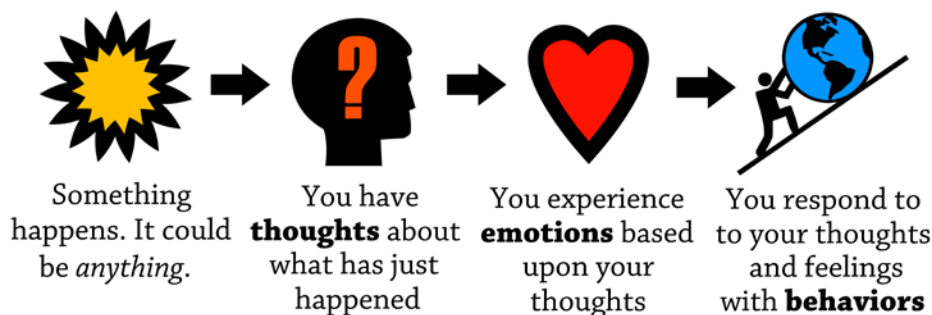


⁽¹⁾ Adapted from Sichel, [Deborah](#) and [Jeanne Watson Driscoll](#). *Women's Moods: What Every Woman Must Know About Hormones, the Brain, and Emotional Health*, Harper, 2000.

Cognitive behavioural model⁽²⁾

The Cognitive Model

how you think determines how you feel
and how you behave



Introduction to the model

Sometimes we are very proud of how we manage stressful situations; other times we want to make improvements. Reflecting in this way can help us begin to make changes. The Cognitive Behavioural Model provides a way to do this. You can try using this model by following the instructions below to complete the *Thoughts, feelings, body responses and behaviours worksheet*.

In the instructions, we asked you to focus on mildly stressful situations. If you want to explore your reactions to very stressful and potentially traumatic situations, you should carefully consider whether this is something you are ready to do and whether you should seek support from someone, like a therapist, to help you do this more safely. If you are currently seeing a therapist, it is likely they are familiar with tools like this, and you may wish to explore this further with them.

Situation

Think of something stressful that happened to you this week. To make sure that this exercise is not too difficult, choose a stressful situation that on a scale of 1 to 10 is about a 6, with 1 being the most relaxing situation in your life and 10 being the most stressful.

Close your eyes and go back and relive the experience. What was happening? Who was there? What were you doing? Describe the situation in as much detail as possible.

Thoughts

Describe the thoughts that were going through your mind at the time – some of us literally talk to ourselves all of the time and these thoughts can be very loud and intrusive. If you can, write down the exact words going through your head.

⁽²⁾ Graphic adapted from <https://www.psychologytools.com/self-help/putting-it-all-together/>.

Feelings

Describe the feelings you were having at that moment. Try to be as precise as possible. If you need help, refer to the Feelings Wheel on the next page to help you find the right word to describe how you were feeling.

Feelings Wheel >>>



Body responses

Without us even being aware of it, our body adjusts to situations we go through in life. This includes our heart rate, our digestive system, our respiratory rate, our salivation, our perspiration, our pupillary dilation, our need to urinate, feelings of sexual arousal, our muscular activation, and our perception of external stimuli through our five senses.

Describe how your body was responding. If it helps, you may want to close your eyes to try and remember. If you need help, refer to the list of body responses below to help you find the right word to describe how you were feeling.

Stress-related body responses:

- A pounding or racing heartbeat
- Feeling faint, dizzy, or light-headed
- Feeling very hot or very cold
- Sweating, trembling or shaking

- Nausea (feeling sick), indigestion or heartburn
- Pain in your chest or abdomen
- Struggling to breathe or feeling like you're choking
- Feeling like your legs are shaky or are turning to jelly
- Blurred eyesight or sore eyes
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches and headaches
- Indigestion or heartburn
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Developing rashes or itchy skin
- Feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings

Behaviour/actions

Last, describe how you behaved. Consider what you said out loud, but also record your body language, your tone of voice.

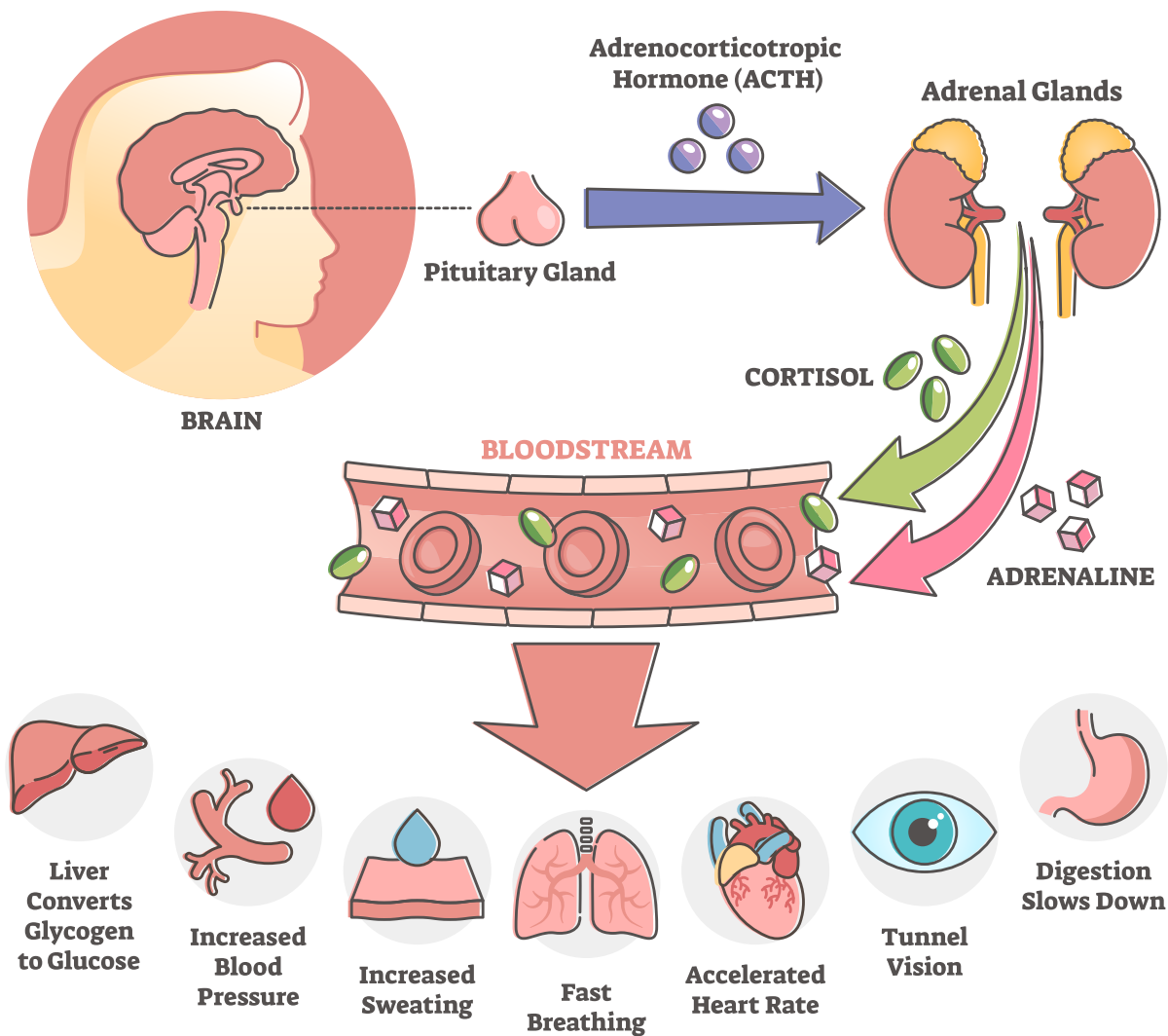
Making connections

What relationships, if any, did you see between your thoughts, feelings, body responses and

behaviours? Did you learn anything about yourself that surprised you?

We know from psychology that our thoughts, feelings, body responses and behaviours are very closely related and can strongly influence each other. This means that efforts we make to create change in one of these domains – for example in how we talk to ourselves before and during a stressful event – can lead to changes in the other domains.

STRESS RESPONSE



Thoughts, feelings, body responses and behaviours worksheet

Situation:

What am I thinking/saying to myself?

How am I feeling?

What is happening in my body?

How am I acting?

Thoughts, feelings, body responses and behaviours worksheet

Situation:

What am I thinking/saying to myself?

How am I feeling?

What is happening in my body?

How am I acting?

Name:

Support person:

Self-care plan			
Area of self-care	Barriers to self-care	Actions to support self-care	How often
Nutrition			
Understanding			
Relaxation			
Spirituality			
Exercise			

Self-care activities

Note: It is good to start any self-care or relaxation activity with the “Calming breaths” exercise. This will help relax your body, clear your mind, and tell your whole self that it is able to find a sense of peace and relaxation.

Calming breaths



Useful for releasing tension, slowing your heart rate, and oxygenating the brain for clearer thinking.

1. Take a deep breath in while counting slowly to 4.
2. Hold your breath while slowly counting to 4.
3. Let the breath out while counting to 4, making a whooshing or “huh” sound.
4. Repeat 3 times (or as many times as necessary to feel your heart rate slowing and the tension releasing).
5. For an additional stress relief, you can roll your shoulders or shake your body a little at the end of this exercise.

Body-listening exercise

Useful for releasing tension, slowing your heart rate, and oxygenating the brain for clearer thinking.

1. Sit comfortably or lie down. You may want to cover yourself with a blanket.
2. Prepare to listen to your body by using the calming breaths activity above.
3. While continuing to breathe in and out slowly, bring awareness to your head. What thoughts are running through your head? Don't engage with these thoughts. Don't try and direct them, don't try and make them go away, just observe them for a few moments.
4. Now bring awareness to how your head feels physically. Begin with the sensations in your head. Is it clear, comfortable, numb, pulsing, throbbing? Don't judge the sensations, just observe them. If there's a specific place that feels sore or uncomfortable, imagine the breath going to that place when you inhale and taking the pain or tension away with it when you exhale.
5. Now focus your attention on your neck and shoulders. How do they feel? Loose, tense, comfortable, painful? If there's a specific place that feels sore, imagine the breath going to that place when you inhale and taking the pain away with it when you exhale. Don't judge the sensations, just observe them for a few moments.



6. Now focus your attention on your back. How does it feel? Relaxed, tight, flexible, stiff? If there's a specific place that feels sore, imagine the breath going to that place when you inhale and taking the pain away with it when you exhale. Don't judge the sensations, just observe them for a few moments.
7. Now focus your attention on your arms and hands. How do they feel? Long and loose, clenched and tense? If there's a specific place that feels sore or tight, imagine the breath going to that place when you inhale and taking the pain or tension away with it when you exhale. Don't judge the sensations, just observe them for a few moments.
8. Now focus your attention on your legs and feet. How do they feel? Are your toes curled up tight or relaxed? How about the arch of your foot? Every nerve ending in your body is connected in some way to your feet, so they are often the first indicator that you are holding onto stress. Really feel your thighs, calves, and feet. If there's a specific place that feels sore or tight, imagine the breath going to that place when you inhale and taking the pain or tension away with it when you exhale. Don't judge the sensations, just observe them for a few moments.
9. Now, thank your body for all it does to manage your stress. Move your body in a way that feels comfortable to you. You can wiggle your fingers and toes, roll your shoulders, stretch your arms up to the sky, bend to the side, flex your feet, rub your face, or all of these things together. Now you can open your eyes.
10. Now, take a couple more deep breaths and lightly shake your heads, arms, and legs, imagining that any of the stress left in your body is flying out of your fingertips, out of your head, out of your toes, and into the air where it will disappear forever.

JUST
relax

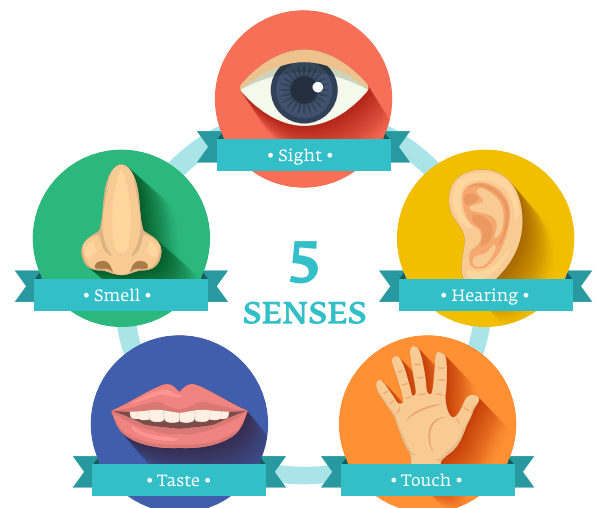
Squeeze it out

Useful for releasing whole-body tension and promoting a feeling of calm.



1. Stand tall.
2. Take a deep breath in and tighten all your muscles, including the ones in your face, for at least 4 counts.
3. Breathe out and let all your muscles relax, perhaps shaking your arms and legs a little.
4. The longer and harder you squeeze your muscles (up to 10 seconds), the greater the benefit will be when you release.

5 senses grounding



Useful for promoting a feeling of calm, refocusing the mind on the present, and reducing anxiety and worry.

1. Sit up tall and take a deep breath in, hold it for 4 seconds, and let it out.
2. Now, look around you. Name 5 things you can see.
3. Close your eyes and listen. Name 4 things you can hear.
4. Reach around you. Name 3 things you can feel.
5. Close your eyes and breathe in. Name 2 things you can smell.
6. Open your mouth. Name 1 thing you can taste.

Mindful eating



Useful for refocusing the mind on the present, supporting feelings of gratitude and calm, and encouraging a stronger mind-body connection.

1. Prepare

- Sit at the table with your food in front of you. Clear away any distractions (phones, reading materials, etc.).
- Close your eyes.
- Breathe in for 4 seconds and out for 4 seconds. Repeat once.
- As your breathing returns to normal, tune in to how you are feeling and what you are thinking. Do you notice hunger, tension, happiness, or something else? Are your thoughts racing? Don't judge the feelings and thoughts, just observe them.

2. Enjoy

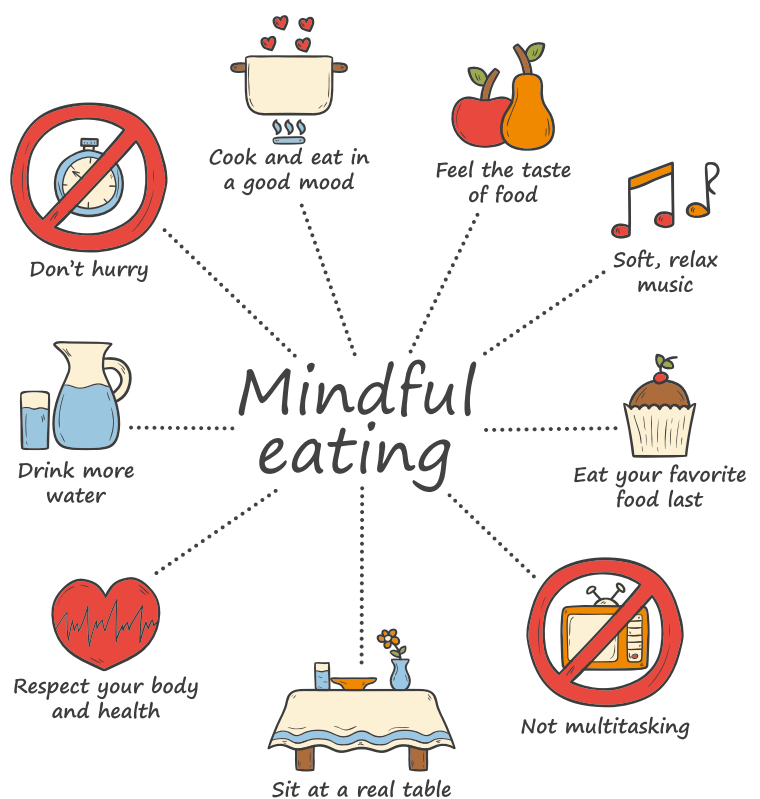
- Take a moment to observe your food, but don't eat it. Notice the textures, colours, and shapes. Consider all that has gone into preparing the meal: rain, sunshine, farmers, truck drivers, chefs, etc. Notice any feelings that arise as you think about consuming the good, such as increased hunger, salivation, gratitude, etc.
- Bring one morsel of your food to your nose and breathe in deeply. What does the food smell like?

- Gently place the food on your tongue, but don't chew. Notice the texture, temperature, flavour, weight, or other sensations.
- Slowly begin to chew, noticing the sounds, sensations, changes in flavour or texture, etc.
- After chewing for several seconds, slowly swallow, seeing how far you can feel the food as it makes its way into the digestive system.

3. Digest

- Take a moment to listen to your stomach. What do you notice? Do you feel satisfaction? Hunger?
- If you feel hunger, be curious about what is causing the feeling: physical hunger, pleasant taste, or something else? While you take a few moments to decide whether to continue eating, take a moment to feel gratitude for the food and the people and resources that made it possible.

4. Repeat these steps for as many bites as you have time for.



Gratitude journaling

Useful for shifting attention away from stressful experiences and promoting feelings of calmness and gratitude.

1. If possible, prepare yourself with a writing utensil and a journal or sheet of paper. You can also use the space at the bottom of this page. (We did not provide lines to allow for creative expression of your gratitude list.) If those are not available, you can still do this exercise by making a list in your mind.
2. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in for 4 seconds and out for 4 seconds.
3. Think for a moment about the things in your life you are grateful for. No item is too large or too small. It could be the milk in your coffee, a warm house, or a good friend.
4. Write a list of at least 3 things you are grateful for. (The list can be as long as you like and have time for.)
5. Now re-read your list.
6. At the bottom of the list, write a one-sentence note of thanks to God, your higher power, or the universe (whichever aligns with your personal belief system) for allowing you to experience these things. (You can also draw a picture/smiley face, sing a song, or do something else to express your feelings and thoughts.)



Deep seeing



Useful for refocusing the mind on the present, cultivating a sense of appreciation for the world around you and promoting feelings of calmness and relaxation.

1. Before you begin, gather a timer, a writing utensil and journal/paper (if you desire), and an object that is visually appealing to you (a scarf, painting, piece of fruit, etc.). You can also use the space at the bottom of this page. (We did not provide lines to allow for creative expression of your reflections.)
2. Set the timer for 3-5 minutes.
3. Take a deep breath in for 4 seconds and let it out for 4 seconds.
4. Observe the object. Note the colours, textures, shadows, etc. Observe the object until you notice things you never noticed before. What do the things you see tell you?
5. When the timer goes off, take another minute or two to write about your experience. What new things did you notice? How did your mind/body feel during the exercise? What, if anything, did you discover about yourself during this process?
6. If you would prefer not to write, use a different way to react to the observation. You can sketch a picture, make up a dance, sing a song—do whatever reflects your experience and feelings.

Deep listening

Useful for refocusing the mind on the present, cultivating a sense of appreciation for the world around you and promoting feelings of calmness and relaxation.

1. Before you begin, gather a timer and a writing utensil and journal/paper (if you desire). You can also use the space at the bottom of this page. (We did not provide lines to allow for creative expression of your reflections.)
2. Set the timer for 3-5 minutes.
3. Take a deep breath in for 4 seconds and let it out for 4 seconds.
4. Close your eyes and listen.
5. Listen to the sounds closest to you, like your breath.
6. Gradually extend your attention further away: birds, cars, etc.
7. Focus closely on one sound at a time, identifying the source, the feelings it creates, your pleasure/displeasure with the sound.
8. When the timer goes off, take another minute or two to write about your experience. What new things did you notice? How did your mind/body feel during the exercise? What, if anything, did you discover about yourself during this process?
9. If you would prefer not to write, use a different way to react to the observation. You can sketch a picture, make up a dance, sing a song—do whatever reflects your experience and feelings.



Walking meditation⁽³⁾



Useful for encouraging a stronger mind-body connection, refocusing the mind on the present, and supporting feelings of calm and relaxation.

1. Choose your location. Outdoors is preferable, but indoors is ok as well. You can even do this meditation when walking in the grocery store or on the way to your car!
2. Begin by standing still and noticing your feet on the ground. Take a slow, deep breath, and set your gaze on what is in front of you.
3. Walk 10 to 15 paces forward, slightly slower than your normal pace. Notice the feeling of your feet on the ground and the sensations involved in walking. If an impulse to move quickly arises, notice it, and continue forward at a slow pace.
4. Focus your attention on your inhales and exhales as you walk. With each step, try to repeat in your mind “breathe in, breathe out.” If you notice your mind getting distracted, gently guide your awareness back to your breath.
5. Notice the sensation of your body as you move. First notice your foot as it touches the ground, then lifts off the ground, and finally returns to the ground again. Move slowly and purposefully. As you move, think “right foot forward, left foot forward, right foot forward, left foot forward.”
6. Turn around. At the end of 10 to 15 paces, come to a stopping place, and take a slow breath. Then turn around and walk back using the same process. Continue like this for ten to fifteen minutes.

⁽³⁾ Adapted from https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/25786o_IACP_Mindfulness_Toolkit_p5.pdf.

Rock activity

Useful for grounding our hearts and minds as we work with migrant children.

1. Find a rock that is small enough to fit in the palm of your hand.



2. We are with a child for a very short time in their migration journey and a very, very short time in the journey of their life. We may know little of the earlier experiences that shape who they are. And the difficult thing about our work is we often know nothing about what becomes of them.

It might seem like the impact we have on a child is minimal. But we know from migrant children themselves that the cruelty and the kindness of the adults they encounter stays with them and can mean a lot.

3. The rock you have just chosen is a metaphor for the children you work with. As you hold this rock in your hand, feel how it has been shaped by the journey that has brought it here to you today, a journey that has lasted thousands, if not millions, of years.
4. Now, as you hold this rock in your hand, I invite you to transmit to it your feelings and hopes for the children you work with.
5. I invite you to take this rock with you as you go about your day to remind you of the impact you can have on the children you work with. And, when it feels right, at any time in the future I invite you to place this rock down so it can continue its journey without you.

Appreciation activity

Useful for shifting attention away from stressful experiences and promoting feelings of calmness, gratitude, and community.



Note: This activity is designed to be done in a group. If you wish, you could also adapt this for online/email delivery.

1. Before you begin, gather small squares of paper (post-it note size), pens, and a basket/bowl.
2. Practicing gratefulness promotes self-care in several different ways: it drives us to take better care of ourselves, it drives us to help others and it strengthens our relationships with others.
3. Gratefulness is not just an individual practice, it is a social practice, and one that can have a wonderfully positive impact in the workplace. Our work is not always easy, and receiving a positive message of appreciation and encouragement is often what keeps us going.
4. Take a piece of paper and write down a word of appreciation and encouragement, something nice and caring, that you would like to receive.
5. Once you are done, fold it up and put it in the container.
6. Once everyone has contributed their response, have someone stand by the door, holding the container of notes.
7. As everyone leaves, have them take and enjoy one message of appreciation and encouragement.



DON'T FORGET
ABOUT
yourself



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