

## The Importance of Self-Care

Source: [www.bethe1to.com](http://www.bethe1to.com)



We can all help our loved ones and community members get through crisis. But as we take action to support others, it is also vital that we take the time to support and care for ourselves.

### The Importance of Self-Care

While you are supporting and helping someone who may be in crisis, it is especially important for you to also take care of yourself. Practicing self-care does not mean you are choosing yourself over your loved one. It means that you are simply being mindful of your own needs, so you are better able to support the people you care about. When you take care of yourself and are not stressed, you are better able to meet the needs of others.

Self-care comes in a variety of forms. It does not require an elaborate plan; self-care can be as simple as taking a deep breath when you notice you are becoming stressed. By maintaining your physical and mental health, you will likely be better equipped to handle the stressors that come along with supporting someone you care about.

### Signs of Stress

Take a look at this list and check in with yourself. It's important and healthy to acknowledge your limits.

*Do you feel...*

- Anxious or full of worry?
- Unable to concentrate?
- Achy or sick more than usual?
- Sad or generally unhappy?
- Overwhelmed and constantly worried?
- Irritable or short tempered?
- Tired often?
- Lonely or alone?

*Are you having trouble...*

- Remembering things?
- Relaxing?
- Getting your work done?
- Making good decisions?

*Have you...*

- Used alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to "feel better"?
- Been sleeping too much or too little?
- Been eating too much or too little?
- Gained or lost weight?
- Isolated yourself from friends and family?
- Neglected responsibilities?
- Lost interest in activities you used to enjoy?

These can all be signs and symptoms of stress. If you think stress-overload might be affecting your life, there is something you can do about it.

### **Self-Care Strategies for Managing Stress**

Self-care, as the word itself suggests, is what we do to take care of ourselves. When we get stressed out, we tend to ignore the very things that might make us feel better, so it is important to find time to take care of yourself.

- **Remain socially connected.** When you are supporting someone else, it can be easy to lose sight of your other social connections. It is important stay in touch with your family and friends who can offer support. Set aside some time each week to spend time with others in your support network.
- **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** By improving your physical health, you will be better able to maintain your mental health, and therefore may be more effective in supporting someone you care about.

*Exercising regularly* is an important part of staying both physically and mentally healthy. Exercise doesn't have to consist of a complicated workout routine at the gym. It can be as simple as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or walking or biking instead of driving. Daily exercise produces stress-relieving hormones and improves your general health.

*Eating healthy foods* is what will give your body fuel to exercise. By eating mostly unprocessed foods, you can lower your risk for chronic illness and stabilize your energy and mood.

*Getting enough sleep* is also important in maintaining your physical and mental health. People generally require 7 – 9 hours of sleep to stay healthy. Turning off your phone and TV about 30 minutes before you go to bed can help you sleep better.

*Avoiding use or misuse of drugs and alcohol* is an important aspect of stress management because rather than reducing stress, drugs and alcohol can worsen it.

*Practicing relaxation exercises* such as deep breathing and meditation can help reduce stress and clear your mind.

- **Make time for yourself.** When caring for someone who may be suicidal, it can be hard to find time to take care of yourself. However, to be a productive caregiver, it is important to have some "me time." Write out a list of activities that bring you joy to refer to when you need some time for yourself. These activities do not have to be elaborate or take a lot of planning. It can be something as simple as taking a walk in a park, listening to music, or writing in your journal. Anything that makes you feel better is worth a little bit of time out of your day.
- **Know when you need to ask for help.** When caring for someone with suicidal thoughts, you may become overwhelmed. Being overwhelmed does not make you a bad caregiver, family member, or friend, it makes you human. There are various resources for caregivers such as *NAMI Family Support Groups*. These groups offer support for people with loved ones who have experienced symptoms of a mental illness. In addition, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is always available to provide free and confidential support and resources to you or your loved one by calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255).