

Information and exercise sourced from: Dr Kristen Neff www.self-compassion.org

1. Think about times when a close friend feels really bad about themselves or is really struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation (especially when you're at your best)?
2. Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations?
3. Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
4. How do you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you're suffering?

### HOW WOULD YOU TREAT A FRIEND?

SELF-KINDNESS VS. COMMON HUMANITY MINDFULNESS VS. SELF-JUDGMENT VS. ISOLATION OVER-IDENTIFICATION

'Compassion' literally means 'to suffer with', it describes the emotional response we have of been deeply moved by another's pain or suffering. Just like having compassion for somebody else, self-compassion is about recognising when you are struggling, feeling that deep sense of empathy for yourself, and offering kindness in place of judgement.

### DAY 1: SELF-COMPASSION

WHAT IS IT?

You've probably heard of the importance of practising self-care, but the underlying practice behind self-care is the concept of self-compassion, which in a way has to come first. We need to be able to treat ourselves with compassion first, to learn how to be kind to ourselves, to then make conscious decisions and actions to better our wellbeing (self-care).

### DAY 2: SELF-REFLECTION

Reflecting on both the positive and negative aspects of your life more aware of things you'd like to continue doing, and things you'd like to change to improve your wellbeing and be happier.

SCRIBBLE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU FEEL...

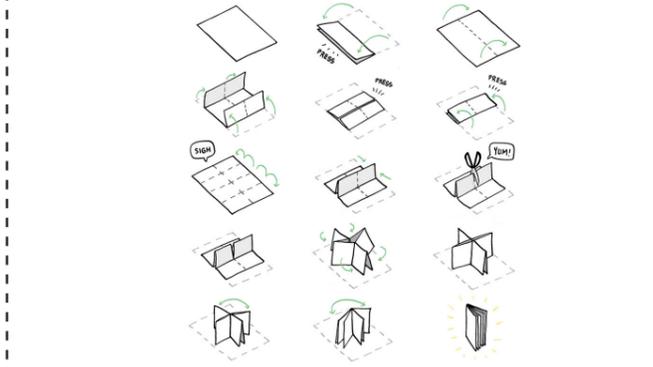
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## 7 DAYS OF SELF-CARE

PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



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### DAY 7: GIVING

Only after we have cared for ourself can we care for others. Ensuring you look after your own wellbeing is important, but further self-nurturing can also be found in giving. Caring for others grows our inner compassion, humanity and love. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be very rewarding and creates connections with other people.

NOTE AN ACT OF KINDNESS YOU HAVE DONE/CAN DO FOR OTHERS. HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

Neuroscience has shown that mutual cooperation is associated with increased response in the reward areas of the brain, which indicates that social cooperation is intrinsically rewarding.

The act of giving doesn't always have to be a physical thing. Giving your time can mean so much more to people and really help them deal with challenges they may be struggling with.

Research suggests that acts of giving and kindness can help improve your mental wellbeing by:

- Creating positive feelings and a sense of reward
- Giving you a feeling of purpose and self-worth
- Helping you connect with other people

Sources: NHS, New Economics Foundation

LISTEN TO MUSIC THAT MAKES YOU FEEL STUFF. MAKE YOUR BED. HAVE A BATH/SHOWER. READ A FAVOURITE BOOK. PUT THE RADIO ON AND CLEAN YOUR SPACE. DO SOME FEEL-GOOD STRETCHES. GET A HAIR CUT. REARRANGE YOUR FURNITURE. LISTEN TO A PODCAST. WRITE DOWN 5 THINGS YOU LIKE ABOUT YOURSELF. CALL A FRIEND. CANCEL A SOCIAL DOPAMINE: a positive neurotransmitter. So when you look for and spot a bird, squirrel, or other wild animal, your mood tends to lift.

Information sourced from: Emma Mitchell / BBC Autumn Watch

### DAY 3: THE LITTLE THINGS

Self-care looks different for everyone. Find those little things that work for you. Practising self-care includes activities and actions you consciously decide to take to care for your physical and mental wellbeing. Self-care isn't always about making us feel good in the moment either, it might be an action that is difficult in the moment, but brings us longer term happiness.

Note your own personal self-care actions that you know help you feel better in your mind and body. Circle any action on this page and try to do it today.

NOTE SOMETHING YOU WANT TO DO TO FUEL YOURSELF TODAY:

### WHAT KEEPS YOU BALANCED?

<b>FOOD</b> Our bodies need food to survive. Cook yourself loving meals as much as possible and sit at a table to eat. Honour your natural feelings of hunger and fullness.	<b>SOCIAL</b> Often we feel energised when socialising. Talking and especially laughing, releases endorphins, a natural feel-good chemical that promotes an overall sense of happiness and wellbeing.	<b>REST</b> Respect your body's need to get enough sleep, and to have moments of rest from work and other responsibilities. Rest your mind by doing things you find relaxing.	<b>MOVEMENT</b> Keep moving in a way that feels good for you. Exercise in a way that you truly really enjoy, in a way that energises you, not drains you. You do not need to exercise to fulfill an idea of how you should be or look, but move your body purely for your own wellbeing.
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Where do you get your energy from? It can be hard to stay motivated to practise self-care, so today is about thinking about ways to keep ourselves fuelled - emotionally and physically. We're not just talking about what we eat, although feeding yourself lovingly is a part of it. There are various things we can do to find different kinds of energy, whether that is getting active, socialising, resting or doing something you love.

### DAY 6: FUELLING YOURSELF

### WILDLIFE

When we see something beautiful, experience awe or find something we are looking for, our brains release dopamine: a positive neurotransmitter. So when you look for and spot a bird, squirrel, or other wild animal, your mood tends to lift.

Information sourced from: Emma Mitchell / BBC Autumn Watch

### SOIL

Soil contains a type of microorganism called 'microbacterium vaccae', which, when we naturally inhale, causes a group of neurons in our brains to release serotonin: one of the positive neurotransmitters responsible for mood, making soil act as a natural remedy for low mood.

When among plants, we inhale chemicals called 'phytoncides' which decrease blood pressure, heart rate and levels of the stress hormone 'cortisol' helping relax our bodies and minds and reduce stress. Plants also contain geometric patterns called 'fractals' which have been proven to reduce anxiety, water, our brain activity moves away from 'fight or flight' and towards rest and relaxation.

### TREES AND PLANTS

There is real evidence that being in nature can benefit your mental health. Today's self-care tip is to go for a walk, visit a park, canal, woodland or place in nature. You can also be in nature by gardening indoors, being in your garden or at an allotment.

### DAY 5: CREATIVITY

Use this page to get creative. Take the first letter of your name and see if you can create it out of things you saw on day 4: consider using wildlife, plants, scenery, seeds, grasses etc. Drawing is fun and does not need to be perfect or take a long time. Drawing is a mindful way to reduce stress and be present. We used 'N' for nature as an example to inspire you...

DAY 4: YOU IN NATURE

PAUSE TO TAKE IN THE SIGHTS AROUND YOU

LISTEN TO THE SURROUNDING SOUNDS

BE PRESENT TO YOUR SENSORY EXPERIENCE

TAKE A MOMENT TO FEEL THE TEXTURE OF NATURAL THINGS: A TREE TRUNK, GRASS, LEAVES.

FOLD