

THE 'HOW' OF SELF-CARE FOR TEACHERS

Building your Wellbeing Toolbox



NARELLE LEMON



The 'How' of Self-Care for Teachers

Providing insights, ideas, strategies and compassion, this book offers a new way of looking at self-care for educators experiencing exhaustion and stress, or who may simply be feeling more tired than they should be.

Drawing on personal experiences of burnout, as well as research in wellbeing literacy, self-care and positive psychology, Narelle Lemon presents a new framework for self-care. Designed especially for teachers of any discipline or sector, the framework is based on five key dimensions:

- self-compassion,
- mindful awareness,
- habits,
- time, and
- empowerment.

Evidence-based and easy to follow, these dimensions scaffold the tools and strategies offered in the book, allowing the reader to create their own toolbox based on what resonates with them most. The book is designed to be flexible, so the reader is encouraged to follow the recommendations as closely as they wish, or to take inspiration for their own ideas, acknowledging that tools will change over time and across contexts. The practical tools in this book are further supported by reflective prompts, as well as opportunities for extension with tips for leaders, working groups and the education sector more broadly.

Written by a teacher for teachers, this book gives you not only the tools but also the permission to look after yourself. It will show you that self-care is an act of self-love, self-compassion, and self-awareness, and that it is relational and you need to care for you in order to care for others.

Narelle Lemon is a VC Professorial Research Fellow at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia, and an interdisciplinary scholar specialising in arts, education and positive psychology. Her research focuses on enhancing wellbeing literacy in K-12 schools, teacher education, higher education and community settings, emphasising evidence-based practices for proactive flourishing.

“What a treasure trove of scientifically informed self-care strategies! It’s clear that this wonderful text is written by someone well versed in the challenges of being a professional educator. Prof Narelle Lemon provides practical, tried and tested strategies that are “non-negotiables” for anyone working in education or other helping professions.”

Dr Suzy Green, *D Psych (Clin) MAPS, Founder and CEO
The Positivity Institute, Sydney, Australia*

“As a time famished high school teacher who moonlights as a teacher educator, I rushed to print out the manuscripts 9 chapters. I can’t wait to curl up with the bound edition once sealed. So much love poured into the text - a GREAT reference! I hope to engage my high school students in some of the reflective practices. I especially love Dr. Lemon’s candid approach to what felt like a fireside chat with a best friend!”

Dr Linda Noble, *Ph.D., Adjunct Assistant Professor, School of Education,
Brooklyn College, City University of New York, USA*

“Informed by positive psychology, “The How of Self-Care for Teachers: Building your Toolbox for Wellbeing” offers educators research-based strategies to reset and reinvigorate individual | collective wellbeing. The book is a gentle, timely, reminder that habits of self-care require our constant attention and cultivation in micro moments as well as sustained practice.”

Dr Malgorzata Powietrzynska, *Adjunct Assistant Professor, School of
Education, Brooklyn College, City University of New York, USA*

“Be gentle on yourself is such a powerful message that resonates with me as a longtime NZ educator. Being everything to everybody is challenging. Looking back I realise how stress is insidious in that you don’t realise how much you’ve been subconsciously absorbing it, often by putting self-care to the side. Narelle draws on her own experiences in an unflinching and proactive manner to encourage us all to take care of our own wellbeing. A must read for potential educators in preparation courses as well as those in the field. This is a generous book which will keep on giving to us all.”

Associate Professor Joanna Higgins, *Victoria University
of Wellington, New Zealand*

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Building your Wellbeing Toolbox

Narelle Lemon



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Introduction

To my colleagues

I hear you, I see you

Teaching is as rewarding and inspiring as it is complex and demanding. It is a profession that requires us to be a superhero in the classroom. An uncomfortable term, yes, but one that is often associated with what we do. We are everything to everyone. The teacher, modeler, facilitator, problem solver and carer. We are discipline expert, group wrangler, magician with a bag full of tricks to support reflection, differentiation master and inclusionary communicator. We inspire, motivate and encourage our students, and at times, colleagues, to work with others who see the world differently to us. We are healers and conflict resolvers. We research, plan, design, deliver, assess and evaluate everything that comes our way. We are always thinking of ideas to engage our students. We are constantly connecting with our peers and colleagues as we continue to grow and extend our pedagogical approaches, while we also reflect on our own practice. Add in connector, relationship builder, mentor and leader to our skills set. We develop and maintain relationships with all students, parents, colleagues, leadership teams, wider institutional community and the public. We have many different roles to many people. No matter if we teach in early years, primary, secondary, vocational and further training, higher education or in community environments we are superheroes.

No wonder we are exhausted.

I've taught across many age groups and in a variety of settings. And as passionate as I am about teaching, I also know I cannot do it all. Neither can you. We might be superheroes to some, but even a superhero needs to know how to set boundaries, say no and care for themselves. Even superheroes need to reset, sleep, refuel, rejuvenate, refresh and rest.

I'm writing this book for you, in case you are anything like me. I have always needed a book that I can turn to, to help me remember to look after me - something that helps me see things differently. That when I read it, I feel that I am not alone, and that self-care can be empowering and is most definitely worthy of my attention.

Most importantly, we need reminders that self-care is not selfish.

This book is a reminder that self-care is a journey of self-discovery not perfectionism. Self-care is not about another thing to do or to add pressure to our already hectic personal and professional lives; it is a resource that you need to act upon and can come back to, to support you.

Before I go any further, I want to acknowledge something upfront. You are doing your best. You are doing the best you can right now. Be gentle on yourself as you keep growing and learning and looking after you.

I know I need to hear that, and I am pretty sure you do as well. If not now, in the future, you know this reminder is here for you.

Let's get real

I want to get real with you. I am a researcher, coach, leader, teacher educator and advocate of self-care, and I have a love-hate relationship with self-care. Honestly, it has not been an easy journey to self-care for me. And it probably isn't for you. It reminds me of a cartoon with the squiggly line that travels up, down, back, twists, turns, dips, has highs and a slow positive rise. I still have moments when I struggle, but I am much nicer to myself when it happens. My attention to self-care has allowed me to become more aware of what is good for me, what and who my triggers are, and when I need to make adjustments. It is still hard, but I notice more quickly when I need to increase my own care. This can and will happen for you also.

The first time I hit a mega dip was in my first year of teaching: I was teaching music in a secondary school. By mid-term 2 I now know I had glandular fever. I was bed ridden for months. My first year out was not at all what I had expected.

By the fourth year of teaching, I was at a different school. I had had a nagging feeling for a number of years of isolation, disconnect and being in the wrong place. I took some extended leave and travelled through Europe. Being around others from different fields I realised burnout was hitting me. I spent the time refreshing myself. On return, I lasted three days before I was in tears and I resigned the next day. I wasn't connecting to my *why*, and international travel had offered perspectives that I had not had access to before. I had become aware of other ways of living my life that did not involve me being exhausted and feeling undervalued.

I've had the delight to work across various contexts in schools, museums, galleries, community arts festivals and with not-for-profit organisations leading me into higher education and working with pre-service teachers. But my approach to wellbeing had always been a side thought. So, no surprise I burned out again! During my last experience back in 2015 I felt overwhelmed and emotionally drained over a sustained period. I was in a constant state of 'foggy brain'. My energy levels fluctuated. Some days I couldn't get out of bed, yet other days I was full of energy and able to make decisions and meet commitments. I would cry uncontrollably at times and learned the art of hiding this from others. I was susceptible to bouts of irritability, being overwhelmed and feelings of sensitivity that made me overthink and ruminate. I had migraines. I suffered the Sunday night blues.

During the week I kept going; I thought I had to. I was working in an educational leadership role with a team of 80 people relying on me. I had a reputation to maintain. I got up each morning, put on my dress and heels and styled my makeup and hair. I felt disconnected to my colleagues. Isolated. Nobody really knew what was happening in the workplace for me – at least that is what it felt like, as no one said anything to me about it.

On the weekends, it was a different story. I would sleep for long periods and took afternoon naps. I would withdraw, using the television and British crime shows as my enabler to do nothing. I escaped. I lived in active wear, without make-up and my hair un-styled because I had no energy to shower or show myself some love with my appearance in ways I would normally embrace. I avoided, often with last-minute apologies,

most social engagements. I just didn't have the energy to be around people. I disregarded the things I knew were good for me and helped me flourish – exercise, good food decisions, social support, making and being grounded. If I took time away from work to reenergise, I felt guilty. So, I didn't take the breaks and rest to honour my mind and body. I struggled to think rationally. I was completely exhausted emotionally, physically and mentally. My cup was empty, but I did not know why or what was happening. I just put it down to my job demands of excessive travel, deadlines, expectations to produce research and perform well in teaching and managing a large team.

Although this book is about self-care, I share with you my story of burn-out. It is one path, and not the only way, to rethink our self-care. Your experience will be different, but we all have moments in our life, personally and professionally, when we are reminded to pause and reposition the place of our wellbeing. I believe that embracing these moments is the first step towards caring for ourselves. I also want to place upfront that self-care is not the only solution, but it is a significant contributor to helping us think about how we care for ourselves in order to care for others. The self in self-care is relational – you need others from some of your strategies/tools, for inspiration, support and motivation. Self as a focus is also not blaming the individual nor is it saying wellbeing is an individual's sole responsibility. Self also means tuning in to what your needs are, what the influence of the context is and what is possible right now. Self-care and wellbeing are also not just an individual's responsibility – it does not matter how well you look after yourself, if the context you are in does not value wellbeing nor support wellbeing in a systems wide meaningful way, it does not matter how much your wellbeing literacy is developed, you will find it difficult. This is why developing an I, we and us approach to self-care and wellbeing is so very much required, it is no longer a nice to have or negotiable, it is a must have and do.

What will be present for all of us, is one experience (or more) where we have been forced to pause. Our mind and body has told (or tried to tell) us that we need to do things differently.



Figure 0.1 Self-care . . .

There is good news . . .

We can build our self-care capacity and our wellbeing literacy, that is how we compose and comprehend for and of our wellbeing and care needs. For some of you this will be slowly (slow and steady is one of the best intentions you can ever set yourself) and for others, you may jump right in and immerse yourself with anything and everything. The most important thing to remember is that either of these approaches, and anything in between, is totally fine. The good news is whatever your approach, taking a step forward is a wonderful thing and it is a contribution to developing your self-care.

Looking out for you

Success looks different on different days. It might be setting personal and professional intentions and landing all of them for that day or being able to exercise as well as catch up with a trusted friend. It might also be simply getting out of bed and showing up.

It might be just making it to tomorrow.

*Reminder to self: you have got this. Each moment is new
and we can reset.*

Throughout this book I talk about self-care as being **a proactive action to develop, maintain or protect your wellbeing**. As teachers, self-care is imperative and does require deliberate attention. This requires us to develop our skills in this area while holding the space of compassion for ourselves and others.

This is where I think of self-care as a strength – we can be excited by it, energised by and from it, and do it well. From this perspective we engage with both our fixed and growth mindsets. Fixed mindset is where we know what works for us, when and why. Growth mindset is where we embrace change, learning, risk taking and failing forward as we try, explore and are curious and courageous with new tools or strategies.

As you look out for you, you are enacting a self-kindness.

To be **compassionate** you are caring about others, seeking out ways to help and support while sympathising.

When we are **self-compassionate**, we remember that everyone suffers at times (common humanity) and that when we are aware, we are in the moment acknowledging what is happening, without an exaggeration or further storytelling (mindful awareness), enabling us to be a little kinder to ourselves as we process and move through the suffering (self-kindness).

Mindfulness is being aware and present with an attention and attitude that is non-judgemental to oneself.

To be **curious** is to explore and discover, to be seeking out new information and learning more as you take an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake.

Courage has us being brave, vulnerable, to listen to our needs and try new things or surprise ourselves in how far we can go.

This book is underpinned by mindfulness, compassion, self-compassion, curiosity and courage. I think about these concepts as central to how we engage with self-care. They are attitudes as much as concepts we draw our attention to. Each will have a focus throughout the book: mindfulness and self-compassion have their own chapters. They are interwoven and each informs the others. Mindfulness, for example, involves an awareness and curiosity about yourself as you develop self-compassion. Being curious allows you to be mindfully aware. Holding compassion for yourself allows you to explore with curiosity how you can be mindful in your day-to-day. Courage runs throughout, when we are exploring what is next, possible or surprising.

Mindfulness is the experience of the present moment. When being mindful you approach experiences with curiosity, rather than judgement. Mindful living is about bringing self-awareness into as much of your life as possible. Mindfulness is about making what you are doing right now the most important thing. It is based on accepting and embracing the present moment and coming to know in detail all aspects of self. We do this without rejecting the uncomfortable, shameful or embarrassing bits. We are courageous and vulnerable. Mindfulness practice builds the capacity to accept, tolerate and transform mind and body states without reacting so intensely to them.

Mindfulness is a way of living and being. It involves learning how to pay attention to what we experience. We tune in to what we feel, rather than being heavily situated in our thinking and thoughts that can play over and over in our mind in not so helpful ways. Mindfulness is not about emptying the mind of thoughts; it is rather about noticing what thoughts we are having and if they are serving us well or not. Mindful thinking allows us to explore what is not necessarily true. We can do this through the mindfulness mechanisms of intention, attention and attitude in formal and informal practices. You'll become familiar with these as we move through the book. I'll use these to frame *Do* activities. They are also in some of the journal prompts.

Intention is the why of practice and is significant in relation to setting a personal vision in practice that supports self-regulation, self-exploration and self-awareness.

Attention is the core of mindfulness and involves observing one's moment-to-moment, internal and external experience, with a non-judgemental curiosity.

Attitude is how we attend to a mindfulness practice and is connected to the qualities one brings to attention and awareness.

Curiosity enables us to be open to exploring and inquiring. If we do this mindfully, by tuning in to what is needed in this moment in time gently and non-judgementally, we come to a way of being that is compassionate. We can explore a kindness, mindful awareness and common humanity for ourselves and others.

Compassion can be thought of as a mental state or an orientation towards suffering (your own or others'). It can be developed and includes four components:

1. Cognitive or bringing awareness and attention
2. Affective or feeling emotionally moved by that suffering
3. Intentional or looking for ways to bring relief
4. Motivational or displaying and enacting a readiness to take action

Self-compassion allows us to think about how we can be mindfully aware with our own suffering. We can acknowledge non-judgementally that life has ups and downs and everyone experiences this. When we are self-compassionate, we are kinder to ourselves.

As you read this book, I am inviting you to consider your self-care with a curiosity to possibility, with an openness to being present with what might and could help you that comes from a space of self-compassion. I am setting an intention for you to be kind to yourself.

In this book I would like to propose a new way of looking at self-care for teachers who experience exhaustion, stress, burnout or who just have too many balls in the air and are feeling more tired than they realistically should be right now. I would like to see if we can reposition self-care as something worthy of our attention and as an act of self-compassion.

I am inviting you to feel empowered by your self-care.

Sparking your curiosity

By using the strength of curiosity, I want to spark your interest in what might be possible for you as a teacher. I want to invite you to go on a journey of self-discovery where you consider what you can do personally and professionally to care for yourself. By taking a more curious stance and integrating mindful awareness, I'm inviting you to be present and

fully aware of what you need to help yourself. This can then help you to help others.

I want to encourage you to move away from thinking about self-care as the commercialised hedonism of mainstream and social media. It is not the costly massages, manicures and yoga in the hills of a beautiful retreat. I invite you to shift from thinking of self-care as being selfish or that if you have had no time today you have failed. I invite you to move away from feeling like a failure because you were not able to list your gratitudes. I want to spark your curiosity about how you can flourish and thrive with self-care by building on things that excite you. I want to empower your self-care decisions. Curiosity is a first step. Curiosity can lead you to different approaches. It allows you to ask questions, discover, explore and ponder the small acts that help you feel good.

Curiosity is a teacher's superpower.

A call to action: a self-care education is needed

In sharing my story of burnout and self-care I noticed something. At the time I did not know what it was. I did not have any wellbeing resources. I actually had no idea what to do. I went to my GP for a mental health plan to access counselling. This revealed for me some significant issues:

- I didn't know what self-care looked like beyond a deficit way of thinking.
- I didn't have resources and I couldn't access assistance beyond hedonic practices and seeking professional help and relying on health systems.
- My peers did not know how to assist with recommendations to extend feelings of helplessness as we had no wellbeing language to support self-care.

My experience is not uncommon. Research reveals that many of us feel self-care is selfish, that we don't have time, find it difficult and compare our practices judgementally with others. A significant block to our self-care is that we often find that we discard our good wellbeing decisions when we are under pressure.¹ Self-care is often the first thing we drop when we need extra time to mark or write reports, or when we think we are feeling good so we can afford to break our good habits. But these little interruptions often

hang around longer than we had planned and usually are accompanied by guilt and shame. Other blockers include waiting to be told we need to do it or waiting for health professionals to provide solutions. Interestingly, there is evidence that those with little to no engagement in self-care practices prior to recommendations are less likely to follow professional advice.² So, we wait to be given suggestions but then don't follow through with them.

What we need is to build on what we already do and then expand the options.³ This requires a change in attitude, intention, attention and curiosity. We haven't been taught to think about self-care like this. But this is how I have come to think about self-care: start small and grow in our awareness. That way we are better placed to deal with personal setbacks and surprise. We can learn to reset and renew again. This resetting is empowering – after reflection we are often stronger and more focused on what is non-negotiable for our self-care.

By reflecting we are constantly working on self-care. To do that we need a toolbox. A collection of resources: knowledge, practices, strategies, attitudes, networks, supportive professionals and friends, information sources, mentors, leaders and communities we are connected with. We are constantly identifying these and drawing on them as we learn how to extend the ways we care for ourselves. We build what I call in this book a toolbox for self-care. But more of that in the next chapter.

I now think about self-care in a really different way as a result of both my personal experiences and also research into this area. I believe that we can honour being curious and empowered as individuals in our self-care practices while raising awareness, and building confidence and capacity to reduce the effects of stress, exhaustion or burnout.⁴ This really excites me and I hope you as well, as you read this book. Will you join me?

Self-care versus wellbeing

Why do I refer to the word self-care rather than wellbeing or teacher wellbeing? One reason is the focus on self so that we can also help others. As teachers, we tend towards caring for others, often putting them before ourselves. We are trained to care. The education system relies on and feeds into this. Our initial teacher education did not or barely touched on our wellbeing. It was never mentioned to me as a pre-service teacher in the late 1990s. And as an initial teacher educator I can see the difficulty tertiary institutions face in implementing training in self-care. This is not good enough. We know

teaching is stressful, and it becomes more so as we progress through our career. We get promotions, more responsibilities, our lives become more complex. We are required to do more with less. We find ourselves responding, reacting and having to reprioritise to requests of 'do it now', 'take care of this', 'action this now' and 'this was due yesterday'. In addition to us also having to write reports, carry out yard duty, cover an extra class as a colleague is sick, host a parent-teacher night, manage changing curricula, attend an extra meeting, offer pastoral care, and lead after school sport, before school choir and a school camp. We do this on top of our schedules and commitments often with a last-minute hustle. Walking down the school corridor we hear 'don't forget to do this'. And 'this directive has just come, please action'. Oh, and my favourite, 'this is an opportunity too good to miss, we just have to find time to do this'. The demands keep coming. We keep putting others before ourselves as we slowly take away time from our own needs and health. The more we 'have' to do for others the more we forget about ourselves. As we progress, we focus more on others and what must be done, and time is not allocated to ourselves. Exhausted, we keep going. We get sick. We are always tired. A quick school holiday allocation of 'me time' is not enough. Some of us take leave to complete the work. We find there is really no refresh time. We just can't seem to find the time.

Exhaustion is not a badge of honour.

We cannot keep doing this to ourselves.

Working our muscle

Self-care is hard. It is a muscle that you must train. You have to work at self-care to get better at it. You must keep working at it to maintain it. I'm curious about self-care. Like you, I've struggled with it throughout my life and career as an educator. For a long period, I didn't really know what it was. I wouldn't have been able to tell you what it looked like for me. And I certainly didn't have anything that I knew energised me that I did every day to help me enact self-care. Does this sound familiar?

I certainly didn't build my self-care muscle. I didn't train it, didn't stretch it. I just kept thinking my mind and body would go along for the journey. And, well, it didn't . . . on several occasions, as you well know now.

I hear too often that as teachers we know how to approach wellbeing and self-care for the students we teach. We know where to go and seek help for them, and we know we need to scaffold and grow this in the young people we work with. I was talking to a friend recently who said, ‘ask me to scaffold self-care for a student and I can do this. Ask me to do it for myself, and I don’t know where to start’.

This is why I’ve written this book. It’s for you: the teacher who is caring for others but is looking for ways to care more for themselves. I’m writing this book for me as well . . . the former me that needed it, the current me to celebrate and share ideas with you and the future me that will need a reminder to heed myself. We all need to sustain and learn how to maintain, develop and protect our self-care. I’ve been researching and working in this area for many years now and I’m still learning. I want to share with you what I’ve learned. I want to help anyone else who wants to get started. I want to inspire you. I want to break it all down and look at different aspects of it so you can connect with what is right for you right now. You may have routines or rituals you call on, then you feel great, then stop doing them and then you fall over. And some of you may just be surviving, not really sure what it is you are doing with a little dabble here and there in strategies but not really thinking too much about what energises you and helps you perform well mentally, socially, emotionally and cognitively. I get this. I’ve been in all these stages. Sometimes I fall back into them. And I’ve been worse: total exhaustion where I stop doing anything that looks like caring for me.

Enjoying this book

This book is in three informal sections:

1. The opening chapters focus on what self-care is and how a toolbox theory approach can help you. I’ll introduce you to how you might develop your toolbox for self-care informed by positive psychology.
2. Chapters 4–8 focus on the five dimensions of self-care that I think are essential to help us approach putting into action diverse strategies and practices to be our best. We will connect closely to the concepts of mindfulness, self-compassion, empowerment, habits and time.
3. Concluding Chapter 9 is where I offer some ways for you to protect your self-care.

The tone of this book is intended to be conversational – a collegial conversation that provides connection to theory but more importantly practical ideas and strategies. Throughout, I intersperse theory with practice. I have wanted to write a book that is easy to dip in and out of. You'll see features such as journaling and *Do* activities explained through the mindfulness mechanisms of intention, attention and attitude. They are designed to help you build a toolbox for self-care to help with your wellbeing. They are not an exhaustive list, nor are they essential activities for you. They are, however, suggestions to help you to find a variety of strategies that work or could work for you. Think of them as a menu. They are ideas to inspire you. You might take some and tweak them, make reasonable adjustments or use them as a starting point to find something else. You may become immersed in them and share your excitement with others. Whatever happens for you, embrace the exploration. As you do this, keep in mind that you are forever changing and developing and what is right for you right now will probably be different from what is right for you in the future. Context is important. So, as you think about the strategies and ideas in this book, think about these questions:

- What does this activity bring to me?
- Why might it be helpful?
- How can I see it in action?

These questions will be a great prompt to help you reflect in conversation with others and in your journal for yourself. As you consider strategies and practices, this is the perfect moment to introduce mindful journaling. As you work through the book, and as you read page to page, or dip in and out, have a space for you that is just for you and capture your thoughts, ideas, new practices, feelings and possibilities.

Savouring your awareness via journaling

Throughout I am going to invite you to journal. I'll provide journal prompts to support you and guide your thinking.

Journaling doesn't have to be a 'dear dairy' activity, but it could be. Either way, you may have a love-hate relationship with the suggestion to journal. That's OK. Ponder for a moment what might be possible with the concept of journaling and then consider how you might make it work for you.

For me, journaling has become a practice to help me capture ideas and process my thinking. I write in grey-lead pencil as I love the feel. Others love to use a favourite pen or ink with a nib. Some use black ink, others colour. There is no right or wrong, just consider the tool that might work for you. As you journal, consider how you like to capture your thoughts:

‘Blah write’: this is where you just write and do not edit,
do not worry about spelling mistakes or repeating yourself.
It is an expressive get-it-out or stream of consciousness action.

Dot points

Lists

Mind map

Draw, doodle or sketch

Poetry

Visual narratives

I encourage you to journal in handwritten form in a notebook that is specifically selected for your self-care discoveries. Don't mix it with shopping lists, assessment records, research notes or meetings minutes. Create a space just for you. Perhaps you might even purchase a specific notebook. Find what is right for you. Journaling by hand provides you with something tangible to work with. The physical act of writing stimulates the reticular activating system (RAS) which acts as a filter for everything your brain needs to process, giving more importance to the stuff that you're actively focusing on now.⁵

Handwriting is slower and to me there is something about it that seems more personal and supportive than typing on a computer. However, your journaling could be a digital version where you use a product such as Evernote, Microsoft Word or a cloud-based notes program. You could blog, tweet, vlog or even podcast or audio record as your journal.

There is no best way to journal. Most important is that you provide yourself with the option to find what works for you and explore different ways to do this. It could be one way or a mix of ways or formats.

No matter your choice on the how, the purpose for making notes on your self-care is to record your thoughts and growth, engagement with activities

that I share throughout this book. The journal is for collecting other ideas, strategies and practices on your journey of self-discovery.

*I think that journaling is supportive of your
embodiment of self-compassion.*

Journaling has been noted to support stress. Lauren Hensley and Karleton Munn in their work looking at reducing college students' procrastination found that journaling stimulates cognitive, emotional and behavioural components of personal development.⁶ They noted that by putting the experience into words, one is able to develop an awareness to spot the context and become attuned to one's own tendencies. Over time one is able to catch oneself more quickly with unhelpful habits. It was also noted that journaling could help support noting the change that needed to occur with regard to mindful choices to be undertaken in the next moment, thus supporting self-regulation.

Of further note is how journaling can support self-healing and be a version of quiet time or me time.⁷ Journaling supports reflective practice and brings awareness to your thoughts, actions and behaviours.⁸ It can support you to be able to reveal patterns and facilitate change.⁹ The act of 'writing your thoughts out' can support the examination of different angles and examination of assumptions or blockers.¹⁰

Journaling helps you to notice your own self-care routines. Added bonuses to journaling include:

- Practice a daily or regular period of reflection.
- Prioritise tasks and delegate where appropriate.
- Acknowledge what you did well each day rather than focusing on the undone.
- Recognise imbalance and adjust accordingly.
- Record appreciations for others and yourself.
- Openness to new perspectives, attentiveness to consequences and willingness to critique oneself.¹¹

The process of writing is a time for solitude, time to slow down and connect with oneself. Writing for self-care and spiritual and emotional wellbeing helps us to:¹²

- Assert the value of acknowledging that there is always a way to figure things out; sometimes we need time and methods to process.
- Engage everyday realities.
- Respond to something happening in our life.
- Imagine our future self.
- Find a safe space to trial beliefs.
- Look back and reflect upon growth.
- Determine what serves us well.

Throughout this book I'll provide journal prompts for two purposes:

1. As a part of the practice or strategy to record what you notice about yourself, others, changes, assumptions, your feelings, behaviour and/or impact
2. For documentation of what you have done, how you feel and to provide a record for current self to reflect on changes and development over time

DO: A place for you to capture your thoughts

Intention: To set up a space for you to explore your development, maintenance and protection of self-care.

Attention: Draw attention to being curious with the process of journaling right from the start by deciding how you will do this.

Attitude: Come to journaling with a curiosity. This could be about the process itself if you are not too sure about it, in how you will do it or in what you will learn about yourself.

Set up your journal and capture your self-care practices from this point on. You will use these to build from as you engage with the ideas in this book.

How will you set up your journal?

Will you create sections? Will you just free write each time, or will you think about headings that resonate for you and help you track your thoughts, ideas and reflections?

- Joyful moments
- Strategies and practices that work for me
- Strategies and practices I want to try one day
- Affirmations
- Journal prompt reflections
- 'Ah ha!' moments
- Gratitudes and appreciations
- Unexpected moments
- Memories
- Noticings or observations

Just the right amount of curiosity

As you engage with this book, I invite you to think about where you are right now with your self-care. And one aspect of the awareness that comes with tuning in to your needs right now is being aware of the different zones that are associated with your comfort zone.

When you are aware of your different zones this is what it looks like:

- Comfort zone = feeling safe and in control
- Fear zone = feeling hesitant, fearful, vulnerable but searching for excuses and ways to remove yourself from the situation, can lack some self-confidence
- Learning zone = extending your comfort zone and extending yourself while learning to deal with challenges, unexpected or unknown
- Growth zone = growing through setting goals, finding new purpose, realising dreams and aspirations

As you focus on your self-care, I invite you to work in your comfort zone but also step outside it. You will move back and forth. As you do this the most important aspect to remember is to listen to your intuition to do what is right for you. Tune into your needs. If you need to break, take a break. If you

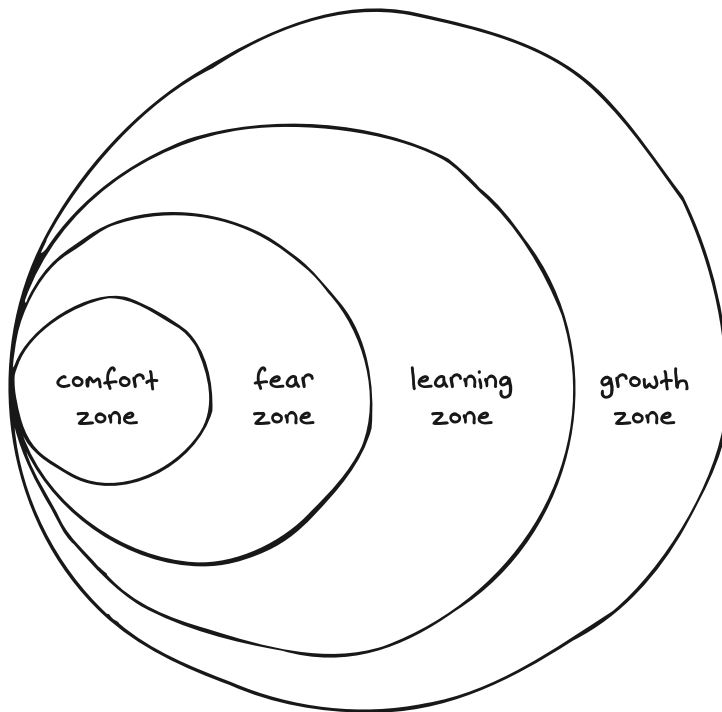


Figure 0.2 The challenge of moving beyond your comfort zone.

need to think, tweak, ponder and action, do this as part of an investment in yourself. Your comfort zone is the zone where you feel safe, it is here where things come easily to you. In your comfort zone you know what to expect – what energises you, what makes you feel good, what helps you and thus you are aware of what the expected outcomes will be. At the same time this is safe and familiar to you, much like your favourite cosy jumper or the same place on the couch that you always go to. A safe place also means we aren't pushing ourselves. And I think you would agree, if you are reading this book, you need to push yourself to pay more attention to your care. So, I invite you to embrace a learning curve that has you putting yourself ahead of others and to step into some of the other zones. We ask our students to do this and now it is time for you to embrace this as well, because I know you are going to appreciate it.

To learn and grow we need to step into the fear zone, the unknown where we are not quite sure what is going to happen. A little bit of courage,

vulnerability and open-mindedness for possibilities will be required. This is where curiosity will be your friend. Develop some new skills. Explore some new ideas. Reinforce others and be reminded of some you may have forgotten about. Begin to challenge yourself and your approach to self-care, and as you do this you will extend your comfort zone. Before you know it, what was new, uncertain and uncomfortable is a part of your self-care toolkit for wellbeing.

*This is where I invite you to be curious, explore
and investigate for you.*

JOURNAL PROMPT: Self-compassion, curiosity and mindful awareness about stepping beyond your comfort zone

Intention: Connect with some of the key terms and ideas presented to you initially in the introduction of this book.

Attention: Pay attention to patterns in behaviour, reactions or sayings you might often repeat that may hamper you.

Attitude: Bring an openness to explore and connect with moving beyond your comfort zone.

Note to self: Don't judge, just notice.

What is happening for you right now regarding compassion, curiosity and awareness of how you look out for you? What do these words ignite for you? What do they mean? What do they look like in practice? What do you admire in others who model these?

An extra note about taking care of you

This book is about helping you, providing some insights and strategies to support you. It is a menu of strategies rather than focusing on one or two. This is important to acknowledge for you and for me. Research has indicated that this approach is far more productive. It allows us to build up strategies as well as tune into those that help us at this moment and as we build up

our resilience, understanding, approaches and of course ability to be able to manage our nerves a little better.¹³

To make this book as user friendly as possible, I have avoided in-text citations and long lists of references as I refer to research. I have, however, drawn on research and you'll find references at the end of each chapter. I have also included 'You may also be interested in . . .' sections at the end of each chapter. I also share some powerful quotes to support your development and connection to ideas. This is where I'll link you with websites, videos, podcasts, blogs and other reading materials.

In writing this book, the aim is to keep it clear and concise. It is not a script in how to do self-care, rather a resource for you to use with suggestions that others and I have found invaluable. Some ideas may be familiar to you, others may not. These have been included to help you through your own journey, with the underlying lesson that you find a way to care for you, to then care for others.

I write this book to help you explore self-care, and being mindful can support you as you explore the ideas presented. The tips and advice do not replace professional assistance from a counsellor, psychologist or other medical expert (see Chapter 3). This book is a resource for you. It is a point of inspiration, empowerment and a place to access ideas to support you. As you move into the next chapter, I will introduce you to the underpinning framework for self-care that I have developed where empowerment, awareness and your curiosity are embraced. I'll talk about a toolbox for self-care to support your wellbeing. I'll unpack the layers to this framework. And I'll establish a background to the field of positive psychology to support your reading and engagement within a framework. I'll introduce you to PERMAH as one way you can build your toolbox. Much like a tradesman who has many tools for different jobs to assist in problem solving, this book also offers many strategies and practices to help you build, maintain, protect and develop your self-care. I invite you to explore those strategies that resonate with you right now. I encourage you to be open to other strategies that might not appeal to you now but could be of benefit to you at a later stage as you explore your journey and become more self-aware.

Before you move through the book, let's connect to what self-care means to you.

JOURNAL PROMPT: What does self-care mean to you right now?

Intention: The intention is for you to feel comfortable with the term self-care.

Attention: Pay attention to what self-care means to you. Explore some of the ideas presented in the introduction.

Attitude: Hold the space for yourself to explore this term. Acknowledge past assumptions, beliefs and expectations.

Note to self: Your definition will change over time.

Can you define self-care for you right now? What would a definition be that sits comfortably for you?

You may also be interested in . . .

Websites

Six Habits of Highly Compassionate People

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_habits_of_highly_compassionate_people

Reading

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Notes

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1

A 'toolbox' for self-care

Introduction

Self-care does not happen on its own. First, we need courage to be open to what we might need to help us, we need to be curious to try new things and most of all we need a diverse set of tools to help us with our self-care. As we tune in to what we need, our curiosity and courage will help us to seek out tools to help us engage with our self-care. These tools are strategies and practices that we can appreciate as resources to help us to action maintenance and protect and grow our self-care. We will call on the ones we know are our go-to tools when we are exhausted. We will call on the tools throughout each day to help us be our best selves, and we will call on new tools that we will learn about.

Wellbeing science is a foundation for the diversity of tools for self-care. There are many different frameworks, and some will be introduced to you later in this chapter. The one I call on often is PERMAH which I have used to inform a toolbox model of self-care in this book. PERMAH stands for positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment and health. It is one such framework that allows you to access and embody a variety of different areas that support our wellbeing and build on our talents and what energises you to support your wellbeing. It is accessible, and this is one of the reasons why I use it in this book.

Although this book is focused on you, as a teacher you can also translate it to the classroom. Key is that I want you to feel empowered to explore what interests you and I am very much hoping your curiosity gift becomes fully charged.

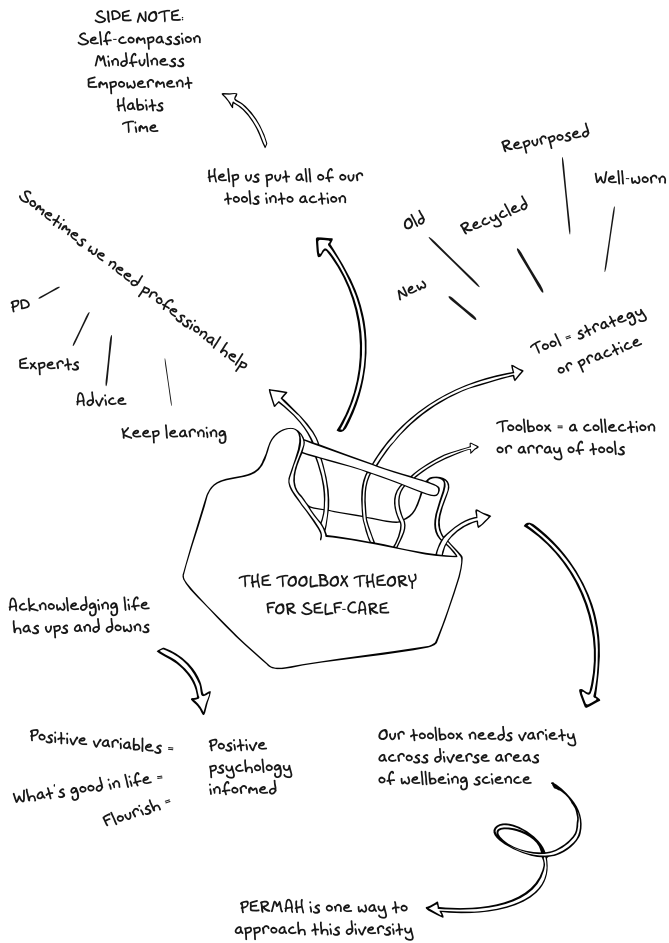


Figure 1.1 Developing your toolbox of resources.

We have the 'power to change through how we act and how we think'!

The one strategy will not work at all times and will not be for everyone. Michelle McQuaid and Peggy Kern² remind us that for each of us, tools, strategies and approaches will vary, depending on the person, situation, individual and collective states of wellbeing. The outcomes we want to achieve also influence what we engage with, just as much as our awareness of what is possible, accessible or helpful.

The 'toolbox' is a way to think about your self-care resources; a collection of strategies and practices that:

Work for you right now.

Help you be your best.

You want to start doing.

You are interested in.

You have learned about and want to come back to.

May not be right for you right now, but at some stage they may be.

You are curious about.

You have heard about but don't currently have time to invest in or apply.

A toolbox for self-care requires a variety of multiple intentional activities, strategies and practices³ across different areas of wellbeing. These will be your tools. This offers a framing of self-care that supports embodiment⁴ and a broaden-and-build approach that embraces novelty.⁵ This is where I like to think of the strength of curiosity to approach building and sustaining this self-care toolbox of strategies. Curiosity is a motivator for learning, and it is crucial for healthy development – it helps you focus your attention while appreciating novelty, challenge and uncertainty.⁶

The toolbox theory for self-care

Let's connect with the toolbox theory first before I unpack where PERMAH comes from and what it is.

The toolbox is a metaphor for self-care that I use to ignite your imagination and to offer a visual.

A **tool** is a strategy or practice.

A **toolbox** is a suggestion of a way to store the tools, where you can collect, dip in and out of, build upon, use actively and keep the tools to come back to when needed. And the toolbox suggests an array of strategies and practices.

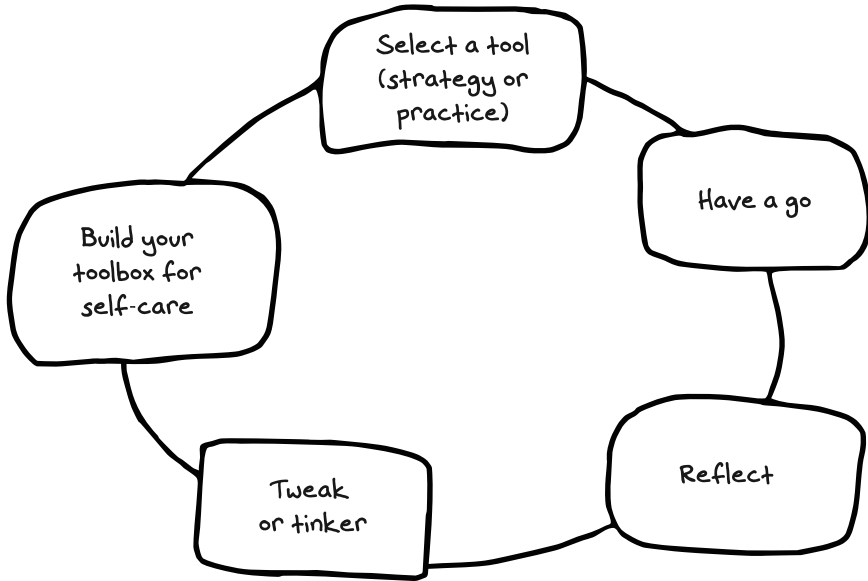


Figure 1.2 Approaching your toolbox for self-care.

The toolbox theory for self-care infers there is a problem. We know teachers are either heading towards exhaustion or are already exhausted. Additionally, we are fully aware that wellbeing is a sustained sector issue regardless of the context we work in. Thus, the theory is underpinned by this awareness and the need to be able to position self-care as a professional responsibility not just personally but systematically. It is not just an individual problem; it is a collective.

We can recognise a tool for a purpose it serves. Your tools (ie, practices and strategies) are a combination of new and old stored in different ways – on a toolbelt, sometimes in a box, at the bottom of a draw, on a shelf, in a specifically designed tool case or they may be on a funky wall display that has outlines to remind you where they all go. Sometimes the toolbox is so big that it feels never-ending; that there is so much within it that you are not even sure anymore what tools are in there. Alternatively, we can think of our toolbox as an Inspector Gadget-type jacket with many pockets containing all sorts of tools and gadgets.

A tool can be new. Some tools we use all the time. They are a trusty tool we rely on. We can add to our toolbox. We can collect tools, leave them, borrow them, lend them, adapt them, forget about them or perhaps possess

but are not sure how to use them. Sometimes we need to pair them together, swap them or use multiple to help solve a problem or situation and to simply suit our own needs.

We all have well-worn tools. We use these a lot. We are known for the use of these tools, especially by those who are close to us. We are transparent and open with these tools. They are embodied. And we may even teach or mentor others who observe us frequently using them.

We can also acknowledge that tools do not always work in isolation. The context and reason for use is important. Sometimes we are an apprentice, learning how to use a tool. Other times we can be an expert. Occasionally, using a tool yourself just isn't enough and we have to call in the experts, a professional to help us learn how to use the tool or indeed another tool as what we have been drawing on for a while may be unproductive or unhelpful, or doing more damage.

And of course, other times the tool we select, or any of the tools we have in our toolbox, just don't work because the structure (ie, system or specific context we are in at the time) is itself broken and no tool we use will help us. In fact, at that stage perhaps we put down our tools, pack them away and remove ourselves from the situation. There can be at times structural issues (ie, a restructure, poor leadership, bullying, being in the wrong workplace that butts up against your values, etc) that impact our self-care and we cannot be responsible for these.

Be careful with some of your tools

As you engage with the toolbox theory for self-care, be cautious:

1. Don't assume you have all the tools to solve the problem.
2. One tool may be a go-to, but other tools should be used to also support a diverse approach to wellbeing that isn't based solely on one tool.
3. Tools are ways of tackling a problem or situation, but they need to be maintained (ie, given an oil and clean). And you need to protect them. Sometimes this might look like further training in how to use them more effectively (ie, professional development) or you can read about new ways to use them or combine them with other tools for effectiveness. Maintenance can also look like seeking professional help, such as from a psychologist, social worker, allied health worker or coach.

4. Embrace being an apprentice at times throughout your life; you are always learning.
5. Be careful not to throw away tools or send them to hard rubbish because you haven't used them for a while or tried them and they didn't work once, or you have forgotten about them. You may be surprised what they can offer you. Other times you may need to reconnect with the purpose as your needs are always changing and so too do the tools you access for your self-care.
6. Sometimes you just need to work with the trusted go-to tools to help you reboot.
7. Sometimes you need to undertake a renovation (ie, start again and rebuild or reset your self-care) with the support of professionals or a trusted friend.
8. Your concept of self-care will grow and with this a lot of your tools will change. Sometimes this can feel like it happens suddenly in association with a significant life-changing event or situation. Remember to be gentle on yourself at this time.
9. Be careful of overuse and shutting off from other perspectives or opportunities to explore different tools or the same tool in a different way.

Tuning in to your toolbox and what it looks like right now

Now that I have introduced you to the toolbox theory for self-care, I want to show you both what it can look like and how it changes over time.

As I mentioned in the opening of this book, when I was in my first year of teaching I had glandular fever. When it came to my self-care, I was not doing much at all. I would watch a lot of TV as my version of numbing myself. I had learnt several years before to stop and TV was one of the strategies introduced to me as a tool, but in the depths of illness it was overused. At this time my self-care looked like this:

- Relaxing on the couch watching a TV show
- A 15-minute walk around the block usually combined with food shopping
- Texting with friends
- Sleeping (a lot)

My tools were not diverse. I was heavily reliant on a narrow set. But at the time I wasn't able to draw on anything else. Mainly because I wasn't aware of others and I didn't have a language to talk about my wellbeing.

On reflection, this situation is a great 'ah ha!' moment. We need to be proactive and build our toolbox for self-care. If we are curious and courageous with exploration on an ongoing basis, we have a pool of resources to access in those times when we need some extra help. So, this sounds obvious, and it also sounds like I am making it much easier than it is. After all, I had no idea for a large majority of my life. What I mean is that if we can build, maintain and protect our toolbox on an ongoing basis and during times when we are thriving and flourishing, the opportunity for us to have that little extra bit of help when we need it can be there. It's a 'current self' helping 'future self' moment. When we are under pressure, ill, stressed or experiencing distress we find it hard to find solutions. If we have prepared in advance, we can draw on these tools in these difficult moments.

Over the years my self-care tools have expanded. I have sought professional help, enrolled in mindfulness training and undertaken further study. I've maintained a curiosity; always learning and observing what others do with their self-care. I've invested in getting to know myself. With these actions has come both confidence in myself and a sense of empowerment in the choices I make. My story is key to this book – the central message is that no matter what is happening for you, self-care can grow, and it will always look different over time as we grow and learn more with investment. That is the exciting part.

Now my self-care has a baseline, the go-to tools (strategies and practices) I use often look very different. These are what I have found to work for me to help me flourish and to feel good. And, by the way, they will change again while being influenced by context, what is happening in my life and how I embody new knowledge and understanding. This will happen for you as well.

My current self-care list:

- Making and using my hands
- Drinking water
- Making better food choices
- Podcast listening
- Going for long walks or hikes
- Using essential oils

- Knowing my *why*
- Meditating
- Intention setting
- Soothing touch
- Green tea morning ritual
- Writing and journaling
- Social conversation
- Being supported by my professional support team: chiropractor, GP, counselling, coaching, Pilates, Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, myotherapy
- Time in/with nature
- Sleep
- Having trusted colleague(s) for work debriefing and reflective practice
- Self-compassion mantra
- Rest
- Planning for/taking a holiday
- Embracing my strength of curiosity
- Using my top or underused strengths
- Spotting my strengths
- Volunteering, mentoring and giving back
- Listening to music and making playlists
- Watching TV series with the household
- Cooking with others
- Cooking new recipes
- Walking on the beach
- Auditing my time
- Applying a growth mindset with curiosity

Over time I have added more tools to my toolbox of self-care. These have built up from reflection on what helps me. I've listed these here, however as the book progresses, I will categorise these strategies and practices in a way that is informed by wellbeing science to provide an example of how it is possible to have variety.

Although you may find strategies and practices listed here that you also do or spark your interest to find out more, I encourage you to make your own list (we'll do this in the next journal prompt). Wellbeing and self-care are different for everyone. Find what works for you, and give yourself permission to try, fail, tweak, adjust, learn, forget and reconnect and everything

else in between. This is actually the fun part. Collect your tools in the form of strategies and practices as you grow. Most importantly be curious with them and experiment. With an openness and courage, you will find what can work for you. You will be reminded of things that didn't resonate with you earlier but do now. And at other times you will rediscover something that did work once, but you just stopped doing. Be gentle as you go on this self-care journey.

As you work through this book, I'll introduce you to tools I draw upon and many others. My intention in sharing my learnings with you is a way to spark possibility and inspire you as you reinforce, tweak and add to your toolbox for self-care.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Celebrate what empowers you in this moment

Before we move on, I want you to create your current list of self-care tools. Simply write these to get them out, don't categorise, judge yourself or worry about what is or isn't there. Just write what comes to mind and free-flow capture the strategies that you currently engage in that empower you. List what makes you feel good, what you enjoy doing, what nourishes you and energises you. And note to self: your list can be short or long or anything in between. Be gentle on yourself as you 'blah' write this is not a competition with yourself (or anyone else).

Let's begin with where you are now:

What energises you?
What excites you?
Who supports you?
What helps you relax?
What helps you feel rested?
What helps you feel happy?

Tune in to where you are right now for your self-care. Observe this present moment in time. Record what works for you right now. You can think about this from the perspective of personal and professional, as both overlap and influence each other.

Now if you are absolutely exhausted in this moment in time, and you are laughing and cringing at the same time, this is totally fine. Note that and whatever else pops up for you. It may be that all you can do is sit on the couch and watch mindless TV. And that is OK because sometimes that is exactly what we need.

Alternatively, you may read this and create a long list of items. In any case, let's tune in to what you are actually *using* right now on a regular basis. Be honest. This is not a wish list (you could capture that on another page of your journal for future self to come back to).

Note to self: Positive psychology

Focuses on what is good in life, being authentic, fulfilled, satisfied or living the best life you can right now.

Connecting to positive psychology

Positive psychology or the science of wellbeing, is about what is good in life. It is a term that umbrellas the notion of flourishing and what makes life worth living. Martin Seligman is often referred to as the founding father of positive psychology. He, and many of us who engage with positive psychology, have a wish to see that we look at life with regard to what makes us happy, be our best and thrive, rather than looking at wellbeing from a deficit model. His thinking has reminded us to interrupt spending so much time in life thinking about what is bad or negative and to begin to look at what is good and how we can develop these aspects.⁷

To flourish means to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience.⁸

So, in positive psychology we focus on what is good in life, rather than only addressing what is not working or what is wrong. We still acknowledge

life's ups and downs, but we interrupt our natural negative bias. Often this is associated with the term 'flourish': Barbara Fredrickson and Marcial Losada call this living within an optimal range of human functioning which implies goodness, generativity, growth and resilience. Flourishers don't simply feel good and do good; they do good by feeling good.⁹

Positive psychology has developed a growing body of empirical evidence in relation to strengths and connections to life satisfaction, health, achievement and positive outcomes connected to emotions, meaning, relationships, engagement and accomplishment.¹⁰ It was founded on the belief that individuals and collectives want to lead meaningful lives and cultivate the best within themselves. As a result, research in the field of positive psychology is revealing that people with high levels of wellbeing experience:

- More energy
- Greater happiness
- Improved physical and mental health
- Better social connections
- Increased productivity at work
- More resilience

Positive psychology encourages us to bring an awareness to what is going right for us. It does, however, come under some scrutiny. A major misconception of the field of positive psychology is that it is all about cultivating 'positivity'. And although the focus is on the positive aspects of individuals in an attempt to foster enhanced wellbeing, positive psychology is not purely about being positive all the time. The field does acknowledge ups and downs in one's wellness, health and wellbeing. The field does not ask one to ignore or avoid negative emotions or experiences. We need both positive and negative experiences in our lives; that's the reality of our human experience and fundamentally, what makes life worth living.

Positive psychology and our toolbox for self-care

Much of my toolbox for self-care is informed by positive psychology. I've introduced you to a little about positive psychology here and invite you to read more as you explore for yourself. See the references and further reading

lists. However, I will connect to theory throughout the book aligning this to strategies or practices in this way rather than presenting it all here in this chapter.

One of the most significant wellbeing frameworks that has emerged from positive psychology is Seligman's PERMA model. It has since been developed with other variations such as PERMA+ or PERMAH as we have discovered more in the field. I've used PERMAH as the framework to inform this book as I believe the H is important to support a more well-rounded approach to wellbeing. It is also a tangible way to think about all the different areas of wellbeing. It is only one way, and I often use other models and frameworks as well to think about self-care. You could explore as starting points these other frameworks:

Other models of wellbeing

Five Ways to Wellbeing (<https://neweconomics.org/2008/10/five-ways-to-wellbeing>) developed by the New Economics Foundation in the UK is a framework that draws on the areas of connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give.

The 10 Keys to Happier Living (<https://actionforhappiness.org/10-keys>) is a framework that is shared by the not-for-profit organisation Action for Happiness and is an easy and accessible way to connect with diverse areas of wellbeing science. Focus is on giving, relating, exercising, awareness, trying out, direction, resilience, emotions, acceptance and meaning.

Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (www.esa.edu.au/solutions/our-solutions/student-wellbeing-hub) developed in 2018 to support all schools to build and maintain safe, inclusive and positive learning communities where everyone can flourish. It focuses on leadership, inclusion, student voice, partnerships and support.

Community Wellbeing Framework (www.dialogdesign.ca/community-well-being-framework/), developed in North America, focuses on cultural, political, social, environmental and economic areas of wellbeing.

New Zealand's Wellbeing Framework (www.planalytics.co.nz/journal/2020/8/31/new-zealands-wellbeing-framework) has been informed by Māori wellbeing concepts such as Dr Mason Durie's *Whare tapa*

whā model, *He Ara Waiora* research and the wellbeing outcomes for *whanau* articulated in the *Whānau Ora* approach. Areas addressed are mental and emotional wellbeing, social wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and physical wellbeing.

PERMAH

Essential to the PERMAH framework is the encouragement of social awareness and positive relationships that are generated and maintained through high-quality connections, fostering self-motivation and the emphasis of social and emotional learning, meaning, engagement and building character strengths.¹¹ Each initial concept is associated with a pillar that supports and enables wellbeing:

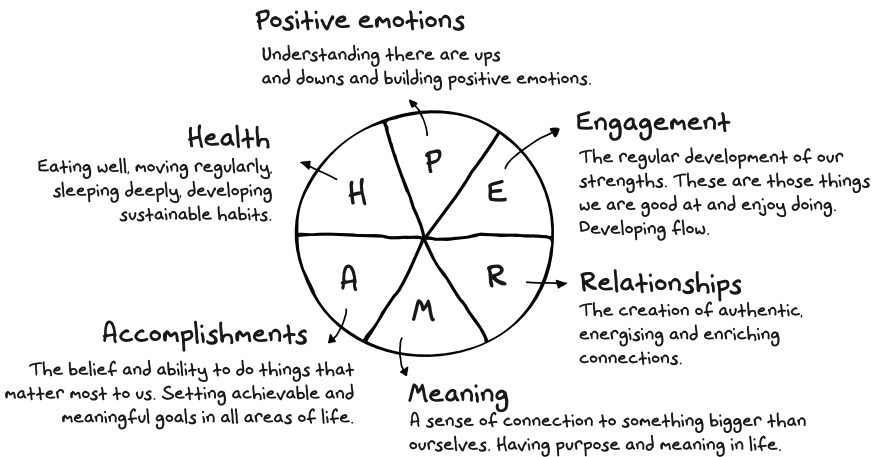


Figure 1.3 The PERMAH model.

All pillars contribute to wellbeing in PERMAH. Each can be measured separately and engaged with for its own sake. The pillars can also overlap as you will see throughout the book with the PERMAH code attached to each *Do* activity.

As we think about our toolbox for self-care, and the tools we engage with to develop, maintain and protect our wellbeing, it is PERMAH that can assist us in making sure we have the diversity we need.

Let's dig deeper into each pillar.

P(ositive emotions)

Positive emotions can occur briefly, fleetingly or for a sustained period. What they do for us is build up our psychological, social, intellectual and physical resources to support our wellbeing. Our approach to positive emotions is akin to the concept of a coin jar or piggy bank. If we keep adding those coins we have in the bottom of our bags, pockets in jackets and from quick spends at the store we build up our savings. If we keep building our experiences with positive emotions, we build our wellbeing and broaden our mindset for the discovery of new information, engagement with others and exploration of new skills. That piggy bank of positive emotions also assists us greatly when things don't go so well. If we keep filling our piggy bank, we can draw on it when we need.

Positive emotions are infectious and have a significant impact on our wellbeing. Think about the place of, for example, kindness, gratitude, joy, love, awe, curiosity and contentment in your life. Just thinking about them begins a process but enacting them or being on the other side of them is magical.

I often think about life like a wave: we all experience ups and downs that are never the same and can be impacted by the context. Positive and negative emotions will be experienced. Both are good for us if in the right doses. When we tune in to these, they can really help us navigate what is happening. They can tell us much about our triggers and how we can approach a problem, conflict or challenge. For example, anger can help us to increase our optimism and perseverance to problem solve. Or, hurt can motivate us to engage in self-compassion. A little anxiety can help us to be creative or bring out a strong performance. We don't want to avoid negative emotions, but we do want to engage in positive emotions, especially those authentic emotions that help us with our self-care. Most positive emotions are responses to positive events.¹²

Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory¹³ considers it possible to engage with positive emotions and for us to broaden our momentary thought-action repertoires. In doing so we can build enduring personal

physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources. We can play, explore, savour, envision and integrate positive emotions. Each time they are engaged with meaningfully we can broaden habitual modes of thinking or acting. So, we can actually generate more opportunities to experience positive emotions rather than focus on negative emotions that can have a significant narrowing and negative impact on our wellbeing.

What is important here for self-care is that positive emotions can be cultivated, and we can grow our capacity through intentional selection or modification depending on the circumstance. Positive emotions can be a *result* of a tool you use, or they can be the *strategy* itself.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Jolt of joy

Positive emotions are infectious. Take a moment to connect with what brings you joy or gives a quick moment of positive emotion injected into your day.

- What or who brings you genuine joy?
- How do you show joy? Laugh, smile, dance, jump up and down, scream with excitement? Something else?
- How do you respond to a good event or experience?
- When was the last time you did this?
- How can you add more of this into your life?
- What impact does it have on you? On others around you?

E(ngagement)

Much of the focus of engagement in positive psychology has been on flow: that moment when you are intensely concentrating, absorbed and really in the moment of what you are doing.¹⁴ Engagement and experiencing flow are often connected to your why, that is, you have a purpose and experience a stronger sense of self. As a result, you feel more self-belief and experience higher levels of confidence. Experiencing engagement comes from clear goals balanced with skill level, sense of autonomy, choice in approach and feedback. But engagement is more than just flow, it is also the regular development of our strengths – those things we're good at and enjoy doing.

When we think about engagement, how we can use our strengths in ways that allow us to be involved in a task deeply while living with interest and curiosity?

JOURNAL PROMPT: Experiencing flow

Can you recognise a moment when you have been in flow – where you have been totally absorbed and have lost track of time, felt inspired and motivated and had a balance between being pushed but could explore skills/knowledge you already felt connected to? What was this? When was this? What happened? How did it make you feel? What was the outcome?

R(relationships)

It is the team approach to planning, helping each other out, in delegating tasks and just being there for each other when you are feeling unwell that made me realise what I really like about the school I work in. It is my colleagues, the connection I have to them.

Veronica, secondary school teacher

Relationships are fundamental to life.¹⁵ We need each other to support, motivate, inspire, offer advice, problem solve and to feel connected. Relationships are critical for our wellbeing to help create feelings of satisfaction and security. We all have different relationships, such as partners, friends, family members, colleagues, bosses, mentors, supervisors and community. And although relationships are complex, most have a goal of improving and maintaining good connections while also fostering connections with others we meet.

We also need to have a good relationship with ourselves. Where an awareness is cultivated to allow us to tune in to our needs, to celebrate our growth and to pause when we need to recalibrate.

In the workplace, relationships influence identity, how we shine (or not) and how we feel motivated and supported.¹⁶ Relationships are crucial for

seeking social support. So, it is no surprise that work-based friendships often feature as a critical element to feeling valued in a workplace.¹⁷

JOURNAL PROMPT: Work relationships

As a teacher we work collaboratively across many diverse relationship connections. In this T-chart, reflect upon your current work relationships. Note aspects about the connections that have supported your wellbeing. Consider various contexts, situations and people you work with.

POSITIVE INFLUENCE	UNHELPFUL INFLUENCE OR TENSION PRESENT THAT HAS A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE

What do you notice? Are there relationships that feed your wellbeing? Are there relationships that feed others' wellbeing as you mentor, guide, help or coach? Are there relationships that are one-way or multi-directional?

M(eaning)

Every time I hit a hurdle when I was questioning if I could do this, I reconnect back to what my why is, and that energises me every day and especially in the moments when I am feeling overwhelmed. This thinking brings me back to the reason why I became a teacher. The energy comes back. The spirit in me comes back.

I reconnect with my passion, and this comes out in what I do with the students.

Phillip, final year pre-service teacher

Meaning is about having a sense of worth and value. Dedicating time to think about what provides us with meaning in life is crucial for us all. Research tells us that when we have a sense of meaning in life, we also report that we are more satisfied with our life, jobs and relationships. When we find our purpose, we can express more positive feelings and opinions about ourselves and others. We also experience less feelings of anxiety and depression. Knowing our *why*, purpose and connecting with our meaning are important. And providing opportunities for us to link into this area of wellbeing is crucial, but often overlooked.

Michael Steger¹⁸ is one of the leaders in this field, and he reminds us that meaning in life is based on feelings of significance and mattering about one's life; it is being able to make sense of and comprehend one's life and having purpose.

For teachers, there are significant links between a teacher's sense of meaning and how the student responds to this. Students sense that teachers care for them when a teacher embodies their meaning and purpose for being a teacher.¹⁹

A sense of belonging, appreciation, acceptance and connection is linked to how teachers feel about their work. And unsurprisingly there are overlapping links here to developing and maintaining healthy student-teacher relationships. Of note is the value teachers see in their work and how this can have a huge impact on relationships with self and others. For example, being connected to meaning and purpose impacts working with students and expressing care towards students in a way that is reciprocal.²⁰

JOURNAL PROMPT: Meaningful connections

Why be a teacher? What impact do you wish to make? What opportunities are there for you to reflect on or discuss what is meaningful in your professional life? Are you engaging with your purpose? What does this look, feel and sound like for you? When connected to your purpose, how do you see this impacting your relationship with yourself as well as with others?

A(ccomplishments)

When we think about accomplishment we think about setting, working towards and achieving goals. If we have a sense of accomplishment, we experience a sense of pride, which contributes to our wellbeing.

Accomplishment can mean different things to each of us in different contexts. Ideally, we have a combination of different accomplishments throughout our personal and professional lives. In the workplace, this may be an achievement for receiving an award or promotion.²¹ Alternatively, it can be subjective, for example, reaching goals or completing tasks.²²

From a wellbeing perspective, Michelle McQuaid and Peggy Kern remind us that 'it is the small, subjective wins that matter most' and a need for belief that one can improve is also critical.²³ This is a very important reminder that we should celebrate the small wins, appreciate how we grow as we work towards goals and make time for this rather than move on so quickly that we forget what we have accomplished.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Connecting to your view on accomplishments

Take a moment to note what accomplishment means to you. What might this look like? How does this change in terms of context? How do you celebrate small wins versus achievement of significant long-term goals? How do you persevere with your goals?

H(ealth)

Maintaining physical health, including eating well, hydration, movement, sleep and mindful restoration activities are behaviours that support wellbeing, including mental health, relationships and cognitive functioning. And these are all a part of the H(ealth) in PERMAH.

Another important part of the H is rest. This is a big one, especially for teachers. It is a self-care practice that is something many of us don't include in our toolbox. It was something I had to learn, and now it is a staple in my toolbox that I use weekly, and during peak pressure times daily. It is also a strategy we can easily overuse, so we must be careful that it is balanced with other strategies.

In the workplace, health has gained attention in acknowledgement that there needs to be shifts in workplace culture to support employees. However, it is reported that adult engagement in physical activity is low²⁴ and often workplace health programs do not lead to help-seeking or outreach behaviours.²⁵ It has also been noted that employees in larger businesses are less likely to access workplace health promotion opportunities.²⁶ This provides important insights into what we need to consider as teachers and leaders in the sector.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Healthy choices

Across the variety of healthy choices you can make, how does H(earth) feature as a part of your self-care? Make note of the variations for you. What do you observe in yourself over time associated with these areas? What do you overuse or underuse?

Where to next? categorising your toolbox

Let's connect with how it could look in action.

Returning to my list of self-care strategies from earlier in this chapter, these are my tools or strategies in my toolbox for self-care. We can classify this list across a variety of areas of wellbeing based on the PERMAH framework.

As we progress throughout the book, you too will begin to establish your toolbox for self-care featuring many diverse practices and strategies or tools.

For your tools and toolbox to be useful for you, you need a set of dimensions to help you with the *how* to make this all happen. The dimensions of mindfulness, self-compassion, empowerment, habits and time are what I have identified as critical for this support. These dimensions help us put the tools into action. I'll introduce you to these in the next chapter and they will have a chapter each including strategies and practices for your toolbox.

What you will also notice is that each *Do* activity is coded to PERMAH. This is both to support your awareness of how practices and strategies can be overlapping in areas and to help you identify diverse tools for your toolbox. Keep reading and be curious about what resonates with and inspires you.

Table 1.1 My self-care toolbox categorised through PERMAH

P Positive emotions <i>Understanding there are ups and downs and building positive emotions.</i>	E Engagement <i>The regular development of our strength. These are those things we are good at and enjoy doing. Developing flow.</i>	R Relationships <i>The creation of authentic, energising and enriching connections.</i>	M Meaning <i>A sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves. Having purpose and meaning in life.</i>	A Accomplishments <i>The belief and ability to do things that matter most to us. Setting achievable and meaningful goals in all areas of life.</i>	H Health <i>Eating well, moving regularly, sleeping deeply, developing sustainable habits.</i>
Self-compassion Mantra Soothing touch Planning for/taking a holiday	Embracing my strength of curiosity Using my top or underused strengths Spotting strengths Making and using my hands Listening to music and making playlists	Social conversations Cooking with others Volunteering, mentoring and giving back Watching TV series with the household Being supported by professional support team – chiropractor, GP, counselling, coaching, Pilates, Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture, myotherapy Having trusted colleague(s) for work debriefing and reflective practice	Knowing my <i>why</i> Podcast listening Writing and journaling	Intention setting Auditing my time Applying a growth mindset with curiosity	Going for long walks or hikes Walking on the beach Meditation Green tea morning ritual Drinking water Time in/with nature Sleep Making better food choices Cooking new recipes Baking Rest Using essential oils

You may also be interested in . . .

Watch

Martin Seligman on PERMA

www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqqHUxzfBI

Notes

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2

Self-care and me, time to become closer

Defining self-care is rather tricky. There are so many different perspectives, disciplines and contextual influences. So, it is no wonder we can be confused about what it is and what it can look like in practice. In this chapter, I unpack the definition I am using in this book, and I will position it in the broader discussions of self-care research. I will also outline my 14 self-care principles. These will help you be gentle on yourself . . . and others. These will become your best friends as you explore what your toolbox for self-care does, can and will look like. The chapter concludes with the conceptual model of self-care I have developed to help us put our toolbox into action, introducing you to the place of mindfulness, self-compassion, time, habits and empowerment that will then travel with you throughout the remainder of the book.

Even defining self-care is complex . . .

What is self-care? Self-care became formally recognised in medicine in the United States in 1981 when it was added to the Medical Subject Headings of the National Library of Medicine. Here it was defined as ‘caring for self when ill or positive actions and adopting behaviours to prevent illness’. By 2011, Christina Godfrey et al., in their analysis of practice, policy and industry perspectives on self-care, identified 139 different definitions and little consensus in healthcare literature.¹ But self-care is more than healthcare – it encompasses social and emotional wellbeing; it is not just preventing illness and so we need to add the components of self-management, self-monitoring and self-help. No wonder the act of self-care is confusing and challenging – there are so many various terms that are used interchangeably.

Here are some ways teachers have defined it.

Self-care to me is a way of being able to truly take care of my mental wellbeing alongside my physical wellbeing. It is being able to listen to what my body needs and provide that for it too.

Ensuring I make time to become a better, and healthier person. Inside and out. It requires dedication, and commitment to yourself.

Self-care means to take time for myself and relax. To take a second and breathe.

Listening to my mind and body and giving them what they need. If this means taking time out of my day to ask myself what I need, then I take all the time I can get.

This is the definition I use for this book.

Self-care is anything you do proactively that helps you develop, protect, maintain and improve health, wellbeing or wellness. It is about meeting yourself each day, learning who you really are and continuing to be present with your needs to help you be the best version of yourself today. It is a process of self-discovery, not perfectionism or comparing yourself to others.

Put simply, self-care is about taking care of yourself. It is the proactive and deliberate process² of taking steps to develop, protect, maintain and improve health, wellbeing or wellness.³ It is complex. It requires change. It takes time and reflection.⁴ Plus, we must also acknowledge the limits on our ability to take action.⁵ It is not just about us. Relationships are critical; family, partners, dependants, friends, community, workplaces, leaders and/or cultural groups all influence our self-care.⁶ This is where self-care becomes relational. We need others as acts of self-care and for support, motivation and inspiration.

Healthcare providers also have an important role to play. However, in practice this varies, and health practitioners and policy organisations tend to focus on physical health (illness or disease) rather than social and emotional

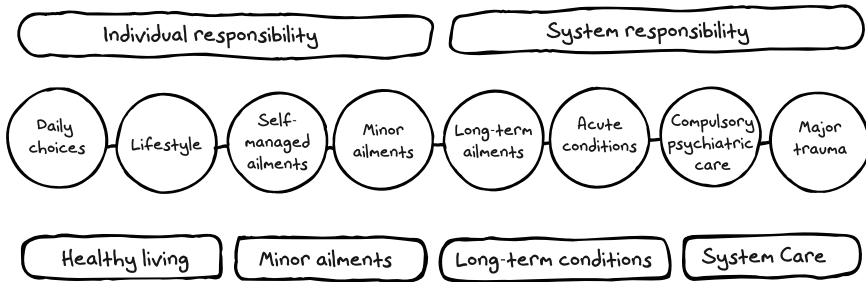


Figure 2.1 The self-care medicalised continuum based on the work of the UK Self Care Forum.

Source: developed from www.selfcareforum.org/

wellbeing. The World Health Organisation's⁷ (WHO) definition of self-care clearly takes this approach: 'the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a health-care provider'. This medicalised model also tends to see a continuum of responsibilities ranging from the personal/individual to the system/social.

The act of self-care is underpinned by self-awareness and balancing of self and other interests,⁸ and reflection⁹ as growth is a significant part of self-care in relation to wellbeing.¹⁰

Self-care is therefore comprised of actions within an individual's control to manage health and wellness.¹¹ Self-care can be embraced over a continuum¹² – from daily choices that support pure self-care and healthy living underpinned by individual responsibility moving through to pure medical care where professional responsibility is key.

What we notice about the WHO definition is that self-care is focused on the prevention of disease as the primary aim. In this interpretation of self-care, chronic illness¹³ and solutions for administration of medications for the management of health ailments¹⁴ dominates.

Within the literature there is some research that reveals challenges in enacting self-care. My analysis reveals four main areas of challenges:

- Awareness (commercialisation, term definition confusion, professional competency, orientation to what is wrong, hard to do when mentally unwell)
- Systemic (reliance on formal healthcare systems, attention)

- Attitude (eg, outlook, hard to enact when stressed, comparison to others, individually hard to adopt)
- Time (belief around it having to take a lot of time, and little to no engagement in self-care practices prior to professional recommendations from a GP, for example)

While it is reported that self-care interventions increase choice,¹⁵ there is, however, a gap in promoting self-care proactively for self-regulation and management of wellbeing to approaching life from a perspective to thrive.¹⁶ Noted also is that choice and empowerment are missing, especially in how self-care can be applied consistently and through the everyday to support physical and mental health.¹⁷ The growing interest in the concept of self-care and that making time for self each day in order to relax, to process stressors and worries, and to focus on key life goals that align to meaning and purpose is required.¹⁸

These are areas I pick up in this book.

Self-care and you

Many of us (including me) have a love-hate relationship with self-care. I am fascinated by it. Why is self-care so hard? What can it look like? What is possible?

One way to think about self-care is to reflect on some of the critical aspects of your life through these guiding questions:

How do you nourish yourself?

How do you rebuild your energy?

What are the things you do when you nurture yourself?

What do you drop when you are stressed? Tired? Exhausted? Or when a strategy or practice is no longer serving you?

What energises you?

Who energises you?

What makes you excited?

What make you feel flat?

What do you miss when you do not do it?

What makes you smile?

Who makes you smile?

What has surprised you lately?

What have you been introduced to that was unexpectedly rewarding?

What are your values?

What do you believe in?

How and when do your values and beliefs shine in your life?

These are just some questions to consider. There will be more as the book progresses. But as you can see from this list of questions, self-care is complex, dynamic and is important across different areas of our lives.

There is no one prescribed way of growing, maintaining or protecting your self-care

Choices about your individual self-care needs may seem obvious, but under pressure, stressed or exhausted we forget this. Sometimes you'll find you have alignment to a friend or colleague and other times you will not. There are some influences, however, that when we are aware of them help us to process a complexity, a situation or feelings we may be experiencing. What is right for your self-care at any time in your life is determined by a few variables:

- Interest and motivation (it's natural, you enjoy it, and you find it valuable, versus you feel guilty if you don't do it, someone told you to do it or

an external reason, such as someone else wants you to do it or you are required to do it).

- Personality
- The need for variety (what, when, how)
- Skills and knowledge base
- Our demographic, such as cultural background, gender and age
- The time involved versus the time available
- How we are feeling at the time in terms of our energy levels or what is happening for us

For a strategy to work for you, you need a tipping point which is usually three of these areas. And throughout your life the combination of these tipping points will also change. For example, one educational environment might be conducive to your self-care being proactive and an environment that supports you to continually engage with new practices and strategies, while another may not. So, take some time now and connect with what this means for you right now. Ponder a bit. And as an example, the tipping point for my last burnout experience was my personality type (introvert, deep thinker and driven), time (I couldn't sustain being in burnout and after eight months was looking for something more than just visiting my GP), my knowledge base (although I lacked self-care skills I did know that there could be more), and interest and motivation (I was motivated to stop feeling so low, to find out more, and to interrupt what I was experiencing).

Underpinning this book is your curiosity. I want you to build from what you know now, and from what you know works for you right now. I firmly believe in beginning with what is exciting for you, what makes you smile, brings you joy and gives you a zap of energy. This feeds your empowerment.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Journal your tipping points

Intention: Set the intention to connect honestly with how you are feeling now regarding your emotional, social, mental and physical wellbeing.

Attention: Draw your attention to what is happening for you with regard to tipping points referring to the seven variables described earlier.

Attitude: Come to this journal prompt with an openness and be careful not to judge yourself. You are noticing. Record data on yourself without judgement.

Note to self: If you acknowledge that your self-care needs some attention, focus this journal prompt on this current situation. If you are feeling really great at the moment, can you think back to a time or a critical experience where your self-care needed some attention?

Journal about your tipping points. What does/did that look like for you? What do you do now that works for you? What might/could you change or build upon? Let's capture them.

Can you identify what self-care means for you?

Self-care is essential for us all. And if you are reading this book, you are already moving in the right direction in placing it as crucial to discovering what this is for you. No matter what relationship you currently have with self-care, it can be developed, and you can feel empowered. I've moved from having no relationship with self-care to a love-hate relationship, and now to one where I am fascinated and look forward to finding new ways to help myself thrive each day. I am especially curious to find ways to be gentler on myself on those days when it all feels a little too hard.

A note on noticing

'Noticing' regarding self-care is a term coined by John Mason.¹⁹ As he notes from first glance, the term seems basic, simple and rather obvious. But it is complex and more far reaching than what you may first assume.

The discipline of noticing involves us undertaking research about our professional practice but also ourselves. This includes self-care. In some ways the practices and activities throughout this book are ways for you to begin noticing yourself and allow you to collect data on yourself about how you care for you – you can notice patterns of behaviours, gaps, times when you overuse a particular strength, ignore an area of wellbeing science or where you are flourishing and feeling empowered with your choices.

To notice is to make a distinction, to create foreground and background, to distinguish some 'thing' from its surroundings.²⁰

DO: *Train yourself to notice your needs*

Intention: To notice what your relationship with self-care is

Attention: Focus your attention on being honest with yourself, but be gentle; this is about noticing not judging

Attitude: Explore with an openness

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Noticing is about beginning the moment from the retrospective into the present (being awake in the moment) so that choice can be made to respond rather to react habitually.

Let's begin with noticing what is happening for you.

Tune in to what is happening for you and your self-care, and what your intuition is telling you what you might need to do. Just observe. Don't judge it.

What's happening for you regarding:

- Sleep?
- Diet?
- Exercise or movement?
- Water intake?
- Rest?

I start with these as I think of them as the crucial variables we can have some control over. They are the H(health) in PERMAH. They are also aspects that if not observed, over time they can have real impact beyond just your everyday self-care.

What's happening for you regarding other areas in your life?

- Personal intimate relationship
- Friendships
- Family
- Your children
- Work relationships
- Your boss
- Colleagues you work closely with
- Those you care for
- Those caring for you who you pay or provide services (eg, professionals such as allied health, GP, hairdresser, Chinese herbal doctor, dentist, acupuncturist, nutritionist, psychologist)
- Community
- Neighbours
- Sport, arts or hobbies
- General people whom you engage with when you go to the shops or for a walk
- Other people you engage with formally or informally?

Relationships are crucial as self-care is not only about you, but also about who you engage with, what this looks like, and how it supports or impedes you. Self-care also involves others at some point in time, regardless of how you see yourself as an introvert or extrovert for example, or if you are single or partnered, or if you have family or are estranged or distanced from them, or if you have children or no children. Being reflective about your self-care, it will probably also involve others, as we are always learning with and from others.

Think about your relationships regarding:

- Roles
- Responsibilities

- Connections
- Energy levels
- Toxicity
- Power and control
- Influence
- Cultural influences
- Gendered influences

What is going on in these areas? What is happening in your personal life? What is happening at work? How are you feeling? What are you noticing? What might need tweaking? What might need more focus? What is exciting you?

Now think about the self-care practices you do regularly that empower you. What are these? What do they involve? How do you make sure these happen for you?

Now use the reflections and/or notes you have made from the preceding questions as data. In this noticing you are tuning in to an awareness about you and your needs that support you to notice what choices can be made to assist you to respond rather than react.

What patterns have you noticed with your needs? Where do you place you? Where do you place others? Are there any repeated patterns in your actions or reactions?

What signs appear in your noticing about valuing self-care? How do you know what you need right now?

What do you recognise with regard to choice? Choice you have, choice you can make and/or choices that are not present for you?

How do you feel about some of these characteristics/actions/attitudes in your life? What opportunities exist for you to acknowledge what empowers you versus what needs some attention, a tweak, a change, additional work or removal?

The self in self-care – yin and yang

For many of us the ‘self’ or ‘I’ part of our self-care and wellbeing is often associated with being selfish. Self-care isn’t selfish. We’ve been told to think if we spend time on ourselves we are being selfish. This is untrue and only serves others. Think about that. If we aren’t caring for ourselves then we automatically dismiss ourselves, our needs, our awareness to listen to anything being not right, and for many of us, we have been taught to always put others before ourselves. But is this really what we should be doing? How can we possibly care for others if we don’t care for ourselves? We exist in an exhausted foggy disconnected bubble that only feeds into the issues we are all wanting to address: exhaustion, burnout, tiredness, not being seen or heard, feeling disempowered, running on the last of our battery charge.

This debate we have with ourselves, paired with the pressures that society and our upbringings place on us would benefit from considering a yin and yang approach. We need both.

The yin side has to do with being with ourselves, with soothing, validating and comforting but it needs the support of protecting, motivating, and providing the yang side.²¹

Let’s have a look at what yin and yang can tell us.

Yin and yang characteristics

YIN	YANG
Feminine	Masculine
Heart	Head
Being	Doing
Loving	Fierce
Nurture	Angry
Hug	Providing
Care	Motivating
Gentle	Protecting
Feel	Strong willed

Yin and yang have a place in our life as we navigate what self-care looks like at any time.

Kristen Neff,²² who researches self-compassion, calls this being a Mumma Bear. Sometimes we need to be protective, fierce and strong-willed to provide our self with the best care we need. It is the protective yang perseverance of prioritising self-care paired with the yin of being nurturing to ourselves that offers us so much. Yin and yang can show up for you as you persist with a new habit, protect the time you have carved out for movement in the morning, for example. It can be when you are planning for the week's meals to include food that will support your body to function well and your mind to be fuelled, or at difficult times of conflict where you find your purpose not aligned to the context you are in.

What is new for many of us is that we have the capacity to choose how to move along the yin-yang or feminine-masculine spectrum according to our situation. We do this ever so well as teachers in the classroom, but we need to be reminded that we need to do this for our self as well.

I've begun to think about this from the perspective of empowerment and deficit ways of looking at self-care. Both have a place, both are valuable for certain situations, but we want to sit more with the empowering side for self-care, rather than the deficit side. Those feelings, thoughts and behaviours on the deficit side are something to tune in to and have an awareness around what triggers them, and what happens for you; for example, when we find something too hard, and we stop doing the things we know help us be our best. But deficit ways of thinking and being are not helpful when we are trying to treat ourselves like a friend or someone we love.

EMPOWERING	DEFICIT
Self-less	Selfish
Self-aware	Self-absorbed
Self-compassion	Self-critical
Self-management	Self-talk (negative)
Self-responsibility	Self-interest
Self-worth	Self-indulgent
Self-knowledge	Self-criticism
Self-regulation	Self-persecution
Self-awareness	Self-sacrifice
Self-sufficient	Self-sabotaging

EMPOWERING	DEFICIT
Self-reflective Self-preservation Self-efficacy Self-preservation Self-monitoring Self-motivating Self-discovery Self-love Self-soothing	Self-centred Self-assessment (negative)

When I first started exploring self-care and digging deep into what it is, researching how we engage with it and how to translate research into proactive action, what was revealed to me is the guilt most of us have for enacting self-care. The 'self' aspect is hard for many of us to move past, and the 'care' aspect is also igniting many reactions – care for me? I always care for others. Caring for myself will just happen. But does it?

Self-care as an investment in yourself

The beneficial effects of self-care include improved wellbeing and lower morbidity, mortality, and healthcare costs for the individual and the government.²³ We know this from the more medicalised definitions and policy around self-care. Self-care is influenced by internal factors including our own self-efficacy, learning opportunities and openness, motivation, perception of imbalance, religious beliefs and precepts, cultural beliefs, mindset, commitment and ability to make judgements.²⁴ External factors also influence, such as cultural or contextual influences, the environment and availability of social support and resources.

Self-care is performed to maintain health, life and wellbeing. Some say it is about us reaching autonomy and empowerment, supporting the exploration of a meaningful life.²⁵ Others indicate it is purely about eliminating, preventing, coping with or controlling disease and illness.²⁶ I interpret it as a combination of all these aspects; empowerment and building from what you know helps you and assists you in supporting yourself to

flourish. This is the baseline no matter the situation. We can build capacity through exposure to practices and strategies that have a strong evidence base. By planning, celebrating and measuring our growth and ability to maintain good health it is possible to benchmark and derive a prioritised action plan personal to each of us.²⁷ We can build our personal toolbox for self-care.

The research reminds us that:

- We need to be proactive with our self-care.
- Self-care is performed to reach autonomy, to improve self-esteem and self-transcendence and to achieve a meaningful life.
- We must take personal responsibility, but it is also relational thus involving others.
- Empowerment and support enhance us to perform actions of self-care that impact positively on wellbeing.
- Self-care is usually the first line of approach in every healthcare encounter.
- Self-care requires maintenance, monitoring and management . . . it does not just happen.
- There is a yin and yang component to our self-care.
- Context is important; the environment and who we are around influence our self-care positively or negatively.
- Self-care requires a variety of different strategies and practices from different areas of wellbeing.
- We are much better at self-care when we engage with practices and strategies that excite us and energise us, and where we feel we have choice, agency and empowerment.
- Each day we need to tune in to our needs and be mindfully aware of different influences and situations.
- We need to treat ourselves with kindness and humanity.

Self-care is an investment in your wellbeing to make sure you are functioning well. You can also think about self-care in terms of attributes that reinforce that you are on a journey of self-discovery; and you are forever developing and growing in your understanding and implementation.²⁸

Note to self: As an *activity* self-care entails physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual components. These can be learned and consciously performed by an individual. A situation usually drives the activity, and which we have individual control over what is engaged with while implementing it for a specific goal.

Self-care is an action *capability* directed toward universal needs, goals and health problems.

Self-care is a health developmental *process* that involves a series of steps or actions.

Be gentle on yourself: self-care principles to help you

You need to be gentle with yourself as you explore and build your self-care toolbox. One of the key aspects of being gentle is to have an awareness of others – how they support your self-care, how they may approach their own and the place of noticing without judgement or comparison. Everyone’s life is different and what we know of another person’s life is only a small part of a bigger picture. Self-care is complex, so comparing ourselves with others is not always useful. Although others inspire us, help us, guide us or are a part of our toolbox, we need to be careful to do what is right for us.

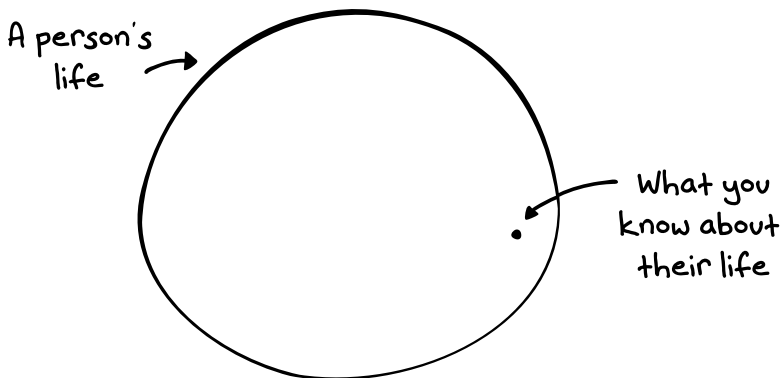


Figure 2.2 Awareness of others.

These 14 guiding principles are conducive to empowering you with your self-care, while also helping you navigate expectations and assumptions from others in your life.

1. Small changes are a change.
2. Keep it real.
3. Be careful with comparison.
4. It is hard, but it is worth it.
5. Variety is required.
6. Care for you so you can care for others.
7. Be gentle.
8. Be careful not to judge others.
9. Embrace daily reflection.
10. Check in with yourself.
11. It looks different for everyone, and across time.
12. Fail forward.
13. Every day is a new day.
14. Self-care is not a checklist on social media.

Let's unpack each.

Small changes are a change

Any small action contributes to change and cultivating the best you. We often think that we must make a grand gesture, but we all know these often become too much and we drop them quickly. Self-care involves small choices that we repeat, and as we repeat these small changes impact builds up over time, and before we know it there is a significant positive change.

Keep it real

Be honest with yourself as you explore your self-care needs. Keeping it real means keeping your self-care needs authentic to you, acknowledging that your needs change over time and across contexts. Listen to your intuition.

Be careful with comparison

Our self-care does not benefit from comparison. Learn with and from each other, but don't compare yourself to others as we all know everyone is different (and often we do not know the complexity of others' lives).

It is hard, but it is worth it

We see self-care as an add-on rather than an essential. So, as we acknowledge this and reset how we think about self-care, we will each struggle through some complex hard times. Self-care is certainly worth our attention. Start with what excites you, what makes you feel good, and then slowly add to your toolbox of resources with strategies and practices that support you across a broad variety of different areas. And remember, self-care does not have to involve a lot of time; it could be a 30-second micro-moment that assists you. Lots of these repeated can really make a difference.

Variety is required

Our best selves require a variety of different approaches to help us while we are establishing, protecting, developing and maintaining our toolbox for self-care. You want to be able to dip into the toolbox, as well as pair, adjust, sharpen, refocus and restore, as required. We need diversity in types of strategies, how they are enacted, who they are or are not completed with, and where and when they occur. Variety is the key, but not in a way that you collect strategies and practices and never engage with any. Find what works for you now, that empowers you, energises you, while drawing from different areas of wellbeing science.

Care for you so you can care for others

We must care for ourselves first, to be able to care for others. If we are run-down, exhausted, multitasking or not present with our own needs, how can we truly be able to deeply listen to others, support them and not wear their needs?

Be gentle

Trust the process and remind yourself that as you help yourself there will always be ups and downs. For all of us there will be healing involved. As we heal, we are coming to know ourselves at a deeper level. We are letting go of the old imprints, actions, behaviours and beliefs, and as such there are patterns that keep us caught in a loop that repeats the past that sometimes we have to address. Be true to you, nurture yourself and seek support where you need to as you address these and continue to grow and move

back-and-forth during the process. Your self-care, healing and doing what is right for you now is not a linear upward experience; there are lots of twists and turns accompanied by many surprises, positive and negative.

Be careful not to judge others

You never really know what is happening for someone else. A helpful mantra to support this acknowledgement is to think and embrace the idea that *everyone is doing the best they can do today*.

Embrace daily reflection

Consider these four questions each day; they will support you no matter what is happening in your life.

Are there changes I want to make today?

What strategies or practices bring me joy?

Where can I add self-care to my busy schedule?

How will self-care make me feel energised today?

Check in with yourself

Regular check-ins are required. These may be at times daily or weekly or at other times once a month or quarterly. This will vary according to contexts and what is happening in your professional and personal life. A good check-in helps you reflect and embrace any adjustments you may need to make and celebrate how far you have come in other areas.

Ask the questions:

What do I bring to my self-care?

What did I feel when I engaged with a practice or strategy?

What do I gain?

What's next for me?

It looks different for everyone, and across time

One of the greatest truths I know about self-care is that it always looks different for everyone *and* it looks different for us according to our needs and situation at the time. This is why I talk about a toolbox for self-care filled with various

tools (ie, strategies and practices), so you have many options you know work for you. You know your safe go-to strategies, your daily boosts, what you need when it all feels like it is falling apart. You will also collect strategies, practices, resources, ideas, approaches and theories as you go along in life – additionally, you change, you grow and so do your self-care needs.

Fail forward

Our failure does not define who we are. But often we think it does, especially in that moment when it feels like everything you are trying to do just doesn't align and you struggle to have self-care work for you – timing is wrong, strategies do not excite you, you are interrupted, you are time poor, you are just so exhausted you can't pick yourself up from the couch, someone else needs to have their problem solved or you have just forgotten about yourself today.

Kim Anderson's *Letting Go of The Myths: Keeping You From Who You Are Creates To Be*²⁹ describes how failure does not define who we are, and it only becomes a threat when we give it this power. Perspective is the key for us when we think about our self-care. As you try, experiment, explore, find what works for you for specific situations, you are allowing failure and success to be a part of your story, not *the* story. Failure makes us real, the opposite of perfect . . . but what is perfect? When we tune in to our needs, we are showing humility and a vulnerability that allows us to have a greater intimacy with our self, and we provide ourselves with the opportunity to try again, this time with new insights, from a new angle, or with a little tweak that can help us land what it is we need to at this particular moment.

Every day is a new day

Some days you will hurt, and other days you will heal. There will be good days, and there will be outright tough days. Every day is a new day, and we have the chance to reset and begin again. Sometimes we even have the chance to reset within the same day.

Self-care is not a checklist on social media

It is impossible to do everything every day – time constraints, different agendas, different expectations, different energy levels and different you. But you

can have your go-to self-care practices, routines and strategies that work for you daily, however they may not all be possible even when we try. So be careful to think of self-care not as a checklist, but a toolbox with certain compartments you dip into more than others.

Myth busting

I've heard all of these and more. And I have to say every time HR sends an email telling me to undertake a mindfulness course or complete a compliance module on wellbeing, I yell at the computer screen. Not very zen of me, but I have a strong dislike of those practices. Some institutions try to roll out wellbeing assistance, and with the best of intentions, no doubt, but miss the point in systematic planning, change management and the voice of who they are directing it at. Add in a pandemic that has highlighted that we all need help, and that there is a mental health crisis in so many of our communities, and it all seems too much.

One of the problems with self-care is that in recent times it has been hugely commercialised and dehumanised. Just look at Instagram, for example. Under the hashtag selfcare (#selfcare) most self-care practices featured are centred around spas, nail polish, facials, hair care, holidays lying beside a pool, retreats, massage and what I call mostly costly and shallow hedonic practices. Having a massage or time out to care for your body or getting your hair done are self-care actions, but only two examples of many. When I work with pre-service teachers and I ask them about what self-care is and



Figure 2.3 Self-care myths.

ask for examples of what it looks like in practice, too often I hear these earlier-listed examples. This drives me to want to further unpack what self-care is and promote what it can be. It doesn't have to come with an expensive price tag. It can involve others, but it does not have to involve this kind of other. It could also be a version of some of these popularised activities. It may be for some, and it may not be for others.

This current rhetoric of self-care makes us feel four ways:³⁰

1. I am no good as I can't maintain my routines.
2. I'm not doing it right – Instagram moment comparison.
3. Self-care costs lots of money (commercialisation).
4. I am selfish when I practice self-care.

JOURNAL PROMPT: What do you really think about self-care?

Intention: To acknowledge any tensions with your relationship with self-care

Attention: Pay attention to getting it all out

Attitude: All perspectives are valuable, and use this activity to take note of your beliefs

PERMAH links: E, M

What do you really think about self-care? Take a moment to journal any beliefs, assumptions and thoughts that you carry with your approach to self-care.

What do you notice? Is there any obvious flipping or different perspective you could begin to challenge or shift? Or perhaps there are beliefs that should be showcased more as you set the intention to embrace your self-care?

Self-care in action will look different for everyone. It will look different for you at different times in your life. There will be some strategies that travel with you throughout life, others that will come and go, and they may return or may not. They will most likely be different to others in your life, but you can most certainly learn from what others do to see if there is anything that might be good for you. Self-care at times may involve others. Self-care will be deeply connected

to your values, ethics and who you are. It will also be associated to your habits, boundaries, routines, rituals and triggers. Self-care will also be closely related to stress. It will help you to de-stress, help you manage stress and be a reminder that you had forgotten it when you were stressed.

Dimensions of self-care

I think about self-care in relation to five key intersecting dimensions. These are a way for you to show yourself self-love, but they help bring the toolbox theory to life. These five dimensions are essential in our mission to be proactive in how we can develop, protect, maintain and improve our health, wellbeing or wellness. I have developed this framework from my own personal experiences and from my research.

1. Mindfulness – being mindfully aware and present without judgement towards yourself and your self-care. You are invited to be present and aware right now and pay attention to your intuition to find what is right for you now from your vast developing and growing toolbox of resources. You are being mindful of how we can engage with our authentic self to feel empowered.

A guiding question is: If I tune in to my current present moment, what is right for me right now?

2. Self-compassion – this is about treating yourself like a friend when it comes to your self-care. When being self-compassionate, you are being kind and mindfully aware with a common humanity.

A guiding question is: How do I treat myself like a friend when I approach self-care?

3. Time – acknowledging there are a variety and combination of different ways time can help us with self-care. You may engage with micro-moments of 30-second practices right through to lengthy activities. You can participate in practices daily, multiple times a day, weekly, fortnightly, monthly or annually. Time periods can vary just as much as frequency.

A guiding question is: How can the variable of time assist me with my self-care?



Figure 2.4 Five dimensions of self-care.

- Habits – this is about embracing small choices that you can make that if repeated over time have impact. We just need to make small changes or tweaks sometimes. Other times we just need to keep doing what we know works for us and helps us be our best, even if we are exhausted.

A guiding question is: What small choices can I make that when repeated over time make a greater impact for my self-care?

- Empowerment – engaging with choice, agency and becoming confident with what energises you, helps you, motivates and inspires you, and supports you within contextual, cultural and socio-demographic boundaries.

A guiding question includes: What excites me and how can I make choices to engage with this energy?

Throughout the next chapters in this book, I draw on this conceptual model of self-care that I have developed informed by my research with teachers, pre-service teachers and the general public, in partnership with positive psychology literature and other evidence-based research. There is a chapter on each dimension bringing together the concept and practical solutions with regular links to practical activities and practices for your toolbox for self-care. Reminders of how each tool shared relates to PERMAH are shared to support the diversity that you need for your wellbeing.

Concluding thoughts

In this chapter we have engaged with the research to support understanding the context of self-care, including the influence of popular media and the mixed messages we have been sold through commercialisation. Thinking about the yin and yang influence has been important in how you think about caring for you, especially in relation to feelings of selfishness. As we have explored the 14 principles of self-care, a pattern is emerging that self-care looks different for all of us, and it is critical to learn with each other but not to compare. In the next chapter, I want to continue the conversation about self-care, acknowledging it can be hard, but it is worth our attention to cultivate.

You may also be interested in . . .

Podcasts about self-care

Narelle talking about self-care and the dimensions with Dr Michelle Tichy on the Heart of Educational Psychology Podcast

<https://anchor.fm/drmichtich/episodes/Mindfulness-and-Self-Care-Interview-with-Narelle-Lemon-elmvt>

Teachers Supporting Teachers – Summer Series (Series 3) Narelle with Ruby Potter and Ellen Inglese talking self-care and graduating as a teacher www.exploreandcreateco.com/teachers-supporting-teachers-podcast (find on your fav platform such as Apple or Spotify).

Self-Care: A Slow Living Deep-Dive

<https://slowyourhome.com/self-care-season-5/>

Website

Power & Control. Adapted from original wheel by Domestic Abuse Intervention Project: theduluthmodel.org accessed at <https://ywcaspokane.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/2018-YWCA-Spokane-Power-and-Control-Wheel.pdf>

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3

Developing your self-care muscle

Self-care requires constant attention. But this attention needs to be with a gentleness that balances being attentive and setting intentions while also not being judgmental when curve balls come your way. You need to adjust, pause, stop or reset regularly. A way to think about this is through the metaphor of self-care being a muscle. Just as a muscle in our body needs to be developed, maintained and protected, so does our self-care. For muscles, specific exercises can help us regain strength after injury. Additionally, we need to take breaks from certain movements or really slow down when recovering. Just like our muscles, self-care needs this kind of observation, care and attention.

With self-care there are various things we can do to help us develop, maintain and protect our wellbeing. In this chapter I will explore some of the blockers and barriers to self-care and explore our response to them and how we can tune back in to our sphere of control. As you refine your awareness, throughout the chapter I'll introduce you to a set of practices and strategies for your toolbox for self-care that can connect you back to knowing who your support people are. You'll be introduced to tools that support you to tune in to your energy and help you feel grounded and present. These are tools to help you develop your self-care muscle.

An elephant in the room . . . or is that a herd of elephants?

There is a herd of elephants in the room when it comes to self-care. Some of these elephants include:

- Self-care lacks conceptual clarity.
- Self-care lacks a shared vision.
- Self-care is not prioritised by individuals, families and communities.
- Self-care is the first recommendation of every healthcare encounter, but advice lacks specifics and practical guidance.
- We have been indoctrinated to feel guilty when we engage in self-care actions.
- We have been taught to place the needs of others above our own.

We also know that putting self-care into action, developing our practices and most definitely maintaining habits that help us to flourish and feel the best we can is hard. During the inaugural conference of the International Centre for Self-Care Research¹ held in Rome, Italy, in June 2019, colleagues came together to look at the problems and challenges with self-care. They identified six knowledge gaps that need to be addressed:

1. The influence of **habit** formation on behaviour change
2. **Resilience** in the face of stressful life events that interfere with self-care
3. The **influence of culture** on self-care behavioural choices
4. The **difficulty performing** self-care with multiple chronic conditions
5. Self-care in persons with **severe mental illness**
6. The **influence of others** (care partners, family, peer supporters and healthcare professionals) on self-care

These are crucial points to recognise how we approach self-care. They are the self-care elephants in the room at a macro level. They provide us with some further insights into why self-care is complex and rather tricky.

Let's talk about some of these elephants from a micro level.

It feels limiting

The term self-care can feel limiting or narrow for some, especially the 'self' part. Self-care is a term that sounds like we drop everything else to care for ourselves, and only ourselves. But this is rarely true. Self-care is actually holistic. It is not about just you. It is about you looking after you so you can

look after others, in whatever form that is. Professionally as a teacher, you need to care for you to care for your students and colleagues. If you are constantly feeling drained, how can the best of you be on show? If you are constantly exhausted, how can you possibly have energy for yourself, let alone for others? And then personally, what does that mean for other people in your life that you care for and love? If you don't care for yourself, how can you be truly present in their company?

Self-care can be about you looking after you so when you support a loved one/friend/colleague/student and anyone really in need, you can embody deep listening, full attention and be present for them while not feeling drained or like your needs are not being met. It is about the boundaries you put in place. It is about looking after you, so you can care as appropriate for someone else who may need help with a task, or their physical or mental health. Self-care is about you managing, maintaining, developing and protecting your wellbeing so your mind and body feel strong. It is about nourishing you.

Think about it from this perspective: Have you ever been around someone who is stressed, not coping or really unhappy and they transfer this energy to you? You don't have to know the person that well. It might be a waiter in a café whose energy suggests that they do not want to be there. At home it could be a family member who is under pressure to complete something and they begin ranting at everyone. At work it may be a colleague who is so stressed that their need to control everything and know every detail about everything leads them to aggressively dominate meetings. These people are hard to be around. And when we are not feeling 100% it is very easy to wear their stress. Stress is highly transferable, and it takes a toll on everybody. Sustained stress depletes our immune system and increases the likelihood of us becoming physically sick. Stress has an impact on our clarity of mind and self-awareness. Stress we create and stress deflected onto us does not feel good. This is why developing a self-care toolbox of resources is essential for us all. It becomes a part of who we are, how we operate. As we develop, maintain and protect our wellbeing we begin to develop a language or way to do and talk about wellbeing that enhances our self-care, and indeed this has a positive domino effect. Self-care isn't limiting; it has an expansiveness that allows us all to grow and be the best we can be the more we do it.

Not all emotions are created equal: negative bias

The phrase ‘we are hardwired’ is often used. One aspect of hardwiring that receives the most attention is the tendency to focus on the negative. This is called a negativity bias, or sometimes positive-negative asymmetry. It is also associated with dwelling on things, focusing on the bad news, recalling insults more frequently, reacting strongly to negative feedback, for example. We can notice this in ourselves and others. When I am tired, I tend to focus on the negative rather than see opportunities for learning. Negative bias can have a significant influence on your behaviour, decision-making and relationships – including the relationship with yourself.

The science says negative bias means we are led towards focusing our attention more on the bad things that may or may not happen.² When we do this, we make these events seem more important than they really are. We feature them in our thoughts. We ruminate, with thoughts going around and around in our mind, often catastrophising the negative. Our brain behaves this way as it is trying to help us to process what is happening and to support us to make sense of the world. As a result, we pay more attention to negative events than positive ones. We lean towards learning more from the negative outcomes and experiences, and we make decisions based on negative information rather than positive evidence.³ However, it is rarely helpful if we stay in this thought pattern.

What are the factors that influence our engagement with self-care?

- 1. Motivation** – Negative bias influences your motivation to complete a task and really shows up when we think about self-care as being something that is framed as an incentive (do it and you will feel better), versus seeing it as a gain that helps you avoid the loss of something (for example, I engage in regular self-care strategies to help me feel more energised so I can avoid or reduce the feeling of stress or exhaustion after a long day in the classroom).

Negative bias kicks in when we end up focused on the dwelling aspect or what we will lose. In self-care an example is healthy eating. We know we should eat more vegetables, but we really love chocolate. We have been indoctrinated to think that eating healthily is about protein and vegetables only, rather than thinking about a well-rounded diet that can include little less healthy treats every now and then. When we engage in this act of self-care, we want to focus on what we will gain, for example, healthy gut, more energy, clear skin, functioning brain, sleeping better,

rather than dwelling on what we are going to miss out on to achieve the goal associated with this self-care action, ie, less or no chocolate.⁴

2. **Greater attention to bad news** – Bad news seems to resonate with us more than good and so there is a tendency to perceive it as truthful.⁵ When it comes to self-care one of the common go-to points we tell ourselves is that, I hear it is hard so I do not do it. Or, self-care takes time and I do not have time.
3. **Relationships** – Negative bias can lead to thinking the worst in people. We can create stories about how someone may react or respond to particular events or situations. We easily make assumptions that can lead to resentment. This is where awareness of the brain's tendency to fixate on negative interactions is vital. By understanding how the brain works we can reframe situations. We can also cultivate our relationships with a curiosity that enables us to understand rather than expect the worst. So, if we connect back to self-care, I often hear colleagues say, my partner or children will not like it if I take the time to go out for that one-hour walk. A story is created that there will be resentment towards oneself. This resentment can spiral towards others who make this time, or to a resentment towards your partner or children who you perceive will not support you. Thinking the worst in this situation doesn't seem productive, and indeed I would probably guarantee that you have created a scenario that is not true.
4. **Decision-making** – Negative bias can lead us to fear the consequences of an action and focus on 'what if' thinking. Research tells us that people tend to spend more time focusing on what they might lose rather than what they might gain.⁶

It is Barbara Fredrickson's *broaden-and-build* theory that lets us really dig deep into this topic with a flip to focusing on positive emotions as a way to build our resources for flourishing that interrupt negative bias.⁷

*The more we engage with positive emotions, the more
we have an upward spiral that impacts our own wellbeing,
and those around us.*

As we progress through the book, I will identify strategies you can use to speak back to this negative bias by exploring positive psychology

interventions, such as gratitude, acts of kindness and working with our strengths. But right now, let's identify what's going on for you in this space so we can reconnect and help you recognise your sphere of control.

DO: *Short circuit your stress*

Intention: Notice your stress triggers that lead to negative thinking.

Attention: Draw attention to your blockers. Just notice them, do not judge yourself.

Attitude: Be curious and honest.

PERMAH links: P, E

If you can observe what happens to your body, mind and emotions in these moments you can begin to react differently. Think about these questions:

Have you noticed patterns in your reactions to stress, pressure or feeling under the pump? What are these?

Are there reactions you can easily interrupt?

Are there repeated patterns you are ignoring?

Are there patterns you are aware of or perhaps someone else has told you about that you are not ready to address yet, but could moving forward?

Take a moment to observe how stress or pressure impacts upon you. Do this without judgement.

Then think about what events, tasks or people might cause this for you. You may want to reflect on different scenarios to help see what is happening in your life.

Can you identify a few common stress moments?

How might you navigate these in the future? Brainstorm some steps or activities or ways of thinking that may interrupt these responses or change how you react.

Make a note. Set an intention for these.

What is in your sphere of control?

We all have the ability to control ourselves. Awareness enables us to react to things that are out of our influence or control. Part of controlling the reaction is acknowledging the feelings you are experiencing when you are confronted by one or more of the things that are outside your control. You can then use the steps involved in the activities '*I can control . . .*' and '*3 Ps and ABCDE*' to assist you with your sphere of control at times when you are feeling stressed or anxious.

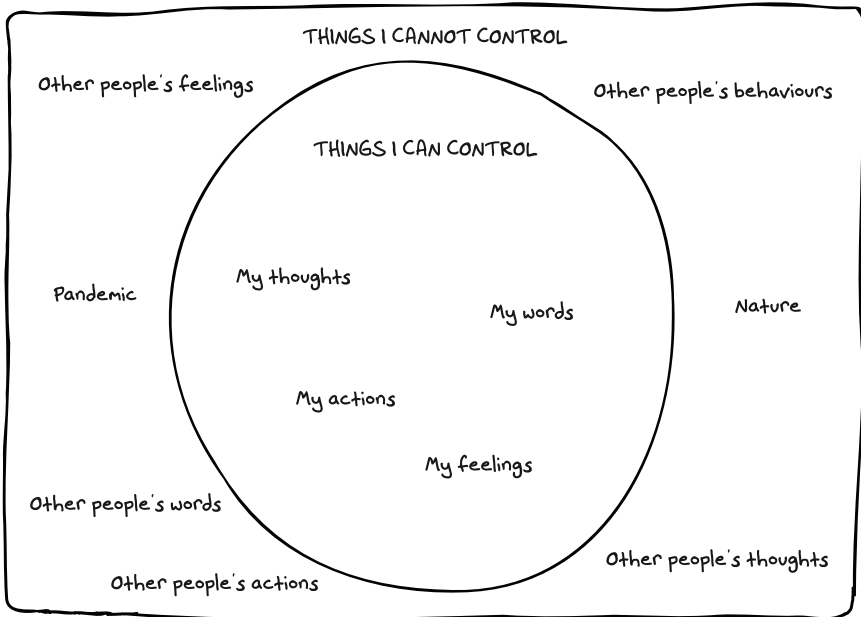


Figure 3.1 Your spheres of control.

DO: *I can control . . .*

Intention: Reset your focus.

Attention: Draw your attention to your sphere of control.

Attitude: Come to the practice with an open-mindedness and perspective. To be open-minded is to be willing to consider new ideas

without judgement. To have perspective is to come at this openness with an attitude that is willing to consider different points of view while not narrowing your learning or thoughts about others.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Let's connect with some perspective. I use it as a go-to tool when I feel overwhelmed. I often turn the lists into circles of influence and connection to support gaining perspective.

If you think of your situation right now, or life generally, what can you control?

Make a list.

My list begins like this:

- My kindness to myself
- Turning off the news
- Doomscrolling (a habit of scrolling through social media and news feeds where one obsessively seeks negative information)
- Who I can reach out to
- My positive emotions
- The fuel I feed myself to help me feel the most energised I can be
- My self-care routines and habits that empower me
- People in my life who energise me
- How I present myself at work
- The environment I scaffold in my classroom

As a teacher, what can you control? Make a list.

Now make a list of the things you think or ruminate about, or head into 'what if?' thinking about, that you cannot control.

Reflect upon what you notice across your three lists. What surprises are there in terms of how you can react to a situation? What tweaks might you need to make? What realisations have you feeling empowered? Do you need to reframe anything or even remove it? What might you need to challenge?

The 3 Ps

Martin Seligman studied the way people analyse positive and negative events and identified that three key areas of self-talk will influence whether we take a resilient, optimistic or a less-helpful approach. He identified these as the Three Ps (3 Ps): permanence, pervasiveness and personalisation.⁸

The 3 Ps can be used as a lens through which we can view our self-talk. And this tool is especially helpful for that unhelpful self-talk, such as repetitive rumination on memories, fears or problems. Optimists tend to apply the 3 Ps to positive experiences but not negative ones, while pessimists tend to do the opposite. It is good to note here that optimism is about the future, and it does not mean that someone who is optimistic is naïve about negative aspects of behaviours or events. Optimists choose to focus on the fullness of the other half of the glass or find the silver linings in a cloud.

We can learn to look at our experiences and self-talk optimistically. The ABCDE framework can assist us in realigning our self-talk to a more constructive, optimistic and resilient approach:

- A** Adversity – a negative event, situation or experience
- B** Belief – your interpretation of the event (the 3 Ps)
- C** Consequence – your feelings and behaviour, and how you respond to the event
- D** Disputation – find evidence that disputes your belief (use the optimist approach to the 3 Ps)
- E** Energisation – tap into the positive energy created by the successful disputation and celebrate that achievement to build your optimistic approach

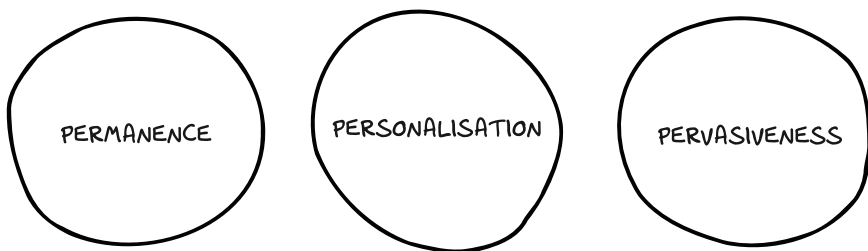


Figure 3.2 Martin Seligman's 3 Ps.

For example:

(Adversity) I've just graduated from my teaching degree and everyone else has a job but me.

(Belief) This is because I'm not a good teacher, I don't have the right experience. Maybe my methods are wrong, or I just didn't have the right professional experience placements to allow me to shine. My CV isn't of a high enough standard and I'm not good enough.

(Consequence) I won't get a job. Why bother trying? Any job interviews I go for, I won't be successful at. They won't like me. Every other graduate is better than me.

(Disputation) Actually it's not me, it's the time of the year that I am applying. I've had several successful placements and voluntary experiences, with those who mentored me commenting on how I am developing into a teacher who will have so much to offer. I have a lot to give as a teacher. I'm going to work on tweaking my CV and how I present myself to be able to gain an interview so when an opportunity comes my way, I am ready. I might even look at some further study to assist my skills and knowledge base in areas that I am really passionate about.

(Energisation) When I align to my passion and my true self, I can do this. I am optimistic. I know I can do this. I have a support team around me to ask for advice. I can recognise, interrupt and dispute my negative thoughts to stop myself from spiralling down into a slump. I know I will be successfully appointed for a graduate teaching job. I know the right place will come at the right time where I know I can contribute.

DO: 3 Ps and ABCDE

Intention: Explore the place of positive self-talk and optimism for constructive and resilient thinking.

Attention: Draw your attention to a situation you have been avoiding.

Attitude: Openness to your experience and self-talk.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Reflect on a situation related to your self-care and professional life.

Now work through each stage of this framework.

- A Adversity** – What is the negative event?
- B Belief** – What is your interpretation of the event using the 3 Ps?
- C Consequence** – What are/were your feelings and behaviour? How did you respond to the event?
- D Disputation** – Find evidence that disputes your belief (use the optimist approach to the 3 Ps).
- E Energisation** – Tap into the positive energy created by the successful disputation and celebrate this.

What do you notice about this process? How have you been able to reframe or reset?

What surprises you about your shift(s) in approach to self-care?

What happens when it just isn't happening for me?

I have moments when I get cranky. I become really tough on myself. I get frustrated. I make mistakes, attention to detail goes out the window (like I have a haze over my eyes hiding all the details). I get snappy at my partner (even though they are the closest person to me, and I know they are trying to help, protect and comfort me). I withdraw. Do you have moments like this or something similar?

What I have learned over the years is when I am sick or exhausted, I must listen to my mind and body. I have to tune in to 'the story' I am telling myself and those moments where I end up focusing on the negative and refocus with a reminder to self to acknowledge what is working. I'm becoming better at observing myself at these times, recalibrating much sooner. When I do this, I use these questions as a check-in to help me show myself self-compassion:

What is going on here?

How am I reacting to this situation?

Why am I reacting this way?

Can my emotions tell me something?

What am I saying to myself?

What behaviours am I embracing that are not so great for me right now?

What are my repeated patterns?

What little roadblocks do I put up for myself?

How am I sabotaging myself?

Who can help me?

Who hinders me?

What can I do?

Note to self: Self-compassion will be further explored in Chapter 4.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Have there been times when it's just not happening for you?

Intention: Reflect on when you were hard on yourself during a stressful time.

Attention: Pay attention to those thoughts, feelings and body reactions.

Attitude: Don't judge yourself; notice, label and be mindfully aware.

PERMAH links: P, E, M

Note in your journal a time or times when self-care is not happening for you especially when there is or has been a stressful situation. What is/was happening? How do/did you feel? What did someone else say to you? What contextual influences may be of consideration? Does this stress happen a lot? Are there any patterns? Are there any triggers? What do you notice happens for you emotionally and cognitively? What do you feel you are missing in your self-care at these moment(s)? What is possible?

How do we know when everything is not OK?

We all react differently when we are under pressure, stressed, anxious or just not at our best. Some of these might be familiar to you:

- Sleep issues (feels like not enough or just want to sleep or wake up in the night)
- Moody or irritable
- Snappy
- Angry or frustrated
- Low energy
- Low focus
- Low motivation
- Low inspiration or imagination
- Creative flow stops
- Push people away or distance yourself from others
- Relationship issues
- Feeling isolated or not belonging
- Hard to achieve at work
- Loss of meaning
- Smiles and laughs go missing
- Stop exercising
- Make bad food choices
- Cry (or go for a period of trying to hold it in)
- Stress

Anxiety
Depression
Burnout
Blame
Feel overwhelmed
Experience shame or guilt
Make ourselves feel smaller

It will be different for all of us, but you may resonate with some of these responses. Remember our self-care principles here: don't compare and don't judge. What is most important is to notice what happens for you. Draw on your professional support team here as required.

What can I do to stop myself hitting rock bottom?

During the first year of the pandemic I asked the question in my research about self-care: *What do you do when you reach low levels and want to stop yourself hitting rock bottom?* The results were a surprise, but really affirming that even during times of unknown, stress and fear there are so many different strategies and practices open to us. Here are some suggestions that were shared to inspire you or affirm that you are not alone:

Read a book, knowing that when you read a book that sparks your interest it can be a moment where you can pause and just be with the story. It can help you cry, express emotions and ponder as you identify with characters. A book can transport you to another context.

Force myself to step back and remember what matters most and stick to focusing on what I can control.

Surround myself with friends, family and close colleagues.
Talking helps.

Exercise, small doses can do wonders.

Tell people how I am feeling.

When I arrive home and I see my daughters smiling at me.

I have an amazing partner who gets it.

I go outdoors.

I seek professional help.

Try to fall back into good habits – exercise, meditation,
eating healthily,

stepping outside of the worry, staying in the moment, giving
myself time and space,

being self-aware enough to not make decisions.

Watch a film.

Chat to a friend.

Look forward and pretend you are 90 years old, and ask
yourself, does it really matter?

Listen to, really enjoy and savour some really beautiful music.

Spend time in the garden.

Play basketball and shoot some hoops outside.

Go for a long walk in the country with my camera.

Send positive messages on social media.

Bake.

Walk the dog.

Crochet (focusing on the counting and pattern).

Cake and tea.

Carry out a 'tour of the garden' when you get home.

Run.

Date night.

Talk to my coach.

Use bath salts.

Swim in the sea.

Talk to others to try and gain perspective.

Sewing, knitting, drawing or another making activity that has you working in a tactile way.

Notice that everyone uses different practices. The variety in the tools is inspiring for us as we continually build our toolbox for self-care.

Seeking out other perspectives

From a strengths-based approach, perspective is the ability to see the bigger picture in life. Perspective often has us referring to other ways of thinking about or doing something. When we seek out and open up ourselves to other ways of viewing a situation, we can consider multiple sides or options to a situation. With perspective you can weigh up other ways of considering something before you make a decision. To do this you have permission to be super curious and courageous by reading, researching, asking questions and/or listening. When embracing perspective, you can simultaneously think about life lessons and how you wish to conduct yourself while thinking through what might be the best situation, result and/or approach for you.

Another way to discover other perspectives is to seek professional help. Professional help can come in many different forms. Traditionally many of us think of a psychologist or GP. But seeking professional help could also be with other health and wellbeing practitioners such as a coach, social worker or allied health practitioner.

Personally, I strongly advocate seeking professional help when you need to seek a perspective. I have a support crew across many fields of expertise. It's important to check in with the experts who have the knowledge and systems established to help you for your specific situation. Their fresh perspective and guiding questions can support you process situations or consider alternatives.

There are many ways we can do this; you are not alone and there are amazing services available to help you.

A GP can support you with a mental health plan, and if you are a pre-service teacher still studying you will have access to free services such as GPs and counsellors at your tertiary institution. At every stage of your career, you always have access to numerous telephone and online support services.

Help on the end of the telephone or online in Australia

Lifeline

Lifeline is a non-profit organisation that provides free support in Australia. Volunteer trained crisis supporters provide suicide prevention services, mental health support and emotional assistance, via telephone, face-to-face and online.

Hours: 24 hours/7 days a week, or chat online 7pm–midnight (AEST) or text 7pm–midnight (AEST)

Call: 13 11 14

www.lifeline.org.au

eheadspace

Provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services to young people aged 12 to 25 years and their families.

Once you create an account, you can connect 1:1 online from 9am–1am (AEST) 7 days a week. It's a confidential, free and safe space to talk about what's going on. Calling hours: 9am–1am (AEST) 7 days a week

Call: 1800 650 890

<https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/>

MensLine Australia

A professional telephone and online support and information service for Australian men.

Hours: 24 hours/7 days a week

Call: 1300 78 99 78

<https://mensline.org.au>

FriendLine

Supports anyone who's feeling lonely, needs to reconnect or just wants a chat. All conversations with FriendLine are anonymous.

Hours: 10am–8pm 7 days a week, or chat online 6pm–8pm Monday–Friday

Call: 1800 424 287

<https://friendline.org.au/>

MindSpot

A free telephone and online service for people with stress, worry, anxiety, low mood or depression. It provides online assessment and treatment for anxiety and depression.

MindSpot is not an emergency or instant response service.

Hours: 8am–8pm Monday–Friday, 8am–6pm Saturday (AEST)

Call: 1800 61 44 34

www.mindspot.org.au/

Butterfly Foundation

A free, confidential service that provides information, counselling and treatment referral for people with eating disorders, and body image and related issues.

Hours: 8am–midnight (AEST)/7 days a week

Call: 1800 33 4673

<https://butterfly.org.au>

Blue Knot Foundation Helpline

(Formerly ASCA Professional Support Line)

Provides help, information, support or referral for adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse, their partners, family and friends, health professionals

and anyone in the workplace working with people who have experienced childhood trauma and abuse.

Hours: 9am–5pm (AEST)/7 days a week

Call: 1300 657 380

<https://blueknot.org.au>

Beyond Blue

Aims to increase awareness of depression and anxiety and reduce stigma around these.

24 hours/7 days a week

Call: 1300 22 4636

www.beyondblue.org.au

When you ask for help

Seeking help might be hard or unfamiliar for you. It is normal and not uncommon to experience hesitancy. You might feel embarrassed, shame or that you are taking up someone else's time. But asking for help will seriously change your life. It is often making the first step that is the most difficult.

Reaching out feels different for everyone, but a few points that may assist you are that:

- Professionals listen deeply.
- Sessions can be in a variety of different formats: face-to-face, virtual and/or via telephone.
- It is encouraged to ask lots of questions about the process.
- Ask for recommendations from trusted people in your life or your GP.
- Sessions are not designed to embarrass you or make you feel uncomfortable by exposing you. They are about supporting you, providing some options, highlighting insights and supporting you to grow.
- Sometimes you may cry which is also very normal and a way to release your feelings. It can also be cathartic.
- You can say, 'I'm not ready to go there yet' with a topic that comes up; you set the pace.

- Sometimes you outgrow your support person, this is totally normal. You can find someone else as you move through periods in your life.
- If you feel uncomfortable, find someone else.
- You will often feel exhausted after a session; allow your body and mind to process the experience, hydrate, be gentle on yourself and rest.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Make a list of support people

Intention: Prepare a list of go-to support people who can assist you. This list can set up your future self when you are feeling overwhelmed, confused, worried or isolated.

Attention: Think about people you know and professionals. Perhaps think about professionals from a variety of caring professions that you see now, have been recommended to you or you have seen in the past. Everyone on the list will offer you something different, not only due to their role but also because of the relationship and connection you have with them. So you may have similar listed professionals or people in your circle of trust, but they offer something ever so slightly different or respond in a certain way in certain situations.

Attitude: Think about those who can help you now and in the future, acknowledging that every now and then this list will need revision as people in your life and your needs change and grow.

PERMAH links: P, R

Make a list of people who can help you and offer you support.

Here are some prompts for you:

- Doctor
- Social worker
- Psychologist
- Personal coach
- Professional coach

- Allied Health professionals
- Trusted people from work
- Family members
- Close friends
- Trusted people in your community
- Trusted online forums that specialise in wellbeing
- Trusted helplines you can call
- Others

Connecting to breath

Connection to breath is one of the easiest things you can do to maintain your self-care. It is so simple that we often forget about it. It is one of my essential grounding self-care strategies. It helps me be more heart centred. Others describe it as moving from 'my head to back into my whole body'. Connection to breath is a great starting place to support tuning in to your needs and refining or resetting your self-care muscle.

I use mindfulness awareness, and especially connection to my breath to tune in to my energy levels emotionally, cognitively and physically. This tuning in helps me identify both what is going on and an opportunity to pause as I restore myself and rejuvenate. It may help you in those moments where you feel overwhelmed, such as the end of a difficult day. It can help me in the moment as well especially if in complex situations such as a tense staff meeting or being in the same space as someone else's distress. And as you develop your self-care toolbox and become more conscious of your triggers, reactions and needs, breathing is one of the strategies we can apply immediately. It is a power micro-moment as well as a longer sustained practice.

The next section introduces four breathing techniques. All of these practices align to the H(earth) from the PERMAH framework and encourage you to be present in this moment, with attention to your breath with an attitude of self-awareness.

DO: *Diaphragm breathing*

Good breathing techniques assist in the management of relaxation but also are helpful for support of airflow. This is particularly important for teachers as we talk a lot. This breathing technique is designed to make you more aware of regularly practicing diaphragmatic breathing, which will benefit all your bodily systems. The diaphragm is a key element of breathing, focusing on the flow of blood at the base of the lungs near the ribcage, where the diaphragm is situated.

STEP 1

Lie on your back with your eyes closed.
Relax your jaw.

HINTS

Make sure your jaw is relaxed.
You may need to stretch and/or massage your jaw and mouth muscles slightly if super tight.
Breathe regularly.

STEP 2

Rest one hand lightly on your abdomen, just beneath your breastbone.
Rest the fingers of your other hand on your chest.

STEP 3

Inhale through your nose slowly and smoothly. As you do so your hand on your abdomen should rise slightly as your abdomen moves upwards. There should be no movement of your other hand placed on your chest.

Keep your abdomen as relaxed as possible.

STEP 4

Exhale through your mouth slowly and smoothly. Your lips should be apart slightly. As you do so the hand on your abdomen should move downwards.

STEP 5

Keep repeating the breathing pattern.
Each time your hand on your abdomen should rise when you inhale and lower when you exhale.

Remember your chest should not move.

STEP 6

Once you have completed this breathing exercise you should maintain your lying position. Relax and lower your arms to beside your body. Breathe regularly, connecting into this pattern of slowing down your breath.

DO: Focus breathing

This breathing technique is designed to make you focus on diffusing difficult feelings. The technique is particularly good for when under pressure and we need to re-direct emotional energy (eg, nerves, worry, fear, anxiety) into constructive energy.

STEP 1

Sit or lie in a comfortable position with your spine in good alignment.

STEP 2

Close your eyes and breathe in and out in an even pattern through your nose.

STEP 3

Shift your attention to the part of your body where you feel a tension or stress the most.

STEP 4

Direct your breath into that area. Breathe in through your nose slowly, smoothly and deeply, as you remain relaxed. Maintain an awareness of the emotion as you breathe. Feel and experience this emotion without fear.

STEP 5

As you exhale slowly and evenly, visualise the emotion, that is, allow it to disappear and evaporate with the outgoing breath.

STEP 6

As you feel comfortable, continue with the breathing pattern but now think of a new, pleasant emotion.

STEP 7

Breathe into your chosen part of your body again.

HINTS

While in a comfortable position make sure your throat, jaw and facial muscles are relaxed. Also make sure shoulders, chest, abdomen, back, arms and hands are relaxed. You may need to wiggle a bit to relax these muscles depending on where you are holding your tension.

This most commonly is your neck, stomach, shoulders or jaw.

Remember not to strain your body.

Repeat this step a number of times until you feel comfortable with the breathing patterns and focus.

Visualise sending the emotion out of your body. Repeat until you feel the emotion lessening.

You may think of comfort ability, focus, passion, love, affection, happiness, etc.

Remember to breathe through your nose.

STEP 8

Visualise sending a warm, positive feeling towards the emotion originally felt when experiencing a stressful situation or emotional distress.

STEP 9

Continue focusing on your breathing, open your eyes when ready.

Repeat this step until you feel a sense of peace about the emotion you associate with the stressful situation or emotion.

Maintain focused with breathing and positive emotional feeling, leaning into the calmness that has come from your connection to breath and positive emotions.

DO: *Anti-anxiety breathing*

This breathing technique helps you counteract anxiety and panic when coping with any stressful moment, a moment before a meeting . . . even in a meeting, performance nerves, public speaking, parent-teacher interviews or teaching in front of others. It is particularly helpful for coping with difficult emotions such as fear, apprehension, frustration and anger.

STEP 1

Sit upright and look straight ahead, with your shoulders back and relaxed. You may close your eyes or keep them open with a lowered gaze. Relax your jaw.

STEP 2

Inhale smoothly and deeply through your nose without strain.

STEP 3

Exhale through your nose as slowly, smoothly and completely as you can. Focus attention on your abdomen, near your navel.

HINTS

As you inhale you should feel as if your body is slowly and gently filling with air.

STEP 4

Before inhaling again, you need to mentally count 'one elephant', 'two elephants' and 'three elephants'.

STEP 5

Repeat the process again. Inhale slowly and exhale smoothly and deeply through your nose. Hold and mentally count 'one elephant', 'two elephants' and 'three elephants'.

STEP 6

Keep repeating this process at your own speed in smooth succession.

This prolongs your exhalation and prevents hyperventilation.

This is great to slow down your breathing rate to enable you to become calmer and more present in the moment.

DO: *Transition breathing*

Sometimes we carry burdens with us. They get heavier and heavier; you know when they keep going around and around in your mind. We keep replaying the worry, and if you are like me, every version of a response, alternative or perspective is problem solved in the mind. There comes a time when we need to let them go. One strategy is a breathing transition. In this strategy we set the intention to let go, to slow down, to stop and be present with the moment, rather than positioned within our mind and not present. You can try it as well.

STEP 1

Put the burden down. Drop the burden like you would a heavy rope.

STEP 2

You can pick it up again later (if you wish).

STEP 3

Bring your attention back to your breath.

HINTS

Visualise your burden, stress or worry. And begin the process of shifting your rumination.

STEP 4

Pay attention to your breath and apply, if you like, the conscious thought of breathing in for three counts, holding for four counts and breathing out for five. Repeat a few times or for as long as you require until you are refocused and present with your breath and your body as the diaphragm and lungs do their job.

STEP 5

Maintain this breathing pattern, noticing the slowing down of your heart rate. While still breathing this way, purposely bring your attention to the task you need to attend to.

STEP 6

Take a moment to be present with the intention of this task. Think about: What is it you want to achieve? How will you do this? What will you be focusing on? How will you be present? How much time will you honour this burden? What gift can you give yourself by fully dropping the burden?

STEP 7

Be aware of your mind and your sensations in your whole body as these intention(s) are set.

Count:

Three inhale
Four hold
Five exhale

You may find you slightly reframe burden, stress or worry as part of your stepping back/dropping the rope paired with your current state of calmness.

Make sure they are right for you.
Reframe as many times as you need to.

Your energy: tuning mindfully into how you restore

Having considered breathing and the way it grounds and supports us, we also need to think about our energy. Energy is a huge influencer of our self-care. It can help us and hinder us. We can think about energy levels in four ways:

Physical
Emotional
Spiritual
Mental

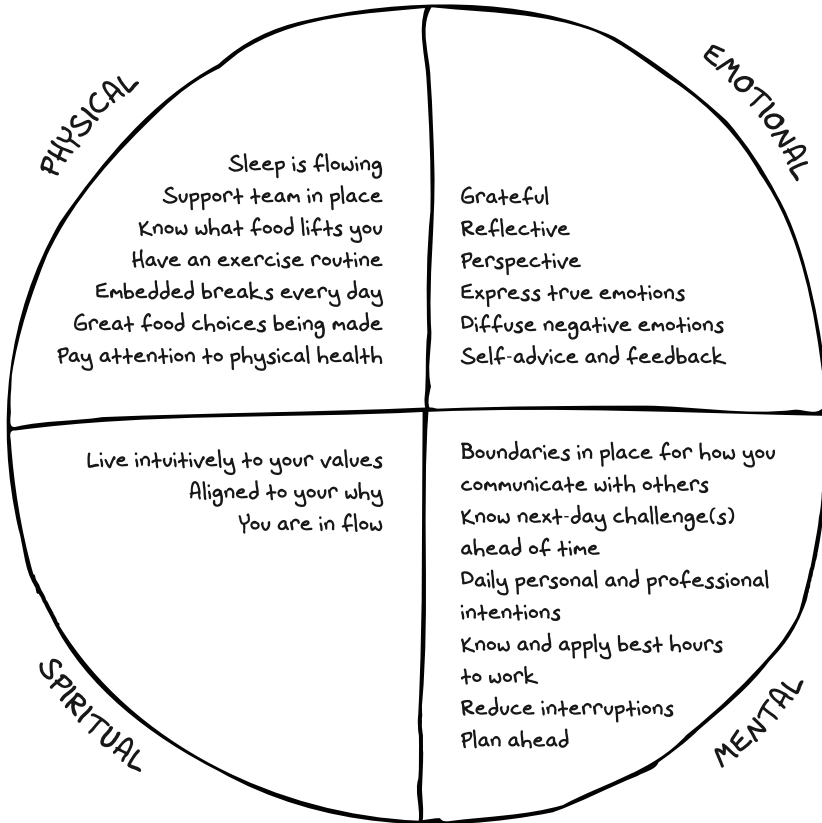


Figure 3.3 Thinking about your energy as you develop, maintain and protect your wellbeing.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Energy tune-in

In thinking about time, when is your energy at its best? How do you protect each of these four areas of your energy? What practices boost these energy levels? What are barriers?

Make note of these in a grid under the overarching guiding question: What do you need?

WHAT DO YOU NEED? <i>Think about a time when this type of energy is performing at its best, acknowledging environment, context, relationships, food, hydration, activities, etc.</i>	ENERGY TYPE	
	Physical energy	Emotional energy
	Spiritual energy	Mental energy

What patterns are revealed for you? What proactive actions are obvious for you? Are there some gaps that can be inspiration points for you to explore further?

Where do we place our energy on the self-care action and energy progression point scale?

If you don't prioritise your life, someone else will.

Greg McKeown's book *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*⁹ changed my life. McKeown also has a podcast, many other resources and has researched across many fields. His analysis of where to place energy is revolutionary.

McKeown asks us to consider where we allocate our energy and how we engage with making a choice between 'I have to' and 'I choose to'. In other words, we are asked to consider what is essential and non-essential. These can be applied to the self-care toolbox filed under H(ealth) in PERMAH, as it aligns with helping you look after your mind, and to be aware of your entire mind, body and spirit. Specifically, this tool assists in protecting your energy

and contributes to your health by nurturing your thinking or your mind, specifically in being mindfully present with your needs.

As I have processed McKeown's ideas, I have developed a self-care energy progression point scale that helps us be aware of where we place our energy across the self-care model. Bringing a self-awareness to how we engage with our energy when approaching self-care is vital. I've identified each extreme in the progression point scale, but you will move along it depending on all the variables of your life. What this progression point scale offers is a way of providing you with an approach to reflect on both your personal and/or professional energy.

Tuning in to you more

As you explore your self-care, you'll notice that sometimes your muscle may be tired or weak and at other times in peak condition. In this chapter you learned to observe aspects of your behaviour and some techniques to use to establish a stronger understanding of yourself. In the next chapter we build on these, focusing on self-compassion and the critical self-love question: How do you treat yourself like a close friend?

JOURNAL PROMPT: Where do you sit on the self-care energy progression point scale?

Where do you sit along the self-care energy progression point scale? What are your celebration points? What are areas that you had not previously thought of and could benefit from some attention? Are there gaps for you? Are there real strengths that only now you are aware of that would be of great benefit if they appeared more often in your daily life?

Self-care energy progression point scale

DIMENSIONS OF
SELF-CARE

Self-compassion

FEELING OUT OF CONTROL
OF MY SELF-CARE

Self-critical
Talk to myself in a way
I would never to a friend
who I am caring for
Put everyone else before
myself



FEELING IN CONTROL OF MY
SELF-CARE

Celebrate and appreciate repeated
small steps
Kindness to self and self-care needs
each day,
tuning in to what is needed
Care for myself to care for others

Time

'I have to' approach/attitude/
thought response/self-talk
Forget
Don't action
Collect practices but don't
make the time to engage
with them
Unsure where time has gone
and why I haven't been able
to implement any practice or
strategy
Feeling overwhelmed often



'I choose to'
I will focus on a few strategies that
help me today
Micro-moments each day that are
energising
Plan for strategies across various time
points that support me to feel good
across a variety of areas of wellbeing
Have a clear plan
Reflect regularly to align to my self-
care action plan
Regularly make the time to check in
with myself

DIMENSIONS OF SELF-CARE

FEELING OUT OF CONTROL OF MY SELF-CARE

FEELING IN CONTROL OF MY SELF-CARE

Habits and boundaries

I'm all things to everyone
I have porous and/or unhealthy boundaries
Say 'yes' to everything
Never really finish anything, but involved in lots of things



I choose to focus on a few things
Focus on a few things and do them well
Develop healthy boundaries
Remove the repeated constraints and blockers
Create a pattern of cue and reward attached to repeated small choices
'No' is not a bad word . . . it is 'no, not now', 'no, after I . . .', or 'thank you, but not at this stage'

Empowerment

Numbing behaviour (eg, chronic busyness, alcohol, bad food choices, food coma, overindulging in alcohol)
Energy levels are low
Feel flat
Exhausted
De-energised
Feel out of control, choices and options are not available and/or accessible
Try to put things in action at the last moment



Nourish myself
Implement a wide variety of self-care strategies and practices across all wellbeing areas
Energised
I align to my intention
Excited, empowered and aligned most of the time
Flow aligned
Feel in control, choices and options are available and accessible
Plans and pauses to tune in to what energises me

**DIMENSIONS OF
SELF-CARE**

Mindfulness

**FEELING OUT OF CONTROL
OF MY SELF-CARE**

Mindless actions
Not present
Judgemental about own self-care (and others)
Sit in rumination about what doesn't work
Forget to listen to self and needs

**FEELING IN CONTROL OF MY
SELF-CARE**

Present with self-care strategy for right now
Aware of triggers that block actioning self-care practices and strategies
Curious with own self-care – explores, asks questions, inquires, listens
Self-aware of needs and how these change
Is gentle on oneself as explores baseline practices and strategies, while discovers new ones

You may also be interested in . . .

Websites

Mindful Self-care Question Cards

www.exploreandcreateco.com/buy/mindful-self-care-question-cards

'Reminder to self' self-care series of short practical strategies www.exploreandcreateco.com/reminderto-self-series

Podcasts

On the reg: An emergency Melbourne pandemic lockdown broadcast!

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/on-the-reg/id1526042481?i=1000524032547>

Greg McKeown The Essentialist Podcast

<https://gregmckeown.com/podcast/>

Notes

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- 6 Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(4), 323–370; Kahneman, D., & Tversky, A. (1984). Choices, values, and frames. *American Psychologist*, 39(4), 341–350.
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- 8 Seligman, M. (1991). *Learned optimism*. Random House.
- 9 McKeown, G. (2014). *Essentialism: The disciplined pursuit of less*. Currency.

4

Cultivating your self-compassion

Self-compassion is key to self-care and is therefore central to the self-care framework shared in this book. It enables you to think about yourself when it comes to caring for you. In turn, caring for yourself enables you to care for others better. This approach is healthier than putting all your energy into caring for others and forgetting yourself.

In essence, self-compassion is being kinder to ourselves. In doing so we are less judgmental of ourselves and more aware that everybody is trying to be the best they can be. Self-compassion is very closely associated with mindfulness because it centres on being more aware. For teachers self-compassion can be challenging. We often get caught up in caring for others, especially our students, which often leaves us with low energy, fewer resources and little time for ourselves. In this chapter I unpack self-compassion, explain why it is important and introduce strategies and practices for your toolbox for self-care. This will highlight that caring for you is an essential aspect of your self-care. It is a part of showing yourself self-love.

Treating myself like a friend

Think of self-compassion as the response to the question: How do I treat myself like a friend? Self-compassion is a way to feel safe and protected, and it draws our attention to how we respond to ourselves. We are encouraged with self-compassion to treat ourselves with kindness, a gentleness. With self-compassion we treat ourselves like we would a friend in times of difficulty or when struggling. We can learn to treat ourselves in a way

that allows us to embrace our lives, despite any inner conflict or perceived imperfections.

When we get too caught up in the business of the world, we lose connection with one another, but most significantly ourselves.

Self-compassion research has been led by the American researchers Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer.¹ Their work has been especially influential in mindful self-compassion with evidence-based practice that has shown to have benefits for our wellbeing. Their work has demonstrated that individuals who are more self-compassionate are able to:

- Manage better relationships.
- Experience greater life satisfaction.
- Experience less anxiety and depression.
- Apply their motivation.
- Have the resilience to cope with stressful life situations.

Sometimes I feel like I am alone. I sit in the staffroom, and I don't know what to say. I'm not sure how to be a part of the conversation. My thinking shifts between not being interested in the conversation to how can I be a part of the conversation. Either way I just sit there. Not sure what to do. My feelings of isolation escalate. I don't feel like I belong. I don't know what to do to belong. Can I ever be a part of this staff group? Sometimes I just want to stay in my classroom and hide there. But I know I can't. I'm not sure what to do. How can I find a connection?

Natasha, first-year secondary teacher

I'm just so tired. I've marked all weekend in between trying to catch up with friends, preparation for next week, food shopping, doing the washing and cleaning the house. I'm not feeling rested, but I know I will repeat this all again. Again and again, every week. I just don't think I can keep doing it.

Rebecca, Grade 1 teacher,
graduated three years ago

Natasha and Rebecca's narratives are different, but so relatable. They are a reminder that we all have our own mind chatter, feelings and lived experiences. Every one of us walks around each day with thousands of thoughts. These thoughts can come and go. Some linger for a long time. Some leave, then reappear. Others fester as ruminations that are not so helpful. Others leave and don't return. What is important to remember is that our thoughts and feelings are constantly changing. They shift. At times they feel all consuming.

Everyone is doing their best.

We all struggle, and when we are in the midst of struggle we are hurting; we suffer, feel like we are a failure, inadequate. In these moments we may feel everything is hopeless. Our fight, flight, freeze or fawn responses kick in. For example, we may freeze and not be able to think through what we could do to help ourselves; we often forget about tools we have learned that could help us. We may just want to walk away, give up, leave or quit. Sometimes this feels easier to do when we are in the grips of a struggle. And other times we want to fight. Our anger or frustration can come right up to the surface. We blame, finger point, transfer and go into a rage about what is wrong with everyone else. Or we blame the system. We can move between crying, screaming, silence, withdrawal and even self-sabotaging behaviours. Our thoughts bounce from 'I can't do this' to 'I don't like this' to 'Why did they do this to me?' to 'What is wrong with me?' to 'Why is this happening to me?' to 'Make it stop!' or to 'What is wrong with me?' We find ourselves in

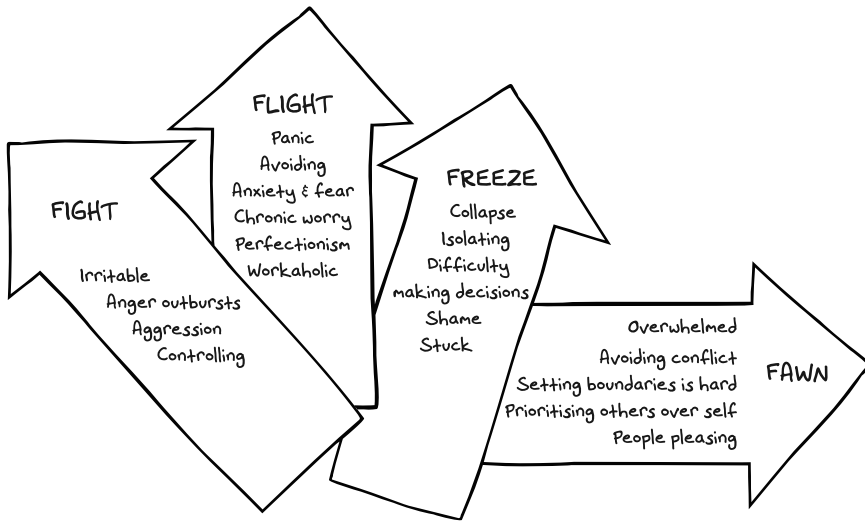


Figure 4.1 The fight, flight, freeze or fawn response.

the midst of self-loathing and rumination.² We move through various stages and combinations of fight, flight, freeze or fawn responses.

What we need at this exact time is self-compassion. We don't need to sit with shame, self-loathing or self-pity. Yet for many of us this is what has been modelled to us and what we fall into. Self-compassion is kindness to ourselves. What suffering can help us learn is that there is another way to talk to ourselves. A new way to treat ourselves.

Self-compassion can be learned, and you can cultivate it. Self-compassion is a journey. On this journey the unexpected can pop up for us, and this can be activating. We close our hearts in this moment. Going back to what we know is not helpful; that is a coping mechanism. Self-compassion helps us to comfort and soothe ourselves when we are able to begin to open up our heart and be much gentler.

Self-compassion springs from the heart during moments of suffering.

Life has ups and downs. This is true for everyone, regardless of how we perceive someone else's life. I think about waves as a metaphor for life,

feelings, thoughts and emotions. Some waves are small or even smooth in a body of water; some crash, some break. Others flow. Some waves are larger than others. The waves change as the weather changes. Some smash us. Others soothe us. Some waves are always small because they are formed in a sheltered cove. Others are a mix of swells and crashing that stir everything underneath. They are like the volatile seascapes we see from cliff tops.

Let's reconnect to my initial question: How do I treat myself like a friend?

JOURNAL PROMPT: How do you treat yourself?

Intention: The intention for this practice is for you to observe yourself. Be gentle with yourself. There is no judgement held here, just notice and label.

Attention: Draw your attention to how you are with yourself. This is a private moment, so be honest but kind to yourself as you celebrate but also notice that sometimes some moments may be undesirable.

Attitude: Come to this practice to reflect with a non-judgemental awareness. Be curious and courageous.

PERMAH links: P, R

In this Plus Minus Interesting (PMI) graphic organiser, think about the question 'How do I treat myself like a friend?' Respond to this question by considering:

Plus – Strengths that may be present for you, positive actions, comments or feelings and examples of strategies or practices.

Minus – Actions, thoughts or feelings that are not supportive to you or would be framed as negative or a deficit way of treating yourself.

Interesting – This could be things you notice in yourself, observations in others who practice self-compassion, tools you may wish to try and questions that you are curious about.

Draw a PMI chart in your journal, it may look like this, or you can experiment with another format.

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING

Every time I have workshopped this activity, I am amazed at the openness to sharing here. I have been privileged to hear insights from many people over the years in response to this question. When I think about how I treat myself, I know at times I can be incredibly harsh on myself. Here is what I would share to this question after many years of learning.

PLUS	MINUS	INTERESTING
<p>My strength of curiosity is a circuit breaker that enables me to observe myself without judgement, and I can begin to pick up the not-so-helpful patterns that emerge.</p> <p>My mindfulness breathing practices support me to become grounded when I remember to reengage with them. In this way I think with my heart, not my head.</p>	<p>Self-talk escalates.</p> <p>Rumination: I create a script inside my head of how I want to respond to a moment or person or situation that is stressing me at the time.</p> <p>I blame myself.</p> <p>I withdraw.</p> <p>I isolate.</p> <p>I am self-critical.</p> <p>The strength of judgement becomes overused.</p> <p>Not present/autopilot.</p>	<p>Perfectionism rises, and I fall back into past well-practiced and indoctrinated patterns of thinking and behaviour if I don't enable myself to recognise what is happening.</p> <p>Soothing touch with loving kindness meditation (LKM) has become a key self-care strategy for me.</p>

This is one example, it is my example, and it will also change over time as I grow. If we connect with your reflection to this question, and some ideas and further insights that may have emerged for you, let's take these and think about them regarding how we treat a friend.

Let's keep being curious . . .

So, we've thought about how we treat ourselves, now let's flip the situation and consider how we treat our friends. I treat a friend much gentler than I treat myself at times. I would never talk so harshly to a friend who is upset or processing a struggle as I talk to myself at such times. I think we could all resonate with this. Our kindness is overt and judgement is set aside for friends; we listen deeply and are supportive.

JOURNAL PROMPT: How do you treat a friend in need?

Intention: Connect with your actions and reflect upon how you engage in compassionate acts with those you care for. A close friend provides a relationship in which we enact wonderful connections and compassion. We can reflect on this to improve how we could treat ourselves.

Attention: Focus on one close friend here as you complete this activity.

Attitude: Connect with a curiosity and shift your mindset to observe yourself treating a close friend. You could think about how you respond to a close friend when they are present for you.

PERMAH links: P, R

Can you answer the question: How do I treat a friend in need? Think about your close relationships and how you comfort a friend who might be upset, distressed or stressed. What does this look like? How does this sound? What do you say to them? How do your actions feel for yourself and the other person?

Draw this chart in your journal and complete with your reflective notes.

LOOKS LIKE	SOUNDS LIKE	FEELS LIKE

As you process what you have written, let's look at some of the key aspects that are considered common practices when we enact compassion towards a friend who is suffering.

LOOKS LIKE	SOUNDS LIKE	FEELS LIKE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with them • Never criticise what friends are experiencing • Offer support • Normalise the experience/thoughts • Comfort • Listen • Make eye contact and offer comforting body language, such as a hug or hand holding • Be patient • Invest time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are you feeling? • Can I help you with anything? • How can I help you? • How are you going today? • It is normal to feel this way. • Crying is OK, let it out. • Watch a romantic comedy film and let yourself cry. • Allow time to heal. • Be gentle on yourself. • It will take time, and that is OK. • Use a soothing voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive • Encouraging • Active listening • Helpful • Caring concern • Comforting • Soothing • Deep connection • Responsive • Someone has time for me • I belong and I am thought of • Open mindedness in action

Would you add anything else to your chart?

Now that you have reflected upon how you treat yourself and a friend, make a note about what you notice. What is similar? What is different? What changes might you need to make?

When we compare how we talk to ourselves and how we talk to a friend, some clear patterns emerge. We are likely to see things like:

Nurture v dismissive

Soothing v harsh

Reassuring v shaming

Patient v pushy or rushing

Deep breathing v shallow breathing
or disconnection to breath

Relaxed v tight

Kindness v weakness

It will change, ride the wave v permanence

Mindful awareness v de-identification

Common humanity v isolation

Self-kindness v self-judgement

We could summarise these comparisons as compassion versus judgement.

Noticing is a good thing. Even if right now you are thinking that you are not so nice to yourself, you've made the first important step which is to notice it. Shifting the tone of your self-talk can follow.

Without self-compassion we can't self-care

As Neff's and Germer's³ research progressed they noted that self-compassion had to be more than treating yourself kindly. Their curiosity led them to develop a three-pillar model of self-compassion:

1. Kindness to self
2. Mindful awareness
3. Common humanity

Mindful awareness is the foundation of self-compassion. This is the ability to be with what is. Be with it to be able to notice it and then change or accept it with an empowerment. This is where we can say to ourselves, 'I know I am having a hard time right now'. This is being aware. This awareness helps us to acknowledge suffering. Although it doesn't make it any easier, acknowledgement of suffering is required for us to be self-compassionate. If you aren't aware of what is happening in your thoughts and behaviour

you will just keep on doing it. This is the pivot moment. By labelling what is happening for us, in whatever language that is – feeling like we are having a hard time; just not feeling right; feeling tired or unhappy – we become aware.

Self-kindness is the motivating aspect of self-compassion – the willingness to take action. This is associated with alleviating suffering and the connection or urge to help ourselves. When we are kind to ourselves we are learning a new way to be. This could be a reminder to self that we have fallen back into a judgemental way of being with self. Or it could be the moment that helps us dig a bit deeper into what our triggers of harsh chatter are. Suffering can be large or small. This is where self-kindness acknowledges this as a way to help us counter the tendency we have to be harsh, critical, judgemental and notice our shortcomings or the things we perceive we are no good at. We know that when we fail, we are likely to be critical to ourselves rather than be that friend to ourselves who would nurture, listen and comfort. Self-kindness has us being encouraging, supportive, unconditionally accepting and soothing.

Common humanity reminds us that this is not just us, it is also about others. We are interconnected in more ways than we think and often forget this when we are suffering. Everybody is complex. Everybody is a work in progress. Everyone fails. Everyone is learning. Everyone experiences ups and downs in life, and everyone experiences hardships in life. You and I are not unique to this. Self-compassion enables us to acknowledge that life is like a wave, we all have ups and downs, the smooth and the rough. The metaphor of the ocean is a reminder of constant flux. Our life is like the ocean. But when we are in the moment of suffering, we tend to forget this. We feel isolated and alone. The common humanity pillar reminds us that we all suffer, that pain is a part of the shared human experience, and each moment of suffering can become a moment of connection with others.

When we are self-compassionate, we are not avoiding, ignoring or disconnecting from pain or suffering. We are instead opening ourselves up to notice what is happening to heal ourselves with kindness, acknowledging that one's experience is seen as a larger part of the human experience.

Western cultures tend not to foster or value self-compassion as much as, for example, Buddhist cultures in Asia.⁴ In some parts of Western culture self-compassion can even be considered selfish, an indulgence. Self-compassion is like the discussions of self-care, self-love, self-awareness and yin/yang that were discussed in Chapter 2. But the 'self' aspect is not about being self-centred. Rather, the 'self' aspect enables us to think of others. We can admit to our failures and see them as learnings. We don't blame others and we are able to take greater responsibility for the I, we and us. We are able to participate in perspective taking, rather than focusing on one's own distress. When we are self-compassionate, we remember that everyone suffers at times (common humanity) and that when we are aware we are in the moment acknowledging what is happening, without an exaggeration or further storytelling (mindfulness), enabling us to be a little kinder to ourselves as we process and move through the suffering (self-kindness).

Without self-compassion we can't self-care.

This is why self-compassion is a key aspect of my framework for self-care. Self-compassion is crucial for us to remember that we need to care for ourselves, that everyone needs to do this and that everyone is learning to be kinder to themselves.

Right time, right place . . . self-care choices

A toolbox for self-care filled with a variety of strategies is essential as a part of our personal responsibility as individuals and as teachers. Having a variety of strategies is critical for successful everyday self-care. A lot of focus has been on self-care being about tangible, quick strategies: massages, going for a walk, a holiday, spending time with friends, going for a manicure. Resting well and developing good sleep patterns are also recommended. These are good, and there may be times for these. I know a massage helps me when I wear my stress and my shoulders are kissing my ears and my lower back starts sending me messages via electric shocks down my leg. But I don't have a massage all the time, and I also know it is not what I need when I am in the midst of my suffering. I am too emotionally and physically oversensitive. The idea of a massage when I am at the peak of my tightness is not soothing, but I recognise that one would be beneficial in the days after.

I can both look forward to the experience and also monitor how my body is responding. There is nothing worse than having a massage when I am emotionally wound up. Lying on the table just makes me more tense.

We need a range of choices in our toolbox because one strategy is not appropriate for every situation. What we do in our personal time would be very different to what we do in our professional time, and indeed within the professional context varying tasks, environments, people and situations influence choices we can make.

This is where the aspect of time in my framework for self-care becomes significant. You will explore time in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8 but for now we need to think about the time we need now, what we will need in the future and of time as duration. Most obviously our self-care requires strategies for a particular moment in time.⁵

As teachers who work in a profession that can be classified as care giving, we are facilitators of learning, mentors, motivators, encouragers, inspirers and care givers in moments of suffering. This suffering varies between teacher experience and career stages, as Mansfield and her colleagues note in their study of work of the resilience of Australian teachers.⁶ Although resilience is often associated with 'bouncing back', and we see this in curriculum materials as well when we facilitate with young people, resilience can look different and mean different things to us. For example, it has been found that graduating teachers considered managing their emotions and coping with stress was primarily about the ability to 'bounce back'. In contrast, early career teachers place greater weight on maintaining a work-life balance and addressing their self-care needs.

Teacher resilience is multi-dimensional and includes personal qualities of the individual,⁷ the capacity to rebound (or 'bounce back')⁸ as well as accessing and putting in place strategies for adverse situations.⁹ Resilient teachers are seen to be those who draw on emotional intelligence, social intelligence, positive thinking, self-efficacy and healthy self-esteem¹⁰ to address situations they find challenging. What is clear is that teacher well-being and self-care draws on several factors. It is multi-dimensional and overlapping. It varies in intensity.

The emotional nature of the professional certainly features.¹¹ We establish and maintain relations with students through their emotions such as sympathy, interest, surprise, boredom and joy, as well as sometimes anger and annoyance.¹² These 'emotional geographies' of teachers, as Hargreaves calls it,¹³ require us to develop structures that allow for us to establish, maintain

and build professional communities and authentic professional relationships and friendships.

Emotions are at the heart of teaching. It is a passionate vocation,¹⁴ and we are passionate about ideas, learning and the relationships with our students, families, peers, colleagues and the sector. Then we also add the layers of what feels like constant change and restructuring that don't always make it easier for us to do our job. The personal and moral conflict with a system at times seems to work against us. It is hard to sustain, tolerate and maintain when we are also aware of the strain it is not only taking on ourselves but also on our peers and colleagues, with an empathetic response resonating with us in watching an increase in cases of fatigue, burnout and stress. As we care, we care for ourselves, students, parents and each other,¹⁵ but we are also aware of this being a double-edged sword. Being a caring teacher is not simply a romantic gesture, it is a significant part of the job; but as we continue to care and give, we have a society and system that turns against teachers who sacrifice themselves emotionally for the needs of others.¹⁶

With this in mind, self-care for when you are actually in the classroom and in an educational context is imperative. Granting self-compassion can be a positive emotion that energises us. I'll also distinguish between compassion and empathy fatigue.

Empathy and compassion fatigue

Empathy is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing. It is the ability to put yourself in the place of another and understand someone else's feelings by identifying with them. It can best be thought of as standing in someone else's shoes. It derives from the ancient Greek *empathia* which has a meaning of physical affection or passion whereby we resonate with another's positive or negative feelings.

When in empathetic listening mode we can find ourselves saying, 'I know how you feel'. This is then often followed by recounting our own feelings of a similar experience. Sometimes, sharing feelings is helpful because it can build a connection with that person. At other times it may be less helpful because your feelings can overwhelm those of the person who you are sharing with. Or you may delve too deeply into your own thoughts rather than be there to listen to the person you are supporting.

Empathy is key to developing relationships as teachers; indeed, it is crucial for making human interactions work, as researchers into the nursing profession found.¹⁷ However, empathy can have a negative consequence if overused.

If we think about empathy as a strength, empathy is the ability to understand and connect with other people’s feelings. As with any strength we can realise it, learn how to use it, but it may be unrealised or overused. This is what empathy as a strength in action could look like:

Table 4.1 Empathy as a strength in action

REALISED	UNREALISED
You are able to connect easily with others as you understand what they are feeling.	You are tuned into what others are experiencing and can feel what they are feeling. There is an awareness of supporting versus stepping back and not being involved.
LEARNED	OVERUSE
You have learned to see things from other people’s perspectives, perhaps having picked up on how to look and sound for yourself or others.	You may not feel a natural connection to others emotionally, perhaps feeling exhausted by what you observe or sense. Finding solutions is draining. You may benefit from supporting others by guiding them to actions that support them and are led by them when they are distressed.

Empathy fatigue emerges when we engage with another’s world as if it were our own. We resonate, perhaps a little too much. I often describe this as wearing someone else’s situation or having jumped in a hole with them. By taking in another’s suffering when we lack the right emotional resources, we become exhausted. Building empathy can be the first step to making connections with others, but it is important we don’t feel with the other person, and thus confuse ourselves with the other.¹⁸ Awareness helps us to know what is happening – we can label the emotion that we are resonating with while also naming it as it is the other person’s emotion and not our own.

Compassion is different. Compassion is characterised as feelings of warmth, concern and care alongside a strong wish to help improve another’s

wellbeing. Compassion goes beyond feeling *with* and is about feeling *for* the other.¹⁹ Compassion requires a tenderness whereby we hold a space for others with a gentleness. Holding a space means you are physically, mentally and emotionally present for someone as you listen to them. It requires you putting your focus on someone to support them as they feel their feelings. You embrace the suffering, acknowledging it, but you do not struggle with it or wear it. You show concern for another person when you feel sympathy for them. This is different to empathy. Empathy is stronger where you put yourself in that person's place. You can wear that person's situation to the point you over-embrace their feelings and they become your own. Compassion enables us to slow down and be present with those we are supporting without experiencing distress.

Compassion is a strength and is our ability to be caring, helping and sympathetic with others.

Trisha Dowling, in her work in the veterinary sector, provides us with a tangible definition of compassion fatigue:

Compassion fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.²⁰

This hierarchical model helps us connect the subtle differences between empathy and compassion.

Table 4.2 Compassion as a strength in action

REALISED	UNREALISED
You have an open heart and warmth with a caring nature for all of those people around you.	You want the best for others and offer sympathy to others where possible.
LEARNED	OVERUSE
You have learned that it is important to care about others, especially those who are around you.	Being sympathetic doesn't come naturally anymore, you can show care through helping or your perspective.

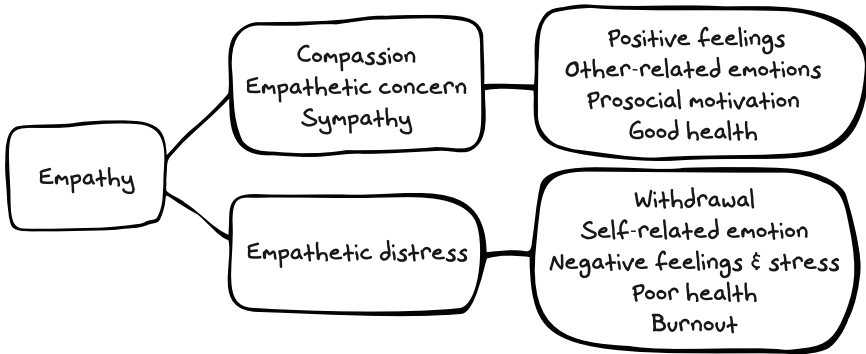


Figure 4.2 Hierarchy model of empathy and compassion.

Source: Adapted from Klimecki, O., & Singer, T. (2011). Empathic distress fatigue rather than compassion fatigue? Integrating findings from empathy research in psychology and social neuroscience. In B. Oakley, A. Knafo, G. Madhavan, et al. (Eds.), *Pathological altruism* (pp. 1–23). Oxford University Press.

Where empathy says, 'I feel you', compassion says,
'I hold you' and produces positive emotions.

(Neff & Germer, 2018, p. 139).²¹

Compassion is a way of supporting others. Compassion means tuning in to what is right for you now as you support others. You calm and soothe your own mind while you are caring for others. You can cultivate peace internally while you help those you are in contact with. This in turn helps the other as well.

You can learn how to be compassionate, and as you cultivate it you are about to tune in to a kindness and gentleness that is self-soothing. It is, however, complex, and there are multiple ways it should be embraced. Most commonly, to turn empathy into compassion²² mindfulness meditation programs are recommended.²³ These have been reported to provide long-lasting changes on attitudes and behaviours and have been proven to support shifts from self-centred reactions to other-centred reactions.

In the field of health sciences, compassion care has been identified as a professional gift that can support the shifts from self-centred reaction to other-centred reactions. In the flow of compassionate care, we can cultivate a mindset of professional compassion which is associated with fostering and humanising an intention to improve participation and experience.²⁴ Compassionate care is a process that, for us in education, we can translate into

cultivating an intention to improve the student experience, for example. In this process we can engage with three dimensions: defenders, drainers and professional compassion. Defenders may be, for example, our supportive colleagues and seeing a student as a person. Alternatively, drainers deplete, and we have experiences such as competing demands, changing expectations, poor resourcing and lack of time. We ultimately want to be in the professional compassion dimension. At this stage we hold the space, we are present for ourselves and those we are working with, and we shift from empathy and/or compassion fatigue being the dominant rhetoric in our professional reflective practice. This is more succinctly outlined in the following table to help you consider what compassionate care can look like for us in teaching. We can also see some parallels to what resilient teachers look like.

Table 4.3 Dimensions of compassionate care in the classroom

DIMENSIONS	AREAS TO CONSIDER
PROFESSIONAL COMPASSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being present in the classroom, holding the space for learners • Acknowledging each learner as an individual with gifts and strengths that they bring • Working in partnership with other teachers, support staff and parents/guardians/carers and relevant professional staff • Facilitating and supporting action • Promoting openness in sharing with a mutual respect • Applying professional skills and knowledge (acknowledging that these are forever growing and developing so we draw on different aspects at different times and through a continuous improvement cycle) • Communicating care • Committing to students' growth • Being organised and prepared while managing time • Engaging with a variety of effective teaching skills • Engaging with reflective practice • Feeling a part and a sense of belonging with colleagues to build supportive relationships • Initiating care conversations that enable connection to find out more about the student. This can provide insights about who the student is and what matters to them to help understand how they feel about an experience.

(Continued)

Table 4.3 (Continued)

DIMENSIONS	AREAS TO CONSIDER
DRAINERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absorbing or wearing negative emotions • Confronting competing agendas • Feeling affected by students’ personal lives • Lack of leadership • Toxic workplaces or cultures • Poor working conditions • Feeling energy from others that butts up against your own energy and conflicts with your values • Empathising with students’ situations • Engaging in several unproductive coping strategies • Lack of, cutting or shifting of resources • Fighting for your discipline v other disciplines • Making repeated mistakes
DEFENDERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding compassion for students’ situations • Drawing on colleagues for peer support • Instilling a professional autonomy in the everyday • Being curious • Enacting a self-awareness of one’s own emotions with strategies to support managing any emotions that occur • Being humble • Exploring a variety of productive coping strategies • Enjoying teaching • Finding ways to cope with the demands and stress of the job • Not taking things personally • Focusing on learning and improvement • Adapting and modelling a growth mindset • Maintaining motivation and enthusiasm • Embracing challenges as opportunity • Setting realistic goals, expectations and intentions for self and others

Source: Adapted from Tierney, S., Seers, K., Tutton, E., & Reeve, J. (2017). Enabling the flow of compassionate care: A grounded theory study. *BMC Health Services Research*, 17(1), 1–12.

When compassionate care is put into place we are in flow and we become engrossed in what we are doing. As teachers it means being motivated to experience and be fully present with the student(s) we are caring for. In this way we cultivate a level of awareness that means we are sitting in the dimension of defender not drainer. We listen to the pain or suffering, but we

do not wear it; we say 'I hold you' or 'I am holding this space for you' while you support but do not wear or embody others' suffering.

Inhale for me, exhale for you

For a long time, I relied heavily on empathy fatigue, using this and compassion fatigue interchangeably as I didn't know the difference. I can overuse my strength of awareness and intuition sometimes where I physically and mentally embody what someone else is experiencing. I've learned to be very aware of this. And the more time I tune in to how I overuse my strengths in this area, the more I build my capacity to hold the space of compassion.

One of my top strategies to help with self-compassion is to place a sticky note on my desk with the words: inhale for me, exhale for you. During COVID-19 I created this reminder for when I was in virtual meetings with colleagues and students. My leadership role, teaching and coaching work all required me to work with others who would share their experiences of pain and suffering. It really helped me to remain grounded and less burdened by the information I was processing.

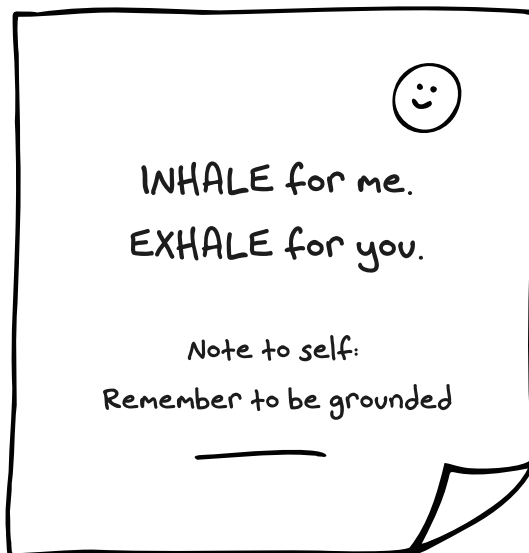


Figure 4.3 This sticky note is a reminder of a mini-loving kindness meditation.

DO: *Inhale for me, exhale for you*

Intention: To soothe yourself.

Attention: Focus on self-kindness, bringing your attention to caring for you.

Attitude: Bring an attitude that this too will pass.

Side note: You can complete this practice with eyes open or closed, and you may stand or be seated. I often use this practice in my teaching, in meetings and when I am working with others. The more confident you become with this tool you can practice it anywhere and anytime.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, H

Connect to breath.

Inhale slowly through your nose and exhale slower through your pursed lips.

Slow down your breath.

Feel grounded.

Feet firmly on the ground.

Be in your body, releasing any tension or tightness.

Wriggle around in your body to release as required.

Breathe deeply into your gut.

Inhale and exhale slowly, slowing down the heartbeat.

Be present with the person you are listening to.

When you are listening to someone you are caring for, inhale for yourself.

Say to yourself as an internal dialogue a soothing mantra or motto, such as 'I am listening with heart'.

The intention for this inhale is on you; you are caring for you at this moment of the inhale.

Exhale.

As you exhale you are exhaling your breath for the person you are listening to. Again, with a mantra spoken internally: 'Share, cry, it is OK you can do this. It will be OK; this too will pass'.

Your mantra is about helping you hold the space for whom you are caring.

And as you exhale you are letting out any embodiment of other from your body. In this way you are sending it out into the world, rather than it being worn in your mind or on your body.

Taking it further

As I have worked with this mini-meditation I have adapted a mantra or motto as: 'I inhale for me, giving myself a hug, knowing I am being the best I can be', and 'I am exhaling for you, this will pass'. Each mantra said as internal dialogue with my breath enables me to be grounded in the moment.

Develop and extend this practice for what is right for you, and the situation. What remains the same regardless of your tweaking is: inhale for yourself, exhale for the other. What this practice offers is a self-care strategy that can be used in the moment of an event or situation that is stressful, heightened and where you need to care for yourself. It is a portable, transferable, flexible and a fluid self-compassion practice. Inhale and embrace love for yourself, and exhale, get it out of you, as you hold the space for someone else.

Being careful – backdraft

You cannot be compassionate without mindfulness (and indeed vice versa), as there is an essential need to notice the pain of the other person, be with the pain, and have a willingness to be with what may be even more painful. Thus, mindfulness and compassion are viewed as complementary practices.²⁵ It is assumed that this will hold true for an individual to avoid extremes of suppressing or running away from painful feelings. Sometimes the pain may increase at the beginning of exploration. Kristen Neff²⁶ calls this ‘backdraft’ whereby emotional or mental resistance to pain is exacerbated when love and kindness, which has been deprived, is added. This is addressed by mindfully accepting the experience and having ‘compassion for how hard it is to experience such intense negativity’.²⁷ Self-compassion is a practice of goodwill, not good feelings.²⁸ Mindfulness is vital in self-compassion training as a means to anchor awareness in the present moment.²⁹ One way to consider this is through the S-Art model that illuminated self-awareness, -regulation and -transcendence as a process for becoming aware of the conditions that cause, and remove, distortions or biases.³⁰

Self-compassion in practice

Let’s connect with some examples of practices and strategies to support you to cultivate self-compassion.

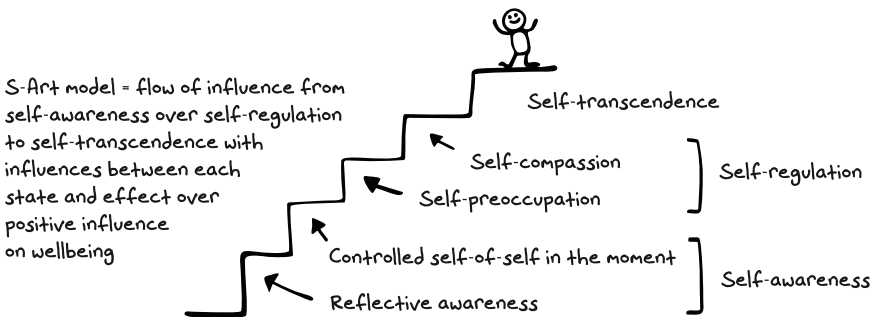


Figure 4.4 S-ART model.

DO: Soothing touch

Intention: Explore how touch can support you.

Attention: Bring your attention to your body and what soothing touch, movement or action helps you.

Attitude: Begin with your hand and then try different parts of your body such as arm, shoulder, elbow, wrist, knee, thigh, fingers, ear, that when you touch softly with a tender touch can help you feel calm.

PERMAH links: P, H

Ever so lightly allow your thumb to slightly move back and forth over your other hand in a calming manner. Softly touch your skin. Feel the sensation. You may close your eyes or lower your gaze. Touch can become a gentle warming gesture to reinforce treating yourself like a friend. In this way you are allowing touch to soothe yourself, to remind yourself that it will be OK, and that you can do this. It is the act of touch in this way that activates the care system and the parasympathetic nervous system to help us calm down and feel safe.

You may find that soothing touch for you might look different. It may be a hug to yourself, fingertips placed together, rubbing of your elbow or leg or ear. Experiment. Find what works best for you.

Loving kindness meditation

Loving kindness meditation or LKM as it is often referred to is a central self-compassion practice. It is commonly referred to when we talk about self-compassion. Loving kindness meditation is a meditation that cultivates a quality of goodwill, not good feelings.³¹ It is designed to enhance unconditional, positive emotional states of kindness, empathy and compassion and to genuinely ease suffering.³² But even though LKM has us take a friendly, supportive stance that supports us to enact and embody self-compassion aimed at the alleviation of suffering, we can't always control the way things are. What we can control is how we react, and this is what LKM helps us with.

Loving kindness meditation is an example of an active or focused meditation practice, strongly connected to the practice of mindfulness. It has also been associated to varying traditions including Theravadin, and Japanese and Chinese Zen.³³ Loving kindness meditation exercises are believed to enhance positive emotions, lessen negative states, broaden attention and shift an individual's basic view of self in relation to others.³⁴ The practice often begins with a mindful grounded preparation focused on awareness to the body and mind, before moving to active cultivation of love. This is usually undertaken through a sequence of six stages, focusing on one or more people,³⁵ and is contributed to a path of deep spiritual transformation.³⁶

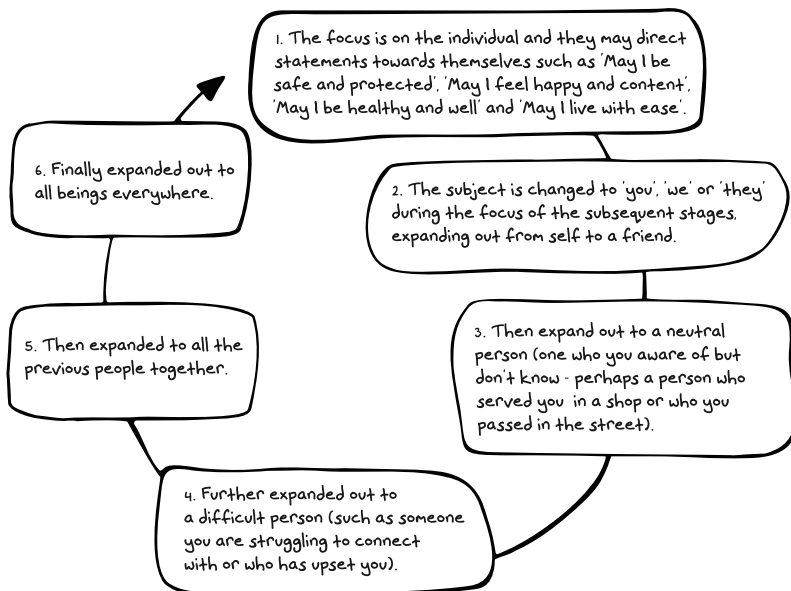


Figure 4.5 Stages of LKM (adapted from the work of Mark Quirk and Itai Ivztan).

Source: Adapted from the work of Quirk, M. J., & Ivztan, I. (2018). Soft is hard: Building resilience with loving kindness meditation at work. *International Journal of Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, 11(3), 125–131.

Despite the practice of LKM having a history within mindfulness practices, there is little literature examining its effects.³⁷ James Carson et al.³⁸ found that relationship satisfaction and overall wellbeing

improved during couple counselling. While Barbara Fredrickson et al.³⁹ identified that those who engaged with LKM over time display positive wellbeing and resources especially with regard to joy, love and gratitude.

Loving kindness meditation has been investigated in the workplace with Mark Quirk and Itai Ivztan⁴⁰ finding that over seven weeks employees of Microsoft Corporation in the UK demonstrated significant increases in psychological resilience in the experimental group, along with reduced depression, anxiety and stress, while the control group changes remained insignificant. Stefan Hofmann et al.⁴¹ studied the effects of LKM when used for back pain and found the experimental group had reduced overall pain, anger and anxiety. They discovered that the physical and psychological wellbeing improvements continued to hold in a three-month follow-up of those who continued treatment.

Additionally, Mark Leary et al.⁴² conducted a number of studies with undergraduate student populations by using a self-report instrument to measure self-compassion as a trait variable. These studies suggested that self-compassion moderates reactions to distressing events involving failure, rejection and embarrassment.

Time is the one variable that we are unsure about with LKM. Some studies suggest impact can be made with training within a relatively short period of time, such as 7 minutes,⁴³ while 15–20 minutes in duration is recommended in some of the research⁴⁴ and others highlight the benefit of 60 minutes of training.⁴⁵ There is much discussion on daily or weekly practice, and how sustained practice also impacts wellbeing.⁴⁶

As you explore LKM or variations, tune in to a time frame that may be beneficial for you. Start small and explore different time periods. I know for me when I am feeling particularly fragile, LKM 5 minutes a day is beneficial, and at other times I may practice it once a week for a longer period such as 30 or 45 minutes. I have also been known to practice it multiple times a day under particularly stressful situations and times of change through micro-moments of 30–60 seconds. Explore and see what is right for you.

DO: *Loving kindness meditation*

Intention: This is a soothing meditation based on breathing and self-talk. Bring care and understanding for oneself rather than being critical or judgmental.

Attention: Generate kind attention towards yourself and others.

Attitude: Come to this practice with awareness and kindness.

PERMAH links: P, E, A, H

Loving kindness meditation comes in many different versions and with a quick search on the web or a listening platform of your choice you would be able to find various guided meditations. Each is based on different traditions, however, what you will find is at the core of each variation are similar psychological principles as shared in the stages of LKM. Key is that you generate kind intentions toward yourself and others.

Here is a simple and effective LKM script to try:

Find a quiet space. Sit comfortably. Close your eyes or lower your gaze ever so gently, relax your muscles and take a few deep breaths. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, slowing down your breath. Feel your feet on the ground. Breathe into your gut.

As you connect to your breath, imagine yourself experiencing complete physical and emotional wellness and inner peace. Allow yourself to experience self-love, empathy, understanding and kindness. Thank yourself for all that you are, knowing that you are just right – just as you are. Nurture yourself as you need right now. You might make requests of yourself such as: Tell me about what I need right now. Tell me how you feel. Tell me what is on your mind. Tell me what you dream about. Tell me what you want for your life. Tell me what you believe in. How can I best support you? Focus on this feeling of inner peace. Breathe out tension and breathe in feelings of love.

As you maintain this breathing pattern, inhale slowly and exhale even slower, inhale love for you, exhale any tension.

Repeat these reassuring mantras to yourself.

May I be happy.

May I be safe.

May I be healthy, peaceful and strong.

May I give and receive appreciation today.

And then add in variations that support you for where you are now, for example:

I have strengths, I am strong, or I can do this, for example.

Tune in to what you require for right now in this moment.

Savour this moment of self-love. Embrace the feelings of warmth and kindness to yourself for a few moments. If your attention drifts, gently redirect it back to these feelings of loving kindness. Let these feelings move throughout you, embrace and embody this gentleness.

Next steps: LKM can move into a focus on yourself only, or progress from this stage, when you are ready, to focusing on others in your life.

Begin with someone who you are very close to, such as a partner, child, parent or best friend. Feel your gratitude and love for them. Stay with that feeling. Repeat the mantras for each person you focus on. Maintain your breathing cycle of inhale love you, exhale any tension.

May x be happy.

May x be safe.

May x be healthy, peaceful and strong.

Etc.

Once you've held these feelings toward that person, bring other important people from your life into your awareness. One by one repeat the process with them, extending feelings of loving kindness to people around you, in your community, the globe. Repeat as appropriate as to what is happening in your life and what you wish to focus on.

DO: *Compassion with equality*

Intention: This strategy is an expanding self-talk practice to bring kindness to self and others, acknowledging that all suffer (common humanity).

Attention: Draw your attention to holding the space for yourself and others who require care, observe without judgement or wearing what is happening.

Attitude: Bring a calmness and open-mindedness.

PERMAH links: P, R, M, H

Find a comfortable position to sit.

Inhale and exhale slowly, embracing a deep connection to breath.

Place your hand over your heart, or on a location on your body where the touch is soothing. Bring an affectionate awareness to yourself and the experience.

When you are ready, think of someone who may be frustrating you, de-energising you, challenging you in a way at that moment that generates negative thoughts and/or feelings or who may be suffering.

Visualise that person, think of them from a caring perspective, that you care for them but are aware they are suffering. Visualise this person in a caregiving situation.

Repeat these words:

Everyone is on his, her or their own life journey.

I am not the cause of this person's suffering,

nor is it entirely within my power to make it go away,

even though I wish I could.

There are times when this relationship is difficult,

yet I may still try to help if I can.

Inhale and exhale slowly, tune in to the creation of loving kindness for yourself and this person.

Be aware of any stress you may be holding in your body. Exhale this and inhale love for you. Exhale the tension. Inhale compassion for yourself. Repeat.

Inhale for you, exhale for this person compassion, gratitude and love. Continue breathing.

Say this motto out loud: Inhale for me, out for you. Repeat this out loud and then move to saying this internally in your mind.

Notice your body reactions; keep repeating the motto until you feel a floating sensation in your body, where you are limiting the wearing or embracing of the suffering.

Let go of the practice, allow yourself to be right here, right now in this moment.

Holding the space for your students in the classroom

When we hold the space, we are being truly present in the moment and 100% grounded. Right in the moment, fully aware and here right now. We let go of anything we might be holding onto that can be held physically in the body or mentally in our mind. I think about this as physically having my feet firmly on the ground. I can wiggle my toes, feel the heel on the ground (or on the sole of my shoes), I can move my feet around ever so slightly to feel the edges, the arch and the pads of my toes. My attention is in my heart, rather than in my head, so I am not ruminating, thinking in the past, rushing to what has to be done in the future. As I breathe, I inhale deeply, raising my gut, versus raising my shoulders (up to my ears). I am in the here and now when grounded and I can hold a space for myself and for others, that is about the present moment.

As we engage with grounding, we gently guide our attention away from thoughts about the past and guide them towards a present. Neurologically, in this way we are looking to turn off the fight, flight, freeze or fawn reactions

and we are looking at anchoring on a safe and interesting feature of our current environment. We are interrupting this overwhelming and exhausting state. Being grounded helps when we are dealing with stress or feeling overwhelmed, but over time it becomes an addictive daily practice that has a calming effect on both you and others around you.

How do you know if you are not grounded? You may find you:

- Overthink things
- Ruminates
- Are critical to self and others
- Have perfectionist tendencies that flare up
- Are easily distracted
- Space out or daydream often
- Attract and engage in personal drama: yours or others
- Have anxiety and constant worry that are all consuming
- Obsess over material possessions
- Are extremely image-conscious
- Are not as honest with yourself or others as normal
- Feel out of touch with reality and may feel you are not your normal self at times

As we explore grounding, you are essentially bringing yourself back into the present moment, and you are tuning in to your five senses. Grounding is a technique that helps us pay attention. It differs from mindfulness. Mindfulness is a way of being where we pay attention to the present non-judgmentally. Grounding is very personal, as with self-care; what might work for you will not necessarily work for someone else, but we can learn with and from one another as we discover.

You are grounded if:

- Your breath is deep and slow
- You breathe from your gut not your chest or shoulders
- Your mind is quiet
- You are present, deeply listening to others or yourself
- You are fully present, no ruminating or having conversations in your head
- You are heart centred
- You are able to accept and let go of the tough moments throughout the day and are not easily influenced by others' ideas or feelings

I unpack some simple techniques or practices that you can engage with to become connected to the concept of grounding. As a reminder to self, they are listed for you, not as a checklist, but as a menu of possibilities to explore and find what might resonate with you:

- Five senses
- Three deep breaths
- Open your eyes
- Earthing
- Mindfully walking
- Stand like a tree

Strategies to stay grounded

DO: *Five senses (5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique)*

Intention: To help you be in this moment.

Attention: This grounding technique purposefully draws your attention to your surroundings by using each of your senses.

Attitude: Being present in the right now.

Side note: This is a great emergency tool when anxiety threatens to overwhelm you, or you are not able to focus. You can also add in a movement where you look at your hand with your fingers spread. Trace each finger over each step. Trace up a finger for an inhale and trace down a finger for an exhale. This process adds a soothing touch to the noticing. Move along each finger for each sense focus.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Acknowledge **FIVE** things you see around you.

Acknowledge **FOUR** things you can touch around you.

Acknowledge **THREE** things you hear.

Acknowledge **TWO** things you can smell.

Acknowledge **ONE** thing you can taste.

DO: *Three deep breaths . . . and blow on your thumb*

Intention: Interrupting feelings of being overwhelmed, worry or distraction by focusing on your breath.

Attention: Draw your attention to being in the moment and slowing down.

Attitude: Curiosity to the power of a micro-moment.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

This grounding strategy is a very easy and effective micro-moment strategy.

Put your thumb near your mouth about 2 cm away directly in front, purse your lips and gently blow on your finger.

Blow slowly and connect to deep breaths. You could imagine blowing on a candle flame softly, so it flickers but doesn't go out. You may also choose to close your eyes.

DO: *Open your eyes*

Intention: Being present.

Attention: Notice what is happening around you and for you.

Attitude: Curiosity to the power of a micro-moment.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

When you feel you need to be a bit more grounded, open your eyes wide and allow them to become unfocused. When they re-focus become aware of the first thing you see. Let yourself be with the object or person for a short time.

DO: *Earthing*

Intention: Interrupting everyday hustle and bustle and bringing you back to earth (literally).

Attention: Notice what is happening with your breath and body while in these surroundings.

Attitude: Bring an openness to how connecting to earth can be helpful for you.

Side note: It is recommended that we go barefoot for at least 20 minutes each day.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Earthing is a grounding activity that has us connect with the earth. One approach can be to take off your shoes and socks and walk barefoot on grass or sit and rub your feet on a green space. If you don't have access to a backyard or a park, walking barefoot around the

house can also be effective, with a conscious attention tuned into the connection to the surface underneath you. Notice the feeling under your feet. Slow down, be present with the moment of touch. Wiggle your toes. Touch the surface feeling all parts of each foot.

DO: *Mindful walking*

Intention: To slow down, observe and notice what is happening around you (even if in familiar everyday situations). Set the intention to be fully present with walking with a break from being connected via phone, others or technology.

Attention: Draw your attention to the moment, what is around you, in your neighbourhood or environment.

Attitude: Bring an attitude of being present with your surroundings.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Mindful walking means to walk with no destination in mind while being present and aware of each step and breath you take. It is a practice where you do not listen to music, do not have a conversation with someone else and stay off the phone. It is about being totally present with your environment, no matter what that is, noticing and appreciating. You'll observe in yourself a raised awareness of sounds, smells and things you have never noticed before.

DO: *Stand like a tree*

Intention: To bring your focus back to your body.

Attention: Explore the connection to heart, mind and body.

Attitude: Draw your focus to how becoming grounded with your body through this action can support you to reconnect in this present moment.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Take your shoes off. Stand with feet hip-width apart. Lift your head like it is a balloon on a string. Keep your neck long and your head

floating above your body. Allow your spine to straighten and your pelvis to tuck under. Rest your hands on your sides or place them over your belly button. Consciously sink your body weight into your feet, feeling all the skin of your feet on the ground. Be careful not to adjust your posture. Feel the ground with your feet and imagine roots growing out of your body extending deep into the ground underneath you. Stand in this position for a couple of minutes and breathe deeply into your gut. You may move slightly side to side, relaxing the body, feeling grounded with your connection to the earth.

Contemplative practice in the classroom

We are required to create psychological safe spaces for our students. But what about ourselves? In a study that I carried out with pre-service teachers, I looked at how a range of pedagogical practices could help us to do this. From this perspective I argue that mindfulness practice supports being grounded and an ability to hold the space for being vulnerable with students and oneself allows for the exploration of their wellbeing and thus develop, grow, maintain and protect their self-care. To achieve this, I located contemplative pedagogy at the heart of this action intention where one could cultivate an intentional and reflective learning environment, underpinned by self-awareness, self-examination and co-learning.⁴⁷ What I love about this pedagogical approach is that it is beneficial both to teachers and our students.

Malgorzata Powietrzynska et al. reinforce that a contemplative pedagogy approach 'allows us (and our students) to pause, zoom-in on the micro situations and cancel out the cacophonous noise inside and around us and thus develop a sense of equanimity'.⁴⁸

I embody contemplative pedagogy, centred on mindfulness (including informal and formal practices) to cultivate my ability to be present in the moment non-judgmentally. I want to introduce how and why I do this to help not only my self-care but also my students. In the model or framework, I bring aspects of two researchers together with inspiration from the work of Brené Brown⁴⁹ and her BRAVING Inventory and the mindfulness

mechanisms intention, attention and attitude (IAA) that Shauna Shapiro et al.⁵⁰ first introduced as a way to unpack elements of mindfulness. I see these as intertwined in my practice. They help me be grounded, present when I teach or work with students or colleagues. They also help me to model what is possible when I embody them. I explicitly teach (for example a meditation with students) and I implicitly apply through modelling or engaging in a practice myself before I enter the classroom to help me take care of myself as a way to establish a compassionate and calming classroom energy.

Brené Brown's *Daring Classrooms* and the initiative *Braving Inventory*⁵¹ that piggy backs from her work in *Daring to Lead* influences the approach to the work shared here. She uses the acronym of BRAVING to represent elements of boundaries, reliability, accountability, vault, integrity, non-judgement and generosity. We connected with these elements in Chapter 1. These are elements of trust and are used to scaffold a safe community of practice where there is a sense of belonging.

B = Boundaries: *Respect of boundaries. Clear communication of what is and is not OK.*

R = Reliability: *You can be counted on, and you do what you say you will do.*

A = Accountability: *Own up to mistakes, make amends and apologise.*

V = Vault: *Confidentiality in action underpinned by a respect of what is shared.*

I = Integrity: *Courage over comfort, and you put into practice your values.*

N = Non-judgement: *All can ask for what is needed right now without fear of judgement. Perspectives are appreciated.*

G = Generosity: *A relationship is only a trusting relationship if you can assume the most generous thing about my words, intentions and behaviours, and then check in with me. Presume the best in people.*

I've taken these BRAVING principles further and aligned them to the mindfulness mechanisms of intention, attention and attitude (IAA).⁵² You will be familiar with these as this is how I have been setting up the 'Do' practices and strategies throughout this book.

Intention is the *why* of practice, and is significant in relation to setting a personal vision in practice that supports self-regulation, -exploration and -liberation.⁵³

Attention is the *core* of mindfulness and involves observing one's moment-to-moment, internal and external experience, non-judgementally.⁵⁴ In doing this, we open up possibilities to willingly let go of our ideas about how we *should be* and simply accept the way that we *are* . . . in this present moment. One can place attention and be mindfully aware, and this has been associated with attentional control, or capacity to make choices and enhance executive attention in situations requiring self-regulation.⁵⁵

Attitude is the *how* we attend to mindfulness practice and is connected to the qualities one brings to attention and awareness.⁵⁶ It is the attitude that can be cultivated that can shift practice of being in the moment to attend to one's own internal and external experiences with openness, kindness and acceptance, with no judgement.⁵⁷ With intentional practice, patience, compassion and non-striving are developed, and the place of curiosity becomes significant to support one's attitude.⁵⁸

Both BRAVING and IAA are valuable as independent concepts, and they can offer us a way to talk about wellbeing and self-care; to help us hold the space for ourselves and the young people we work with.

I want to share in this table how I see these as being intersecting, and then I want to pose some questions for you as you think about this framework for yourself. I've developed this chart based on thinking about the classroom. I use it as a framework for how I prepare myself before entering the classroom, how I maintain an integrity with the students I work with and for how I hold a space for compassion, care, deep listening and opportunities to support growth throughout a lesson.

At each of the BRAVING Inventory elements I think about IAA as:

I am setting the **intention** . . .

I cultivate my **attention** through . . .

My **attitude** of . . . enables me . . .

These are the backbone to what I think about in contemplative pedagogy; they inform my teaching. You can begin to see aspects of positive psychology (strengths, compassion, mindfulness and gratitude and appreciation) filtering through both the language but also enactment. This is what I love about contemplative pedagogy: there is no one way to do it. And for us

Table 4.4 Mindfulness mechanisms and BRAVING to hold the space for our students when teaching in the classroom

MINDFULNESS MECHANISMS BRAVING	INTENTION <i>What I hope to get out of practicing mindfulness.</i> <i>Directing my attention with purpose.</i> <i>Why we practice.</i>	ATTENTION <i>Paying attention to the inner and outer experience.</i> <i>What we practice.</i>	ATTITUDE <i>Paying attention to certain attitudes, noticing habits of the mind and becoming gentler and more appreciative.</i> <i>How we practice.</i>
Boundaries <i>Respect of boundaries. Clear communication of what is and is not OK.</i>	I am setting the intention to bring my mindfulness practice into my work life as a teacher educator to allow me to be authentic and embrace a way of being that enables me to be the best version of myself.	The strength of my attention is in being centred and grounded, having an inner composure and self-assurance, whatever the situation, with a deep inner sense of calm and confidence.	My attitude is underpinned by an openness and honesty to connect with those I am teaching, to accept differences of perspectives, and to embrace different lived experiences as we co-learn with and from one another.
Reliability <i>You can be counted on, and you do what you say you will do.</i>	I am setting the intention to own my decisions and be held accountable for my promises.	I cultivate my attention by being guided through a LK mini-M with mantras. I inhale for me; I exhale for the pre-service teachers. I repeat this as I listen to difficult stories or prepare as I ask a tough question and wait for the pre-service teachers to be courageous in sharing when they are ready.	I bring my signature strengths of curiosity and self-awareness to assist me to align my intentions while holding the space. I enact compassion, appreciation, kindness, acceptance, open-mindedness and gratitude.

<p>Accountability <i>Own up to mistakes, make amends and apologise.</i></p>	<p>I am setting the intention to cultivate a community of practice that models and respects differences of opinion and acknowledges biases, assumptions or any incidents that may hinder sharing.</p>	<p>I cultivate my attention through an openness to be accountable for any assumptions or biases I may make.</p>	<p>My strength of persistence (achieving success by continuing to keep going particularly when things are difficult) and relationship deepener (forming deep, long-lasting relationships) underpin an attitude to learn from failures and connect with pre-service teachers to maintain and develop a true connection.</p>
<p>Vault <i>Confidentiality in action underpinned by a respect of what is shared.</i></p>	<p>I am setting the intention of mutual respect, to allow open sharing with confidentiality collectively or individually.</p>	<p>I cultivate my attention through the action of what I believe is right, ie, embodying a moral compass.</p>	<p>My attitude of authenticity where I am being true to myself, even in the face of pressure from others allows me to embody a genuine interest in pre-service teachers' self-care journey.</p>
<p>Integrity <i>Courage over comfort, and you put into practice your values.</i></p>	<p>I am setting the intention to create a safe space where we can ask and answer the often unspoken questions about self-care.</p>	<p>I cultivate my attention through compassion with an open heart and a caring philosophy for the pre-service teachers I am working with.</p>	<p>My strength of courage enables me to acknowledge that sometimes I might feel afraid, but I will never let fear stop me from stepping outside of my comfort zone.</p>

(Continued)

Table 4.4 (Continued)

MINDFULNESS MECHANISMS BRAVING	INTENTION <i>What I hope to get out of practicing mindfulness.</i> <i>Directing my attention with purpose.</i> <i>Why we practice.</i>	ATTENTION <i>Paying attention to the inner and outer experience.</i> <i>What we practice.</i>	ATTITUDE <i>Paying attention to certain attitudes, noticing habits of the mind and becoming gentler and more appreciative.</i> <i>How we practice.</i>
Non-judgement <i>All can ask for what is needed right now without fear of judgement. Perspectives are appreciated.</i>	I am setting the intention that all pre-service teachers can ask for what is needed in this moment without fear of judgement. Perspectives are appreciated.	I cultivate my attention through a grounded breathing, feeling my feet firmly on the ground, inhale slowly, exhale slower.	My attitude is to be in the moment non-judgementally for the pre-service teachers I work with, underpinned by curiosity that supports deep listening with empathy.
Generosity <i>A relationship is only a trusting relationship if you can assume the most generous thing about my words, intentions and behaviours, and then check in with me. Presume the best in people.</i>	I am setting the intention to hold a space for pre-service teachers non-judgementally and with compassion as I create a space for seeing the best in them, creating a community where we share and where mutual respect and trust is developed over time.	I cultivate my attention through a generosity in my sharing, time and deep listening where I am focused on what pre-service teachers say, listening to not only what words are used but how they are communicated and what energy comes with the message.	My attitude of humility where others are acknowledged for their contradictions fed by a sharing culture modelled by myself, sharing my vulnerability of my self-care journey as a teacher, to support pre-service teachers for where they are right now in their journey of paying attention to their own self-care.

Source: Shared with permission from Lemon, N. (2021). Wellbeing in initial teacher education: Using poetic representation to examine pre-service teachers understanding of their self-care needs. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 2021(2), 1–22.

when we are thinking about our self-care (and that of our students as well) we can embrace these positive emotions.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Your contemplative practice in the classroom

Intention: Think about how you are fully present and authentic in your classroom.

Attention: Focus your attention on what you do to show care for you and your students.

Attitude: Be open to how you notice your intentions, attention and attitude as a teacher, how these are cultivated within a classroom environment and indeed perhaps across various different classroom contexts.

Focus question: How do you cultivate a classroom where holding the space is valued for you and by your students?

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Using BRAVING and IAA and the model I have shared with you, what might your matrix look like? Transfer this into your journal and complete.

Gratitude, appreciation and savouring

Gratitude is an essential element of human flourishing.⁵⁹ Gratitude involves the ability to notice, appreciate and savour. When we intentionally apply attention to being grateful or expressing a gratitude, we can increase enjoyment of experiences. In turn there is an increase in strengths such as kindness, appreciation, perspective and optimism that enhance our wellbeing. We also know that by expressing a gratitude we become aware and can develop our mindfulness muscle that supports us being able to respond to positive events with gratitude with a sense of being present non-judgementally.

What is important in thinking about gratitude and appreciation is that we can express gratitude toward ourselves and others in different ways,⁶⁰ and these small acts have a positive impact on our wellbeing during a time of crisis and uncertainty. Something that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught

Table 4.5 Proforma for your own mindfulness mechanisms and BRAVING when teaching in the classroom

MINDFULNESS MECHANISMS BRAVING	INTENTION <i>What I hope to get out of practicing mindfulness.</i> <i>Directing my attention with purpose.</i> <i>Why we practice.</i>	ATTENTION <i>Paying attention to the inner and outer experience.</i> <i>What we practice.</i>	ATTITUDE <i>Paying attention to certain attitudes, noticing habits of the mind and becoming gentler and more appreciative.</i> <i>How we practice.</i>
Boundaries <i>Respect of boundaries. Clear communication of what is and is not OK.</i>	I am setting the intention to	The strength of my attention	My attitude of
Reliability <i>You can be counted on, and you do what you say you will do.</i>	I am setting the intention to	I cultivate my attention through	My attitude of
Accountability <i>Own up to mistakes, make amends, and apologise.</i>	I am setting the intention to	I cultivate my attention through	My attitude of
Vault <i>Confidentiality in action underpinned by a respect of what is shared.</i>	I am setting the intention to	I cultivate my attention through	My attitude of

<p>MINDFULNESS MECHANISMS</p> <p>BRAVING</p>	<p>INTENTION</p> <p><i>What I hope to get out of practicing mindfulness.</i></p> <p><i>Directing my attention with purpose.</i></p> <p><i>Why we practice.</i></p>	<p>ATTENTION</p> <p><i>Paying attention to the inner and outer experience.</i></p> <p><i>What we practice.</i></p>	<p>ATTITUDE</p> <p><i>Paying attention to certain attitudes, noticing habits of the mind and becoming gentler and more appreciative.</i></p> <p><i>How we practice.</i></p>
<p>Integrity</p> <p><i>Courage over comfort, and you put into practice your values.</i></p>	<p>I am setting the intention to</p>	<p>I cultivate my attention through</p>	<p>My attitude of</p>
<p>Non-judgement</p> <p><i>All can ask for what is needed right now without fear of judgement. Perspectives are appreciated.</i></p>	<p>I am setting the intention to</p>	<p>I cultivate my attention through</p>	<p>My attitude of</p>
<p>Generosity</p> <p><i>A relationship is only a trusting relationship if you can assume the most generous thing about my words, intentions and behaviours, and then check in with me. Presume the best in people.</i></p>	<p>I am setting the intention to</p>	<p>I cultivate my attention through</p>	<p>My attitude of</p>

us is that gratitude and appreciation as acts of kindness are central no matter one's situation or difficulty.⁶¹ Here are some examples of self-compassion appreciations and gratitudes from the research I gathered on self-care during the pandemic:

I value connection with others even more.

I do not feel guilty for taking care of myself.

I've realised that social acts are more important to my self-care than I thought.

I've realised slowing down is possible and beneficial.

Reaching out to friends for connection has also been huge. Having (virtual) events or plans to look forward to keeps me anchored and energised.

I am walking in nature more.

I am pausing more in the evenings and on the weekends.

From a positive psychology perspective, gratitude is connected to the psychological state of appreciation. It is felt. And it can be expressed to others. Some ways you may explore gratitude may include these 'Do' tools.

DO: *Dial up gratitude*

Intention: To position the positive emotions of gratitude and appreciation as possible.

Attention: Bring your attention to what is good in life, no matter how big or small.

Attitude: Bring an openness to noticing what is happening around you or with your own thoughts and actions that is worthy of celebrating, appreciating and acknowledging.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Here are some different ideas of how you can dial up gratitude. Connect with one or more that may resonate with you.

- Creation of a gratitude jar where you write on a note one gratitude each day. You can curate a collection over time that you can then dip back into to reflect on and appreciate at another time.
- Share some good things in life. You could journal this or share via social media or express to someone close to you.
- Find an accountability buddy and trade some gratitudes for the week via email on a Friday. No need to expect or ask for a response, this is about expressing and appreciating.
- At dinner each night share something you are grateful for with your partner, family or housemates.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Create an 'I am grateful' appreciation mantra for yourself.
- Participate in a guided meditation.
- Share one gratitude each day inspired by a reflective sentence.

DO: *Expressing your gratitude*

Intention: To help you with the expression of gratitude I've collated a list of questions that can scaffold your expression of appreciation to yourself and others.

Attention: Draw attention to being curious and open to possibilities with these sentence starters.

Attitude: Enjoy the exploration of the questions to support your exploration of gratitude – pick one daily to inspire you.

PERMAH links: P, E, A

Side note: You could use some of these questions as inspiration for your own journaling or reflection or use with others to learn with and from one another.

Who made you smile or laugh today?

What was something new you did today that surprised you?

What have others done that has benefitted your life – even if you don't know who those people are?

What relationships are you thankful for?

What are you taking for granted that, if you stop to think about it, you are grateful for?

How can you be thankful for the challenges that you've experienced? What did you learn from them?

How is your life different today than it was a year ago? How can you be thankful for those changes?

How did you treat yourself like a friend today?

What song or artist makes you want to sing or dance?

What insights have you gained that you are grateful for?

Who do you appreciate? Why?

Who is always there for you, and how do you feel about them?

Who has helped you become the person you are today, and what's the main thing you would thank them for?

Who is someone who always really listens when you talk, and how does that affect you?

What is the best thing that happened today so far?

What is something that inspired you recently?

What is something that touched you today?

How did technology help you stay connected today?

What surprised you today?

Has anyone done anything recently that made your job easier?

What's one thing you enjoyed about doing your job recently?

Who is one person you could reach out to, to express an appreciation for how they help you at work?

Can you think of any non-material gifts you've received recently – someone's time, attention, understanding or support? What did this mean to you?

What is it about today that has been better than yesterday?

Who have you enjoyed being around recently and why?

How have you used your talents and abilities recently, and what have you enjoyed about doing that?

What did you create today?

What skills did you use today?

What strengths did you apply today?

What weakness were you able to keep in check today and reframe?

How were you able to help others today?

What have you learned recently that will help you in the future?

What made you laugh today?

What's the last song you heard that you enjoyed? How did it make you feel and why?

Have you experienced any blessings in disguise lately – things that did not turn out as you would hope and yet turned out for the best?

What is the weather like today and what's one good thing about that?

Did you go outside today? How was this? What happened?

Who unexpectedly helped you today?

How has technology enhanced your life and your connections recently?

Have you had an opportunity to help someone recently, and how did you feel about that?

What is one thing you experienced recently that made you feel a sense of wonder or awe?

What opportunity presented itself today?

What obstacle did you overcome today?

What problem were you able to resolve today?

What negative were you able to turn into a positive today?

What is the silver lining to something that went wrong today?

What made you feel hopeful today?

What is the best thing about your home, and how have you taken time to enjoy it recently?

What choices have you made in the last five years that you would thank yourself for making?

Who made a positive difference in your life recently?

What is something you're looking forward to in the future?

What is something you witnessed recently that reminded you that people are good?

How many of your basic needs do you not need to worry about meeting today?

What event or interaction made you feel good about yourself recently?

What is something you take for granted that you appreciate?

How do your friends show they care about you?

What is the last thing you enjoyed with your senses – a good meal, a song you love or aromatherapy – and how amazing is it that you were able to experience that?

What is your favourite thing about your bed, and how often does it enable you to get restful sleep?

What is something you have easy access to that always improves your mood, and how has it improved your life?

How did you move an important goal forward today?

How was your body an ally today?

Who were you happy to meet with, chat with or run into today?

What compliment did you receive today?

Who did you show affection to today?

What positive emotions did you experience today?
What negative thoughts, beliefs or emotions were you able to release today?
What was the best part of the day?
Who helped you today?
Who was kind to you today?
What insight did you gain today?
What did you learn today?
How are you better today than you were yesterday?
What did you read or listen to today that added value to your life?
What positive habits did you engage in today?
What negative habits were you able to avoid today?
When did you feel love today?
What did you do today that was fun?
What was something playful you did today?
How did you show yourself compassion today?
What positive things did you notice about your surroundings today?

DO: *Word inspiration, notice, respond then share*

Intention: Engage with one word to inspire a positive response or mindset.

Attention: Draw attention to the everyday.

Attitude: Be curious and open to possibilities.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, A

During the month of February each year I run a community of practice on Instagram and Twitter called Feb Flourish using the hashtag #Feb-Flourish. Each day we post a photograph to share on social media or

send to your close friend via message, which sparks positive emotions and ignites ideas about self-care. Here is a list of inspiring words and short phrases that may inspire you with your interpretation:

- Grateful
- Pushes you
- Want to do again
- Random
- Blessed
- Mentor
- Surprise
- Curiosity
- Relationship deepener
- Joy
- Mindfully present
- Creative
- Listen
- Love
- Self-care
- Self-aware
- Open
- Honest
- Humour
- Ritual
- Unexpected
- Digital
- By yourself
- Habit
- Communication
- Smile
- Movement
- Kindness
- Care
- Social
- Excited

DO: *Journaling as thinking*

Intention: Engage with writing as a form of processing.

Attention: Draw attention to the power of capturing your thoughts (as per the Introduction chapter and benefits we explored in relation to your journaling as you engage with this book).

Attitude: Bring an openness.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Writing is thinking. And writing about your growing ideas is one type of self-care strategy. Think about writing as a strength in the following ways:

- Pay particular attention to the words you are using. How do they help you to convey a message?
- Just blah write – write those words, don't stop to edit or fix the spelling mistakes, just write your ideas and enjoy the moment of flow.
- Experiment with the difference between handwriting and typing on a computer. You could even notice the difference in the tools that you use . . . grey-lead pencil versus pen or typing on a computer.
- Write a hand-written note to communicate an appreciation, new understanding or to acknowledge a connection professionally.
- Experiment with mind mapping or a graphic organiser to capture your ideas.
- Explore capturing words on Post-it notes and moving them around a large wall or piece of paper to make connections.
- Consider: What kind of writing do I enjoy?
- Reflect upon the last piece of writing that you were proud of. What was the outcome?
- Explore different styles of writing to support you and your processing of ideas and thinking.

How does writing help you with your self-care? How is it an act of self-care?

Concluding thoughts

So, how will you treat yourself like a friend? Why not experiment with self-compassion and see how you feel? Regardless of your current situation, time pressures, energy, doubts and how many balls you are juggling, investing in you is a must. Self-compassion is both a tool for your self-care toolbox and a dimension that helps you enact self-care. I've set the intention that you feel this, and I am hoping you will be curious and inspired from these suggestions to take this on board. Please care for you so you can care for your work, students, colleagues and vision. Use your passion for learning for inspiration.

You may also be interested in . . .

Read

The Art of Nurturing Self-Talk: How to Tell Yourself What You Need to Hear by Rita Loyd

<https://tinybuddha.com/blog/the-art-of-nurturing-self-talk-how-to-tell-yourself-what-you-need-to-hear/>

Websites

Tedx Talk: Stacey Schuerman on Breath – five minutes can change your life

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFcQpNr_KA4

Self-compassion in difficult times with Kristin Neff, presented by Action for Happiness www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoqSvlakeSQ

Brené Brown and Daring Classrooms

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5

Empowerment and tuning in to your own self-care

Empowerment comes from awareness of what you need. It can be fostered and grows as you develop skills, confidence and the ability to pay attention to what you need. For your self-care, empowerment brings the possibility of proactive action to bring about what you need, especially with a lens of curiosity and courage.

As you explore what empowerment is and can be for you, in this chapter we will work with some tools that can support you with this. I'll provide a scaffold to develop a plan for your wellbeing and how to put self-care into action. We will connect closely to your purpose or meaning, and work through strengths and how these are a part of our self-care to support engagement and flow.

Underpinning this chapter is a mutual respect and non-judgement of how you can approach and continue to build your toolbox for self-care, where you cultivate choice, agency and capacity to access tools that help replenish you.

Awareness of empowerment

This weird, wonderful and sometimes confusing moment is empowerment.

We are telling the truth to ourselves about what we need,

and we are putting in place what we need.

Self-care is about paying attention to what you really need. It is about assessing and putting into place healthy boundaries and then maintaining them. Self-care is a path to empowerment, and empowerment is a path to self-care.

Right now, you might be reading this and saying, 'Yeah, right! That's easy for you to say'. And it might be easy for me to say, now, but like you, I have been in, and still go through moments where I do not feel empowered, either because of being around people or in situations and contexts that are not empowering. At these times, I feel defeated, low, exhausted and my head hurts so much that I forget my words, I walk into tables, I fall up stairs and I drop things. This *is* paying attention. In these moments, I am paying attention to the fact that my body and brain are telling me to stop, retune and recalibrate. And for me my self-awareness has me stop and step back. In this confusing state, with self-awareness I begin making those adjustments to how I have been operating. I begin to (re)tune in to the self-care actions I need (and must) do.

It is OK to figure it out as you go.

Let's break that down. It is OK (you are giving yourself permission) to figure it out as you go (because you are being self-aware). This saying is like a mantra. It is OK as you figure it out. It is OK to be figuring it out. It is an acknowledgement that you are paying attention, and you are being curious about what is happening and what you need to do. You are being curious as you explore what does and doesn't work for you, and you are opening yourself up to being curious with a courageousness that opens you up to trying new things. You are problem solving, inquiring, asking questions, noticing – whether consciously or subconsciously. When you do this, you are tuning in to your own needs and building your self-care. You are discovering what works and what you didn't know existed. You are noticing who isn't helpful and who you may need to engage with more. You are assessing those healthy boundaries for times when you are feeling good. And you are assessing when those healthy boundaries need some extra attention, and you return to what you know works for you and what you need to help you move from just functioning to thriving once more.

Empowerment comes from awareness of what you need, that moment when you tune in to what you need right now. Empowerment can be fostered and grown as you develop skills, confidence and the ability to pay attention to what you need to act on.

Recharge yourself as often as you recharge your mobile phone.

Think about it this way: if I am away from home for a few nights on a holiday or for work, one of the first things I pack is my mobile phone charger. My phone doesn't work without charging. When I arrive at the accommodation or my work site, I find the power points where I can place my charger. And if I am travelling somewhere remote, with limited access to reliable, or any power sometimes for a few days, I have my portable power bank with me. At all times I make sure that I can charge my phone.

So, when do you recharge yourself?

It is crucial we think about self-care in a different way. Self-care is vital for you. It is both a self-responsibility, but also it is essential for you to be able to do everything that you want. Self-care is not just about protecting and maintaining your health in relation to medical needs for now and in the future. It is about supporting you to function your best right now so that you can flourish, thrive, contribute and enjoy life. And we know that if you are feeling good, then you have the energy to help others. This is when we can really use self-care as a strengthening process that not only empowers you but can empower others as well.

Self-care requires empowerment of choice that broadens and builds resources for us. It is more than just focusing on preventing disease, surviving caring careers or what is wrong.

Cultivating empowerment

We know from the healthcare system that empowering individuals to enact self-care is crucial. This empowerment involves building self-efficacy and capacity to make informed decisions about one's needs, while also acknowledging various sociocultural influences such as race and ethnicity. From this perspective, empowerment is seen as a cyclical process involving an accumulation of knowledge, confidence and self-determination for your own health and healthcare. Culturally and contextually these elements

mean different things to different people as empowerment is acknowledged and built.

From a wellbeing and psychological perspective, empowerment is more proactive and allows for considerations of how one can be autonomous within systems of support. As we develop knowledge, we gain confidence. With confidence we can become more motivated and gain self-determination abilities. This might include being able to communicate our needs, seeking professional health more proactively, and being able to express concerns or preferences.¹ This also includes making daily decisions about what practices or strategies you can use from your toolbox for self-care. It is your self-determination that empowers you to seek more information, gain more knowledge and thus become more confident. It is a cycle where we become more inspired with what we can do to help ourselves.

The World Health Organisation² (WHO) considers empowerment as one of their core concepts for their vision for health promotion and to be proactive with how we manage our health and wellbeing through interacting with daily choices. The WHO thinks about empowerment with regard to it needing to occur simultaneously at the individual and community levels. It is relational. They state that as health is a fundamental human right, empowerment is a societal task whereby everyone can act in a way that is proactive for oneself *and* that we can and should support others and respect their right to health and wellbeing.³

At the individual level WHO think about empowerment across four dimensions that are vital for human development. At the heart of these four dimensions are taking control and responsibility for one's actions as a way

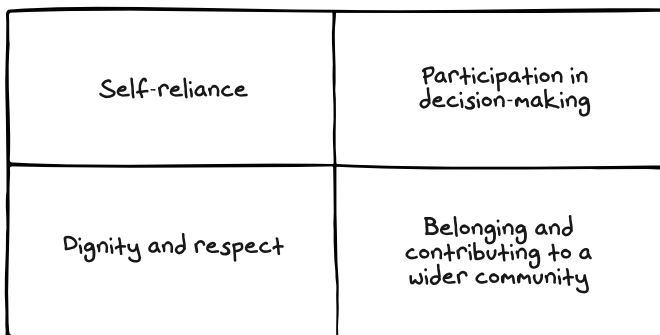


Figure 5.1 The four dimensions of empowerment that are vital for human development.

to be able to support one to show intent and have the potential for living a fulfilling life.

Empowerment in this way is for one to:

- Overcome any feeling of powerlessness
- Gain control of one's life
- Embrace our individual needs and ambitions and be able to define and describe these needs
- Develop one's capacity and resources that support one's wellbeing

The cultivation of empowerment helps us adopt self-determination and autonomy. This means that you can exert more influence on decision-making processes not only for yourself, but over time within society, and possibly politically, while also gaining increased self-esteem. This is critical and a game changer in how we can be activists for self-care for each other and our education sector.

At the community level this can work in two ways:

1. When we have empowered individuals, influence can occur within a community especially when there is a sense of belonging and leadership that facilitates decision-making processes that benefit all involved in the community.
2. Communities can support individuals via the establishment of networks of social support where resources are offered in ways that both facilitate capacity and growth but also acknowledge periods of vulnerability for some.

Empowerment promotes and recognises individuals' strengths, resources and skills. This includes:

- **Decision-making** and a healthy balance between support from others to help make decisions and be aware of what might be possible, while also respecting the tensions between dependency and being independent.
- **Access to information and resources** to support the ability to make decisions. Thus, allowing knowledge to support the making of choices.
- **Learning skills, strategies and practices that you define as important**, including being able to inquire into what inspires or intrigues you with

others such as leaders, professionals, those in your community and those close to you.

- **Meaningful choice** allowing for the opportunity to explore a variety of options that might be relevant and reasonable to select at the time.
- **Reclaiming your own sense of competence** allowing for an awareness of what you currently know (or can do) while also recognising the temporality of that knowledge, in that it can continue to grow and be nurtured.
- **Relational connections:** other people are a critical aspect for ideas, accountability and/or for encouraging each other. Find your right person for the right task, practice or strategy and know these people can change as well as you move through your exploration. Empowerment does not occur in isolation; experiencing a sense of connectedness is helpful for us to celebrate, unpack, explore, tweak, be introduced to new ideas, problem solve experiences and just share to help us open up to other perspectives.
- **Everyone has rights** and we need to think about the broader community and those in it. Don't forget equal rights, the oppressed and disadvantaged. We need to ensure that for everyone human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. We all have a contribution to make in this area.
- **Empowerment is a journey not a destination:** we are always learning, growing and changing. No-one reaches a final destination; our wellbeing is an ongoing journey. We pick things up along the way, some things we keep, others are right for right now or can be rested for a while and picked up again when we need them. Other practices or strategies we don't yet know about at this moment, but may come to learn about them when we are open and when we need them. If we are curious as we grow, it is amazing who and what comes our way for right now.

When we are empowered, we have a sense of reclaiming our sense of who we are.

Your self-care action plan

Self-care means different things to different people. And we know it looks different for each of us. What we all can do is put a self-care action plan together for ourselves to help us identify what our own self-care looks like. This process is about our empowerment.

DO: *Empowering you – your self-care action plan*

Intention: To think through deeply what self-care looks like for you from an action perspective.

Attention: Draw attention to what empowers you and how you can build from what you do now and how you can build your strategies and approaches across diverse areas of wellbeing.

Attitude: Be curious and open to different insights and perspectives that may emerge as you dedicate time to focus on your self-care action plan.

Side note: This plan works in partnership with the personal recovery plan. It will also take time to work through these questions; honour this and know you can come back to it as you process and ponder.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

As you work through this action plan, a set of questions across dynamic areas will be posed. Write your thoughts in your journal in a method that best works for you.

Let's start with what empowers you:

- What do I like doing?
- What do I do that every time has me feeling energised?
- What are my daily needs to help me be my best?
- What makes me feel really good when I have done it?
- When I feel really good, how would I describe this?
- Who are the people in my life that help and value me?

Now let's think about your personal preferences:

What are your personal preferences for things that help you feel and be well?

- I need to do x at the beginning of the day.
- Before I go to bed, I need to do x.

- At the end of the workday before I leave to go home, I need to do x.
- The time of the day I feel most fresh and creative with my thinking and action is x.
- Every day I need to do x.
- I know if I do x, I have caused myself some problems.
- I know when I move at x time of the day, I feel more energised.
- X amount of sleep is required.
- X food helps me.
- X people energise me.
- X appointment helps me.
- X and x paired together help me.
- If I don't do x I don't feel myself.
- When I listen to x or watch x I feel relaxed.
- X is a ritual that helps me flourish.
- X is something that is not helpful for me.

Treating yourself like a friend:

- What can I do to treat myself like a friend?
- What things help me during a difficult time?
- What kinds of things can I tell myself to help me when I am feeling a little down?
- What one word soothes me?
- What brings me comfort when I am under pressure?

Awareness of your stumbling moments:

- What are my signs or stumbling moments that are indicators I am not feeling well mentally or physically?
- What have I noticed in myself as unhelpful repeated patterns when things are not going well?
- What might be some of those behaviours I engage in that are self-sabotaging?
- Is there anything I have done in the past that has helped me?

- Is there anything in the past that has been recommended to me as help and I would like to try?
- Is there anything that you need to tell specific people who could help?
- Who would be my safety people to help me if things get worse?

Preparing your self-care into action:

- What do I need to do every day?
- What are things I need to do less often?
- What are things I can do once a year that I know help me to flourish?
- What actions do I need to take?
- What might get in my way?
- Who can help or support me with these actions?
 - Being an accountability buddy
 - Offer advice
 - Offer encouragement
 - Offer insights
 - Offer support
 - Provide a calmness

Taking action:

What does your self-care empowerment wheel look like?

Level 1: Things I know that energise me now in small micro-moments.

Level 2: Things I know that energise me when I plan for them (think practices and strategies that require longer periods of time).

Level 3: Things I would like to try.

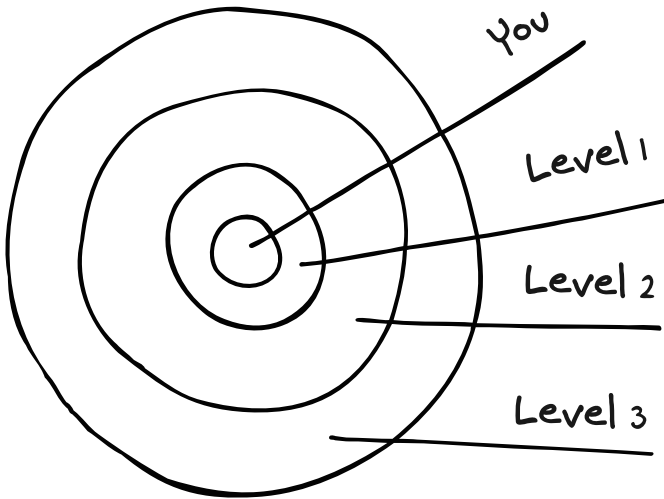


Figure 5.2 Self-care empowerment wheel.

Hope and you:

What is your personal self-care goal, hope or dream?

What first steps will you need to take in terms of habits you can put into place? (See cue, craving, response, reward in Chapter 7.)

Do you have a variety of practices and strategies that vary in and across time to help you with this self-care goal, hope or dream?

Do these strategies and practices all empower you?

Do you have a variety of strategies or practices across a variety of areas of wellbeing? (Think PERMAH as a way to audit what you have noted)

What rewards do you have in place for you to celebrate your engagement with self-care?

Hope statement:

Write your hope statement for your self-care.

You might begin with a sentence starter such as:

I am . . .

I will . . .

When I . . .

My self-care . . .

Hint:

Hope is about optimistic thinking, and it is an action-oriented strength that involves agency, motivation and confidence so your goal can be reached. What does this look like for you with regard to your self-care?

This hope statement can become a mantra or intention for you. It could also be a letter to yourself, something you can handwrite on a card or sticky note and place somewhere you see it regularly. Most important is that this hope statement or intention/mantra brings you joy and forward-moving action that you can care for you, and that your self-care is worthy of your attention. You may even consider the 3 Ps strategy introduced in Chapter 3 here to help you.

Covid-ly reminder of the importance of self-care

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant change for us all. I want to acknowledge this upfront – it has impacted everyone and in different ways, but we have a united understanding of this catalytic moment in our lifetime.

At the time of beginning to write this book I was living in Melbourne, Australia, and it was Week 7 of Stage 4 stay-at-home orders (or Lockdown 2 as we called it, lasting 111 days). This lockdown came with a curfew, so movement was restricted to a 5-km radius from your home, and you were only able to leave home for one of four reasons: exercise for no more than one hour, care, purchasing essential supplies, or for permitted work. I'd been working from home full time since 13 March 2020, with my teaching moving online, my national and international trips all cancelled and workshops and presentations all moving to virtual platforms. All my routines and rituals changed. My house was due to be auctioned at the end of March: the first of

many locked down weekends. What followed was a 19 ½ week adventure rather than what was supposed to be a 5-week stint of open for inspections. We had double-deep cleans multiple times each week with strangers visiting. Amongst unexpected challenges, I learned to cook new recipes, connected with others via phone calls more than I had done for some years and found myself enjoying being at home (I now have a family of multiple indoor plants). I walked more. I did bake-offs with my neighbour, leaving sweet surprises on the doorstep on a Sunday afternoon. I created the #meditation54321 series (which will be unpacked further in Chapter 6) as an act of self-care activism both to capture my daily walks and mindful moments but to also interrupt the social media madness of blaming and shaming that occurs during change and uncertainty.

I was also reminded that self-care was essential, and that the COVID-19 pandemic was a rude interrupter to everyone's every day.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been and continues to be a rude interrupter to all our lives. What we had taken for granted, what we just presumed and what we just kept on expecting has all changed. The change has made us all feel uncomfortable to varying degrees.

With dynamic and fluid changes occurring daily, we were embraced with a rude awakening: What is it we do to care for ourselves and others? For some, this meant parental mother-bear energy fired up, and children and family were immediately taken care of, with bunkering down and regular isolation-by-choice moments. For others, this wasn't the case. Relationships were revealed in ways that challenged us in positive and sometimes less positive ways. Anxieties were present with a rawness that spoke volumes.

I noticed two things during the beginning of the pandemic about self-care:

1. When change happens suddenly, if you haven't valued self-care as a vital part of your daily life, change will hit you hard. You will scramble for anything and usually anyone who appears to have their self-care under control to solve your problems. You will want to have solutions shared with you immediately, thinking that there is one answer,

resolution happens quickly and the magical solution must simply be shared.

2. If you have been working on self-care for a while and have set the intention to discover and find new ways to care for yourself, then when change hits you, you will be OK. You will be able to ride the ups and downs, and you may even relish the opportunity to reset, rediscover and relearn strategies and resources that help you flourish.

JOURNAL PROMPT: How has the pandemic reminded you to value self-care?

What has happened for you? Are there any surprises, highlights, questions or areas that need some tweaking?

COVID-19, self-care and what we can learn from each other

We have all experienced the pandemic differently. But we have an experience as teachers that we can all resonate with. That is, the extreme pressure we were under to pivot quickly to remote and flexible learning. With this pressure came opportunity, and for many of us a chance to learn new skills, be creative with solutions and be surprised in how we supported one another. We created magic and designed, delivered and evaluated learning experiences in ways that for many of us we had not considered or enacted before. We were challenged, sometimes in ways that felt like too much, but often in ways that allowed us to work in different ways that supported us to shine.

Research I undertook in mid-2020 via an online, open-ended survey collected data on how one views self-care during a pandemic from the perspective of flourishing.⁴ This particular study was open to anyone globally over 18 years of age. I was interested in furthering our knowledge of what proactive self-care looks like during the dynamic and changing time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individuals from various professions, including but not only teachers, responded on what works for them during this time. This revealed some great insights.

Self-care evolved as a more conscious and intentional action. Observations included:

- Habits changed with a shift to using more time to do the things that one knew would help one to slow down and be present with the changes occurring personally and professionally.
- Realisation of how important self-care is and how it needs to be a requirement in the fast pace of daily life, and especially during times of uncertain change.
- New ways of carving out self-care were required when navigating working from home with family members, small children, others such as housemates and/or living by oneself. Rethinking the blur between personal and professional spaces and boundaries was required, serving as a reminder that self-care had been dropped previously and that self-care could not be during lockdowns, work from home orders or self-isolation moments.
- Location of work changed, and the home or neighbouring outside areas such as parks or the local streets became the space and place for self-care to be enacted most of the time.
- Self-care happened in the home by snatching small moments.
- Self-care became a conscious act that moved beyond watching a movie on a weekend to everyday acts across broad areas that enriched oneself.
- More walking and methods of moving were explored in ways that had not been before.
- Acts of altruism such as donating time, volunteering, helping others, raising money for causes that help others featured more and provided connection to positive emotions.
- Self-care became scheduled or timetabled rather than leaving it to a 'when I get to it' behaviour.
- Embracing the reliance on technology to connect made it more possible to attend an online yoga session, send out an invitation for a virtual family birthday celebration that involved members from various locations or host a virtual dinner party with friends, for example. The openness to the variety of options to virtually connect provided a shift in perspective and an embracing of alternative ways to stay connected and maintain and build relationships.
- Self-care was a requirement when grieving.

- Gratitude and appreciation featured more in conversations and personal reflections in authentic and surprising ways that assisted greatly in feelings of isolation, confusion, frustration and/or tiredness.

And what began to emerge was the place of our attitude towards self-care. There was a significant shift in embracing what can be possible and how self-care is worthy of our attention with comments such as:

- Finding out more on what it is and making sure each day has all aspects
- Making it a priority
- Take more time to think about it and strategies to improve and focus even more on self-care
- Awareness
- Importance
- Variety
- Learning to do
- I miss it if I don't do it
- Feeling less guilt
- Being kinder to self

DO: *Three good things*

Intention: The pandemic has changed much for all of us, personally and/or professionally. Set the intention to notice your self-care patterns at this time. Underpinning this strategy are the positive emotions of appreciation and gratitude. Gratitude is an essential element of human flourishing.⁵ As a positive emotion, gratitude is an essential part of one's orienting system that has significant benefit during a pandemic.⁶

Attention: Draw attention to small acts non-judgementally. With self-compassion, notice and appreciate your lived experience.

Attitude: Be curious and open, remembering your experience is unique.

Side note: This is a great practice that can be adapted to any situation or context.

PERMAH links: P, E, A

What are three good things that you have noticed in your protection, maintenance and proactive actions for self-care at this time?

Professionally, you could also consider:

- What are three good things remote and flexible learning have taught you?
- What three good things changed in your relationship with students?
- What three good things occurred to allow you to learn with and from your colleagues?
- What three good things surprised you in your professional growth?
- What three good things would you like to continue to do?
- What three good things allowed for you to revitalise your *why*?
- What three good things have emerged from working with parents and carers during the pandemic?
- What three good things have emerged from your engagement with digital technology?

DO: *Being curious*

Intention: Connect with the strength of curiosity to empower you and your self-care action.

Attention: This is a great strategy to engage in when you do not feel empowered. You can use the questions to spark positivity and refocus energy into your thinking to support a shift.

Attitude: Inquire with an openness.

PERMAH links: P, E, A

As you are curious about your self-care and building from what empowers you, reflect on these questions:

- What happens when you approach something new and/or challenging with an awareness and curiosity?
- Who do you admire for their zest and enthusiasm? Why?
- When was the last time you smiled and why?
- What happens when you move your body gently? Or in a way where you raise your heartbeat and sweat?
- If you make a playlist of your favourite and some new songs to inspire you, what happens?
- How can unplugging from your digital devices for a while support you?
- How do you mentor others? What do you notice in yourself?
- Can you book in some time with others who inspire you?

Connecting to your *why*

Connecting to your *why* is an important step to working out *how* to achieve the goals that excite you. It is associated with M(eaning) in PERMAH. Your *why* is associated to your self-care – how you care for yourself and indeed how you care for others with your contribution(s). It is a large part of creating a life you enjoy living (versus merely surviving!).

As teachers your *why* is often associated with your work – such as, why you wanted to be a teacher, what impact you would like to have, who inspired you and how you would like to pass this on. But your *why* is not only about your work. It is as much about your meaning, your passions and what drives you holistically. Your *why* is a part of your self-care, especially when it means engaging with your vision and passion holistically.

In connecting to your *why* you will often find that the nature of what you are doing, your passion for the work you do and what contribution you want to make are all significant elements. Your *why* is your purpose. It is the bigger picture of why you are doing what you are doing. We can also find that there are some activities, collaborations or experiences that take us away from this *why* or blur it (this can be a time when tensions can emerge for us) as much as inspire it (when we feel highly motivated and engaged).

Susan David⁷ in her book *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life* talks about five ways to walk your *why*:

1. Think about choices as equal and different, rather than as choices that are better or worse.
2. Understand that values relate to quality over quantity.
3. Practice social snacking where you can find opportunities to enhance your valued relationships when things become busy. Social snacking can be things like phone calls, coffee dates, walking together, text messaging conversations, social media connections. These types of interactions are also super micro-moments for your toolbox and the R(relationships) of PERMAH.
4. Accept that loss is inherent in choice and move forward with clarity.
5. Show up for yourself with courage, curiosity and self-compassion.

When it comes to your empowerment, finding your *why* and aligning to it is key for your wellbeing. There are a number of ways you can do this, and the following tools are a beginning point for you.

DO: Your *why*

Intention: (Re)articulate your *why*.

Attention: Set the intention to engage with your professional purpose.

Attitude: Inquire into your current reality; be gentle not to judge if you are not happy with your current work reality, rather using this practice as a way to articulate your *why*. If you are excited with what you are doing currently professionally, celebrate, appreciate and enjoy how your *why* is shining while also connecting with what it is that allows this and how you can make sure you can maintain it.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Here are some reflective questions to support you in (re)articulating your *why* as a teacher. Build from your current situation. And you may want to draw on the *ikigai* discussion later in this chapter to

support your connection to your *why*. You could also link to another activity in this chapter called *The things that make you get out of bed*.

- What is your background? How did you come to be where you are right now?
- What are you interested in?
- What are your goals?
- What are your strengths?
- What skills and expertise do you bring?
- What impact do you want to make?
- What are you curious about?
- What do you want to be known for?
- What energises you?
- What do you want to be known for?
- What will be your legacy?

Reflect on these questions to support you to align to your purpose, meaning and *why* as a teacher.

DO: *Your why, your strengths and setting goals (individual to group activity)*

Intention: Place strengths upfront with your *why* and allow opportunity for these to feed into your goals.

Attention: Draw attention to the strengths that bring out the best in you.

Attitude: Be curious and open to your strengths.

Note to self: It is OK if you do not have a language for these as you can engage with what intuitively comes to you. If you do want to draw from a variety of strengths assessment tools, flip through to later in this chapter for support, however, this is not required for this strategy.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

This is a great activity to do with colleagues or a small group. The steps involve individual work, then collaborative work to bring out the best in your curiosity and engagement with what strengths can look like.

Individual reflection on large butcher's paper:

1. Draw a large Venn diagram.
2. Begin with one of the circles, writing the prompt 'a teacher to me is . . .' as a header at the top.
3. Circle 1 reflection prompt: reflection and capturing of thoughts: a teacher to me is . . . What skills, knowledge, practice, attributes, beliefs, values, actions or behaviours do we see are crucial to the role of being a teacher?
4. Write or draw responding in key words, sentences or images.
5. Move to the second circle.
6. Circle 2 reflection prompt: The teacher I am! Write this header. Think about who you are as a teacher right now, in this moment (you can respond based on where you are at in your career trajectory). What skills, knowledge, practice, attributes, beliefs, values, actions or behaviours do you see in yourself?
7. Write or draw your responses.
8. Move to the middle of the circles. What overlaps occur between the role as teacher and where you are at right now?
9. Write or draw your responses.
10. Now, in looking at the work you have completed in the Venn diagram, identify strengths you believe are visible in circle 1 and circle 2. Write these on a sticky note, with one strength per sticky note. Place the sticky note alongside the outline of the Venn diagram in the relevant location based on connections. Note to self: you do not need to refer to a strength-based tool for this, think of strengths that resonate with you in this moment.

Now leave your reflection on the Venn diagram. Come together as a group standing around a table where a set of strengths cards or a list of strengths have been laid out:

1. Look at these words.
2. Note what you see: What is familiar, what is new, what is reinforced or what surprises you? Think to yourself.
3. Now think about you as a person. Connect to your life, for example, who you are, your beliefs, values. What strengths do you see on these cards that you think are you right now?
4. (Teaching moment led by someone who is experienced with strengths.) As a facilitator or team leader, outline what strengths are in connection to wellbeing science. Share how we use, overuse or underuse them, how they are not realised or shine, for example, and link to use, performance and energy. Model as a facilitator to participants what your strengths are and how you use them.
5. Invite participants to pick up the cards, in particular, picking up a strength card that resonates professionally. Consider the question: What resonates with you? What speaks to you in terms of making you excited when you are present with this strength? Share. As a group talk about these strengths and connection to a lived experience. Support your colleagues and bounce off one another. Reflect as you hear your peers share.
6. Discuss. Think about pairing of strengths, underuse or overuse. What have others noticed in you?

Moving back to the individual Venn diagram:

1. Select a different colour of sticky note.
2. Add in additional strengths or edit others you have written now that you have another layer of knowledge.
3. What do you notice?
4. Walk around the room and notice your colleagues' Venn diagrams. What else do you notice? What could they add, what could you add?
5. Set a goal for your next school term or task framing this through your strengths.
6. Share.
7. Discuss.

DO: *Advice to self*

Intention: To observe yourself and connection to purpose.

Attention: Inquire into the judgements or blind spots you may have with compassion.

Attitude: Bring a beginner's mind that is open to this practice like it is the first time you are meeting yourself and the findings.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

If you met someone exactly like yourself . . .

- Same experience
- Same resources
- Same problems
- . . . what advice would you give them?

I am going to extend this further.

What would you say about them in relation to how they are living their life and connection to purpose? Is being a teacher what you really want to do? Are you being the type of teacher you want to be? How do you embody your purpose? What advice would you give them regarding their wellbeing as a teacher?

What do you notice about your observations? How does this connect to you embracing your *why*? What adjustments do you need to make? What celebrations do you have?

DO: *The things that make you get out of bed*

Intention: Explore this strategy that is underpinned by having a direction or purpose in life which provides a sense of fulfilment and towards which you may take action.

Attention: Draw your attention to listening to your intuition.

Attitude: Trust yourself and your feelings as your authority, rather than looking to others to know yourself.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Ikigai is a traditional Japanese term used in relation to your meaning in life. The tradition is based on the notion that we all have *ikigai*, that which makes life worth living, even if we do not know it yet or we have been slightly side-tracked from it. *Iki* means 'life' or 'being alive' and *gai* means 'what is worthwhile and has value'.⁸

It is believed that we should align to *ikigai* at all times, otherwise we can feel as if we have strayed or become disconnected. Outside forces in our everyday life can influence this feeling. But if we work on our meaning, and we are clear about this, we can better tune in to those paths that take us away and where we need to take a diversion back . . . even if we go cross country to return.

When we tune in to our *ikigai* we can work with the everyday grounded moments, innovative thought bubbles, surprises, ups and downs of life, including those unexpected curve balls that are thrown at us. We are able to draw on our past, present and future.

Ikigai is seen as the convergence of four primary elements:

- Passion: What are you passionate about? What do you love?
- Mission/impact: What does the world need?
- Vocation: What are you good at?
- Profession: What can you get paid for? Now? In the future?

How would you describe each of these areas in relation to your *why*?

How do you build on your strengths?

How can your self-care routines support you to connect in these ways and achieve your *why*? How can your self-care routines support you to be energised or return to your energy to help you achieve?

Self-care and job crafting

When we think about empowerment and our work as a teacher, we can recognise the ways that our job is linked to our purpose or meaning. In relation to our self-care, we know that meaning is critical. But sometimes we need tools to help us identify, revitalise or restore our empowerment in this area. One tool I think you will really enjoy is job crafting (and can complement *ikigai*).

With job crafting we can reshape our approach to our job in such a way that what we do becomes more closely aligned with our *why*. We can really connect with our motivations, as well as our individual strengths, skills and preferences. Job crafting is a process that allows you to reshape and rethink the nature of the job itself, and also your career. So, as a teacher we can begin to think about the demands experienced as a teacher, approaches to a task, working with students, parents, colleagues, policy, leadership or curriculum, for example. Job crafting assists us to develop and maintain a personal sense of efficacy for meeting those demands.⁹ It is a process that allows us as employees to redefine and reimagine our job and specifically tasks and approaches to tasks in personally meaningful ways.¹⁰

When we are engaged in the act of job crafting, we can reshape, tweak and craft what we do, and more importantly how we approach it.

Job crafting is connected significantly to working to our strengths and seeing opportunity to perhaps at times rethink how we approach a task or aspect of the job. This requires an alignment between your knowledge, strengths, skills, needs and preferences with the demands and requirements of the job.¹¹ When alignment is in place you can become fully engaged and satisfied because you are sufficiently challenged without feeling overwhelmed.¹²

While you navigate specific contexts you are working in, job crafting helps you align to your meaning. What I love about job crafting is it gives us a framework to think about what it is we do as teachers and tweak, mould and carve out opportunities for ourselves that make us feel empowered, energised and excited. It is a way to help us reframe, especially with tasks or pressures that butt against our *why* and cause us uneasiness as we process.

Job crafting can benefit us and the educational settings we work in, in five ways.¹³

1. **Enhanced organisational performance** – Job crafting is a proactive action to find ways to carve out your whole self within an organisation. You can be creative and innovative as you are flexible and adaptable in your role.
2. **Greater engagement** – Job crafting facilitates personal growth, helps you feel a part of a workplace and assists you in aligning to your why. As you engage with job crafting, you can alter the way you see and engage with your job, and indeed elements of the job. As a result, it provides you with a sense of control over how you approach the tasks to be done, and in some cases over what tasks you do, while also supporting you to feel more fulfilment.
3. **Seeking out feedback supports your growth** – As you approach job crafting, you stretch yourself to see things in different ways. A part of this process is seeking feedback and support that can boost your individual performance and affiliation to the workplace. This can be achieved not only through formal key performance indicator (KPI) meetings, but in ongoing ways on a daily basis formally and informally from a variety of people, including students.
4. **Better fit** – When enacting job crafting, you are able to work more effectively and align to your own goals while also meeting workplace requirements. You thus feel and experience a better person-job fit.
5. **You are happier** – As you engage in job crafting you have the chance to align with your goals, values, why and thus enhance your meaning in the workplace.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Your chance to job craft

How could you craft your role as a teacher to connect to your why?

What specific task(s) might you craft?

How could you craft your relationship with colleagues, students and leadership to support your why?

What opportunities through your leadership (formal or informal) can you facilitate others' job crafting?

Note to self: As you explore job crafting *be careful* of misaligned goals. Missing the point of a task or request from your line manager, changing up the job beyond recognition, unequal access, limiting yourself under the impression you are freeing yourself, taking on too much and exploitation.

DO: Job crafting in action – finding opportunities

Justin Berg et al.¹⁴ from the Centre for Positive Organizational Scholarship at the Michigan Ross School of Business have developed an amazing and comprehensive tool. The Job Crafting Exercise is a tool that has been designed to help people identify opportunities where they can make their jobs more engaging and fulfilling.

The exercise encourages us to view our jobs in a new way – where opportunities can be crafted based on tasks and duties that are required of us. It provides an amazing way to rethink, and really connect with our purpose, strengths and many of the areas of our wellbeing that support our self-care. It's not a quick process, but one that is worth investing in, and I would say individually but also as leaders to support our colleagues.

You can access this in-depth tool that guides you through all the different implementation levels and steps to craft your job online here: <https://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/Job-Crafting-Exercise-Teaching-Note-Aug-101.pdf>

Digging deeper with our strengths to help with our self-care

Strengths help us to feel empowered because we're working with what makes us feel and be our best. When working with our strengths we work in ways that are empowering. We make decisions that are aligned to bringing

out ways of being that highlight an energy that is positive, constructive and light. When working with strengths we are able to form a clear understanding of what is best in ourselves and others around us. There is often a positive energy, and as we know this can have a contagion effect on those around us. When using strengths, you are connecting to ‘who I am’ (a part of your core identity) rather than being viewed for your talents (what you do well), interests (what you enjoy doing), skills (proficiencies you develop) or resources (external support(s)).¹⁵ Put simply, strengths are something you are good at and enjoy doing. Put academically, strengths are the characteristics you hold as a person that allow you to perform well or at your personal best.¹⁶ I’ll unpack more as you progress through the book.

As I wrote this book, I had been working with a group of final-year pre-service teachers during a five-day professional experience placement. I had been running this remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions, connecting daily for briefing meetings, planning sessions, teaching and reflective debriefs online. The pre-service teachers had been preparing a unit of work together inspired by virtual excursions that are now being offered as we find new ways to still engage with knowledge. They had been writing lesson plans, working as a team, teaching, exploring online pedagogy and providing feedback to one another on their teaching.

It was an absolute delight to watch them grow in confidence as they navigated an online placement. Both they and I learned so much. Like many of us during the start of the pandemic in 2020, we were stretched, pulled and challenged in many different ways. During these five days with these future primary and secondary school teachers they were also experiencing this. The day they each taught online was like watching ducks on water . . . they looked smooth and in control, with their timing, movement between platforms, facilitating interactive activities, asking questions to stimulate contributions, and providing positive reinforcement as we all engaged. But behind the scenes, under the water, their legs were paddling hard. The future teachers were making decisions on the go, adjusting teaching plans according to the flow of the virtual classroom and emerging moments. With this came managing mind chatter, sequencing shifts to respond to learning moments and navigation that so many of us have had to do of making pedagogical decisions that scaffold student-centred learning with digital tools extending us beyond the face-to-face we are so accustomed to when we teach.

'Can everyone see my screen I've just shared?'

The question of 2020!

As teachers we know this feeling. We've also been there, adjusting to the flux of a classroom and indeed ways we do what we do, and we will revisit moments like this often no matter our experience. I've been teaching for over 25 years, and I still have the butterflies in my tummy in anticipation when I first meet a group of students and I overthink every possible solution to an idea I want to put into action as if it is the first time I have done it.

When I reflected with these future teachers, I asked them just one question: What is a strength of yours that came through for you during your teaching?

Silence. [Insert reflection, processing, cultural block moment.]

I was looking at a screen of faces. Some sliding off the screen as they slide under their desks. Others changing their line of view so that they wouldn't catch my attention. I waited.

This is a hard question to answer. We have been trained to ask this of the students we work with, but we never give ourselves the opportunity to ask this of ourselves.

So true, right?

We, as teachers, are so great at scaffolding others, finding the strengths in others, we forget to ask it of ourselves.

I love this question as it automatically brings an awareness of how we talk to ourselves and that there is always a positive in amongst the critical self-talk and the hustle and bustle of quickly moving to the next thing we have to do. It makes us stop. We must slow down. We have to be present.

What did these future teachers share?

Some of the amazing strength spotting included:

I can think on my feet and know that I can adjust to the
situation I am in.

(Adaptable/Perseverance)

I feel more confident as time progresses during my teaching.

(Optimism/Bounce back/Growth)

I can keep students engaged with multiple learning experiences
and ways to engage all the students.
(Esteem builder/Enabler/Explainer)

I am curious and enjoy learning from others.
(Curiosity/Love of learning/Improver)

I want to start the hard conversations, and I am developing an
awareness of how to do this.
(Courage/Self-awareness/Ethical/Integrity)

I have enthusiasm, and I bring this energy to my teaching.
(Self-belief/Zest)

I share this story as it is a fundamental reminder of a few things that are central to this book:

- Strengths energise us.
- Strengths allow us to be gentler to ourselves and others.
- Strengths offer us a new way to experience a situation.
- Strengths are one major resource for our toolbox of self-care resources.
- Strengths change and develop over time.
- Strengths, when embodied, are a way to explore, enact and be with some of those core aspects important for flourishing.
- Strengths provide us with a common language to talk to one another.
- Strengths empower us.

As a teacher in the classroom, I describe strengths as our superpowers. From this perspective, we perform a strength well, the strength energises us, we love using the strength and we are at our best when we use it. With my coaching clients, I explain that knowing strengths is knowing your greatest natural talents and they represent potential. I often say they make us jump out of bed in the morning. We can't wait to use them because we feel at our best when we are putting them to use.

We all have strengths. When we use our strengths, we are happier, more confident and we have a glow about us that is infectious. Strengths can be overused or learned so we have to be careful about that aspect, but when

we tune in to what is right for us and really dig deep into thinking about ourselves through a strengths-based lens, things around us change. They help us to gain perspective and clarity.

A strengths-based approach is underpinned by intentionally choosing to focus one's attention and energy on cultivating that which will yield the most significant growth. This does not mean we ignore weaknesses, but instead we seek to understand and manage areas of deficiency while optimising effort by building on strengths.

There are many different strengths. And there are many different research-informed frameworks we can draw upon. Most of these frameworks have assessment tools that help us to identify strengths and also monitor our growth over time when we revisit them. In education we often use values in action or VIA as it is commonly called. Values in action was developed by Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson, two well-known scholars and practitioners in positive psychology.¹⁷ I also want to introduce you to the other frameworks, so the seed is planted for you to explore these when you are ready. Each is slightly different in how the list of strengths is presented, but all are united in one thing: strengths help us perform well, and when we use them, we feel better, are more energised and perform well, and thus they have a positive impact on our wellbeing and ability to flourish. They allow us to feel empowered.

All were developed for different reasons but are currently used for similar purposes: to identify our strengths from a Western perspective.¹⁸ Strengths provide a road map for our journey in life. Strengths can provide us with clarity and a common language, and they provide a mindful way to learn about ourselves and others. Strengths can move and shift based on life experiences over time, so it is recommended that you evaluate these for yourself on an annual basis to identify shifts and to see growth areas while also acknowledging life's ups and downs.

Strengths are patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that when exercised will excite, engage and energise you. They allow you to perform at an optimal level and help you grow as an individual. Strengths have been broadly defined as ways of behaving, thinking or feeling that an individual has a natural capacity for, enjoys doing and which allow the individual to achieve optimal functioning while they pursue valued outcomes.¹⁹ Strengths energise us,²⁰ especially when we are tuning in to those that help us grow, and when used productively contribute to our

development and meeting our goals. Strengths are a part of who we are and are embodied.

A strengths-based approach does not ignore what can be perceived as weaknesses but focuses on and builds from our strengths. When working with strengths perspective we are looking for what is working well and how it can be possible to leverage the strengths for optimal performance.²¹ In this way this is juxtaposed to traditional approaches of working individually and collectively in which a focus can be placed on what is wrong, what someone cannot do; this is more a deficit-based approach.

By framing ourselves and work with others the aim is to approach the experience with a positive lens, rather than escape or avoid the negative or focus on the negative, so what is wrong and how something is not working.²² It doesn't mean we ignore but rather we reframe and embrace a growth mindset.²³ It is an approach that can support a terminology and/or common language to work with others, and indeed yourself, and a way that is manifested in relationships with others, not in isolation.

What is interesting to note is that research indicates that most people will reflect upon and identify the weaknesses in themselves much quicker than their strengths and can also struggle to describe or share stories that bring their strengths to life.²⁴ So, there may be no surprise that it has been found that burnout or lowered job satisfaction and motivation are connected to those who do not invest their strengths.²⁵ Does this resonate with you? It does for me. This is why working with your strengths is good for you and empowering.

When I discovered strengths as a way to describe what I do, how I feel and how this impacts my approach to how I work best and engage with others, it gave me a common language to understand myself and also communicate this to those around me. Discovering strengths and investigating more actually felt like a gentler way to think about what I do and how I do it. It also provided me with a language to consider how others work and how to appreciate moments that look and sound different to me.

Have you noticed in yourself that sometimes there are things you do that you find easy and energising? And then other times there are things you do that are draining, difficult and all your procrastination strategies seem to come to fruition? Strengths help us understand these ups and downs, highs and lows, energisers and drainers, and things that make us excited versus those things that we have a passion to avoid (ie, weaknesses or strengths we just do not know how to put into action and develop).

There are a number of approaches to thinking about and classifying strengths including Gallup's Clifton Strengths Finder,²⁶ VIA classification of character virtues and strengths²⁷ and the Strength Profiler.²⁸ All three are slightly different. Let's engage with some of the common frameworks that help provide a vocabulary to discuss and conceptualise your strengths. Connect with all or one that resonate(s) with you.

Values in action

One of the most commonly used strengths tools is VIA Character Strengths which uses a 240-item self-report measure, commonly administered online, with participants receiving feedback about 24 strengths ranked in priorities for you right now. All strengths listed are seen as being posed. Upon completion of the survey, strengths are ranked. Although some may be listed lower in the ranking, it is important not to think you are bad at them, rather to view these as strengths you may not have a chance to develop or use. This framework is commonly used in schools as there is access to a free survey that is accessible on many levels. You can find this tool online at: www.viacharacter.org/

Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman in developing this tool set up several criteria which demonstrate how strengths are the route through which we achieve virtues in our life.²⁹ Peterson and Seligman have both been influential within the field of positive psychology and have been instrumental leaders in how strengths can support us in finding ways that make each of us feel fulfilled and invigorated.

Gallup's clifton strengths finder

Gallup's Clifton Strengths Finder created by Donald Clifton is a published and evidence-based assessment tool.³⁰ This strengths assessment tool focuses on natural talents in combination with knowledge and skills. This assessment tool is often used in leadership scenarios. You can find this tool online at: www.gallup.com/home.aspx

Table 5.1 Values in action strengths list

VIRTUES	WISDOM	COURAGE	HUMANITY	JUSTICE	TEMPERANCE	TRANSCENDENCE
STRENGTHS	Creativity Curiosity Judgement Love of learning Perspective	Bravery Honesty Perseverance Zest	Kindness Love Social intelligence	Fairness Leadership Teamwork	Forgiveness Humility Prudence Self-regulation	Appreciation of: Beauty Gratitude Hope Humour Spirituality

What will happen when we think about what is right with people rather than fixating on what is wrong with them?

Buckingham, M., & Clifton, D. O. (2001).

Now, discover your strengths: How to develop your talents and those of the people you manage (p. XX).

Simon & Schuster

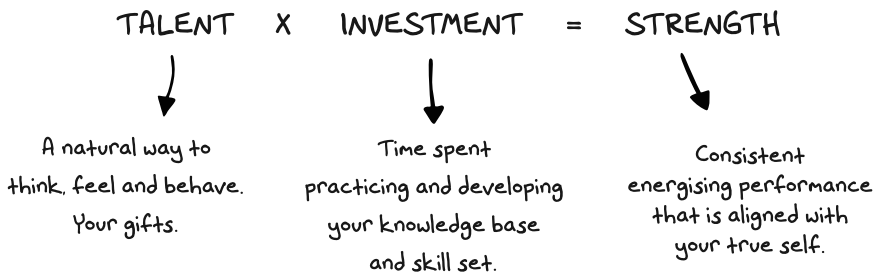


Figure 5.3 Talent × investment = strength.

Table 5.2 Gallup's Clifton Strengths Finder list

DOMAIN	EXECUTING	INFLUENCING	RELATIONSHIP BUILDING	STRATEGIC THINKING
STRENGTHS	Achiever Arranger Belief Consistency Deliberative Discipline Focus Responsibility Restorative	Activator Command Communication Competition Maximiser Self-assurance Significance Woo	Adaptability Connectedness Developer Empathy Harmony Includer Individualisation Positivity Relator	Analytical Context Futuristic Ideation Input Intellect Learner Strategic

There are 34 strengths considered to be foundational across four themes or domains. What I really like about this approach to strengths is the formula $\text{talent} \times \text{investment} = \text{strength}$. It is another version of how we can connect to our strengths, think about our energy and where we place it and how we can support ourselves to consistently perform well.

Strength profiler

The Strength Profiler²⁶ assessment tool is often used more within human resources contexts but does appear in use in educational contexts for deeper and extended work. It prompts a way of thinking about strengths in terms of capacity of feeling and behaving that allows for optimal functioning in the pursuit of desirable outcomes. This is the only assessment tool that addresses the explicit area of weakness. You can find this tool online at: www.strengthsprofile.com/

Table 5.3 List of strengths from the Strength Profiler

Action	Adaptable	Adherence	Adventure	Authenticity
Bounce back	Catalyst	Centred	Change agent	Compassion
Competitive	Connector	Counterpoint	Courage	Creativity
Curiosity	Detail	Drive	Emotional awareness	Empathetic
Enabler	Equality	Esteem builder	Explainer	Feedback
Gratitude	Growth	Humility	Humour	Improver
Incubator	Innovation	Judgement	Legacy	Listener
Mission	Moral compass	Narrator	Optimism	Organiser
Persistence	Personal responsibility	Personalisation	Persuasion	Planner
Prevention	Pride	Rapport builder	Relationship deepener	Resilience
Resolver	Self-awareness	Self-belief	Service	Spotlight
Strategic awareness	Time optimiser	Unconditionality	Work ethic	Writer

The Strength Profiler talks about strengths in relation to performance, energy and use across four areas: realised strengths, unrealised strengths, learned behaviour and weaknesses.

- Realised strengths – strengths you use and enjoy, but we need to be aware to use them wisely.
- Unrealised strengths – strengths that are not used often, and these are encouraged to be used more.
- Learned behaviour – strengths that we do well but may not enjoy. We use these strengths when needed, but they are not preferred. Sometimes the strengths that are classified here for an individual have been overused and become less enjoyable or effective.
- Weaknesses – strengths that we find hard and do not enjoy, so we use these less.

DO: Becoming acquainted with your strengths

Intention: Identify and engage with your strengths.

Attention: Draw attention to how strengths can provide a language to support your feeling of empowerment and engagement with work, people and your personal life.

Attitude: Bring an attitude of fascination.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

You can approach becoming acquainted with your strengths in a number of ways with choice providing your options from the perspective of your professional and/or personal growth but to also help you feel empowered:

- Strengths spot: Look at a strengths list from earlier that resonates with you and brings out the best in you. Create a list, not ranked, but just listing terms as a part of your noticing.
- You could ask a close friend, colleague or someone in your personal life to spot (or identify) your strengths.
- You could complete a strengths assessment tool to identify this.

- You could refer to a strengths assessment you have had completed, ideally drawing on one that was completed in the past 12 months or earlier. And reminder to self that we need to keep in mind that our strengths change and grow as we do, so ongoing assessment is beneficial in connecting to your growth.

Once you have engaged with your strengths and spent some time with them, complete these reflective questions to support your engagement with strengths.

Refer to your full strengths list (from spotting, self-assessment or a strengths assessment tool) and discover how you like to work. Note your top five strengths.

When you review your strengths list of five, tune in to how you're feeling about them.

What are they and what do they mean to you?

Do you feel satisfied with the list as a whole?

What does each individual strength ignite in you?

Do any not feel at all like you?

Put your results into context by thinking back on how you've used or not used these strengths at work in the past to understand what they look like in your role as a teacher. I encourage you to think about two scenarios:

1. A moment in the classroom when you are teaching and you feel present, in flow and just loving what is happening for you, your students and the learning environment and
2. A moment when you were frustrated or stressed. What happened? Were your strengths present? How could your strengths have helped you if you were not so present with them in the moment?

As you engage with your strength, the challenge will be finding ways to apply these more consistently at work (and in your personal life) and spot them in yourself. This is where reflection in and on action also comes to mind, especially the reflection in action aspect: What does reflection in action look like for you when you are engaging with and enacting your strengths? How does this form a part of your self-care?

JOURNAL PROMPT: Strengths tune-in

In your journal, make some notes about how you can be present with your strengths. Observe, notice and connect to the E(ngagement) and M(eaning) of PERMAH. Here are some prompts that you can work with, select one or more that resonates with you.

- What strength energises you and helps you in your approach to being the best teacher you can be?
- What strength de-energises or makes you feel drained?
- What strength(s) could you identify that may be needed to be used less?
- What strength(s) could you identify as being paired together that help you approach specific tasks as a teacher?
- What strengths do you admire in others? How could you learn more about these in action?
- How can strengths be considered when you think about what you do to contribute to your colleagues or the wider school context? What do you notice? How do you feel about it?
- How do students bring out your strengths?

Empowerment and our relationship with others

As you work with the strengths that empower you with your self-care and wellbeing, one of the concepts you can think about is to apply them to cultivate supportive and constructive relationships, especially as a way to maintain connections but to also help you navigate difficulties. In this next section

I look at the R(relationships) from PERMAH more closely in connection with the E(ngagement) and specifically how strengths can help us pair these two areas of our wellbeing. These strategies and practices will also work in partnership with those in Chapter 7 and especially in the exploration of boundaries.

Culture and working with others

Culture in the workplace relates to aspects such as the shared values and assumptions of a workplace, a power hierarchy, rules, hidden or unsaid ways of working. Culture in the workplace has been identified as one of the most powerful and stable forces in operation.³¹ Each workplace, so in this case schools, early childhood centres, higher education institutions or other educational settings, is unique and is significantly influenced by culture. We can all influence culture. We can create culture. Some may say surviving the culture at times becomes a focus. But for all situations internal and external influences are at play. I often think about the workplace culture as an iceberg – there are things we can see on top but underneath the water are hidden aspects of culture, some at the surface and others deeply hidden. There are evaded aspects also influencing culture.

The workplace is an environment in which many of us spend significant time, find meaning and form identities.³² The workplace also influences our wellbeing; it can be a positive influence, but also a negative one. A workplace culture especially can have a huge impact on our wellbeing – I'm sure we have all experienced a workplace where the culture was not supportive or good for our mental or emotional health. Relationships with others are a part of this – leadership, colleagues, teams or community, for example. Working with others can empower some of us, and for others it can be something that makes us want to run and avoid at all costs. Our varying lived experiences can inform this, as much as the people, a specific person, cultural norms and/or context. These experiences can be hidden, evaded or right in front of us.

Mindfulness tips for working with partners

In the book *Reframing and Rethinking Collaboration in Higher Education and Beyond* I worked with my dear colleague and friend Janet Salmons to write about positive approaches in collaborations.³³ We collated a set

of principles that are a great guidance for working with others. I share them here:

- **Identify and concentrate on your strengths.** By knowing you, you can begin to connect with others.
- **Name the strengths out loud.** Use the language of strengths but be careful to not assume everyone knows their own strengths or what they look like in practice. Share your experience, share what you notice or suggest an assessment tool to support next steps of discovery.
- **Give yourself permission to explore and develop your strengths.** Tune in to what energises you.
- **Strength spot.** Notice others' strengths. Appreciate. Express gratitude.
- **Be careful not to compare with others.** We can identify with strengths in different ways and show them in different ways, so be careful not to compare, rather talk about what you notice (from 'I message' stance).
- **When working with others, assign tasks based on an individual's strengths.** Look for ways to use each other's strengths. To be able to approach the task you will need to have a conversation about this. What do they look like? How can strengths support individual and group cohesion? What does success look like?
- **Responsibility and accountability.** Think about how each of you can and will approach the task collectively. What are individual *and* collective responsibilities? What are individual *and* collective accountabilities? What does this look, feel and sound like?
- **Motivate and celebrate.** How can you support and motivate one another?
- **Use failure as motivation.** Learning from mistakes is one way we can embody a growth mindset. How will you individually and collectively approach this? What might be a safe space or phrase that you can use to support the conversations? How can strengths support these conversations?
- **Create a habit.** Create a habit of using your strengths individually and collectively. What are patterns or routines you can put in place to support the honing of your and others' strengths on a regular basis that helps you and your partners to feel more engaged and energised?
- **Reflect.** Practice awareness and bringing your attention framing to your work with others.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Working with others to support your wellbeing

What experiences have you had in relation to working with others where the connection has been a collaboration that has been good for your wellbeing? What was this like? What was involved? What was the impact? How can you cultivate more of this in your working life as a teacher?

DO: *Strengths and working with others*

Intention: Make the time to think through what working with others can look like from a strengths-based perspective.

Attention: Bring a patience with you as you explore ways of being and habits that can be developed in working with others.

Attitude: Be non-judgemental, recognising the judging quality of mind that may arise at times.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A

Let's put these ideas into action. You may wish to journal these as reflective notes or alternatively work on a whiteboard or large piece of paper where you can make links and visualise.

How can you identify strengths in others? What options or approaches are available to you?

How can you use the language of strengths with others? What are ways you can engage to develop a common language and understanding? How can you collectively and individually maintain this?

How can you give yourself permission to explore and develop your strengths? How do you learn from and with others?

What principles can you put in place so that you are careful not to compare yourself and strengths with others?

When working with others, what is possible when assigning tasks based on an individual's strengths? What do they look like?

How can they support individual and group cohesion? What does success look like?

What is the place of responsibility and accountability? How can strengths assist you to explore this? Think about how each of you can and will approach the task collectively. What are individual *and* collective responsibilities? What are individual *and* collective accountabilities? What does this look, feel and sound like?

How can you motivate and celebrate your colleagues in meaningful and purposeful ways? How can you support and motivate one another?

How can you set up seeing failure as a motivation? How will you individually and collectively approach this? What might be a safe space or phrase that you can use to support the conversations? How can strengths support these conversations?

What is possible when you create a habit of working with your strengths as a group? What are patterns or routines you can put in place to support the honing of your and others' strengths on a regular basis and help to feel more engaged and energised?

Bringing your strengths while working with others

Michelle McQuaid and Peggy Kern³⁴ in their work on wellbeing in workplaces remind us that for each person, tools and approaches will vary. They will depend on the person, situation, individual and collective states of wellbeing and outcomes wanting to be achieved. So, when working with your colleagues, key is knowing yourself and then knowing how you can work with others (knowing their strengths and being able to spot them).

In this table, I begin to map some of these considerations. I have aligned a strengths-based way of working to PERMAH to outline what this looks like and can sound like in association with behaviours and actions. These are starting points, and of course can be tweaked, adjusted and further unpacked depending on your context.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Strengths and working with others

As you reflect on the mapping represented in the table *Bringing your strengths to your relationships*, what do you notice about the place of PERMAH to support how you work with others? What do strengths bring to collaborations and teamwork? What stands out regarding actions and behaviours?

Table 5.4 Bringing your strengths to your relationships

	P	E	R	M	A	H
WELLBEING FRAMEWORK	Positive emotions: Experiencing positive feelings	Engagement: Being interested and involved in life. Experiencing flow.	Relationships: Connections with other people. Feeling loved and valued.	Meaning: Connecting to something bigger than ourselves. Having a sense of direction. Feeling valuable and worthwhile.	Accomplishment: Having a sense of mastery. Feeling as though you have achieved a goal. Ability and belief that what you do matters.	Health: Physical health.
STRENGTHS AS YOU WORK WITH OTHERS	Curiosity Hope Gratitude Kindness Love Humour Empathy Positivity Learner Compassion Courage Optimism Legacy Courage Persistence Bounce back	Fairness Creativity Zest Empathy Harmony Individualisation Ideation Input Analytical Adaptability Creativity Planner Improver Resilience Drive Pride Enabler Resolver Mission	Perspective Honesty Social intelligence Teamwork Humility Forgiveness Leadership Adaptability Connectedness Developed Listener Relationship deepener Counterpoint Esteem builder Narrator Writer Rapport builder Connector	Judgement Bravery Love of learning Restorative Significance Input Authenticity Change agent Personalisation Catalyst Innovation	Perseverance Prudence Appreciation of beauty Achieved Discipline Focus Strategic Improver Work ethics Moral compass Growth Time optimiser Organiser	Fairness Self-regulation Spirituality Emotional awareness Self-belief Humility Personal responsibility

(Continued)

Table 5.4 (Continued)

	P	E	R	M	A	H
ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS	Smiling Making eye contact Sharing an appreciation Bringing energy Authenticity Being tolerant Dealing with others' anger Cooling off Noticing other strengths Expressing empathy Saying thank you	Attention to detail Offering other ways of approaching a task Being organised Beginning a conversation Ignoring distractions Following directions Project planning	Making connections Communicating Being on time Offering feedback Being supportive Attention to detail Maintaining minutes Taking notes Listening Connecting via social media Checking in on others Investing in time with others Being reliable Compromising Convincing others Taking responsibility Taking turns Joining in Knowing when to change approach Team meetings	Stepping back and reflecting before responding Visually mapping links Including others Bringing on others to a team Making connections Building from failure	Meeting deadlines Chunking your time Planning Mapping timelines Hosting events Sending an acknowledgement note Promoting achievements Team celebrations Sharing a gratitude	Taking breaks Arranging social events Offering support and feedback Finding time to exercise Bringing healthy snacks Supporting moment to rest

Source: Adapted and extended from Lemon, N., & Salmons, J. (2021). *Reframing and rethinking collaboration in higher education and beyond: A practical guide for doctoral students and early career researchers*. Routledge.

DO: *Mindfully applying strengths when working with others*

Intention: To consider different perspectives when working with others. This is about knowing oneself as a form of empowerment.

Attention: Draw your attention to how you may come across to others or be perceived.

Attitude: Bring a beginner's mindset to this strategy, seeing the process as a part of your growth or as a coaching yourself opportunity.

Reminder to self: This strategy could be undertaken individually or with a trusted colleague.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M

When working with colleagues in the workplace there are several layers to consider in relation to the interaction in terms of your own thinking and behaviours. Firstly, how can you be aware of your presence, what you bring and how you embody strengths? Secondly, how can you be aware of how you respond or be in action, when you are in conversation with someone else? The *Bringing your strengths to your relationships* table may be a great starting place for you to build from.

When working with others there are times when you need to adjust or reframe the perspective of where you are coming from. Here are some reflective questions to support your approach:

- What is an alternative question I could ask?
- How might I reframe a question?
- What extra knowledge could I have planned for?
- What different approach could I have taken to support me being able to communicate where I was coming from?
- When will a mindful pause be of value before I respond or share more?
- In the moment, or reflecting in action, now what can I do?
- Now what do I need to do?
- What might I do to improve or enhance the situation?

- How can I take a moment to regroup and be in the present moment with openness?
- Now what might be the consequences of this change in collaboration focus or conversation?
- What opportunities arise?
- Now what might I change?
- Now what might I pick up?
- Now what is on offer in this learning moment for me?
- Now what is on offer in this learning moment for my colleagues?

DO: When our strengths are the same, but we aren't the same

Intention: Notice how the manifestation and application of the same strengths can be different for others.

Attention: Draw attention to assumptions that you can make that perhaps do not serve you.

Attitude: Be curious as you unpack how the same strength can be interpreted and look different for someone else.

PERMAH links: P, E, R

What happens when you work with someone who has the same strength as you but uses it differently?

When you work with someone who shares your strengths, it can be easy to assume they think and act like you do. The key to this situation is finding what is different and how this can make both of you even stronger. Key to this situation is:

- Noticing how the others work.
- Seeking feedback and constructive review.
- Drawing on your language of strengths to learn from one another.

- Not making assumptions that you use the strength in the same way, acknowledging that this is when skills come into play in action.
- Openness and curiosity to others' different approaches.
- Ongoing dialogue about approaches.
- Being careful not to overuse your strength.
- Considering how you can pair strength with other strengths.
- Viewing approach as complementary not competition.
- Asking lots of questions including what the strength looks like in action.
- You might begin with these questions as a starting point to explore each other's strengths:
 - What can I do to support you?
 - What is another way we can approach this?
 - What is the best approach for us right now?
 - How can we learn from and with one another?
 - What do you bring that is different that can complement me and us?

DO: Strengths as a common language to explore tensions with others

Intention: To shift tensions that can occur when working with others.

Attention: Focus on a different approach to reconnecting with others at times of a tension.

Attitude: Cultivate an openness to learn from one another as you learn more about yourself as well.

PERMAH links: P, E, R

Dynamics of a collaboration change over time. Ideally, the dynamic improves; however, tensions or misunderstandings can also emerge or exist for a longer time. This is not unfamiliar for most of us. Issues

are more difficult to solve when expectations of working together differ and we are unable to discuss these and put into place guiding principles to support progress. Often what can become evident is a withdrawal or low engagement. And in some cases, relationship breakdown can occur.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan³⁵ in their work on self-determination theory found that conflict can exist between one's natural orientation toward growth and development in interaction with disruptive experiences (such as peer pressure restriction, not feeling valued, lacking a sense of belonging). These disruptive experiences can impair, block or hinder autonomy and motivation, impacting overall success individually and collaboratively. This is where using your strengths and the strengths of your collaborators can benefit a shifting of experience and understanding. In this way strengths can become a language to align and support a positive approach.³⁶

Key questions to help colleagues relate to each other in positive ways:

- How can you translate your strengths in forming trust with your collaborator(s)?
- What steps will you take to establish mutual respect?
- What protocols should be put in place proactively to support problem solving?
- What agreements need to be put in place that are proactive in ensuring successful conflict resolution?
- What will be the best way to communicate any issues that may arise?
- What steps will you take to deepen trusting relationships that allow for processing and moving through problems or conflicts?
- Have you had a conversation about your triggers and what you need to be able to move forward productively and positively?

Conclusion

Connection to empowerment promotes positive energy, choice, agency and voice. It is time for you to feel empowered with your self-care. No matter how you connect to your strengths or focus on your *why*, every small step makes a difference. It is the choice you make for yourself that is the magic. Start small. Reach high. Get excited. And remember to align to what you know now works for you, excites you and energises you, then keep being curious as you build your skills and capacity to develop your toolbox for self-care. Be curious as you try it.

You may also be interested in . . .

Read and explore

Character Strengths at Home: Sharing hope

<https://www.viacharacter.org/resources/activities/character-strengths-at-home-sharing-hope>

What Matters Most? Using your strengths to impact well-being by Ryan Niemiec

www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/what-matters-most

Self-care and re-energizing

<https://schoolguide.casel.org/>

Podcasts on empowerment

Need a Strengths Energy Boost? Podcast with Alex Linley & Trudy Bailey on Making Positive Psychology Work Podcast www.michellemcquaid.com/podcast/need-strengths-energy-boost/

Dr Ryan Niemiec on Can You Put Your Strengths To Work? www.michellemcquaid.com/podcast/dr-ryan-niemiec/

Teachers Supporting Teachers Podcast – Narelle talks with Jodie Cooper on the place of play as adults.

www.exploreandcreateco.com/teachers-supporting-teachers-podcast/2020/8/28/teachers-supporting-teachers-series-2-episode-9-play-as-an-interruption-to-stress

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6

Being mindfully aware

Introduction

I think of mindfulness as a way to rejuvenate myself and to create restorative time to bring me back to this moment right now. It is time focused on being present with myself, with self-awareness as an act of care. When engaging with(in) a mindful moment act, a meditation or any formal or informal mindfulness strategy, I am centred and grounding myself. I might be practicing a strategy that takes 30 seconds or something that takes longer. No matter the practice I engage with, mindfulness is an act of pausing, non-judgmentally, with an awareness. It is about taking the time, and this honouring of time is an act for and of care.

I do not think of mindfulness for productivity, as is often sold to us in some commercial and human resources situations. For me the sensation of feeling present, or grounded, is a sensation and experience of wholeness. I am connected to my breath and breathing deeply, slowly with an intentionality that interrupts any focus on a tension in my body or a rumination. Although thoughts pop into my mind, and they do for everyone, I can notice and appreciate without analysing or reacting. In this moment I am tuning in to that very moment, regulating my internal physical responses to stress or what is occurring for me in my mind chatter. I am counteracting the fight, fight, fawn or freeze response.

In this chapter we spend time understanding mindfulness as an act of care, and as an important part of your toolbox for self-care. Mindfulness for your self-care assists us in two ways:

1. Mindful awareness of your needs – tuning in to each minute, moment, day and week, and noticing non-judgementally what is happening for you and what will help you at this time.
2. As informal or formal mindfulness practices that form tools for your toolbox.

*Whenever your mind becomes scattered,
use your breath as a means to take hold
of your mind again.*

Meditation and mindfulness connections

Mindfulness practices help restore feelings of calm and focus. They can support the lowering of our heart rate and blood pressure which makes us feel calmer. When our body is calmer our mind becomes calmer. It is this mind-body connection that is often facilitated through informal or formal mindfulness practices.

The commercialisation of mindfulness in Western society has led many of us to think mindfulness is only about meditation, and that meditation usually comes in the form of sitting silently, usually cross legged, with our hands resting on our knees in the lotus position using an app you have subscribed to. However, mindfulness and meditation can come in different forms to support us to reconnect with our bodies, as well as the sensations we can experience in this present moment.

Informal practices can be as simple as washing the dishes in your kitchen sink by hand and noticing the feel of the warm water that flows in and around the shape of a bowl as you are moving your own hand in a circular motion. One of the most exciting things about informal practices is that it can be incorporated into any activity.¹ They are everyday practices that help us maintain an open and accepting present focus in the day-to-day activities that can challenge us. We can do a body scan for example while we are standing in front of a class. Or we can connect to breath when listening in a meeting or preparing to go into class after recess when we know the gossip and tensions of the playground are going to bombard us. At lunchtime we

can sit and savour each mouthful of our meal before going out to yard duty or heading to music rehearsal or to the staff v student netball match.

As with any mindfulness practice, meditation also consists of many different versions of practices. You can think of it as a family of practices that assist us to focus our attention in a way that is non-judgemental. So, there are various different practices that can help us to not dwell or ruminate or can help us pause and slow down. Any moment or activity that involves a mindset or intention to focus our attention on a specific focal point, without analysis, is a meditation. We can undertake this practice in different ways.

As you find a meditative approach that might work for you there are some reminders shared in the mind map that may assist you. As you experiment with meditation as a possible self-care tool for your toolbox, consider:

- Context and moment in time influences what we might use or indeed how we experience meditation.
- Not all approaches or techniques work for everyone (for example, there are times when you might not enjoy a particular one, or you feel uncomfortable).

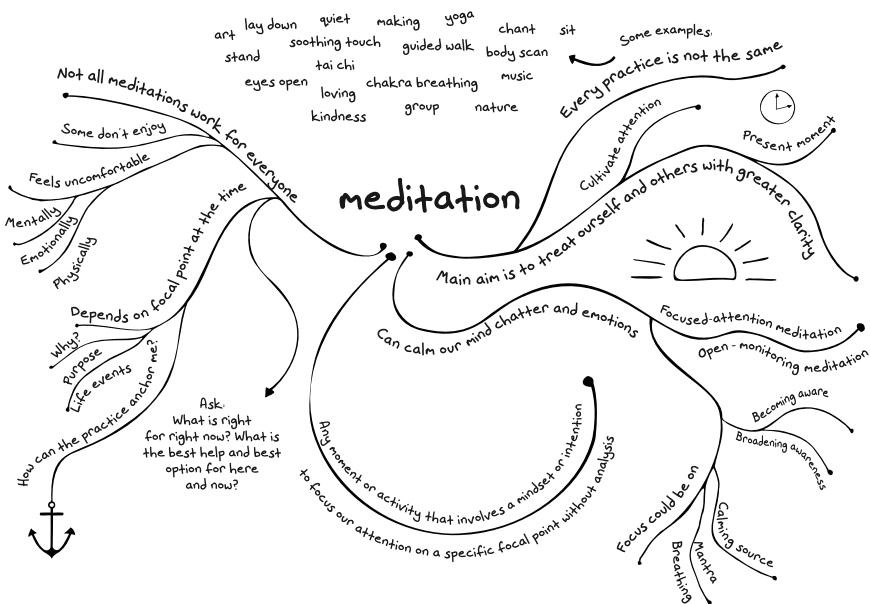


Figure 6.1 The unpacking of a meditation mind map.

- Sometimes we can think meditation is not right for me . . . but this can be an assumption based on one experience and one type of meditation. This is like saying ‘all cakes are horrible’ just because you didn’t like one. You need to learn what is right for you, and which one would be more relevant and appropriate for now. Try variations and see what feels better for you. Explore and be curious with practices but also those who lead them as not every teacher, voice or approach will resonate with us.
- Notice what is the right way for you to meditate according to your personality, preferences and needs, plus point in time (as this will change as well).

Breathing meditation is one of the most popular mindfulness strategies. I introduced you to some examples in Chapters 3 and 4. With breathing meditations, you can use these at any given time, and you can use your breath as an anchor to connect and feel the present moment. We’ll explore some more options, as well as other mindfulness tools that may assist you.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Your meditation experience

What has been your experience with meditation?

Consider:

- What felt right? Why?
- Have you noticed a difference in what works for you based on context and stress levels?
- Have you had an experience that challenged you? What happened? As you observe and notice reflecting back to this situation, what do you think influenced this experience?
- Have you had a moment where you felt total equilibrium?
- What have you noticed in who delivers a meditation for you? Is there a style you resonate with? A voice, approach or format that you find more appealing?

DO: *I'm too busy for mindfulness*

Intention: Locate the value of mindfulness for you.

Attention: Draw your attention to how you can be easily mindfully aware, especially when you think it is not possible.

Attitude: Focus on how it is possible to shift one's attitude and experience with mindfulness.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

So, right upfront, I'm going to address this too common comment, 'I'm too busy for mindfulness'.

If you are too busy to connect with the present and be fully aware with what is happening for you, the next time you stand in a queue at the supermarket or a shop and you become impatient that you have to wait as you need to be somewhere else, inhale slowly and deeply through your nose. Tune in to your breath. Notice the impatience that may be accompanying you, or perhaps the judgement about the person in front of you who seems to have forgotten there are other people waiting to be served as well. Continue to inhale and exhale slowly. Focus on your breath. Really focus on the inhale and exhale becoming slower and deeper. Notice the shifts in your mindset and body. Notice the shift in your experience of being in that queue.

Notice what happens for you.

Being consciously aware: the pause

Mindfulness is a practice of slowing down. It is about cultivating an awareness and paying attention on purpose in the present moment non-judgmentally. And most common definitions in Western society refer to these key elements as they emerge in real time and as they unfold for us.² Leigh Burrows reminded me in her writing that sometimes these words do not reach everyone. She introduced me to this definition by Eleanor Rosch, which may resonate with you:

Mindfulness is an entire mode of knowing and of being in the world composed of many interdependent synergistic facets including: a relaxation and expansion of awareness, letting go even into deep states of not knowing; access to wisdom knowing beyond what we think of as consciousness or the mind; an open-hearted inclusive warmth toward all of experience and to the world; one's deepest intentions toward oneself, other people and the world and one's actions and ways of living.

The teacher, teachings, and community of other practitioners are all part of this tapestry.³

Mindfulness is a way of being and embodiment with the goal to increase awareness. It is possible to cultivate this through:⁴

- Intention (knowing where the attention is, and prioritising where the attention needs to be)
- Attention (becoming fully aware of moment-to-moment internal experience)
- Attitude (the approach via acceptance, kindness and curiosity)

You'll notice these mindfulness mechanisms attached to each practice and strategy in this book. And I use them in Chapter 4 on self-compassion and the interweaving of these mindfulness mechanisms with Brené Brown's BRAVING Inventory. Feel free to flip between this chapter and Chapter 4 as you link self-compassion and mindfulness as part of the self-care dimensions.

Mindfulness has been adapted and adopted in psychology, including positive psychology. Emphasis has been on how to meditate to enable embodiment, emotions, cognition and the cultivation of 'higher' levels of consciousness.⁵ The cultivation of awareness and attention is the fundamental underpinning of both formal and informal mindfulness

practices. They are called practices as they require practice – rehearsal, training, dedication, exercise, alignment, routine and an ongoing openness to explore and develop.⁶ And this practice requires repetitive application over time to sustain long-term effects.⁷ So, it is not about being perfect or doing it once. All of us develop over time and experience learnings about oneself at the same time. With this approach we can develop our skills in paying attention and being present. This can be through formal practice (for example, meditation or mindful movement) or through informal practices (for example, breathing techniques, visualisations or applications to daily interactions that increase awareness). Through cultivating mindfulness, it is reported that compassion, kindness, gratitude, awareness, openness and curiosity can be fostered alongside a quietening of the mind, improved focus, self-regulation and self-awareness.⁸ What you will notice is that many of these are also P(ositive emotions) in PERMAH.

Formal mindfulness practices include an intentional commitment of time. This can be anywhere from 1 minute to 45 minutes or longer that you do almost every day.

Examples are:

- Sitting meditations
- Awareness of breath practices
- Walking meditations
- Sensory-guided meditations
- Body scans
- Yoga

Informal mindfulness practices have us noticing our experience from moment to moment and bringing our attention to one thing as many times as we can throughout the day. We can draw on any of the formal mindfulness practices or we can engage in examples such as:

- Hanging out washing
- Washing dishes
- Noticing nature or green spaces
- Showering
- Floating in a body of water

- Making
- Driving
- Listening
- Moving
- Pilates
- Self-compassion
- Visualisations
- Breathing exercises

In the next section of this chapter, we look at a range of practices that you might use to experiment with mindfulness to support your awareness. As you engage with the practices that resonate with you, explore how you integrate them into your everyday routines, including in the classroom, in meetings and moments you take for you.

DO: *Conscious breathing*

Intention: This is great for times when you are feeling tense or stressed. It is a reliable grounding practice.

Attention: Draw your attention to how focusing on breath can support you to tune in to your body and mind reactions to stressful situations.

Attitude: Bring a curiosity that allows you to observe yourself.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Sit upright in a chair with your feet flat on the floor or you may prefer to lie comfortably on the floor.

You may close your eyes or soften your gaze where you lower your eyes and focus on one place on the bottom of a wall.

Roll your shoulders and move your neck side to side to release tension.

Consciously relax your shoulders.

Rest your arms by your sides or place them in your lap.

Breathe gently through your nose and into your belly.

Watch your belly rise over a slow count of five.

Pause and hold your breath for a count of five.

Gently exhale from your mouth for another count of five.

As you repeat this breathing cycle try to keep your mind clear of all other thoughts, acknowledging that this can be difficult. Label what pops up by just naming it. Acknowledge it but don't engage with it or move into a self-talk dialogue. Then connect back to your breath. Mind chatter will happen, the key is to not engage with it or talk about it. Labelling it helps us take back the power in our awareness.

Repeat the cycle of breathing and notice how your regular breathing adjusts.

Notice the sensations or stillness that comes over your body.

After repeating this cycle for as long as is right for you right now, slowly bring your attention back to the room you are in.

Open your eyes or lift your gaze gently.

Maintain your slow breathing and reconnect with your environment slowly.

DO: *Being present throughout the day*

Intention: Bring your attention to this moment.

Attention: Draw your attention to being present with the space you are in right now.

Attitude: Bring a curious attitude to notice, be and label what happens for you without judgement.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Being present with an activity or action means you need to completely be in the moment of time. This is what we mean by being present. Multi-tasking takes you away from being present, especially if your attention is being divided amongst tasks that require different focuses. Whether you are marking assessments, planning, reading a book, talking to a friend, waiting or walking, think through what it is you are placing your attention on right now. What do I need to do to stay focused? What is it I am aiming to achieve by completing this task? What do I need to do to focus my energy just on this one task right now? How can I make this happen?

Mindfulness is not about making your mind quiet. It is a way of entering into the quiet that's already there, the quiet that is buried under the thousands of thoughts that the average person has every day.

DO: *Taking the time to pause*

Intention: Embrace the art of a pause.

Attention: Focus on being in the moment non-judgementally – resisting crucial self-talk and playing a script in your mind of someone's feedback that has perhaps triggered you.

Attitude: Bring an open-mindedness to what a pause can look like for you.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Take a moment to turn everything off: the television, radio, podcasts, audiobooks, computer notifications for program updates and calendar invites, social media alerts, phone calls, message app notifications and anything else that is demanding your attention right now but causing you to feel conflicted and pulled in multiple ways.

Find a place to sit. To sit in silence and listen to your breath. Connect with your breath. Inhale slowly, exhale slower. Be with this moment. Reset. Just allow your thoughts to come and go in the quiet. It might feel a little strange at first but embrace even 30 seconds of this quiet time.

DO: *Guided meditation visualisation connecting you to nature*

Intention: Pay attention to what nature or a green space can offer you.

Attention: Imagine and connect with a space that centres you and brings you joy in a calming way.

Attitude: Openness to possibility will support you with this act of creativity.

Note to self: Visualise your favourite place or a place you would like to visit. You can do this with your eyes open or with a softened lowered gaze. Key is to imagine rather than physically look at a space or a recorded nature scene.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Sit or lie in a comfortable position.

Take several deep breathes.

Inhale and count 1, 2, 3 and exhale out and count 1, 2, 3.

If you want to close your eyes you can, or you can soften your gaze.

Connect to your breath.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Inhale and count slowly to 3.

Exhale slower over a count of 3.

When you breathe in, bring the air into your belly.

Keep breathing in slowly and breathing out slower.

Think about a place in nature that makes you feel content, calm and relaxed.

Imagine that you are there.

Imagine how the place looks . . . the smells . . . the colours . . . what you might hear.

Take five deep breaths.

Inhale and count 1, 2, 3 and exhale counting 1, 2, 3, repeating this five times.

5

4

3

2

1

Imagine four colours (as you do this continue to inhale and exhale slowly).

Appreciate three sounds (as you do this continue to inhale and exhale slowly).

Savour two scents (as you do this continue to inhale and exhale slowly).

Set one intention to reconnect with your green space this week when you are going about your commitments (as you do this continue to inhale and exhale slowly).

Take a few moments more to sit with your place, savouring how it feels to be in your green space. Think about the sights, sounds, smells and sensations.

Now bring your awareness back to your breathing.

Focus on your breathing.

Bring your awareness back into the room.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

DO: 4 × 4 × 4 breathing

Intention: To slow down and reset.

Attention: Draw your attention to slowing down your mind and that chatter that often accompanies you.

Attitude: Openness to a simple relaxation technique to help you clear your mind and improve your focus.

Note to self: This strategy can also be called box breathing or square box breathing.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Relax your gaze or close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose while counting to 4 slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs and your gut rise. Relax shoulders.

Hold your breath while counting slowly to 4 seconds.

Relax your tongue.

Begin to slowly exhale for 4 seconds.

Repeat steps 1 to 3 at least three times. Ideally, repeat the three steps for 4 minutes in total, or until calm returns.

DO: STOP 1-minute breathing activity

Intention: To interrupt auto-pilot.

Attention: Bring you back to the present moment in a micro-moment.

Attitude: Expand awareness.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

In the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) eight-week course, Jon Kabat-Zinn uses the STOP 1-minute breathing space in his curriculum. This is a great, accessible strategy to support you to connect back to the present and explore present awareness.

This practice provides a way to step out of automatic pilot mode and into the present moment. What we are doing is creating a space to reconnect with your natural resilience and wisdom. You are simply

tuning in to what is happening right now, without expectation of any particular result.

If you remember nothing else, just remember the word 'STOP'.

S = Stop and take stock

Checking in to head/heart/body.

Bring yourself into the present moment by deliberately asking: What is my experience right now?

- Head: thoughts . . . (What are you saying to yourself? What images are coming to mind?)
- Heart: feelings . . . (such as, enjoying, not enjoying, neutral, upset, excited, sad, frustrated, overwhelmed, etc.)
- Body: sensations . . . (actual present-moment sensations, tightness, holding, lightness, etc.) Acknowledge your experience, even if it is uncomfortable.

T = Take a breath

Directing awareness to breathing. Gently direct full attention to breathing, to each in-breath and each out-breath as they follow, one after the other. Your breath can function as an anchor to bring you into the present and help you tune in to a state of awareness and stillness.

O = Open and observe

Expanding awareness outward. Expand the field of your awareness around and beyond your breathing, so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression, then further outward to what is happening around you: such as sights, sounds, smells. As best you can, bring this expanded awareness to the next moments.

P = Proceed/new possibilities

Continuing without expectation. Let your attention now move into the world around you, sensing how things are right now. Rather than

react habitually/mechanically, you can be curious/open, responding naturally. You may even be surprised by what happens next after having created this pause.

DO: *Holding a pebble*

Intention: Soothing touch to help you be present.

Attention: Interrupt worries, nerves or rumination.

Attitude: Openness to how nature can be carried with you to help you feel grounded.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

This is one of my favourite informal mindfulness practices. I use it when I am particularly nervous, or I know I am about to enter a meeting where perhaps one of the participants often demonstrates undesirable behaviour and causes some tension for myself or those around me.

I have a pebble I have collected from a mindful walk in nature (actually I have a collection of them from various beaches I have visited as part of my act of savouring). It is small and it can sit on my desk or come with me in my pocket. Small and smooth is key.

Hold the pebble in your palm or between your thumb and first finger.

Feel the texture.

Rub your finger(s) ever so slowly over the surface.

Feel your skin on the surface of the pebble. Experiment with various tensions and sensations.

Watch what happens with your breath.

Use this motion to both soothe you and also to help you come back to the present moment.

This micro-moment is a powerful soothing practice that supports you being grounded. My friend Rosey taught me this, and it has been a valuable part of my toolbox for a number of years. On days teaching when I know I am going to be very busy or if I have a day where there is a meeting with some difficult personalities, I carry a small pebble in my pocket. I also carry it on days when I just want to be reminded to pause more. Inside my pocket I undertake this soothing touch micro-moment practice. Every time, it brings me back to my breath, reminds me to inhale and exhale slowly, to move back into a grounded way of being and to be true to me.

DO: *Five-finger breathing*

Intention: Slow down and be present.

Attention: Connect with your breath and soothing touch.

Attitude: Be curious to the act of self-awareness.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Hold your hand in front of you. Spread your fingers out.

Take the index finger on your other hand and begin to slowly trace your hand. Start at the wrist and move up to the pinkie finger and along.

As you trace your hand, focus on your breath.

Breathe in as you trace up a finger and breathe out as you move down a finger.

Continue along the hand and reverse the process moving from thumb to pinkie. Inhale as you trace up the finger, and exhale as you trace down a finger. Move slowly, softening your breath, allowing a calmness to emerge for you.

Note how the action also allows you to engage in soothing touch – an act of self-compassion.

As you explore what mindfulness and awareness look like for you, flow will also be a concept that will be important for you to consider. Flow is also a part of the E(ngagement) and A(ccomplishment) of PERMAH. In this next section of this chapter, I connect you with some tools for your toolbox for self-care that will enable you to develop your mindful awareness.

What happens to flow when we are stressed?

Stress is a part of our lives. Any change is stressful because it requires us to make adaptations. Some of you may say teaching is a stress, others won't. And for some, it will be the specific context that is a stress – a particular way of operating within a school or sector, and for others it is the anticipation of the lead-up of change, change itself, such as restructures or mergers, or indeed leaders or colleagues or even parents that are a significant stress.

Teacher work-related stress has been described in terms of unhappy negative feelings, such as pressure, hindrance, nervousness and depression that a teacher finds in some aspects of their work.⁹ To be honest, anything can be a stress to us. And one person's stress is not another's.

Stress is both useful and harmful. Research has shown that with stress or anxiety performance and efficiency increase, but not substantially. At certain levels, if stress continues to increase, performance and efficiency start to decrease. If stress continues to build, performance and efficiency can diminish significantly. This can have a great impact on you as an individual who is dealing with stress or anxiety. The following chart is a great way to think of the stress zone of performing.

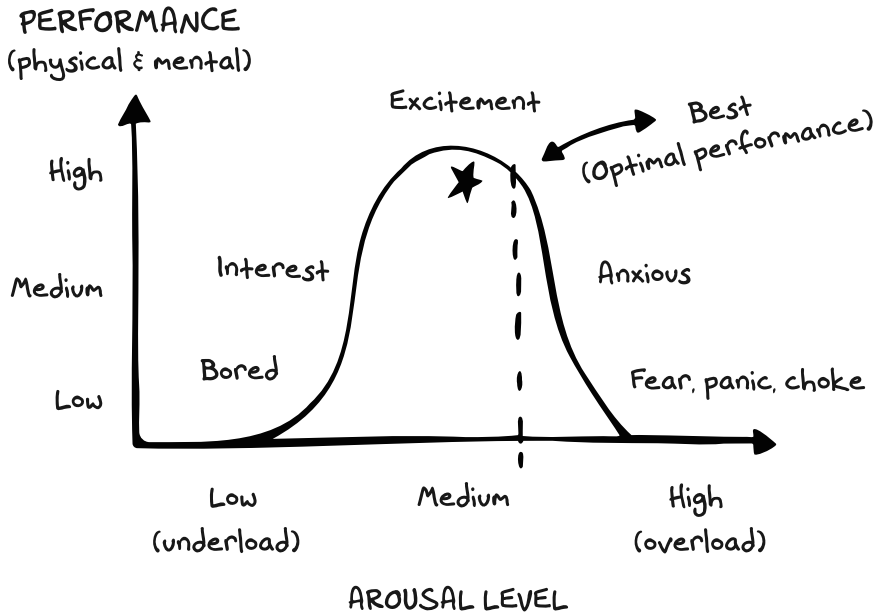


Figure 6.2 Finding your sweet spot or optimal performance zone.

This visual reinforces for us that stress associated with performance is complex. A little bit of stress can motivate us. It motivates us to actually start working and it could be quite good for us. But there comes a point at the top of that curve where we reach peak, and where we are motivated by stress. It can be exciting. This is when we experience flow – we are present, the adrenalin is motivating, and we are at the optimal point. However, any more stress and we are at a tipping point. At this point we move into the anxious point. We can begin to feel overwhelmed, and the arousal level of the performance paired with the pressure means that our performance will start to decrease. This visual is not linear, rather it is fluid. In a performance itself we can shift between these states of arousal, or an individual performance itself can follow the curve.

This optimal peak performance curve also connects closely with the idea of flow, or what is often described as being in the moment. When in flow we are working at the sweet spot or optimal intersection of skill set and learning something new. It is thought of as the 'optimal experience' or 'the zone'. The Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi¹⁰ found that when we experience flow, we are totally present and in the moment. As a part of this immersion is the feeling of being energised; there is full involvement and enjoyment. Many say that when they experience this feeling of flow that

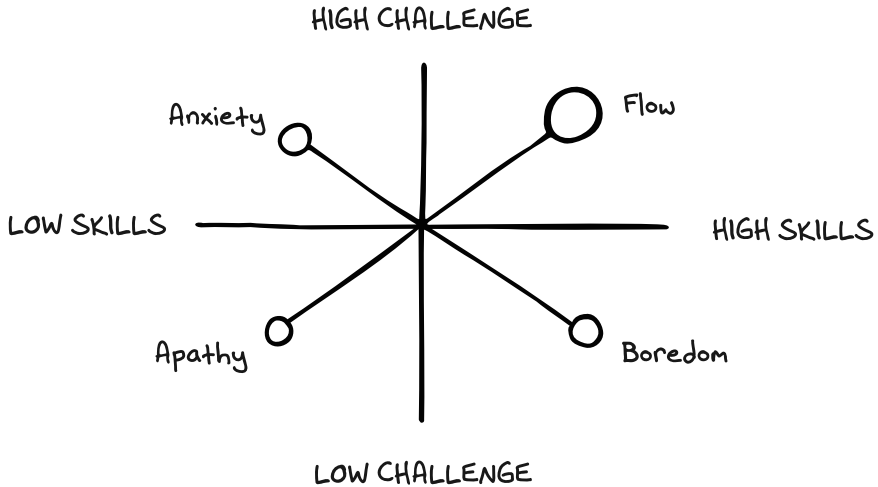


Figure 6.3 The intersections of flow.

time seems to be irrelevant and unimportant, and the mind is focused purely on the task. There are many parallels here with mindfulness as well.

In a situation where we have the presence of a high challenge and ability to display and develop a high level of skills, we have the sweet spot of flow. This is where we are stretched, challenged, our skills are being used and extended, and we have something to look forward to. This is quite different to moments of performance when we feel anxious, that is, we have low skills present within a highly challenging environment or situation. When we think of teaching, there are moments when being in flow are present and moments when we are not.

Basically, when everything is coming together for you and you are in the moment, no distractions, no problems and so no blockers, it just feels great, and flow happens.

Csikszentmihályi's work identifies the following ten factors as accompanying an experience of flow:

1. **Establishing clear goals and expectations** so these are attainable and align appropriately with one's skill set and abilities. Additionally, the challenge level and skill level should both be high.

2. **Concentrating** on the creation of time and place to allow for engagement in the activity to allow opportunity to focus and to delve deeply into it.
3. **Self-awareness**: a loss of the feeling of self-consciousness, the merging of action and awareness.
4. **Distorted sense of time**: one's subjective experience of time is altered.
5. **There really is no such thing as a mistake**: mistakes are OK, learn from mistakes and immerse oneself in the opportunity for direct and immediate feedback. Fail forward.
6. **Challenge oneself** but don't extend too far in that you won't succeed: balance between ability level and challenge of the activity is crucial for the flow channel (see *The intersections of flow* diagram).
7. **A sense of personal awareness** and control over the situation or activity.
8. **You love what you do** and find the activity rewarding so it feels effortless.
9. **Awareness of bodily needs**: take care of oneself and don't allow for burnout point to be reached.
10. **Awareness and absorption of the activity**: focus and narrow the awareness down to the activity itself.

When setting yourself up to flourish, here are some reminders to help you:

- Set intentions and clear goals to add direction (forward moving) and structure in how to build confidence and approach situations.
- Approach your growth with an openness that is underpinned by stepping up to the challenge with a healthy balance between the perceived challenges and your own perceived skills. This is where the toolbox of strategies in this book will support you to explore what is possible.
- Allow yourself to be open to feedback from trusted friends or colleagues (probably not family or loved ones as there can be a tendency to blur boundaries of being over critical or not critical enough). This assists in negotiating any changing demands to support adjustment to your flow state and the pressure to perform in the area that is relevant to you.
- Support exposure to new ideas.
- Create a community of learners who are supportive and open-minded to explore from your reference points. You know, you may not be the only

person in your world who gets nervous before parent-teacher evenings or when seeking feedback on teaching, for example.

- As you ponder being present in the moment, and what this means for you, consider your situations. As you explore the strategies throughout this book, many will link back to helping you experience flow in relation to your context.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Mindful reflection on flow

Intention: Notice with interest and fascination about when you experience flow.

Attention: Focus on when you experience flow, how you care for you in this moment, and after.

Attitude: Bring a curiosity that enables you to identify what flow means to you.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

What does flow look like for you in relation to your self-care? Think about context, environment, what you are doing, time, empowerment and how you can be present.

What do Csíkszentmihályi's ten factors of flow look like in your professional life? What do they look like in your personal life? Can you notice any similarities or differences?

What happens for you when you are stressed? How can this detract from your flow?

Mindfulness and positive emotions

As we learned in Chapter 3, positive emotions are contagious, they can be cultivated, and we have to work on the natural negative bias that can so often occur. As Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory reminds us, positive emotions increase awareness and build resources as one broadens possibilities to enhance flourishing.¹¹ When stressed, positive emotions focus the coping strategy of *positive reappraisal*. This means it is possible to support conceptualising of benefit finding: seeing the good, seeing what is possible or having forward-thinking thoughts, for example. When we engage

with positive reappraisal, we can begin to reduce stress and improve well-being.¹² Mindfulness is a key to positive reappraisal. Mindfulness practices can support how we may let go or be non-judgemental with awareness. We can suspend that evaluative language or critical self-talk we can often turn to.¹³ Developing a more mindful disposition, while viewing a stress from a metacognitive vantage point (stepping back) mediates stress appraisal.¹⁴ Operating in a mindful state results in a reorientation to the novel, or attention to curiosity,¹⁵ and greater flexibility.¹⁶ This is called *mindful reappraisal* (positive reappraisal and mindfulness) and can lead to flourishing.¹⁷

In these next series of practices, I encourage you to explore different positive emotions that can support you and your self-care. They are underpinned by being mindfully aware and present with yourself non-judgementally. Some involve deep reflection, and others are a series of suggestions for you to explore and cultivate in your relationship with yourself and others.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Cultivating optimism

Intention: To support the facilitation of the positive emotion optimism.

Attention: Focus on cultivating optimism.

Attitude: Explore being present non-judgementally with a positive attitude especially in relation to a difficult situation or a challenging relationship you may have.

PERMAH links: P, E, M

Note to self: You may want to connect back to the 3 Ps tool in Chapter 3.

Optimism is about maintaining a positive attitude and outlook on life. It is a practice and perspective we can bring to how we view situations. Just as our mind works to find the negative in a situation, we can work at cultivating a positive attitude, whereby we can still acknowledge a pain or stress, but we find an inner resilience.

Use these questions and steps to help you journal your experiences, thoughts and opportunities:

1. Become aware of your own perspective. What is your self-talk telling you? What story are you telling yourself? How does a lack of

optimism manifest for you? Notice what appears here with regard to always seeing the risks or problems, chronic sarcasm, pointing out your own limitations, highlighting others' limitations, inability to feel joy or hope.

2. Consider the macro level that is you! Connect in with your thoughts, emotions, reactions and the stories you tell yourself. All of this is unconscious; sometimes we ignore these messages, and other times they play on repeat.
3. Take a moment to pause. Let the things you notice come and go. Observe them. Label them. But don't engage with them and begin the storytelling or script writing in your mind. Let the emotions come out and let them go. Allow yourself to feel whatever you feel without judgement.
4. Now with these things you notice, find something about the situation that you could create as a learning moment. What can you learn about yourself? How you react? Patterns? Behaviours? Strengths? Insights about yourself? How can you understand yourself on a deeper level?
As you engage with steps 1, 2 and 3, you will become more familiar with these, and the repetition will become more of a default reaction that you will naturally seek.
5. With more observation, deep listening and tuning in to yourself, begin to take optimistic action. This is where you can make choices in alignment with possibility. This is where you can connect with those ideas of making small choices each day, which as you repeat them become a routine and habit that over time build up to have a greater impact. Carve out optimistic action that sees you beginning to put yourself or your ideas or your work out into the universe. You will be able to begin to remove unhealthy boundaries and place healthy boundaries around the content or people who confirm lack of action or contribute to feed negative thinking, rather than seeking out and attracting those who support your optimism and zest for life.
6. Make notes on what stands out to you. What are the three (or maybe two, or even one or perhaps more) things that you have learned about yourself in this practice?

DO: *A hope for yourself*

Intention: To develop your toolbox for self-care.

Attention: Draw attention to your hopes, dreams and wants.

Attitude: Come to this strategy with an inquisitive mind where you tune in to your self-awareness – what have you noticed would be helpful for you right now? Or could assist you in shifting a repeated pattern that is not so helpful for you at the moment?

PERMAH links: P, E, M

Select one activity in this book and set a hope for yourself with an awareness of what your needs are right now:

- What is the strategy or practice?
- What do you hope you intend to look for with this strategy or practice?
- What might be a small specific goal you could set to engage with this strategy or practice?
- What energises and empowers you about the strategy or practice?
- What approach are you going to take with regard to time you will give this strategy or practice?
- What would you like to achieve?
- How will you celebrate engaging with this strategy or practice?

DO: *Find new ways to move forward*

Intention: Being present non-judgementally to personal growth.

Attention: To possibilities and other perspectives.

Attitude: Curiosity as an avenue to keep learning about self.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

As we keep learning about ourselves, we can find new ways to keep moving forward, growing and thus engaging in positive emotions.

With a curiosity we can begin to build a sense of accomplishment and explore new ways (plus reinforce other ways) that we know boost ourselves, and then of course others, as a result of them being around us and how we engage with them.

Ways you might do this:

- Give yourself a health boost and discover a new activity that has you moving.
- Explore a new recipe that has you making a new meal to share with someone else.
- Learn a new skill.
- Sign up for a making class.
- Be curious about learning a new topic.
- Immerse yourself in a book or a podcast.
- Look at life through the eyes of someone else.
- Find out something new about someone you care for.
- Think about how you could approach a challenge in a different way.
- Explore a strength of yours in a different way.
- Set aside regular time to pursue something you have always wanted to do.
- Look for reasons to sparkle and be hopeful in an uncertain time.
- Join a friend while they undertake their hobby.

Make a record of your discoveries.

DO: Be kinder to yourself and others

Intention: To be mindfully aware of the place of kindness.

Attention: Pay attention to the flow-on effects of acts of kindness for self and others.

Attitude: Openness to the intentional subtle acts of kindness.

Side note: You may also align these practices to those on gratitude.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M

Doing things for others is not only about others, but it is also about yourself. Altruism is an amazing, positive emotion. When being altruistic you do things out of kindness not because you think you have to or you are to gain something with regard to duty, loyalty or for religious reasons. It is one infectious emotion that has significant flow-on effects (as we unpacked in Chapters 1 and 3) for the recipient, yourself and those observing.

Try these suggestions:

- Leave a surprise note on the desk of a colleague sharing an appreciation for something they have done that has helped you.
- Set up a gratitude board in your staffroom where colleagues, parents and/or students can leave notes of appreciation in spontaneous ways.
- Check in on someone you haven't heard from in a while.
- Send a random text message to a friend or colleague just to say hello.
- If someone is frustrating you, be kind, think about the fact that they are probably doing their best and smile as you listen.
- Look for the good side in everyone you meet today.
- Donate your time on a project.
- Turn off your phone and be present with someone you love.
- Plan a future project that has impact in the community.
- Volunteer your time.
- Look for the good in someone who may be struggling.
- Buy some fresh fruit and leave them in a basket for colleagues to share.
- Start a friendly conversation with someone who is sitting or standing by themselves.
- Give your energy and time to someone who could do with a little extra help.

Not feeling the flow?

Sometimes we just don't feel flow. It can be stress, the context or just not the right combination of elements for flow in the mix. Here are some tools to help you get your mojo back.

Piggyback

As things change, so does our to-do list. What was on it at the end of the year or last month or even yesterday may not be relevant now. What we think might be important and that made the list in the past, may no longer be relevant in light of changes in our work priorities or how we do things.

As we think about renegotiating what is important, we also need to be aware that beating yourself up over what has or hasn't been achieved is not at all helpful (would you be saying to a friend those harsh words you say to yourself? Most likely no!). So, one way to approach this is to think about the context in partnership with what needs to be done. As I'm renegotiating with myself, my work KPIs or my personal responsibilities, I am also aware of the changing contexts. As I do this I'm thinking about the role of piggybacking. This is when you strategically deploy your energies. For example, you may take existing work and transfer knowledge, processes or outcomes. I also think about it as working smart.

I'm asking the question: What can I do to piggyback one thing onto another? I'm thinking about how to work smarter here, not harder. Where are there commonalities in content or approach or people I work with that can align in a way that has my energy and cognitive power plus time working smartly together?

As I am thinking about what piggybacking will look like, I'm also looking at what perhaps needs to be dropped, paused or stopped. I'll explore this more in Chapters 7 and 8, especially around the area of boundaries.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Piggybacking and working smart

Here are some key questions that might help you:

- What is energising me?
- What do I do that can piggyback across projects or roles I have?

- What do I need to say 'no' to? Or wisely say 'yes' to?
- What do I need to pause?
- What do I need to stop doing? What hasn't been serving me so well?
- What is something new I have heard about, read or seen in action that I would like to try that helps me to renegotiate my work?
- How am I using the best part of the day for me (thinking about when I am most energised, and I am most creative)?
- What can I renegotiate in my schedule to block this time out, so it works for me?
- What do I need to be careful of as I piggyback to make sure I don't overuse this renegotiating approach?

Monotasking

'Monotasking' is an underused superpower for us as educators no matter the context we work in. We are so intrigued with and involved in multitasking as a way to be productive: it is modelled to us, we see it all the time, and our job often asks us to do it as we navigate our KPIs across many diverse areas of research, learning and teaching, leadership, service and engagement.

Multitasking is doing more than one task at the same time. The classic example is sitting in a meeting and checking emails. Some of our colleagues have created some stealth-like moves when they do this, and others are more overt. There is usually at least one obvious colleague who is not present with the meeting agenda, but this is not OK to do!

Monotasking has us be ruthless with what we focus on at a specific time so that we are fully present, and our attention is in this very moment. I'm thinking of Graham Allcott's¹⁸ work here and the practical and useful tips he shares about how we use our time. You might like these approaches as well:

- Keep your desk clean with no piles of paper or books for other projects, just the items that you need for the task you are completing right now.
- Have only the programs or platforms you are working with at the time open, so you are not distracted.

- Embrace a low-information diet. Be selective about what you are reading, watching and listening to avoid any distractions while you are working on a specific project to support all your cognitive power to feed into the specific task.
- Clean out your email (get it to inbox zero if you practice this strategy or honour calm inbox where you check your email at a dedicated time once in the morning and once in the afternoon) and then close it down. No email is required while you focus on the task at hand.
- Resist the temptation to engage with all the instant messages that pop up with your socials and the platforms our workplaces have us using now that we are working from home. In fact, turn them off!
- Know when to go off the grid so you can just focus. Don't let people down when you are doing this: going off the grid doesn't mean it is OK to ignore your responsibilities. So, you may need to plan for this as you look for big chunks of time in your diary where you can focus on that one project.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Monotasking

As an educator, no matter what year level, discipline or age group you work with, full-time, part-time or a casual, monotasking is essential for you to integrate to support how you manage tasks but also complete accomplishments. The E(ngagement) and A(ccomplishment) in PERMAH feature substantially here as well as P(ositive emotions).

What tasks do you often have to complete that could benefit from monotasking?

How will it support you to care for you?

How can you make this happen? What do you need to change, pause, rethink or stop doing?

Slowing down

What does this really mean?

Slowing down has become a popular saying and movement. 'Slow' has a long history. It started with cooking. It has since become linked to slow

television, travel, schools, books and fashion, for example.¹⁹ Slow is everywhere. Slow movement. Slow living. Hustle. Values-based intentions. One word for a year. New Year's resolutions. Change. Exhaustion. Overworked. No time. Quiet quitting. Quiet flourishing. These concepts have been floating around for a few years, and they always appear at the top of social media posts at the beginning of a new year.

There is no doubt that there is a general feeling of exhaustion for many of us. I feel this. Especially exacerbated during the pandemic. But I do wonder which of these concepts will work for us? And what is it that we can do if we are to embrace or confront any of these terms or ways of being?

We don't have to work as hard as we think to achieve what we need to. One of the most significant things we need to conquer is busy work, that is, activities we do that send us down the road of multitasking or action that lacks focus on specific goals. Where there is a lack of being present, misalignment to our intentions, we engage in time-wasting activities that are not important, or we surround ourselves with activities (or people) that feed procrastination. With this busy work we usually tell others we are so busy! With any of these we are left with an overall sense of non-achievement. We often feel more exhausted, and this is usually accompanied at the time or soon after by worry, what-if thinking and an overwhelming sensation of 'How can I get everything done?'

Here are some things I'm doing to help me explore this, and you may also find them helpful:

- Food – being careful that I make better decisions with food choices. For example, sugar doesn't help me to sleep in the evening, so I'm consciously reducing this.
- Rest – I'm listening to my body when it needs to rest and using this to support me to clear that foggy brain, honouring that my energy levels will benefit greatly from this. I'm resting more to renew and reinvigorate.
- Meditation – connection to breath helps me feel grounded. I begin the day with a body scan and during the day I make sure I'm connecting to breath, even if it is a 30-second micro-moment of deep gut breathing.
- Soothing touch – I have a couple of different pebbles sitting on my desk. Some I have collected on beach walks or hikes in the mountains, others have been gifts. I use these pebbles as soothing touch moments, where I can place one in my hand or pocket and just rub it, feeling the

smoothness. It is a tactile way to slow down and bring my attention back to the present.

- Green energy – I start the day with a walk outside and I get outside for a 15-minute walk around the block in the middle of the day between meetings. I have a plant on my desk, and I look forward to weekend trips into nature as well, savouring the opportunity to get outside for longer periods.
- Notebook – I love to write in grey-lead pencil, and this year I am embracing a paper diary with space as a notebook to slow down and engage with my thoughts. This is also my conscious decision to break the screen time.
- Stretching – child’s pose, cat and cow pose, stand and fold, and eagle pose are my go-to yoga moves to help me stop my shoulders kissing my ears from so much time at the computer. And they are also wonderful stretches to slow down and become more present.

These practices are core self-care strategies for me, and I’m setting the intention to explore more as I grow, maintain and protect my self-care with a curiosity to slow down and be present. What might they be for you?

- Playing a musical instrument – exploring sound, timbre, new music, a song that is familiar, your favourite tune or learning something new.
- Walking the dog or indeed letting your dog take you for a walk – a mindful walk where you just explore your environment with no phone, no earphones or distractions and become fascinated with your dog’s journey and discoveries as much as your own.
- Make – paint, knit, craft, make pottery, bake or whatever it is where you just immerse yourself in the moment, creating, exploring textures and materials.
- Catching up with a friend – being fully present with your friend, savouring the time, not rushing with conversation, just hanging out and enjoying each other’s company.
- Meal planning for the week and shopping for fresh ingredients – being fully present with the curiosity that comes with trying a new recipe or cooking a favourite and then savouring the fresh produce, spices and other items required.
- Planning a party or a holiday – enjoying the time to pull all the moving parts together for the occasion.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Slowing down

What does your version of slowing down look like for you? What does it bring you?

If in doubt, bake

Baking is one of my go-to self-care strategies to help me slow down. It is a mindful practice. It also ignites the feeling of flow for me. It is not just for my taste buds, actually, I do it more for others. I often bake and take the bounty into the office to share in a meeting or in the staffroom or bake as a thank you to share with friends.

My Nana taught me to bake when I was a little girl. I can remember standing on a stool at the kitchen bench, sleeves rolled up and hand in the sponge mix gently airing the mixture to help it rise. Baking has been something I have done ever since. I have some favourite recipes that I turn to, and my choc-chip cookie recipe is my go-to for when I need comforting food, I want to make something for someone, when I want to bring people together, to ignite the positive emotions of savouring, joy, appreciation and connection.

Make them for yourself or to share, either way they tick a few PERMAH boxes for a little self-care when in doubt and you want to find your mojo again.

DO: *Baking*

Intention: To support you to slow down and engage in something different that interrupts the everyday hustle and bustle.

Attention: Explore positive emotions that come with baking for yourself and possibly for others.

Attitude: Think about baking as a mindful activity that can help you pause and slow down, as opposed to something you have to or don't want to do.

Side note: Baking might be your thing, but also find your equivalent making tool and turn to it when you need to pause.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, A, H

Chocolate-chip cookies

Preheat the fan-forced oven to 160 degrees (or 180 degrees in a conventional oven).

Ingredients (and tips)

150 g butter or non-dairy spread

1 cup brown sugar (loosely packed)

1 egg (at room temperature)

1 tsp vanilla extract (optional)

1 1/3 cup sifted self-raising flour (or gluten-free self-raising flour: add this very slowly as the mixture is forming so it doesn't become too dry or tough)

A few variations

- For a little bit of chocolate add 1/2 cup milk chocolate chips
- For a generous serve of chocolate add 3/4 cup milk chocolate chips
- If you love dark chocolate add 1/3 to 1/2 a cup of dark chocolate chips (be conservative as they are strong)
- Or a mix of white and milk chocolate (about 1/2 cup of each)
- You can also add nuts with the choc chips, or you can supplement the choc chips for nuts. Half pecan and walnut (about 1/3 to 1/2 cup each) chopped unevenly, but not too small, works well.

Method

Cream butter and sugar. Add vanilla essence. Add in egg and mix gently. Then add flour to form a dough. Roll into a long tube.

Note: if your kitchen is warm, place the mixture in the fridge for 15 minutes to cool. Then cut into discs. I like small cookies, so usually create a 3 cm-diameter tube and cut disks at 1 cm thickness. Roll into a wider diameter tube if you like larger cookies. Lay them out on a tray covered with baking paper. Leave space between each cookie. Cook for 15 minutes or until slightly golden. Remove from the oven and transfer to a wire rack to cool.

This dough also freezes well at the tube stage, wrapped in plastic, so future self can make cookies super quickly.

Concluding thoughts

As you have worked through this chapter, you'll notice that there are many ways we can build our toolbox for self-care where we can draw on formal and informal mindfulness that also addresses diverse areas of wellbeing. Key has been tuning in to what is happening to you, for you, and around you in a way that allows you to become centred and present. As you develop your mindfulness practices formally and informally, you know that you can grow in multiple ways.

Have a heartfelt conversation with yourself about what mindfulness looks like for you. How are you present non-judgementally with yourself? What does this look like within the classroom and outside? Explore and create opportunities for how you can create the intention for yourself to be present. Imagine what can be possible for you.

You might also be interested in . . .

Podcasts on mindfulness

Tara Brach: The Superpower of Mindful Witnessing

www.tarabrach.com/superpower-mindful-witnessing/

Rachael Kable: The Mindful Kind www.rachaelkable.com/podcast

Mindfully (ABC) www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/mindfully/

Websites

3 Definitions of Mindfulness That Might Surprise You from Psychology

Today

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-matters-most/201711/3-definitions-mindfulness-might-surprise-you
 28 Best Meditation Techniques for Beginners to Learn <https://positivepsychology.com/meditation-techniques-beginners/>
 The 9 Attitudes of Mindfulness according to Jon Kabat-Zinn (Mindfulness Based Happiness)
<https://mindfulnessbasedhappiness.com/the-9-attitudes-of-mindfulness-according-to-jon-kabat-zinn/>
 A 4-Step Practice to Awaken Your Intention
www.mindful.org/4-ways-to-awaken-your-intention/
 Seven Essential Attitudes of Mindfulness
<https://mindfuladventure.com/mindfulness-2/seven-essential-attitudes-of-mindfulness/>

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7

Habits, boundaries and you

Self-awareness about what, when, where and why you are doing something is crucial for self-care. Self-awareness works in partnership with your habits and boundaries. There will always be obstacles, blockers and hurdles to navigate, some more complex than others. We judge what is right for us and act accordingly. If you are lying to yourself, or constantly moving the goal posts, you delay caring for you. You continue to not prioritise your wellbeing, and that is neither sustainable nor beneficial. In this chapter we will explore habits, boundaries and your relationship with them to support you to prioritise your wellbeing.

Life's mountains

Our life is full of mountains, or perceived mountains. We think they are forbidden, too hard or we are just incapable of climbing them. We have a metaphorical fog sitting at the top of the peak that prevents us from seeing what is ahead, or the potential and the possibility. It becomes a lens through which we view an experience, situation or opportunity. Hector García and Francesc Miralles when writing about the *ikigai* journey, note that:

We have to wipe our gaze clean of 'impossibilities', as we would a steamed-up window, before setting off on

our walk to the summit. Because the impossible is, in reality, a mental label, a deceptive filter before our eye.¹

Self-care is one of these mountains. It is a mountain we see in the distance, probably far in the distance for many of us. It is often concealed by clouds and fog. But the feeling that it is too hard, I can't do it, I don't know what it is, I am scared, I am uncertain and I am not sure are feelings we create for ourselves. As humans, with irrational thinking and negative bias that features in Chapters 3 and 7, we are skilled at convincing ourselves that things are impossible. The fight, flight, freeze action comes into play and we align with the mental building blocks (or that storm in the mountains) that we have created for ourselves.

Everything can start with a relabelling: 'mission possible'.²

DO: *Mission possible*

Intention: Notice the mountains you place in front of you and note how you overcame an obstacle.

Attention: Pay attention to how you shifted through blockers and challenges by noticing what you have achieved with an appreciation.

Attitude: Be curious and observe yourself and patterns.

PERMAH links: P, A, M

When those mountains are covered with your mental fog, make a conscious decision to observe and label what you notice as one way to help you process and notice. Write a list of all the things you have achieved when you thought you could not. This list is an inventory or celebration of achievements and accomplishments. It is a record of those things you thought were mission impossible, but they became mission possible.

My list would look like this:

- Paint with oils.
- Stop eating chocolate every day.
- Study while working.
- Have a healthy loving relationship.
- Write each day as a reward not a 'have to' activity.
- Be able to mountain bike and not fall off constantly.
- Hike over a full day.
- Set and maintain boundaries with a toxic relationship.
- Leave a school where I was not the right fit as a staff member.
- Find a new job that was much more aligned to my values.
- Be able to teach in disciplines I was not originally trained in.
- Be well.

What about you?

Making small choices

A habit is an impulse to do a behaviour with little or no conscious thought. A routine is a behaviour frequently repeated. Consistently applied, a small change that you practice or act upon daily can over time each turn a habit into a routine. This is where the magic happens. It is through the process of learning about yourself as you apply that little change each day that you can watch yourself grow.

Habits are about making small changes. These small changes accumulate over time to make a big difference. Often, we underestimate the small changes, the little tweaks we make to our thinking or behaviour. We imagine they don't make a difference. In fact, it is the small, tiny little tweaks we make that add up and contribute to improvements in ourselves.

If you're having trouble changing your habits, the problem isn't you. We've been indoctrinated to think

this way. What if we thought of it as, the problem is your system or approach? Bad habits repeat themselves not because you don't want to change, but because you have the wrong system set up for change and the change you want to make.

This is the power of the everyday decision we make that at the time seems insignificant but over time is impactful. Just as everyday bad choices accumulate, in this case often with a negative effect or a problem, everyday good choices accumulate into a success, a massive change for the better, and most probably a positive impact. Success in this case is about the daily habits that we focus on frequently creating the path to an ultimate outcome – the change we want.

But small choices take time as well. They build up to make an impact. As we apply our small choices, they usually do not produce an immediately noticeable effect. The repeated doing of the new habit contributes to the change being visible in some form.

Let's think about this with regard to self-care. Tiny habits put together create your toolbox for self-care that you draw upon to support your wellbeing. Let's take one example, thinking about our H(earth) in PERMAH, firstly in association with fitness and movement.

If I go for a mindful walk for 30 minutes every day in the morning, I am engaging with a self-care tool that allows me to move while also boosting positive emotions (I love to watch the sunrise, hear nature and enjoy the fresh air). If I repeat this walk daily, over time I am creating a habit. What I find over time is I don't 'feel right' if I don't get out of bed and go for my daily walk. If I skip my morning walk, I really miss it. Repeated over time my walking habit becomes a ritual that is a firm part of my toolbox for self-care. I also notice I can actually walk longer, faster and I feel more energised when I do it as I notice my body becoming stronger and my mind craving the 'me time', 'green time' and also the clarity that comes with just being. My walking becomes a routine that benefits my overall fitness and health, my body becomes stronger, and my mind benefits from the time spent in a different environment.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Habit audit

Intention: Observe your habits, noticing helpful and unhelpful patterns non-judgementally.

Attention: Pay attention to your energy levels.

Attitude: Be candid with yourself holding integrity and compassion.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

What habits work for you now?

Which habits bring you closer to your goal(s)?

What habits make you feel good?

Which habits drain you and your energy?

What new habit might you explore?

What new idea has you energised and do you want to explore further so it becomes a bigger part of who you are?

Each day is a new day: habits that support us

Barack Obama is a great example of somebody who used a habit to enable him to free up some mental space in the course of his hectic day. While President of the United States, he reduced his wardrobe to grey suits, white shirts and ties. This routine reduced the daily choices he had to make about style, colour, fabric and shirt colour. Each day he knew what he was going to wear, thereby freeing up a degree of mental space and enabling an act of self-care.

Repeated habits that help us make life easier are our friend. The wardrobe selection is a potent example. We learn from it that we can help ourselves at the beginning of the day with some simple and effective practices to help us refresh and begin each day no matter what has occurred the day before. Each day is a new day.

DO: Your daily morning habits

Intention: Notice your morning habits and what these look like across mental, emotional, physical and intellectual wellbeing. Observe the impact on your wellbeing.

Attention: Pay attention to the simple habits that can bring you joy across diverse areas of PERMAH.

Attitude: Especially be curious to appreciate what's good with the start of your day.

PERMAH links: P, E, A, H

What might your morning habits look like?

Here are some ideas for you to explore and unpack. Hint: some of these may need some adaptation if you need to pay more attention to your self-care:

- Wake up – Is this the same each day?
- How do you wake up? For example, listening to music, a meditation such as body scan, drinking a glass of water, scrolling on your phone, a loud alarm that has you jump, stretching.
- Exercise – Does this feature? For example, a short walk, gym session, stretch, bike ride, run, HIIT workout. Is it solo or collectively completed? Is it the same each day or a pattern or program?
- Quiet time before the children, family or housemates rise
- Straight into the kitchen to organise breakfast for the family
- Screen time
- Shower
- Breakfast or not
- Cup of coffee or tea
- Read the paper
- Immediately to work
- Read
- Journal

- Meditation
- Digital detox
- Deep thought
- Decluttering
- Chat with a loved one

What can you set up to reduce choices?

What needs some tweaking in your life?

What elements are working really well?

Record your observations visually or as a chart. You can use the insights to help plan your morning ritual that supports your self-care.

The habit cycle

Let's connect with understanding habits further and how we can cultivate them as part of your toolbox for self-care. There isn't one way to change habits. Individuals and habits are all different. Some habits are small, some are large. Some are sustained, some are just emerging. And all habits are different and have their own influences, needs, assumptions and impact on us.

There is a framework that can support us as we develop our habits:

Identify the routine

Experiment with rewards

Isolate the cue

Have a plan

Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers discovered a neurological loop that is core to every habit we have. The habit cycle has three parts: a cue, routine and reward.

Firstly, you need to identify the routine that you have. What is the cue for this routine?

Then we look at rewards. We know these are powerful motivators, but sometimes they are not conscious, and our drivers may not be the best behaviour. Also think of these rewards as a double dip in your self-care toolbox as they are accomplishments or A(ccomplishment) in PERMAH.

Isolating the cue requires us to become and be aware of what triggers that habit. So, what or who is it that will help inspire you to take the action required? You can think of these habitual cues from one of five categories:

1. Location
2. Time
3. Emotional state
4. Other people
5. Immediately preceding action

Once you have identified the habit cycle which includes what is driving the habit, the cue and the routine, you are better able to shift your behaviours. This becomes a plan that you can put into action that is supportive for you.

One way to think about this is:

When I see CUE, I will do ROUTINE to get a REWARD.

One of the best approaches to putting this into action has been from the work of James Clear,³ where we add a fourth step of craving. This is especially helpful for us when we are thinking about our habits in relation to self-care.

Four steps are involved: **cue, craving, response, reward**. Here's one example: running shoes at door with workout clothing (*cue*), I crave the feeling of energy that comes after a run/walk (*craving*), I go out of the house for my workout (*response*: I do it and there is action here involved in the habit) and then I feel energised and excited for a little treat such as a cup of green tea

Top tips include:

- Start small.
- Take small consistent actions to make a habit (those micro-moments are powerful).
- Repeat over time for it to become a routine.
- Changes that are small at the start once repeated over time become remarkable.
- Each day is a new day, so don't judge yourself harshly if you weren't able to action your healthy habit today.

after a shower (that is actually another habit in itself) (*reward* for the action: it is small and supportive of care for myself).

One habit that I know I need to do is meditation. Daily and consistent practice has been formed by using cue-craving-response-reward processes to build and establish a habit. It looks like this:

Cue: morning alarm

Trigger: 5–30-minute loving kindness meditation (LKM, see Chapter 4)

Response: feeling grounded and not in my head (for example, ruminating, engaging with mind chatter, or cognitively over evaluating and becoming disconnected), plus minimise and/or remove the harsh critical voice transferring it to a soothing one.

Reward: feeling centred before the day begins to support the development of new

neural pathways in the brain to cultivate oneself as more loving and kinder towards self and others.

Taking responsibility for our wellbeing requires us to tune in to our habits and cultivate an awareness of what we need to do for our self-care. So, what does this look like for you?

DO: Your habit cycle

Intention: Explore a habit cycle for yourself.

Attention: Draw attention to what excites you and empowers you.

Attitude: Observe non-judgementally and with a curiosity that enables you to look at specific details of your habit(s).

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A, H

Set up your habit cycle for the strategies and practices you know energise and empower you. What does it look like? Are there any changes you notice as you enhance how you enact self-care?

And when you are ready: What might be something you would like to try in the future? What might this look like as a part of your toolbox for self-care?

Habits and our beliefs

If we want to change our habits, we also need to address our belief systems. That is your underpinning beliefs. A habit becomes a part of your identity.

Let me connect this to one of my experiences. A few years ago, I was introduced to mountain-bike riding. After 12 months of falling off every time I went out to ride and coming back with scratches and gashes all over my legs my riding experience changed. I had initially been introduced to mountain-bike riding by my partner. Riding was a hobby we explored together. I was up for a challenge, but I didn't realise how much of a challenge it would be. There was something in this challenge I really enjoyed. I loved being in nature. I liked that you could be out in the bush on the tracks for hours and see very few, if any, people. I like the physicality, the feeling after a ride and the satisfaction of pushing my body. As my skills improved, my riding experience became better. Fewer falls, less damage to my body, and I had a different experience manoeuvring the tracks and becoming more at one with the bike. For some time, I was motivated by riding because I was spending time with my partner, and it gave me a chance to connect with him by forming a shared experience. However, I didn't love it as much as

I was saying I did. I was still developing my skills; I was slow, and my risk minimisation and overthinking would kick in when I found myself on a steep track surrounded by rocks. So, I would walk, and others would have to wait for me. If anyone came behind me, I would pull off to the side and let them through. I was riding at my capacity but holding others up. I became conscious about this and self-critical. I would try my best but could never ride as well as those I was riding with.

My experience with riding changed, though, largely due to me changing my mindset: I started to ride for me; I set the intention to ride at my skill level and to enjoy my time in the bush, instead of riding because I thought it was social. What came with this was a shift in my experience. And a significant shift in my underpinning belief and identity. I acknowledged I was a beginner. I had some skills coaching. And I started riding at other times to build my strength and bike-handling skills. Riding regularly became a pattern, and I started to think of myself as a mountain-bike rider. As I spent more time on the bike, I became more confident. I focused on and enjoyed the process, while knowing that every small step I made built new skills, I would become better on the bike, and thus my experience would improve. What came with this was an attitude change as well. We would head out for a ride together, arrive and set up, talk through which tracks we planned to ride and for how long, and then we'd say goodbye with an acknowledgement that we may run into each other along the way but that it wasn't an expectation. We would meet back at the end of the ride at a certain time. We could come back earlier if we wanted, and if we were over the time, we would always wait for the other to return. Riding on the tracks then meant we were riding for ourselves, focusing on the personal experience, while knowing that on return we should share, reflect and celebrate moments on the ride together.

So, my belief of 'I mountain-bike ride to spend time with my partner but I am slow, have lots of accidents and I hold him up', shifted to 'I am a beginner mountain-bike rider who loves being out in nature on the bike, exploring different tracks and building capacity'. Attitude, intention, framing of the experience and my self-talk all changed. The process of riding, and the habit attached to training each day to support longer rides, enabled me to shape the experience in a totally different way with positive emotions attached. There was a direct change in the experience. My habit was about who I wished to become rather than what I thought someone wanted me to be.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Consider your beliefs

Intention: Dig deep into your beliefs to support your habit formation and enactment.

Attention: Draw attention to: Which beliefs are helpful? Which beliefs are inhibiting? Do you have beliefs that are both? Observe and label these non-judgementally.

Attitude: Be honest with yourself, holding compassion.

PERMAH links: P, M

Note to self: Connect with this practice when you feel ready to. You may also unpack your beliefs with a close loved one or a professional who can support you.

The more you repeat the action, the more you become your habit. James Clear⁴ (who added reward to the habit cycle) reminds us that we become through our habit. Repeated action and evidence accumulated shapes your identity. It is gradual, changing bit by bit, habit by habit. Thus, a habit becomes a suggestion of who you are. Every action you take is evidence of your identity.

It is the habits that help you become the person you want to be.

Don't forget, habits are the small choices we make every day that when repeated help make the change. And you begin with trial and error.

Outcomes: What do you want to achieve?

Identity: Who do you want to be?

Consider the beliefs that are behind the shift:

What might sabotage you?

What needs reframing?

What no longer suits you?

What is right for you right now?

What does this look like for self-care? Let's connect with your beliefs about self-care and then you can directly apply the same process to other beliefs that influence habits you are forming or maintaining.

You might have heard, or even said yourself:

Self-care is hard, I am trying to do it but . . .

Self-care is selfish, it's overrated but I do it because I must.

Self-care is something that young people do.

I'm told that I must do self-care.

A reframe of the intention for self-care when we acknowledge our beliefs shifts not only the language used, but also the feel that the intention has. It is positioned more towards the positive. It is action centred. It is proactive. And when it is your intention, it represents a little of you and who you want to be.

I place self-care high on my priority list as it is
worthy of my attention.

I carry out daily self-care routines to help me be my best.

I love being curious about finding new ways to
help me enact self-care.

I start the day with one self-care routine that always
makes me feel energised.

With this later intention, the habit has the individual present. You can see and hear the 'I' with an action. It is like someone saying, 'One day I will write that book', versus 'I am a writer and I find 30 minutes each day in my schedule to always write'. Identity is present. The individual's belief is present.

What will yours be?

Rest and taking breaks

Rest is vital for your growth. Sometimes we just keep going, even when we are tired, exhausted and know that we should pause. Sometimes we just keep going as we are too focused on the to-do list or the deadlines that are coming up with the idea that rest will take us away from being able to meet these responsibilities.

What actually happens is that as we keep moving through these moments of 'I know I should stop, but I don't', we become more tired, slower at processing, more drained and less effective. Rest helps us to reboot.

I think about this in relation to the metaphor of charging a mobile phone introduced in Chapter 5. Each night we plug our phone in to charge so that the next day it will have a full battery and work to the best of its capacity. If it is not recharged it will run out of power and stop working. Our bodies and minds are like this as well. If we don't create time to recharge, we won't be able to sustain our energy or effectiveness.

Exploring ways to rest, I've collated a few strategies that work for me. I'll unpack some of these later in the chapter, but here are a few to spark your curiosity:

- Have a tech-free day and take a break especially from scrolling and reading/watching the news.
- Every hour, take three long, slow breaths.
- Go nature spotting, even if you are in a city or major town; notice what is around you.
- Walk at half pace.
- Explore turtle pace: this one I love and was introduced to by my good friend, Megan. We often text each other with an emoji of a turtle to set the intention for taking it slower on a day, and intentionally being present with all we do and engage in. The turtle pace is a nice tilt towards a slower, more mindful pace. It is also helps being gentler on self.

- Notice when you are tired, take a break, even for 5 minutes, as soon as possible, rather than pushing through.
- Take an afternoon nap.
- Catch yourself overreacting and take a deep breath. Engage in the STOP strategy from Chapter 6.
- Remember that we all struggle at times, and it is a part of being human. The mantra 'we are all doing our best' is helpful.
- Go for a walk around the block to clear your head when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- Engage in soothing touch when you find yourself feeling overwhelmed.
- Let go of the small stuff and focus on what really matters.
- Adopt a growth mindset where you say, 'I am unable to do x just yet' rather than spending energy on 'I can't'.
- Listen to music, a podcast or audio book.
- Clean a room in the house.
- Make sleep a priority and establish a pre-bed routine for relaxing.
- Carry out a body scan meditation and notice how the body is feeling.
- Choose to park away from congestion and walk slowly to your destination.
- Stretch.
- Pull out a sketch book and doodle or draw a still life.
- Go for a walk and photograph different people or things you notice.
- Go for a bike ride.
- Watch the waves at the beach.
- Take your dog for a walk.
- Admire a friend's puppy.
- Walk away.

JOURNAL PROMPT: What recharges you?

Intention: Be curious about your relationship with rest.

Attention: Draw your attention to different types of rest.

Attitude: Explore with a beginner's mindset.

PERMAH links: E, A, H

Using the rest suggestions shared as a starting point, what might be possible for you? Make note of your recharge go-to strategies, and perhaps others you may wish to try. Also record those that are not on the list.

DO: *Intentional rest*

Intention: Connect with what rest looks likes for you.

Attention: Notice micro-moments right through to larger moments in time.

Attitude: Cultivate a thoughtful outlook that cares for you acknowledging helpful and not-so-helpful belief(s) you may have towards rest.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

How can you be intentional with your rest? What does this look like when you are investing in your rejuvenation or maintenance and protection of self-care? Think about this from a daily and weekly perspective. Additionally, consider the perspective of what this looks like when you are flourishing and functioning well versus when you are just surviving and not feeling your best mentally, emotionally and/or physically. Map what is needed for you based on what is required and what gets dropped.

	DAILY RESTFUL SELF-CARE PRACTICES	WEEKLY RESTFUL SELF-CARE PRACTICES
FLOURISHING (What does rest look like for you? How does it make you feel? What does it look, feel and sound like?)		
JUST SURVIVING (What gets dropped or missed that would be beneficial to help you shift through this? How does this make you feel? What are the consequences or repeated patterns you have noticed when in this state? What does it feel like when you are not at your best cognitively, emotionally and physically?)		

Boundaries

As we form healthy habits, we also need to consider our boundaries. Saying yes to everything is fun, exciting and energising for some of us. We get caught up in the opportunity, the possibility and often in the fact that someone thought of us, and we feel humbled by this. I know that feeling; I'm like a magnet to opportunity and ideas. But I have learned over the years if I keep saying yes to everyone else, I end up saying no to myself.

*Saying yes to everything is fun,
until you are so exhausted you cannot function
anymore.*

In my first year of teaching, I was teaching in a secondary school as a music teacher. I had graduated from music school, and I had the idea that to teach music you must be a performer as well. I remember saying that a basketball coach wouldn't teach basketball if they didn't play the sport. In hindsight I had this fantasy that I would be more authentic as a music teacher if I were still performing, that I needed to do both, and that I was expected to do both. The last was probably the biggest problem (I can say that now) and was the wrong driver for many reasons (but that is another story) that influenced my beliefs at the time.

My first full-time job as a school teacher was over one hour's commute one way from my home and came with before- and after-school responsibilities: choir, concert band and rock group rehearsals. There were long days, plus I added in my own mid-week and weekend rehearsals and performances for my pit orchestra commitments. My social life usually revolved around going to see live music at least two or three times a week. I also had family responsibilities in areas far from home.

I thought I could do it all.

And I did . . . for six months until I had burnout and became sick. What I thought was the flu was actually glandular fever. The fatigue had me spend weeks in bed, taking time off from school (and performing, travelling to work, home, events, family).

I said yes to everything, and I had porous boundaries. My body stepped in and forced me to slow down.

DO: *Boundary audit*

Intention: Explore your boundaries with curiosity that enables you to grow.

Attention: Focus on what is working but also areas that require love and care.

Attitude: Look forward to reviewing your boundaries.

Note to self: I carry out this activity on a regular basis: when I feel overwhelmed, when I transition into a new project, when I am exhausted and need to refresh, or when I need to rethink relationships. You may find this beneficial to do as well.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Consider these types of boundaries. Consider them in relation to yourself but also others in your life from the perspective of how they are modelled.

RIGID	POROUS	HEALTHY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Struggles to ask for help • Feels like a burden • Avoids close relationships so can avoid rejection • Often feels lonely, isolated or disconnected • Can feel quite protective • Lacks flexibility • Rather be right than happy • Doesn't like the word 'no' • Struggles to see/consider/think about other perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on other people for validation • Hard time saying 'no' to others • Over-involved in other issues • Often shares too much • Accepts toxic behaviour of others • Can be an enabler of toxic people due to fear of rejection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't compromise own values • Finds alignment to your <i>why</i> • Can say 'no' and also accept 'no' • Values personal opinions and decisions • Can use discretion to be flexible • Can communicate wants and needs • Doesn't feel responsible for others' happiness

What is going on for you and your boundaries?

Let's do an audit.

Boundaries are healthy for me when I . . .	These boundaries need some tweaks . . .
Boundaries I want to try or explore further . . .	Boundaries that just are not working for me . . .

What resonates with you from the table of rigid, porous and healthy relationships in relation to your self-care?

And this challenge can detract from our wellbeing. At these times our boundaries with others can be tested or required to be adjusted. Relationships are complex. People are complex. How we connect (or do not) is complex. I've begun to explore this complexity in the boundaries audit mind map to assist in your thinking about boundaries with others and the impact on your self-care. And in this next section you'll explore some ways to consider your relationships and boundaries.

Relationship red and green flags

Good relationships take time to build. Research shows that we can feel energised or zapped by others. The people in our life have an influence on our wellbeing. Unfortunately, sometimes they, you or contexts do not make it easy to create a positive connection with another. A red and green flag metaphor is a great way to think about people in your life. A red flag is like a warning. It waves in the wind . . . telling you to be aware. A green flag hangs on the wall, as a metaphor for a positive and mature relationship that grows and develops over time.

RED FLAG	GREEN FLAG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puts you down for your self-care routines • Holds you back from your personal growth • Sabotages your personal growth with putdowns, passive-aggressive comments or behaviours, etc. • Egocentric • Narcissistic • Friendships come and go • Self-centred • Agrees with you to build up your trust, then attacks when they don't get what they want • Always right • Always has an answer • Self-reflection and self-awareness missing • Expects much from others • Lies, manipulates or tricks 	<p>Practises self-care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports your personal growth • Self-reflective • Long-standing friendship • Empathy • Compromise • Vulnerability • Spirituality • Self-sufficient <p>Healthy hobbies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicates openly • Listens • Honours boundaries • Self-responsibility • Checks in on you • Listens deeply without judgement

I think about relationships with others as a Circle of Niceness.⁵ I trust them. We are honest with each other. We give and take. We have admiration for each other. I respect their perspective, and vice versa. We are collegial and show a huge amount of reciprocity and gratitude for one another on many levels. There is a warmth. And there is a genuine mutual respect. A Circle of Niceness brings out the best in you and is full of green flags.

Another way to think about red flags and green flags is through the Marigold Effect.⁶ Jennifer Gonzales writes:

Many experienced gardeners follow a concept called companion planting: placing certain vegetables and plants near each other to improve growth for one or both plants. For example, rose growers plant garlic near their roses because it repels bugs and prevents fungal diseases. Among companion plants, the marigold is one of the best. It protects a wide variety of plants from pests and harmful weeds. If you plant a marigold beside most any garden vegetable, that vegetable will grow big and strong and healthy, protected and encouraged by its marigold.

(Paragraphs 4–5)

When we come to think about marigolds we can recognise they exist in our personal and professional lives. These are the people who are encouraging, supporting and nurturing. These are people in our life who help you to grow and to flourish. Your marigold is your safe person. Your person of whom you can ask anything, ponder with, problem solve with, cry to, celebrate with and just know they will be there for you. They are a green flag and part of your Circle of Niceness.

As we progress through the rest of this chapter you are invited to work through your boundaries with others. Red flags and toxic people are explored or as Gonzales calls them 'The Walnut Tree':

They may not seem dangerous at first. In fact, some may appear to be good teachers – happy, social, well-organised. But here are some signs that you should keep your distance: their take on the kids is negative. Their take on the administration is negative. Being around them makes you feel insecure, discouraged, overwhelmed, or embarrassed.⁷

I think we all have a few walnut trees that we have come too close to, or indeed been hanging out with too much. I know this metaphor has helped me consider my professional relationship boundaries. What about you?

DO: Relationship circle

Intention: To identify who is in your life.

Attention: Notice who is present in your life.

Attitude: Bring an open mindedness and perspective.

PERMAH links: P, E, R

Note to future self: This is a great strategy to do at different points in your life when you need to refresh, reset or when you have had a significant change or transition.

Working from the centre out, make a record and observe who is in your life. What do you notice? Who supports you? Who might be a red or green flag where some boundaries may need to be put into place?

Once you have recorded the relationships in your life, the next step is to draw an arrow to each person. Indicate if you want to move them more inwards (to build a closer relationship) or if you want to create more distance, maybe even remove them from your life (and you may refer to some of the next practices and journal prompts to support you with this).

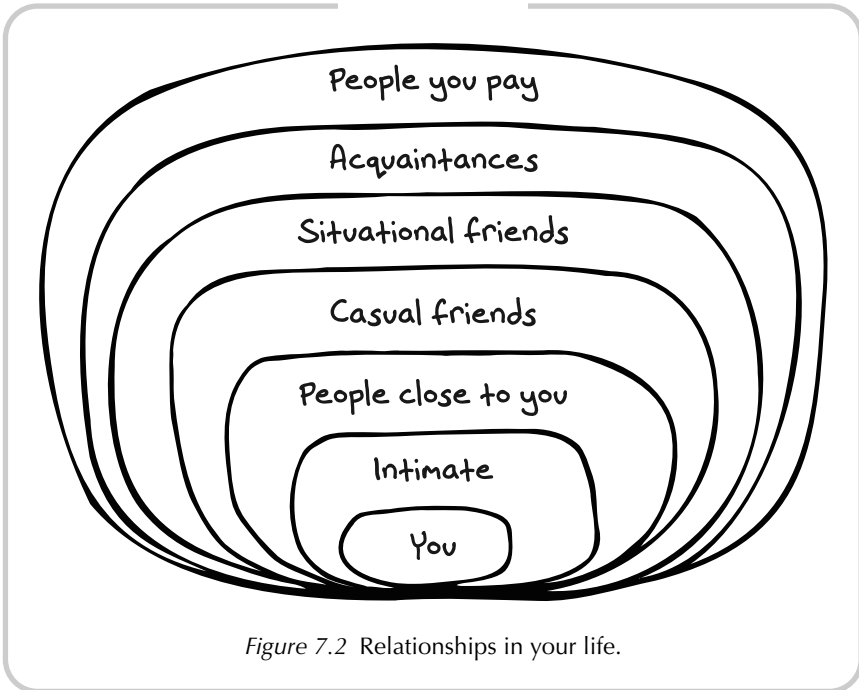


Figure 7.2 Relationships in your life.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Green flag

Intention: Be curious and courageous in the types of relationships you have developed and would like to cultivate.

Attention: Focus on who brings out the best in you.

Attitude: Explore with an open mindedness.

PERMAH link: R

Who is in your life who promotes the green flag way of thinking and being? Why? How do they bring out the best in you? How can you invest in or spend more time with them? How can you find more green flag people?

Toxic relationships

You still want folks to like, respect and even admire what you've created, but your self-worth is not on the table.⁸

Toxic people look different to everyone. But there are a few signs that we can notice that help us to navigate these relationships:

- Love the put down
- Are draining
- Do not respect boundaries
- Are often boundary-less
- Are fake with you
- Guilt you into meeting their needs
- Spread gossip and/or negativity
- Gossip about others
- Love the saying 'don't tell anyone else, but . . .'
- Judge
- Do not apologise
- Critique without being constructive
- Dominate your time with no respect of your time
- Are often jealous
- Don't care about you
- Are envious
- Constantly criticise
- Won't take responsibility for their own actions
- Feel threatened by your other relationships
- Feel threatened by your strengths and successes
- Set impossible expectations
- Are controlling
- Are inconsistent
- Lie to you
- Isolate you
- Are easily angered when they don't get their own way
- Only speak and never listen

This is just a sample list, not exhaustive, and what you notice with toxic people is that they usually do a few of these. They are red flags.

When you think about toxic people in your life you want to notice what is going on for you. When you tune in to your needs, not theirs, there are usually some really clear signs being sent your way:

- How does your body react?
- What do you think of when you think about that person?
- How do you feel when you are around that person?
- What insecurities might be popping up for you that stop you from standing up for yourself?
- What are they transferring on to you that you do not need to wear?
- With toxic relationships you always have a choice. You can choose how to engage or not. You may not have a choice about engagement, for example, it may be a work colleague. Your choice comes with how you manage the engagement, so they don't drag you into the loops of toxicity. And I know many of us have spent a lot of time debating in our mind the pros and cons of such moves. At the end of the day, you can decide what that relationship or association looks like for you. Is it worth the drama? Is it worth the anxiety it causes you?

Caveat: some people may appear toxic, and you can approach them and chat about your relationship, connecting in to where you are at with each other. With a space of compassion, it is possible to discover what is happening, but remember that a toxic person can go along with you for a while and then reappear with all these red flag signs with stealth-like magic. Be careful. You can walk away. In time you will find healthier friendships and people in your life. You really will. You can't change a toxic person; we have all probably tried to. You might want to save them (I've thought this a number of times until there has just been one too many manipulative moves that just needed to be managed in my life as the impact was the direct opposite of self-care), but we can't save other people; we can only support them, because at the end of the day everyone needs to take their own actions to take care of themselves.

Think:

- What are your boundaries?
- What will you tolerate?
- What does not work for you?
- What does a healthy relationship look like for you?
- What does a safe person look like for you? (For example, encouraging, supportive, authentic, trustworthy, trusting, forgiving, consistent, predictable, deep listener, mutual respect, curious, happy when you succeed, not threatened by your other relationships, respectful of your boundaries.)

JOURNAL PROMPT: Toxic relationships

Intention: Tune in to your relationships.

Attention: Draw your attention to those people you work with (and indeed engage with in your personal life) who would be a red flag or cross boundaries of being toxic for you.

Attitude: Be gentle as you process, be careful not to finger point yourself, just observe, identify, label and record in a way that has integrity and compassion.

PERMAH links: E, R, M

What do your boundaries look like when it comes to toxic people in your life? What are the triggers for you to be extra careful of? What are 'just not acceptable and I need to place distance between us' moves?

Note to self: You may explore some of the questions posed in the discussion section leading into this strategy to support you.

Supporting others

As we navigate working with others we are often placed in the position where we need to support some others. Flying green flags and especially compassion, these questions might help you to help someone else, while also helping you to be able to listen deeply but also not wear the pain or suffering.

- What happened?
- What did you think when you realised what had happened?
- What impact has this had on you? On others?
- What has been the hardest for you?
- What do you think needs to happen next?
- What self-care strategies do you know work for you that you could call on now?
- How can we make this happen for you?

JOURNAL PROMPT: The pause in supporting others

Intention: Observe how you support others.

Attention: Notice what you say and do.

Attitude: Draw attention to your strengths in how you support others.

PERMAH links: E, R

When you are in a situation where you need to support a colleague or student, what does this look, feel and sound like for you? How do you pause in the moment for yourself and the individual you are flying a green flag for?

Receiving difficult feedback

One of the flip sides to being the listener and supporter is that at times we are in situations where we are in need of processing feedback that can be unexpected and/or difficult. Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen, the authors of *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*,⁹ offer

a great six-part process for us to consider approaching difficult conversations where the relationship can stay intact (and/or you feel more true to yourself).

1. Know your tendencies: What are your patterns? What does your baseline look like? That is, what is the level of satisfaction you gravitate back to, where you feel content/comfortable/just you? What happens to you when you are excited, elated or experience a positive? And what happens to you when you experience something negative, a set-back or an upset? What are your patterns physically, emotionally and psychologically? What does this look, feel and sound like? How do you recover?
2. Disentangle the *what* from the *who*: who delivered feedback to you matters, even though it shouldn't. Be careful not to spend most of your time seeking feedback from people who think like you, seek out other perspectives (even the people you find most difficult to work with).
3. Think about feedback as coaching: think about feedback as having three different purposes:
 - a. Appreciation: noting a win, something good, a contribution or new insight. (This style of feedback is contagious, and many people want this and more of it.)
 - b. Coaching: helping you get better at something.
 - c. Evaluation: where you are ranked. Seek out all three, not just number one.
4. Unpack the feedback: be an active participant in the feedback, decode and ask questions rather than assume. Look for the subtle or vague points that can unpack some rich opportunities.
5. Ask for just one thing: 'What's one thing you see me doing (or failing to do) that holds me back?'
6. Engage in small experiments: just because you can receive feedback well, doesn't mean you have to accept the feedback, but try the feedback and see if it is helpful. Experiment, be curious. Keep and discard what is appropriate for the time . . . but do give it time.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Difficult feedback and you

Intention: Creating an openness to embrace feedback to help you grow.

Attention: Draw attention to how you cognitively and emotionally respond and action.

Attitude: Cultivate a beginner's mindset to observe yourself.

PERMAH links: E, R, M, A

Think about a situation where receiving feedback has been difficult for you. This could be the feedback itself and/or perhaps how it was done (as we all have situations where the delivery styles could have benefitted from coaching). If you could apply the preceding six steps, what would this have looked like? What tweaks could you have made? What boundaries did you need to put in place? How could you apply these observations moving forward?

Concluding thoughts

Understanding and managing the barriers you have with others and the habits that you establish and maintain are valuable elements in your toolbox for self-care. Shape and refine these tools so that they work for you and your circumstances. Regularly make the time to actively reflect on what works for you. And as you grow, maintain and protect your boundaries and habits, create the time to regularly check in with yourself. Enjoy the processing.

You may also be interested in . . .

Podcasts on habits, boundaries and you

Holistic Psychology with Dr. Nicole LePera <https://whole30.com/podcast/11/dr-nicole-lepera-the-holistic-psychologist/>

Teachers Supporting Teachers – Willpower with Narelle and Jodie Cooper www.exploreandcreateco.com/teachers-supporting-teachers-podcast/2020/11/4/teachers-supporting-teachers-series-2-episode-18-willpower-habits-and-the-20-second-rule

Understanding your stress response and how to balance it out with Ellen Carr <https://slowyourhome.com/stress-response/>

Routines and Ruts

<https://extraordinaryroutines.com/podcast>

Websites

The Habits Guide: How to Build Good Habits and Break Bad Ones
<https://jamesclear.com/habits>

21 Examples of Healthy Boundaries in Relationships

<https://liveboldandbloom.com/05/relationships/healthy-boundaries-in-relationships>

How to set healthy boundaries

<https://positivepsychology.com/great-self-care-setting-healthy-boundaries/>

The Gottman Institute: A research-based approach to relationships

www.gottman.com/

Watch

Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results – Atomic Habits by James Clear

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT7tQzmGRLA

Developing a Growth Mindset with Carol Dweck www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiiEeMN7vbQ

Sheila Heen: Decoding Difficult Conversations www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wxf_ank92DE

Notes

- 1 García, H., & Miralles, F. (2017). *The Ikigai journey: A practical guide to finding happiness and purpose the Japanese way* (p. 35). Tuttle Publishing.
- 2 García, H., & Miralles, F. (2017). *The Ikigai journey: A practical guide to finding happiness and purpose the Japanese way* (p. 36). Tuttle Publishing.
- 3 <https://jamesclear.com/>
- 4 <https://jamesclear.com/>
- 5 www.exploreandcreateco.com/blog/2019/9/3/circle-of-niceness-mapping-our-values
- 6 www.cultofpedagogy.com/marigolds/
- 7 www.cultofpedagogy.com/marigolds/ (paragraph 9).
- 8 Brown, B. (2015). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead* (p. 6). Penguin Random House UK.
- 9 Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (1999). *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most*. Penguin Publishing Group.

8

The elusiveness of time

Time guides us. Just think of the bells in schools – they ring for each critical moment in a schedule, to warn us and to guide us. We schedule everything, or plan to. We have our to-do lists to help us manage our time, achievement lists to celebrate how we have used our time. We roll over in bed to look at the time to see how much longer we have until we must get up and begin the day. We wear watches or carry phones with us that have time prominently displayed on the screen. Time guides almost everything we do.

So why is it we find it so hard to manage time when it comes to our well-being and self-care?

Let's investigate time awareness, valuing your time and time with and for others. As you explore this chapter you will tick a lot of the PERMAH areas to develop and maintain your toolbox. What you will notice is that time as a key dimension for self-care is actually your friend, versus something we consider as a hinderance (ie, I have no time, or I am time poor).

But before you do this, let's think about time and how it can be used to support your self-care. Let's do a quick time audit as a check-in. We need a variety of different practices and strategies in our toolbox for self-care, and we also need to embrace time as a variable that supports us to accomplish this. What does this look like for you?

JOURNAL PROMPT: Time audit and your self-care

How do you currently use time to support your self-care? Think about these periods of time:

- Micro-moments

- Less than 1 hour
- More than 1 hour
- Weekly
- Daily
- Monthly
- Annually
- Bi- or tri-annually

Create a classifying system for yourself to do this audit. It could be a chart, lists or a graphic organiser. What do you do in each of the periods of time for your self-care? Which time period features more? Is there a time period that needs to be tweaked?

The tilt

Work-life balance is a myth. It has been sold to us for years now as a message that we can do everything. I remember as a young woman in my early 20s having a conversation with my mother about doing it all. I was encouraged to do everything – go to university, get a degree, find a partner, get married, have children, be successful in my career, raise a healthy, active and well-adjusted family, own a house, be great at cooking, be fit and healthy, wear the latest stylish clothes, entertain friends regularly, travel, discover the world, maintain family relationships, travel between my home and more distant areas to see family and so on. What was clear to me was that I was told I could have it all, I should have it all and I would be able to do it all. Well, I can't. And you probably can't either. A work-life balance where we are perceived as having it all and achieving well in all areas all of the time is impossible. We've been sold a myth, a myth that for many of us has been consciously disproved and for which we feel guilty.

During my period of burnout I was introduced to podcasts. My chiropractor called me out about working too hard. I was lying on the adjustment table, head down, in tears from pain, barely able to move. My lower

back was in spasms, and pain and irritability meant I was not showing the best side of my personality. She spotted it immediately as I shuffled bent over with squinting eyes from the sensitivity to light. My body was making me stop. I had been ignoring all the other signs, and to be honest didn't really know what was going on, thinking I was just tired. As my chiropractor explained what was happening with my body, she recommended a series of stretches as well as listening to podcasts. I had never made the time to explore and discover them. As I headed into two weeks' leave from work with instructions to lie on my back and not to think about or do any work, I was given one of the greatest gifts: find a podcast on a topic that you are curious about and simply listen. This is the neuroscience behind using your brain in a different way – listening.

During this time, I discovered the Slow Home Podcast¹ with Brooke McAlary and her hilarious husband, Ben. The podcast focuses on daily experiences with slowing down and disrupting the fast-paced nature of life where we are over-worked, over-committed and over-stressed. It was life changing. The act of just listening made me aware of how my brain and body worked and that written text and visuals were over-stimulating. I also picked a podcast that was really practicable and accessible. It was about the everyday. It put things into context. The podcast led me to Brooke McAlary's first book, *SLOW: Live Life Simply*, and introduced me to the concept of tilt.²

Tilt is like a mindset. It is the opposite of balance. Rather than trying to balance everything at the same time, tilt allows us to focus on one thing more closely. It is about where we pay our attention and are more present. We still need to get the other things on the list done, but we can tilt towards one area of our life. When we tilt, we acknowledge that we are willingly throwing balance off. To tilt is to be empowered by focusing more on one aspect of our life than another at a given time. More significantly, tilting recognises that doing so is OK.

Sometimes life is wildly busy. Or we may not feel our best. At these times the tilt is our friend. It allows us to be gentler. It allows us to make things as simple as possible at a particular moment in time. Tilt is also variable. We can tilt towards taking the pressure off someone else or to spending more time at home rather than in the workplace. We can also tilt towards ourselves to focus on an important task.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Tilting towards being more gentle

Intention: To focus on how you can redirect your attention to what you are doing or need to do.

Attention: How you can have a different relationship to managing all that you need to do.

Attitude: Cultivate a curiosity to consider how you can reimagine your to-do lists and commitments.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

What can the tilt bring to your life? How might it allow you to be more courageous in how you balance your commitments?

JOURNAL PROMPT: Tilt in the classroom

Intention: To focus on how you can redirect your attention to what you are doing or need to do when in the classroom.

Attention: How you can have a different relationship to managing all that you need to do.

Attitude: Cultivate a curiosity to consider how you can reimagine your to-do lists and commitments.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Classrooms are notorious spaces for teachers having to multi-task. What have you noticed in your practice that could benefit from a tilt?

JOURNAL PROMPT: Tilt as a leader

Intention: To focus on how you can redirect your attention to what you are doing or need to do in your leadership capacity.

Attention: How you can have a different relationship to managing all that you need to do.

Attitude: Cultivate a curiosity to consider how you can reimagine your to-do lists and commitments.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

As a leader we need to embrace the tilt to support the movement between people-centric tasks and those that are based more around administrative tasks and policy. How can the tilt support you in how you use your time?

Bonus reflective question: How do you model the tilt to your colleagues? How do you support them to also tilt and feel empowered by this decision?

Screen, green, me and down time

To be kinder to yourself, approach tilting each day through a structure like this:

Screen time

Green time

Me time

Down time

Each day I try to have each of these four types of time, they break up my day, but they also help me prioritise my health in a way that is supportive of tilting. This is the backbone of my self-care. On those days when I am not at my best; under the pump, tired, pulled in a thousand different directions or feel out of sorts from illness, these four times enable me to be present. I don't use them as a checklist or to judge myself. They are the backbone, a structure that supports me. They might be the same for you.

Let's unpack each of them and explore how you could engage with this way of thinking about time to support your wellbeing.

Screen time

Screen time is about any and every device in the blurred landscapes of professional and personal life. I'm conscious of how many virtual meetings I attend and how. Do I need to be on video? Can I dial in? Do I need to be sitting while I attend? Am I a participant? Am I running the meeting? Am I just there to listen? Do I even need to attend the meeting? These questions determine how I will take part.

Which devices am I using and when? I hotspot from my phone for Wi-Fi connection, so my laptop and mobile phone are currently linked. Previously, I listened to audio books and podcasts frequently, but this has now reduced and I do this differently. I am no longer driving as much (where I used to listen to audio books) and now must consider when I might engage with them. Television viewing has altered for me as well. In the past it was used to unwind and savour crime shows, but less so now.

After work hours I put the phone away. Although during Melbourne's many COVID lockdowns I noticed I was 'on' the actual phone far more, making old-school phone calls after days online. I am now making conscious decisions about when and how I use my screens.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Screen time

Intention: To raise awareness of your screen time.

Attention: What is supportive and what is overuse?

Attitude: Cultivate a curiosity to consider how you can reimagine screen time.

PERMAH link: H

What are your screen-time defaults? Notice your patterns and behaviours in the workplace and at home. What about when the boundaries blur? How may have changed and perhaps become out of sync during the pandemic? What can you celebrate? What might need tweaking?

Healthy use of social media

Social media can be a great resource for ideas and a community of support, but there are some boundaries that you need to put into place so the creep of comparison or getting caught in with limited perspectives does not impede healthy use.

What communities are you engaging in? Who is there, what are the individuals' backgrounds, what tone do they use, and what kinds of messages are being shared? Look at the patterns of some of the more dominant voices: Are these objective, supportive or empathetic? It is worth noting that some forms of social media, most notably Twitter, are a couple of clicks from hate-land. Is this something anybody needs?

JOURNAL PROMPT: What are your social media boundaries and why?

Intention: To raise awareness of how you may personally and professionally engage with social media.

Attention: What is supportive and what is overuse?

Attitude: Cultivate a curiosity to consider how you can establish and maintain healthy boundaries with social media.

PERMAH link: H

What is the role of social media in your personal and/or professional life? What do you engage with regularly and why? Are you a lurker or participant? What boundaries or limits do you need to set up and maintain? What does social media offer you personally and professionally?

The *why* of your boundary is important. This will help you to be accountable for your engagement. You might build on ideas from Chapter 7 here on boundaries as you reflect upon your personal and professional use of social media and how you manage your screen time.

Green time

Green time: the time in nature, around trees, flowers, gardens and open space has always been a big one for me. Green time energises me. It is an important part of my self-care toolbox. What this might look like for you will differ according to where you live, what is accessible, what is happening with your body at the time, how you are feeling, weather, seasons and the time available to you.

What green time brings to us is:

- A sense of space and openness
- A version of a pause that helps us to feel grounded and present in this moment
- Igniting positive emotions such as joy, savouring, curiosity, appreciation of beauty, kindness, gratitude, appreciation and awe
- Stimulation of our senses: smell, taste, touch, sight, hearing
- A sense of soothing
- A sense of energising
- Providing a moment of quiet time and/or me time

Find wonder and inspiration through a simple stroll.

Two types of green time that are growing in popularity are 'awe walks' and 'forest bathing'. Awe walks have you consider physical vastness and novelty; this could be in natural or manmade environments. Awe walks encourage you to focus on the cultivation of the positive emotion of awe which usually is ignited from exploring a new place that is unfamiliar to you. While forest bathing or shinrin-yoku is a Japanese ecotherapy that means taking in the forest atmosphere,³ it first emerged in the 1980s to combat stress with a focus on encouraging us to move away from technology-focused activities or overworking tendencies. Forest bathing is about inspiring us to reconnect with and protect the forests, national parks and green spaces.

These two green-time practices remind us that nature is an interrupter to our fast-paced way of life, and that slowing down is worth our attention. Nature, or green time, helps us do this by igniting positive emotions that are beneficial for our wellbeing.

I think awe is a part of both practices. When you are in a state of awe, you are engaging in an emotional experience that is usually felt when individuals encounter a powerful stimulus that is beyond their own understanding, like a waterfall, land formations or man-made structures like skyscrapers, sculpture or a temple.⁴ Awe is a positive emotion, one that can be cultivated in nature. Research has discussed that being in nature or looking at it for at least 1 minute can have positive effects on individuals. It can be a prosocial influence on future interactions with others and improve the embodiment of positive emotions such as gratitude and appreciation.⁵

Recent research on awe walks⁶ has indicated that we can readily experience the positive emotions such as joy, compassion and appreciation. Additionally, post-walk we can feel more compassionate and less distressed in daily life. Awe has a way of taking us outside our usual routine. It allows us to connect with something larger and more significant than just us. Some research has indicated that this can generate a feeling of transcendence and with this a sense of broader connectedness and purpose. Spending time in nature, appreciating and engaging in awe-inspiring wonder from the natural world can also help relieve negative moods and improve happiness. As we engage in this way, we can evoke positive feelings that may be helpful when we are feeling blocked, stressed, anxious or while processing day-to-day concerns.

Researchers Ethan McMahan and David Estes in a meta-analysis on positive or negative impacts of nature, explored the influence that real-life moments in nature have on our wellbeing versus simulated or manmade nature experiences with a lens to find out which had a greater positive impact on our wellbeing.⁷ They found that nature simulations can serve as effective substitutes for actual exposure to nature, but the real-life experience is far more beneficial. If you do not have access to real-life nature then virtual nature still produces a substantial increase, indicating that viewing nature indirectly is also beneficial. For example, observing nature through a photograph, watching a nature film or looking into the distance from a window, may be an effective means to improving wellbeing.

And for those of you who are wondering about your indoor plants, small garden or balcony garden, there is good news. Research into experiencing managed and manicured natural environments (such as urban green spaces, arboretums) versus others using relatively wild natural environments

(such as wilderness areas, nature preserves, national parks) has revealed no reported difference. This finding suggests that all exposure to green spaces is beneficial for our wellbeing. That is great news . . . and another reason to add green time in multiple different ways to your classroom, as much as to your personal spaces.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Green space

Intention: Cultivate more green time as part of your self-care.

Attention: Be curious with the types of green spaces you can enjoy.

Attitude: Consider the variable of time that could support you to tilt towards more green time.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

What does outdoor green time look like for you? What does indoor green time look like for you? How can you add more green time? What does it bring to your toolbox for self-care?

What about in the workplace? In your classroom? Is there opportunity to incorporate nature from the school yard or perhaps bring inside indoor plants or visuals of nature?

Me time

Me time, the time I spend with myself and on myself, is a crucial aspect of your self-care. It is slightly different to down time in that you are focusing on you, versus zoning out and resting. My working from home is scheduled time to work on a big project where I can dedicate thought time to it. It is a primary part of my me time. Usually, me time centres around research, writing, journaling and especially reading or listening to podcasts. I process thoughts, develop myself and can engage deeply with new ideas or ones I am consolidating. It also forms a significant part of my work me time but also my personal me time. I do not speak to or see anyone from the moment I say goodbye to my partner in the morning to when he returns in the evening. I don't look at my phone. I don't schedule meetings. I write, hang out with myself and use my time in a way that supports my refuelling (a sneaky

facial mask while writing appears every now and then, and I can pull out the yoga mat and have it in the middle of the lounge room to stretch without worrying about being in the way of others, and I can do all those odd jobs that need doing really quickly as part of my breaks).

DO: *Me time*

Intention: To carve out me time for yourself.

Attention: Cultivate what is possible for you.

Attitude: Be curious to what me time looks like for you.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Take 10 minutes for yourself, and you never know this might expand further as you find your flow. This time can look different for everyone. It is also vital for you to connect into what you need for me time.

Me time invites you to focus on you; it is a check-in with yourself emotionally, cognitively, mentally and/or spiritually.

How do you achieve this?

Down time

Down time is when I just stop. Post-pandemic, down time may look very different for you as compared with pre-pandemic. Pre-pandemic I used to enjoy a glass of wine at the local bar. Now I have a glass of wine in my backyard. But most importantly I stop using computer screens, limit the phone screen time and impose boundaries to make sure I stop and relax and move away from my work.

During the day I add in moments of down time as well: lunch away from my workspace, for example. I make sure I inject micro-moments of joy as well to treat myself with a lovely green tea away from screens, a conversation with a friend, or a moment where I knit or craft, or head to bed early with a book just to be in the moment with my thoughts. Down time also features heavily on the weekend, setting boundaries that protect down time from work.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Down time go-to strategy

Intention: To carve out down time for yourself.

Attention: Cultivate what is possible for you.

Attitude: Be curious to what down time looks like for you.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

What is your go-to down time strategy? The one strategy that empowers, enriches and nourishes you?

How do you make time to tilt towards this as part of your toolbox for self-care?

Micro-moments

As you navigate the variable of time in your life the micro-moment will become one of your go-to approaches. This is a super energiser in your toolbox. Focus is on quick, accessible, powerful and empowering 'you' acts. You can access a micro-moment as much as you need to during your day.

Small moments of time are micro-moments. I think of them as being mini-power blocks that are incredibly helpful when we feel like we don't have time (ie, under the pump or overwhelmed) or help us when we aren't feeling ourselves; we might be sick or tired and require a boost.

There are small moments that take anywhere up to 5 minutes or very short moments that are centred around less than a minute.

Let's explore some possibilities.

Self-interruption micro-moments

Interrupt yourself with a tool that changes your environment and supports you to shift your attention – get up, move to a different location, call a friend, go for a walk, change rooms, walk away from the situation. This is where the micro-moment is an action to help us with rest, renewal or rejuvenation. Here are some ideas to get you going that are designed to help you with your personal self-care, and can be adapted to your professional self-care or to those moments in the classroom or educational context.

DO: *Mindful bird watching*

Intention: To slow down and interrupt what you are observing.

Attention: A micro-moment of anything up to 5 minutes (and if you love it, bird watching could be a hobby you add to your toolbox that occurs over a longer period).

Attitude: Be open and curious to what is around you.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Note to self: You could substitute for any animal: a puppy, cat, fish. And if you have animal guests in your classroom this tool can be adapted to involve them.

Have you ever just stopped to watch a bird in its natural habitat? Just watch their movement, notice the colour of their feathers, how they hold their head and appreciate the sounds they make. Feel your feet on the ground, and notice your breath as it softens, and your inhales and exhales become deeper as you watch the bird.

DO: *Feel your feet on the ground*

Intention: Adding a pause into any moment of the day that helps you become centred and present.

Attention: A micro-moment of 10–60 seconds is powerful, longer is a bonus.

Attitude: Explore a curiosity associated with bodily sensations.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Note to self: You can do this standing or sitting. It can be done in class, as a moment between lessons or as students settle into a task. It can be done in meetings as well while you are listening.

Take a moment to focus on your feet, feel them on the ground. Wiggle your toes, feel the arch, press firm on the heel. What sensations does

this provide? Do you feel a warmth or a freshness? Feel the inside of your shoe. Feel the shoe connect with the ground beneath you.

This activity can be done standing or sitting. It can be done with others around you and without them knowing. It is a great micro-moment strategy that helps you become aware and reconnect in this moment no matter where you are or what you are doing. I especially like this practice when I am about to speak to a group of people, when I am in a meeting where there is tension in the air and as a soothing touch moment when I am listening to someone share their pain.

You may also connect with some of the grounding practices introduced in Chapter 4.

DO: *Three-minute movements of joy*

Intention: To find joy in movement.

Attention: A micro-moment of 3 minutes.

Attitude: Bring an excitement to what you enjoy and notice how the tool makes you feel.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Short bursts of movement are great for your mood as they boost dopamine and the sense of being alive and active. The aim is to raise your heartbeat and get the muscles moving. Select a movement that boosts your sense of strength and brings hope and joy. This might be a yoga pose or a Pilates movement, a brisk walk, a quick run, practicing your golf swing, gardening, walking up a hill, squats, lifting a weight. Anything that you like to do that makes you smile, gets the heart pumping and makes you feel strong and hopeful.

DO: *Hope home*

Intention: Bring hope and joy while helping future self.

Attention: A micro-moment of 10–60 seconds is powerful.

Attitude: Bring curiosity about how the everyday can empower you.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Become immersed with a home project that brings you hope, where you are engaged with the idea of what this task or activity will bring to your sense of joy and future at home. This might be building a new garden bed, painting a fence, cleaning out your cupboards, painting a room in your home a new colour, making new curtains, planting pots with cuttings to create a new indoor green space, decluttering the children's toys or your wardrobe, cleaning out the shed or staining the deck, for example. The focus is all on something you are doing now that is looking after you in this moment and is good for you in the future.

DO: *Meditation 54321*

Intention: To pause, notice and embrace what is around you.

Attention: A micro-moment of 1–3 minutes.

Attitude: Draw attention to your shift in awareness.

PERMAH links: P, E, H

Every day I go for a walk. I walk to feel the fresh air on my skin, to smell nature and to notice beautiful things around me. I also walk to pause; to stop, refresh and renew.

On my walk I've been noticing new things; I've been pausing and connecting with mindful moments. I then take a photo and share

these moments on social media as a way to document them and to share my pause, to pass it on to others, to inspire a pause for someone else and to inspire reframing. Hopefully it may ignite possibility as opportunity in the everyday. This is an act of daily self-care. An act of being in the moment and noticing what is around me during a time that is extra dynamic, full of change and unknowns, and revealing who we want to be, how we want to be and what is important to us.

My photos are paired with a guided meditation, inspired by a traditional mindfulness practice based on five things you see, four things you hear, three things you feel, two things you smell and one thing you taste (as we explored in Chapter 4). I modify the text with a guided meditation that invites a pause, for example:

I then share these daily pauses on social media via Instagram and other platforms such as Threads with the hashtag #meditation54321. It becomes a way to encourage others to also carry out the meditation or create one for themselves.

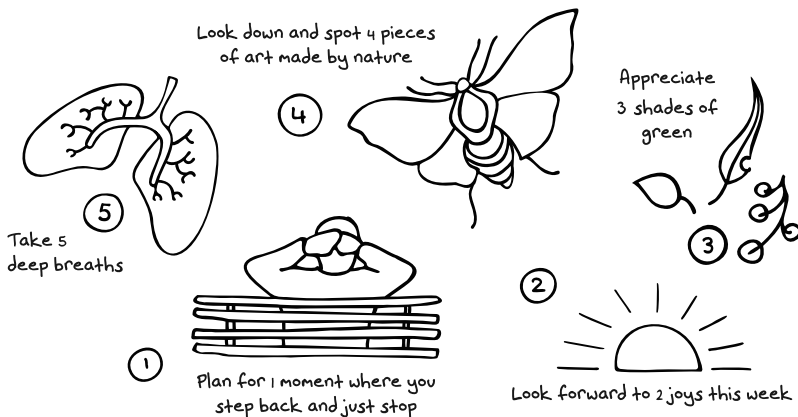
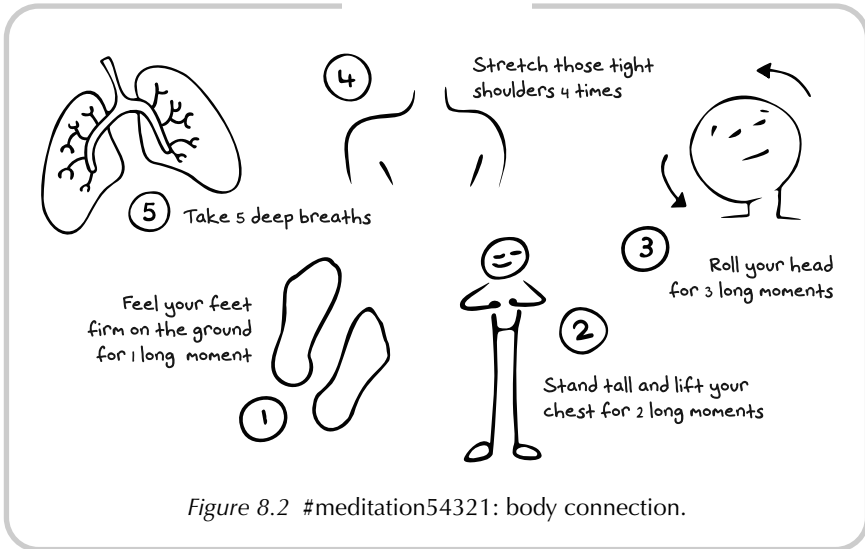


Figure 8.1 #meditation54321: grounding in the moment.



Valuing your time – celebrating your accomplishments

Accomplishment means different things to each of us. For some, accomplishment might be a specific award or a promotion. For others, it may be that you have completed something that matters to you. An accomplishment can be large or small. What you experience is a sense of achievement and satisfaction in completion, and you feel proud.

One of the key aspects of our wellbeing is that we believe in ourselves, and that this belief is linked to knowing that you can improve and grow.⁸ As we set, explore, learn from and celebrate our accomplishments, some of the key aspects we are looking out for are:

- A vision that motivates us
- An approach that stretches us and helps us to keep growing
- That we learn from others, but we do not compare ourselves with others as we must acknowledge our own strengths and what is right for us

- A belief in yourself that you can grow, improve and that your effort is worth it
- That pushing yourself is good
- That it is beneficial to be guided by the statement 'Who knows what I can do?'
- A combination of passion and perseverance helps you
- To see failure as teachable moments
- To understand that self-compassion is enacted to assist you to step away from the inner critic and your ability to focus on shaming and blaming and move towards generating more positive feelings that balance your fear with confidence, joy and calm⁹

Some key practices and strategies you may wish to explore could include to:

- Map your dreams and visions.
- Stretch yourself with SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timebound).
- Audit your time at the end of each week and take a glance at what you have achieved that aligns to what matters most to you.
- Set learning goals.
- Get comfortable with failing, knowing that much learning comes from this.

Growth mindset: openness to growth and improvement for yourself and when working with others

A growth mindset focuses on you being an everyday learner who seeks to grow and develop. With this comes a connection to meaning, engagement and accomplishment. We improve. We learn. There is a belief in yourself that you are able to continually develop skills, understanding and capacity. The psychologist Carol Dweck¹⁰ has been fundamental in this work offering us a way to see opportunity for growth and improvement. At the centre is:

- Enjoyment of learning, even come at it with a bit of zest
- Rising to a challenge

- Showing perseverance
- Seeking out feedback and clarification
- Effort being viewed as worthy
- Seeing mistakes as learning opportunities, not as a weakness
- Finding inspiration and lessons in the success of others
- Reflecting upon experiences, setbacks and possibilities

I have introduced the elements of a growth mindset to support an approach to maintaining and developing your relationships particularly from the perspective of being a teacher.

With a growth mindset how might you approach your role? What is it you personally would like to achieve? How can you learn from others?

Consider here also the work of Ron Cameron often credited with being the founding father of positive leadership, who describes how thinking about working with others, for example, in a mentoring role, can be achieved through an Everest goal.¹¹ Linking growth mindset and Everest goals supports an approach that is about building potential and seeing opportunity. From this perspective, this is about a positive forwarding-thinking focus, not a focus on negative, weakness or past failures.

Everest goals are unique in five ways. They:

1. Are positively deviant: that is exploring the possibility and opportunity to approach or solve a problem.
2. Represent goods of first intent: the inherent value of wisdom or fulfillment, creating a sense of calling or purpose.
3. Possess an affirming orientation that focuses on goals, possibilities, strengths and potential.
4. Represent a contribution, for example, they seek to provide a benefit to others, and by doing so, lead to growth and learning in a person.
5. Create and foster sustainable positive energy: the pursuit of which results in feeling energised and uplifted, rather than tired.

As you grow awareness in your self-care needs, these next set of strategies are to highlight accomplishment and meaning where time is about investment in you. The strength of awareness is intertwined with scaffolding a growth mindset.

DO: Everest goals

Intention: To support you in your growth and working to your strengths.

Attention: Focus on possibilities and opportunities.

Attitude: Become excited about what might be possible.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

What is your Everest goal as a teacher, leader, mentor and/or learner?

With a growth mindset, ask yourself the questions:

- How might I approach this role?
- What is it I would personally like to achieve in this role?
- What impact can I have in this role?
- What am I seeking to learn about myself in this role?
- What Everest goal could I set for myself? (Refer back to the five key aspects and making sure you include them all.)
- How will I seek feedback on my approach in this role?
- How will I approach learning from mistakes?
- What do I value in others that I can use as inspiration?
- What is the purpose or *why* of me undertaking this role?
- What energises me about being in this role? How can I use this?
- How will I use my strengths in this role?

Spend time workshoping ideas with a trusted friend, colleague, a professional coach or by yourself. These questions are also wonderful for working with your KPIs in the workplace. And if you are a leader these questions could support you in your approach to help, mentor, coach or support others, alongside yourself.

DO: Growth mindset reflection

Intention: To embrace a growth mindset as you think about your professional reflective practice.

Attention: Notice how there are opportunities for growth, no matter the context or perceived difficulties . . . there is always a flip side.

Attitude: Align to what is true to you, challenge yourself, and be open to shifts where perhaps a fixed mindset may appear for you.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

In this framework I have taken some of the key elements of a growth mindset and aligned them to a question to support reflective practice for a situation or specific area that you would like to develop.

Table 8.1 How might this be a starting point for you?

ELEMENTS OF GROWTH MINDSET	QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
Be open to always learning.	What happens to you when you approach something new and/or challenging with an awareness and curiosity?
Apply zest and enthusiasm.	Who do you admire for their zest and enthusiasm and why?
Embrace and respond to a challenge.	How can you extend your awareness around judgements that you may have that hinder you embracing challenges?
Display persistence no matter the difficulty or delay in achievement.	What are some of your repeated patterns that block you from persistence in difficult times?
Discover through feedback and clarification.	How can different views of feedback support you in moments where you can grow?
View effort as worthy.	What are some of the hurdles you have to overcome to develop your confidence in yourself?
See mistakes as learning opportunities, not as a weakness.	How can you slow down or step back to view learning from mistakes as opportunity?
Find inspiration and lessons in the success of others.	How can you engage with others?
Reflect upon experiences, setbacks and possibilities.	What types of different reflective strategies could you engage with to support you?

DO: Dreams, visions and intentions in action

Intention: Spend the time investigating how accomplishment is a part of your toolbox for self-care.

Attention: Focus on those areas that you do not often invest in.

Attitude: Bring an open-mindedness to new perspectives opening up for you.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

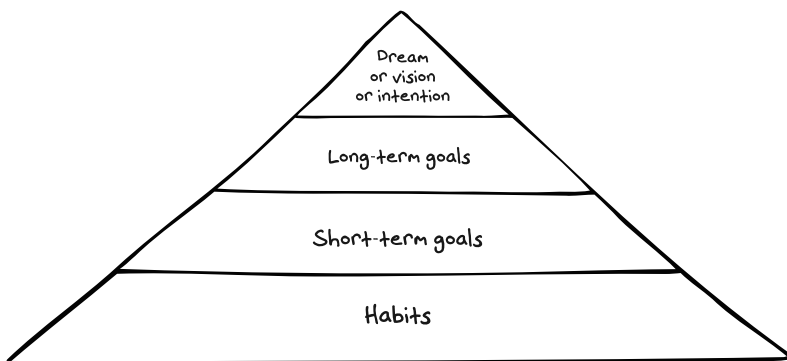


Figure 8.3 Dreams, visions and intentions.

Thinking about your dreams, visions and intention is a useful way to scaffold what you would like to achieve. Like a pyramid, the base establishes a solid foundation. The layers are built on as you move up the pyramid, drawing your attention to specific elements that help you meet the dream, vision or intention. And, as you move up the pyramid, you spend less time in these areas, but they support your dream, vision and intentions. However, all require each other and thus each layer or step is required. Here are the levels:

1. Set your dream, vision or intention. Make it clear and meaningful to you. Remember don't compare this to others, but of course others could support you to frame the language and unpack the details.

2. Set your long-term goals: these are the goals that help you to achieve your dream, vision or intention from a perspective of long-term outcomes you wish to accomplish.
3. Set your short-term goals: these are the goals that help you to chunk your time or task to meet your long-term goals.
4. Habits: What are the daily choices you are going to make to help you achieve your short-term goals, which will help you meet your long-term goals and align to your dream, vision or intention?

Setting your intention

I often use the word 'intention' because it seems more purposeful and gentler when thinking about what I would like to accomplish.

Intention (noun)

Something that one hopes or intends to accomplish.

A determination to act in a certain way.

Something where you show up; it's what we embody.

What one intends to do or bring about.

Intentions focus on the present and provide the guiding light to living mindfully moment-to-moment.

Intentions are in the present moment; this allows you to focus on how you want to be in the moment and allows you to connect to being self-aware.

Intentions are lived each day, independent of reaching the goal or destination.

Intentions are your inner relationships with yourself and others.

Intentions are about how we want to be, not what we want to do (the goal-setting part).

Goal (noun)

The end toward which effort is directed.

Goals are focused on the future; they can take us out of the moment.

Goals are a destination or specific achievement; they can move us forward in the short term, but they can often leave us feeling like we haven't achieved as we are constantly goal setting or haven't achieved enough.

Goals are external achievements.

Focusing on your intentions does not mean you give up your goals or desire for achievement. By partnering goals with intentions, you will become one of the few people in life who enjoy the journey as much as the destination.

DO: *One word*

Intention: To find one word that ignites a zest, passion and excitement for you.

Attention: Focus on your *why*.

Attitude: Be curious to what written and spoken language can bring to your self-care.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Choose one word that sums up who you want to be or how you want to live; one word that you can focus on every day, all year long; one word that will shape everything you do; one word that shapes your dreams, goals, wishes and way of being.

What would be the one word you would choose that underpins your intentions for the year ahead?

You may also like to engage in an online community with this practice at <http://myoneword.org/>

DO: *Setting a mindful yearly intention and making it happen*

Intention: Be inspired by what brings out the best in you.

Attention: Explore with an openness to use intentions in a different way.

Attitude: Draw on a non-striving attitude and a self-awareness where you embrace the process not just the end product.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Let's unpack some of your intentions while thinking about your year ahead. This practice is like a sensible new year's resolution; see what you think.

Think about these mindful actions:

Make it non-judgemental.

Make it personal and meaningful.

Make it positive.

Make it realistic.

Make it simple, doable and exciting for you.

Make it right for you.

Listen to your intuition.

Think about ALL areas of your life, such as relationships, family, friends, career, health and wellbeing.

How do you want to feel? (You may wish to connect to your one word and what this means for you.)

Are you showing up with compassion, courage and honesty?

What is important to you?

What qualities are you bringing?

How do you want to grow yourself this year?

What do you want to do?

Why do you want to do this?

Mindful intentions and achieving these through actions that are true to you involves connecting to what is possible. Remember we can do anything, but not all at the same time.

Connecting to actions helps us to forward plan and see how it is possible to flourish and stay connected to your intentions.

I like to do this in two steps.

1. FIRSTLY, LET'S DO A GOALS DUMP.

Think about all your wishes, dreams, wants and things you want to achieve in the next 12 months. Write them in no particular order, as they come to mind; don't edit or censor.

2. NOW LET'S NARROW DOWN.

Pick one or two dreams that you connect to and that link to your one word. These become your intentions.

I intend to (*intention*), by (*how*) and in the timeframe of (*when*).

I intend to . . .

I intend to . . .

I intend to . . .

As you consider your yearly intentions, let's break these down into monthly intentions to support you to achieve. Like what we did in the pyramid exercise, consider what you would need to do for one month, each month or in a series of months.

Your intention must be real, important to you and actionable. Phrase it in one positive sentence you can easily keep in mind, for example, 'I will . . . by the end of this month'.

As you hone your intention, think about your monthly intention and in your mind go forward in time to the end of the month, when you've completed it.

1. What do you see, on this future date, that tells you that you've achieved this goal?
2. What are you doing on this future date that shows you have achieved this goal?
3. How are you feeling on this future date?
4. What are other people doing around you that shows you have succeeded in this? (What are they telling you? How are they behaving towards you? What actions are they taking?)
5. On a scale of 1–10, where 10 is very high and 1 is very low, how challenging is achieving this goal?
6. How exciting is it?
If it feels more challenging than exciting, can you hone the intention so it's less challenging and more exciting?
7. Where do you have influence or control regarding this goal?
(You should have total control. If not, take a minute to refine your intention.)

Now explore your reality.

What barriers or obstacles may be in your way? Identify them with these guiding questions:

1. What's happening now that tells you that you have an issue or problem?
2. What's missing from your reality that you would like to have?
3. What obstacles are in your way that prevent you from moving forward?
4. What's happening that is good, that you want to keep happening to achieve your goal? Find at least one thing – even if it's doing this exercise!
5. What have you done right or feel positive about?
6. What results did you get from doing those things?
7. Now think back to your monthly intention for a minute. Is it still relevant? Should you hone it down further or change it at all? Take a few minutes for this.

So now for some blue-sky thinking time. Let your ideas pour out, be careful not to judge or limit yourself, let the ideas run free, anything and everything is welcome. As you brainstorm now, the aim is to identify your first step(s) to enable you to achieve your monthly intention. Ideally these are doable by week or fortnight, at a comfortable pace. Why do these make you excited?

1. What could you do to move yourself just one step forward to achieving your monthly intention? Write six things you could do. Don't overthink, just write.
2. What could you do if you didn't have to explain yourself to anyone?
3. What could you do if money were no object?
4. What could you do if you could devote all your time to this one thing?
5. What could you do if you didn't have to live with the consequences?
6. What could you do if no matter what happened, everyone said, 'Well done for trying'?
7. If you asked someone who had been in your exact position and achieved this goal what would they suggest you do?
8. If you know, in your heart of hearts, what you should do first, what would it be?

Now go back over your list and read your ideas. Do any of them spark other easy steps you could take? Choose one, as a minimum, that will move you one step towards fulfilling your monthly intention. If you're feeling fired up, choose several that are easy and achievable. Remember: you want to feel more excited than challenged by taking this step or steps.

What is the benefit of doing this one thing? (There must be a benefit.)

Let's lock this down. Now that you have your idea(s) to move forward, you must commit to it. This is where we are converting ideas into raw action.

1. By when will you have completed the action(s) you've chosen?
Set a date and a time.

2. List the actions you must go through to complete the step(s) you have chosen.
3. Should anyone else be involved in this list of things you're going to do to complete your first step(s)?
4. What do you want them to do, and when will you ask or tell them?
5. Are there any resources you have that you're forgetting about?
6. Is there anything that might stop you from taking this first step? How likely is it to stop you? (If very likely, what can you do to prevent it from stopping you?)
7. When will you start? Be specific about the day, time and place. Put it in your planner, phone or diary now!
8. Is there anyone you want to be accountable to? If so, ask them.

Tracking your achievements

As teachers we need to keep track of our accomplishments for our CV, job opportunities, leadership roles or promotions as well as for individual and team celebrations. This is some administrative work we often drop, thinking we will remember when it comes to the time we have to share, record or apply it to a specific scenario. If you are like me, you forget. So here are some suggestions for tracking those achievements.

The next four strategies are designed to support you to give yourself time to invest in your professional growth and enhance the E(ngagement) and A(ccomplishment) aspects of PERMAH with close alignment to M(eaning). Consider these IAA aspects for the following menu of practices:

Intention: Setting the intention for you to be able to authentically capture your achievements.

Attention: Investing in you and your professional growth.

Attitude: Celebrate and appreciate you.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

DO: *Daily reflection in the diary*

Make time during the day, perhaps at the end of a day, to note all your accomplishments. In a notebook or digitally keep a designated area to note these to assist tracking progress and celebrating moments of growth.

DO: *One sentence a day*

Record in your diary one sentence that summarises the day. This could be seen as a mini-journaling activity, but over time adds up with the positive achievements.

DO: *Work diary*

Maintain a work diary where you record notes about projects you are working on, new pedagogical approaches, readings you have completed, ideas explored, conversations with others. Consider colour coding for projects or using keywords to support tracking. I also love this as a space where you could note three gratitudes or three blessings for the day.

DO: *Capture case studies about your projects*

You could record a case study of your projects on a fortnightly or monthly basis. You could record this by using a critical reflective model such as Borton's Developmental Framework.¹²

Table 8.2 Borton's developmental framework

WHAT? (DESCRIPTION AND SELF-AWARENESS)	SO WHAT? (ANALYSIS)	NOW WHAT? (SYNTHESIS)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • What did I do? • What did others do? • What was I trying to achieve? • What was good or bad about the experiences? • What is the problem that I am facing? • What role was I in during this situation? • What am I trying to achieve? • What appropriate actions did I/did I not take? • What was my response to the situation and that of others? What were the consequences for all involved? • What feelings did this situation evoke for all involved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So what is the importance of this? • So what more do I need to do? • So what does this situation tell/teach me about me, my students and others? • So what does this mean about me, my students and others? • So what does this mean about our working relationship? • So what does this mean about pedagogical decisions I am using, my attitudes and impact on my students? • So what was I thinking of as I acted? • So what did I base my responses on? • So what other knowledge can I bring to this situation: experiential, personal, scientific? • So what could/should I have done to make it better? • So what is my understanding of the situation? • So what other issues arise from this situation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now what could I do? • Now what do I need to do to improve my practice? • Now what do I need to do to resolve the negative outcomes from this situation? • Now what can I do to enhance the positive outcomes of this situation? Now what broader issues need to be considered if action on this situation is to be successful? Now what might be the potential consequences of this action, both negative and positive?

Source: Adapted from Borton, T. (1970). *Reach, teach, touch: Student concerns and process education*. McGraw Hill.

Investing in time with others

Our connections with others are significant for our wellbeing. One way to think about this is to consider the quality of these connections – a toxic connection, or deflating connection, versus one that is energising are very different (as we explored in Chapter 7 through boundaries and green and red flags).

Professor Jane Dutton from Michigan University is a key scholar in this area, and her work in high-quality connections invites us to think about how a connection is about energy or how you can feel energised by the interaction with another person is crucial, especially when you both can see the best in each other. This positive regard is united, it is a mutual feeling and an essential element for a high-quality connection. I think about people who energise or inspire me, but this is a different kind of relationship, usually one way. These types of relationships have a place, but a high-quality connection relationship is not a monologue, nor should a relationship be one way all the time. We are looking for relationships that are about engagement that is positive for both involved. This type of connection is underpinned on both sides by mutual positive regard, trust and active engagement.¹³

Building high-quality connections

High-quality connections are short-term moments within ongoing relationships. The interaction(s) is/are built on and are strengthened through three key areas: cognitive, emotional and behavioural mechanisms. What I love about the work of Dutton in high-quality connections is that the focus is on interactions that are positive and between two people and can be used in the

Note to self:

- Cognitive: conscious and unconscious thought processes, awareness, impressions of others, perspective taking.
- Emotional: how someone is feeling, positive emotions, emotional contagion, empathy.
- Behavioural mechanisms: ways of engaging and interrelating, task enabling or interpersonal actions that help someone complete or perform a task, play, respective engagement.

workplace with evidence-based effectiveness. The interaction is designed to leave you feeling uplifted, and they support you to think more clearly when in conversation with colleagues, acknowledging dynamic environments that we work in involving dynamic people where both are variables in themselves – we change, how we feel changes, the workplace changes and the interaction between these changes.¹⁴

Encouraging respectful engagement between colleagues is one of the best ways to foster these connections. Dutton notes five major approaches that can be put into place to support creating and cultivating high-quality connections:

1. Convey presence
2. Be genuine
3. Communicate affirmation
4. Listen effectively
5. Encourage supportive communication

As we consider our self-care, think about the workplace as a context that cannot be ignored. Here are some activities that might spark conversation about high-quality connections and ways forward that are supportive of you and your colleagues' wellbeing. Consider these IAA aspects for the following menu of practices:

Intention: Find opportunities to enhance connection in the education context.

Attention: Draw attention to ways of being that are uplifting and bring out the best in yourself and in colleagues.

Attitude: Explore short-term moments that enhance relationships over time with an openness to different perspectives and impact for you that may not have been considered before.

PERMAH links: P, E, R

DO: *What went well*

Use the strategy 'What went well' to celebrate team members' achievements. It could be applied as a way to begin a staff meeting where you share outcomes for various projects being worked on, new pedagogical approaches or to undertake a review of a school camp, event or

intentions set for a specific student or group of students. It could be used as a check-in during a semester, or even at the end of a week.

DO: *Reciprocity ring*

The reciprocity ring developed by University of Michigan sociologist Wayne Baker has colleagues or a group form a circle. In this circle make sure everyone is included so that everyone can see one another. Moving around the circle, each member identifies a professional need that he or she would like help with (for example, 'I have always wanted to learn how to set up my classrooms with a more student-centred approach. Can someone teach me how to do that?'). Each person shares, team members listen and offer advice on where support may be sought or offer the support (to be followed up later). This is a great approach to both articulate goals and intentions, but to also use each other as experts and for feedback as all involved are modelling and participating in professional reflective practice.

DO: *Working with your strengths: strength friend spotting*

What do others think are your strengths? Have a conversation with a trusted friend or colleague and ask them:

- What do you see as my strengths?
- What do you admire about me?
- What do you learn from me?

You will be delightfully surprised at how much your peers think so positively about you and are able to translate your worries as strengths.

DO: *Strengths and others*

Consider how a strength-based approach will look in your situation. Start by thinking through these questions:

- How will you identify and work with strengths and skills as an individual and with collaborative partners?
- Consider how you approach communication, organising and managing a team, problem solving and conflict resolution. What protocols do you need to put into place for a collaboration to be viewed as successful by partners and stakeholders?
- How will autonomy be honoured?
- How will mindful reflection be a part of your individual practice and the collective approach?
- How will you remain curious throughout the process of collaboration?

Now create a plan for how your role can bring out strengths in others with the aim that you can integrate them meaningfully into how you work. Think through different relationships with:

- Students
- Team members
- Leadership
- Your leadership (formal or informal)
- Parents
- Institutional community

Work relationships: mentoring

Mentoring is an incredibly enriching experience. It is a way to pass on good practices and inspire. It is also great for our wellbeing especially when we look at the benefits of connection, positive emotions, such as appreciation and altruism, and what we can learn from others with open-mindedness to other perspectives.

Note to self:

Hedonic: achieved through experiences of pleasure and enjoyment

Eudaimonic: achieved through experiences of meaning and purpose

We can connect with our why (M(meaning) in PERMAH and a topic we explored in Chapter 5) by thinking about workplace wellbeing and taking a proactive approach both from **hedonic** and **eudaimonic** experiences.¹⁵ Having a greater understanding of the factors that influence your wellbeing (and including your self-care routines) can help you to have greater control over your experiences in the workplace to increase wellbeing, satisfaction and experiences associated with working in educational institutions. And you can pass these onto others as well.

One of the most challenging aspects of mentoring is to balance what can sometimes be competing needs. It is not uncommon that there is a tension between providing a supportive and safe learning environment for those who you mentor, while also finding a benefit or advantage for yourself as a mentor.

I think about the role here that many teachers undertake in supporting a pre-service teacher while they are displaying integrity during assessment of practice. Another situation may be when you mentor a new colleague to your school who may or may not be familiar with a specific curriculum model or framework that is being implemented. These are a few examples,

DO: *Thinking about what mentoring means to you*

Intention: Think through what taking on a mentor role means for you.

Attention: Notice positive emotions.

Attitude: Inquire into how relationship deepening can support you as much as others.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A

Firstly, how will you approach being a mentor?

Consider the table provided and the areas of discipline, skills development and emotional elements of being a mentor.

Table 8.3 Approaches to relationship support and needs

DISCIPLINE	SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	EMOTIONAL
<p>How can working with others help you to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how your discipline or field has evolved • Recognise and explore your questions • Identify innovative ways of engaging with collaborations, research ideas or work through teaching problems • Understand your discipline, its focuses, questions and/or methodologies in relation to other fields • Make connections outside of teaching or education • Translate impact to desired audiences 	<p>How can working with others help you to develop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills across a variety of formats for different audiences • Collaboration skills • Leadership skills • Learning and teaching pedagogies • Research trajectory • Working with industry • Partnerships • Planning skill • Time-management skills • Approaches to different writing genres 	<p>How can working with others help you to create a space to seek:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspective • Advice • Support for rephrasing, refocusing or processing • Emotional support • Exploration of your lived experiences • Connection with others • Safe/honest supportive dialogue • Exploration of your why • Exploration of your self-care routines • Extension and growth of your self-care routines

Source: Adapted from Lemon, N., & Salmons, J. (2021). *Reframing and rethinking collaboration in higher education and beyond: A practical guide for doctoral students and early career researchers*. Routledge.

Create a record of your reflection about what mentoring means to you while specifically thinking about what it can contribute to your self-care:

- What does it mean to you?
- What do you want to achieve?
- What might you learn about yourself?
- What is energising about mentoring that excites you?

- How can you co-learn with one another?
- What opportunities exist for you to mentor? What might this look like officially or unofficially?
- Record your thoughts in this chart.

	OFFICIAL MENTORING	UNOFFICIAL MENTORING
What empowers and energises you when you mentor?		
What do you need to be aware of, avoid or do less of when it comes to mentoring?		

each being complex in their own right, and when we take on the role of mentoring, it is crucial to think through the why for yourself, and the mentee, while also acknowledging that this relationship maybe crucial to your (and their) toolbox for self-care.

In this way we acknowledge that mentoring is an important connection that has the capacity to scaffold our learning and growth in a way that nourishes us and complements our wellbeing.

Working with others: up, across and passing it on

We know relationships are key to our wellbeing and they are a fundamental way for us to connect to meaning making. They are also crucial for support: both support you require and support you can offer others. I think about

mentor and mentee types of relationships as collaborations where you can collaborate up, across or pass it on.

In the book I wrote with my American colleague Janet Salmons,¹⁶ we talked about this in relation to those working in educational settings as PhD students or early career researchers, however the concept is incredibly valuable for us as teachers and educators across any setting. I've outlined a summary here for you.

Connecting with others will be one of the most significant self-care routines you can undertake. It is the connection with your peers that will be a huge part of this as research indicates that the relationships we have in the workplace can provide amazing opportunities for:¹⁷

- Personal development and professional enhancement
- Improvement via feedback
- Engaging in self-reflection
- Opportunity to provide support being a role model, collegial friend or a critical friend
- Building professional relationships
- Supporting personal development and professional enhancement
- Improving teaching, professional learning and research
- Engaging in self-reflection
- Encouraging new ways of thinking

Table 8.4 Types of collaborations

TYPE OF COLLABORATION	ACTION	QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT CONSIDER	EXAMPLES MAY INCLUDE
Collaborating up	Requires you to consciously plan for, engage in and be active while embracing learning from those who are more experienced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you want to work with your supervisor and/or team leader and/or principal and/or your school leadership team? • What can you learn from collaborating up? • What protocols may you need to negotiate and put in place? • What are your intentions when you meet with your supervisor? • How can this relationship support your self-care? What does that look like for you? • Who else can advise you? • Is your supervisor your mentor? Or is it a team approach? Is there someone else who might offer another perspective at this time? Are there multiple reference points for you at this time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking out a formal or informal mentor • Observing leadership practices • Working closely with a more experienced colleague • Shadowing a senior colleague • Asking thoughtful and intentional questions to learn more

TYPE OF COLLABORATION	ACTION	QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT CONSIDER	EXAMPLES MAY INCLUDE
Collaborating across	Core to these approaches is reaching out and forming relationships with those who are also at similar stages in their career to you and who can understand the complexity of being a teacher. Collaborating across means that you can seek support, and it is closely connected to collaborating to pass it on, that is to share what you have been learning as your career progresses, your identity forms, your pedagogical knowledge transforms and you continue to learn as a reflective practitioner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you use your peers or colleagues for support? • What opportunities exist to engage with peers with your educational context, across year levels or disciplines and/or across institutions? • How can you be proactive in creating opportunities? • How might you extend your networks to support you in your career as a teacher? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forming co-mentoring/support teams • Networking • Forming groups, such as for first-year-out teachers as a first-year-out teacher • Leaders across sites or areas networking together to support one another in similar roles • Partnerships with cultural organisations or professional teaching bodies • Working with parents within in early years or K–12 contexts • Working across educational settings or sectors

(continued)

Table 8.4 (Continued)

TYPE OF COLLABORATION	ACTION	QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT CONSIDER	EXAMPLES MAY INCLUDE
Collaborating to pass it on	Passing it on you may be present when you are collaborating across or up, deepening the context, however, consistently present is an openness and curiosity as you engage with others in the workplace. A number of positive emotions are present where sharing, reciprocity, mutual respect and celebrating learning moments for yourself and others can be enacted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does passing it on support your wellbeing? • What positive emotions exist for you? • What does the action mean to someone else? • What do you hope to achieve by passing it on with regard to supporting someone else? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring a pre-service teacher • Mentoring a first-year-out teacher • Mentoring a colleague taking on a leadership role for the first time • Shadowing opportunities for future leaders • Sitting on advisory boards or committees • Offering fresh-eye perspectives • Retiring from teaching in the classroom and undertaking part-time lecturing within initial teacher education

DO: Your approach to working with others – passing it on, collaborating up and across

Intention: Reflect on your workplace relationships.

Attention: Draw your attention to whom you engage with, or perhaps with whom you do not.

Attitude: Come to this strategy with a beginner’s mindset, inquiring into the details of why, what and how collaboration can support your self-care.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A

Map your work relationships that have a significant influence on your self-care and wellbeing. What do you notice about collaborating up, across and with, to pass it on?

TYPE OF COLLABORATION	YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIPS (Who and what is the focus/project/group?)	OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE INTERACTIONS Who energises you? Who doesn't? What behaviours are supportive? What doesn't work for you? What approaches support each other? How does dedicating time support this relationship?)
<i>Collaborating up</i>		
<i>Collaborating across</i>		
<i>Collaborating to pass it on</i>		

JOURNAL PROMPT: Return to your audit

If you go back to the audit of time you completed at the beginning of this chapter, what could you add, tweak or move with regard to your toolbox for self-care?

Concluding remarks

Just as time guides us, is a part of our planning and all our scheduling, it is also a dimension to self-care maintenance, protection and development. We often struggle with making time, tilting our time, spending time on a tool, or investing in ourselves when it comes to self-care. Therefore, thinking about time in different ways can enable us to be gentler on and kinder with ourselves daily and especially during tough times. Time is also a dimension that when we invest in it, we can see what is possible with prioritising our wellbeing to make decisions that can support us at all times. So, as you build your toolbox for self-care, think about and consider how you tilt. What does this look like for you?

You may also be interested in . . .

Podcasts on time

Slow Your Home [https://slowyourhome.com/the-slow-home-podcast/Routines & Ruts with Madeleine Dore mini episode: On 'puddle theory' and how to do things you're putting off](https://slowyourhome.com/the-slow-home-podcast/Routines%20&%20Ruts%20with%20Madeleine%20Dore%20mini%20episode:%20On%20'puddle%20theory'%20and%20how%20to%20do%20things%20you're%20putting%20off)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/routines-ruts/id1490791468?i=1000500448551>

The Joy Factor Podcast– Create a Sustainable Self Care Map (with Julie Hanson) <http://thejoyfactorpodcast.com/create-a-sustainable-self-care-map/>

Loneliness and learning to look forward with Sarah Wilson

<https://slowyourhome.com/loneliness/>

'Magic Lessons' with Elizabeth Gilbert www.elizabethgilbert.com/magic-lessons/

Watch

The Joy of Movement with Kelly McGonigal and Luke Iorio

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTM0LBzKmi4

The Growth Mindset with Carol Dweck as part of Talks at Google

www.youtube.com/watch?v=-71zdXCMU6A

Notes

- 1 www.slowyourhome.com/the-slow-home-podcast
- 2 McAlary, B. (2017). *Slow: Live life simply*. Allen & Unwin.
- 3 Ideno, Y., Hayashi, K., Abe, Y., Ueda, K., Iso, H., Noda, M., Lee, J. S., & Suzuki, S. (2017). Blood pressure-lowering effect of Shinrin-yoku (Forest bathing): A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, 17(1). Lee, J. Y., & Lee, D. C. (2014). Cardiac and pulmonary benefits of forest walking versus city walking in elderly women: A randomised, controlled, open-label trial. *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 6(1), 5–11.
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9

What gift are you able to give yourself?

As a teacher we are always juggling many things. We have expectations set by ourselves and others as a part of the job, and we are always responding to the complex dynamic and agile sector we work in. To-do lists pile up. We have demands that make us feel overwhelmed or exhausted. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been pushed in ways we never expected. ‘Pani-gogy’ became a new term as we navigated remote learning to negotiate teaching with masks, regular rapid antigen testing and staff shortages due to illness and isolation requirements. What gift do we give ourselves amongst so much political, economic, societal, health and educational conflict and turmoil?

This final chapter explores ways staying empowered is possible. And as we explore how we maintain, protect and sustain our self-care, I’ll also guide you on check-ins, what happens when you backslide or stop progressing forward. I position self-care as worthy of our attention even when the term or semester becomes busy (or we are finding ways to work with a pandemic or other significant changes or surprises) and we want to skip self-care. The importance of keeping self-care habits going at this time is critical, for you and also for those you work with. We need to maintain the intention to be gentle on ourselves as we navigate our working and professional lives where self-care is present.

Making the time to adjust

How are you?

Make it stop.

Can we just pause the world for a moment and let me catch up with everything I need to do?

I know. What's happening right now? I feel the same way.

I've noticed that there is a collective tiredness. And with that comes some people doing well and truly doing more than they need to and for others they are making mistakes, forgetting details, missing key parts of a task.

I'm exhausted, we are exhausted. I just can't keep doing this.

I get that. I feel like it too.

I was reading an email this morning, and I had no idea what the person was saying. I was reading the words but couldn't comprehend what was being said.

I hear you, that was me at the supermarket talking to someone I bumped into. I could hear their voice, but I just wasn't comprehending what they were saying.

I begin this chapter with a snapshot of a conversation I recently had with a friend. It's an example of noticing when you need to make adjustments. We all hit the wall at times. We all need to stop. And we all need to talk about it. My friend and I talk about it openly as a way to acknowledge, support and also see if we can shift things. On this occasion, we shifted a number of situations we were processing that had been impacting our energy, and we laughed, shed a tear, deeply listened to what was happening for each other and made plans for exciting projects. This conversation was an act of self-care for both of us.

Self-care is hard. There is no one solution. But we can and must make the time for it. Hitting the wall and letting self-care slip isn't sustainable. There are key messages that come from those moments . . . some are ever so subtle, and others are yelling at us; ignoring them is not an option. Often, we repeat those same situations . . . just like my story of multiple periods of exhaustion and burnout, but we can learn from these.

Intentional investment is required. We can tilt towards different focuses and embrace micro-moments or even alternatives and tweaks that help us adjust to our demands. We can tilt towards self-care actions that empower us. We can give ourselves the gift of listening to our mind, body and spirit.

Am I living a life that is true to me, where I show up for myself, where it is deeply satisfying and I can truly express myself?

Psychologist Susan David, in her book *Emotional Agility: Get Unstuck, Embrace Change, and Thrive in Work and Life*,¹ focuses on navigation of everyday life. For you and your self-care she offers some great insights that are helpful as we acknowledge that there are times when self-care is really hard – you are beyond exhausted and questioning what you are doing and why becomes more frequent, much like the conversation snapshot I shared with you at the beginning of the chapter. Perhaps this is a time for you to recognise what is going on and to make some adjustments to things that are not serving you.

This is where I would say our self-compassion, mindful awareness and honesty come into play. We need to be courageous for ourselves, which is ultimately being courageous for others as well. It is David's emotional pyramid of needs that becomes a tool for you to take those first steps to making the time to adjust. I have adapted this to support you with your



Figure 9.1 Emotional pyramid of needs.

Source: Adapted from David, S. (2016). *Emotional agility: Get unstuck, embrace change, and thrive in work and life*. Avery Publishing Group.

What gift are you able to give yourself?

self-care and made some suggestions on the right-hand side of the pyramid that could support you with your approach and perspective to adjusting your self-care.

So, what are some ways we can make adjustments to help ourselves with our self-care? In the next series of strategies, I offer you some approaches to gently check in with an attention to listening to what you need mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically with an attitude of awareness and openness.

DO: *Intentional investment*

Intention: Refocus your investment in your self-care.

Attention: Set intentions for investing in you.

Attitude: Be courageous and challenge some of those areas you often forget or ignore.

PERMAH links: P, E, M, A

Self-care requires intentional intervention. These questions support a self-assessment that both refocuses you and supports intentionality.

Ask yourself:

What are you able to commit to?

What gift are you able to give yourself?

What are your 'I's' for your self-care plan?

I am intentionally . . .

I am identifying . . .

I am immediately . . .

I am investing . . .

Use these questions as often as you need to check in with yourself.

DO: *Under the pump adjustments*

Intention: Establish an awareness of what happens to you when you are stressed.

Attention: Cultivate an openness to help future self.

Attitude: Bring perspective to the value of making adjustments in your self-care.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Think about those self-care strategies that empower you and consider those you drop when you are under pressure. What could be an alternative to the strategy you drop that still provides you with connection to your wellbeing?

For example, a one-hour gym session or attending a Pilates class could easily be dropped from your schedule when time-poor. What could be an alternative? A 15-minute walk around the block or in the local park may be an option. Or even parking your car slightly farther away from your destination so you can add in an extended walk. It could be stretching at home in front of the TV or in the morning when you get up before having a shower.

DO: *The weekly check-in*

Intention: Create a feedback pattern for yourself.

Attention: Support the maintenance and protection of your self-care.

Attitude: Cultivate a growth mindset that allows for you to action any tweaks while also appreciating and celebrating accomplishments.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

These questions are great for a weekly review or even a seven-day cycle review where you start on a day that works for you (for example, Wednesday as a hump-day review).

How am I feeling?

- What do I need?
- What's working for me?
- What do I need to revise?
- What needs tweaking?
- What can I stop doing?
- What can I celebrate?
- What do I appreciate that I have learned about myself?
- What can I let go of that is not serving me?
- What is a strength of mine that I can call on to help me maintain my self-care?

DO: *Not finding success with a strategy*

Intention: Create an awareness and action any changes you may need to make.

Attention: Support the development, maintenance and protection of your self-care.

Attitude: Be courageous and honest.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Sometimes a practice or strategy no longer works for you. It could be that it requires a tweak, or it is not serving you right now, but could again with a break or some help. Perhaps a subtle key element of that strategy has been forgotten and you would benefit from an intervention from a colleague or professional with fresh eyes and expertise. These questions are a great strategy for tuning in to the why of a strategy or practice.

- Did I become energised from the strategy?
- Have I noticed a subtle repeated pattern that keeps appearing for me that is telling me something is not quite right?

- Have I gone back to the original source of the strategy to check in if I am missing a key element?
- Have I stopped being curious?
- Am I fearful of what is next?

DO: Are you placing yourself last on the priority list?

Intention: To remind you to invest in yourself.

Attention: Self-care is worthy of my attention, and I need to listen to my mind and body.

Attitude: A curiosity in noticing oneself.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Intentionally listening to yourself is a must for self-care. It is difficult, but it is key to being able to adjust, tweak, stop, try new strategies or do more of something that is really working for you.

If you notice yourself becoming reactive, stressed, behaving in ways that are not helpful for you, or falling back into unhelpful or even harmful patterns, ask yourself:

How well am I listening to myself?

What is the cost of not listening to myself?

To help you to consider and tune in to these questions rate yourself as rarely, sometimes, or often regarding the following statements:

1. I skip routines I know work best for me, thinking I do not have time.
2. I dive in with my own story or experience when someone shares with me what they are experiencing with self-care.
3. I air personal grievances to others often with a range of victimhood and blame.
4. I say yes to others and in doing so say no to myself.
5. I am not mindfully present.

What gift are you able to give yourself?

6. I ignore my stumbling moments.
7. I have a rushed and hurried feel about me when engaging with others.
8. I feel like I am not being heard.
9. I eat the wrong foods.
10. I don't rest.
11. I have a sense of disconnection.
12. I feel overwhelmed.
13. I have sensory overload.
14. I am impatient.
15. I have communication issues.
16. I find stating an appreciation or gratitude feels forced or difficult at times.
17. I do not draw on a variety of strategies or practices from my toolbox for self-care.

What is the message being sent to you?

- *Am I placing myself last on the priority list?*
- *What contributed to this?*
- *What changes do I need to make?*
- *How will I make these changes happen?*

Sustaining and maintaining your self-care toolbox: the five hows behind sustainable self-care

Often, the challenge we have is sustaining our self-care. Life is fast paced. We have many personal and professional demands. Assumptions and expectations from others and from ourselves impact our approach to and sense of wellbeing. Contexts and the past influence our approach.

My top tips for you in sustaining your self-care:

- Start small.
- Align to your intentional investment 'I' statement.

- Focus on you – self-care is about you and holding space for you.
- Focus on immediate – What is the priority for you right now?
- Listen honestly to your commitment – What are you able to commit to now based on the time available to you?
- Revisions are good – that’s you being honest with yourself and tuning in to you.
- One of the great things about time is that you can start again, reset or pause.

Use these points in your self-care, especially if you are feeling down, fragile or self-critical.

Sonia Lyubomirsky, in her book *A Practical Guide to Getting the Life You Want: The How of Happiness* looked at how and why wellbeing strategies worked.² She drew together what she calls *critical mechanisms of action*. These are the *how* behind sustainability.

Sonia’s five critical mechanisms of action are:

1. Positive emotion
2. Time
3. Social support
4. Motivation, effort and commitment
5. Habit

Do these mechanisms look familiar to you? We can see strong connections to the five dimensions of self-care. Let’s unpack them as a way to pull together everything you have been exploring throughout this book. I call them the five *hows* behind sustainable self-care.

1. Positive emotion

Engage in strategies or practices that enable you to be in the moment (or flow) with positive experiences and positive feelings. Practice strategies that **empower** you, excite you and make you feel good when you do them or complete them. **Choose** what these are for you with the aim of having small or large boosts of positive emotions.

Positive emotions are contagious. So, as you explore sustaining your self-care, consider the place of the different positive emotions that excite you and allow you to feel empowered or motivated.

2. Time

There are five areas to consider for sustainability of your self-care:

- a) Be curious with self-experimentation of what works for you and when.
- b) Variety in time duration – think through use of time across micro-moments of less than 60 seconds, micro-moments of 1–5 minutes, 10 minutes, 1 hour, half a day, over a week, etc.
- c) Variety in time of the day – am, pm, lunch, dinner, before bed, as you walk into school, travelling home from work, before you have lunch, etc.
- d) Variety in the times you repeat the practice or strategy – daily, weekly, every time you do x, etc.
- e) Begin small and know that you can build capacity and add more resources (ie, tools to your toolbox for self-care) or revise according to what obstacles pop up for you.

3. Social support

We know self-care is relational as we need others to inspire, help, motivate and support us. Plus, some self-care strategies are undertaken with others. As you maintain your self-care, embrace help and comfort from others. These can be partners, family, friends, colleagues, neighbours or professional support, for example, where trust and emotional support are offered. It is key that with the social support we cultivate encouragement, appreciation and perspective (we want more green flags not red flags with our relationships). Also acknowledge how social support can provide motivation and positive feedback to help you continue to grow.

4. Motivation, effort and commitment

Commitment and dedicated effort are required for your self-care, and this involves developing and working out your self-care muscle. How do you do this? Reminder to self, effort is required to:

- a) Resolve to undertake daily acts of self-care.
- b) Learn what you need to do.
- c) Engage in your chosen strategies or practices while acknowledging the variable of time. Stay connected to your intention, attention or attitude.
- d) Commit to acts of self-care, not just in the moment of stress or exhaustion. Reminder to self that we can fall into patterns that when

we are feeling good, we can have a tendency to stop doing what helps us to feel good in the first place.

When you maintain your self-care, don't forget the check-in strategies shared earlier in this chapter, and the 14 self-care principles from Chapter 2.

5. Habits

These are critical for self-care. As you develop and embed your habits remember these three guiding principles:

- a) Effort is greatest at the beginning when you are establishing a new habit, but this diminishes over time as your small acts of repetition become habitual.
- b) Habits form with repetition and practice.
- c) Habits become habitual when we don't have to think about doing them.

Reminder to self: be gentle and don't compare yourself with others.

What if you backslide?

A backslide is when we stop doing something, we forget, we lose interest, we don't make time or our commitment waivers. As a result, we feel like we have taken a backwards step or have stopped progressing forward.

Note to self: this is totally normal, and it happens to everyone. And often. None of us are perfect.

A perfect state of bliss is impossible to achieve. It is also maladaptive. There are many occurrences in life that cause negative emotions, and indeed require negative emotions. Ups and downs are normal and are key messages about what needs to be tweaked or addressed. I think we all noticed this at the start of the pandemic, for example. Changes in how we operated, what we could access and how we moved around all caused a level of frustration at one time or another. The frustration was a message for us to alter what we could in terms of our self-care. What is key though is to acknowledge what is happening, not to judge yourself. And to tune in to your awareness of when might be the time to reengage in a strategy or practice that you have stopped doing or to switch to something else that might be more helpful for the moment. There is a possibility to renew your motivation.

My top tips for the backslide include to:

- Renew your goal.
- Begin again at any time.
- Do not judge yourself: each moment is a new moment.
- Think about reaching out to an accountability buddy who can support you.

What if you are too busy?

Even when you think you are too busy there really are moments you can attend to your self-care. The busy feelings might be motivating or exhausting, or a combination of both, but you just can't keep going if you don't take some time for yourself. At these moments, being gentle on yourself is critical. Especially with a lens that you are learning to find what works best for you at these times. This is the protection element of self-care.

While writing this book I had a series of conversations with Leesa, a pre-service teacher, in the lead-up to her final placement. They had been feeling the weight of juggling university, assessments, the expectations of others and life in general. Midway through the placement I caught up with Leesa and started with a check-in. Leesa responded:

Leesa: Thank you, I am really loving it. I have been teaching solo for the past 2 weeks and will teach the year 6s next week while our year 5s are doing NAPLAN. My multiplication week was amazing, though I have two students working at a year 10 math level, so they have been a challenge, to say the least! I've had them helping me explain methods and helping others in the class among other things.

I'm very exhausted but even happier:).

Narelle: Good exhausted, I hope, but also adding in times to care for you. You know I am going to ask, what is happening with your self-care?

Leesa: My self-care is going down in some areas but is boosted in others. I haven't been cooking dinner as much this week and getting a healthy take-out instead because I've been so tired, but I have been spending that time reading and doing yoga, so you win

some, you lose some. I also haven't seen my partner this week because they work nights, so I think that has negatively added to my self-care.

My students and I have been working on our wellbeing together though. Yesterday they had cross country running so I have added some more reflection and independent reading time to allow them some rest time. We are also having a funny name day where I've allowed them to create a funny name for themselves and every time I get it wrong they get a house point, so excitement levels are up. I've been told by one of the students that I create a really joyous classroom, so it's lovely to have that feedback and give them some fun memories:)

Narelle: Here's a PERMAH self-care audit in just what you said to me, as your self-care is not going down, you are tweaking to help you protect your wellness at this moment in time:

P(ositive emotions): joy, laughter, smiles with your students with your energiser activity and appreciation is featuring throughout as well.

E(ngagement): finding ways that work for you inside and outside of the classroom.

R(elationships): building rapport with your students and bouncing off them, as well as supporting them. Positive emotions looping in here as well as they are contagious with the strategies you are using. You are also savouring your relationship with your partner, and probably looking at different ways you can stay connected at this time.

M(eaning): you have found your mojo and place to be. Your why of being a teacher is shining through.

A(ccomplishment): savouring (also a positive emotion) your time with the students as well as moments when to listen to mind and body and supporting this. And you are celebrating this as a community.

H(ealth): healthy meal tweaks to keep you going, and yoga to keep you moving and centred. You are listening to your body, and you are also modelling this to the students. And you are considering rest tweaks as a part of your pedagogical decisions.

Go you. So proud.

Tweaks and adjustments are what is required, and you are most certainly doing this to help you maintain and protect your self-care.

Leesa: I'm still learning to think through PERMAH and this outline is helping me realise I am actioning it more than I am giving myself credit for at this time. Thank you.

This conversation highlights that self-care is not a state. You need to constantly make adjustments as you go. This ensures that your self-care strategies match your circumstances and needs. This is why we have a toolbox for self-care. We can dip in and find the right tools for each occasion and context.

Our go-to tools require sharpening. Sometimes we need a different tool for a particular task. We can, of course, improvise in a crisis. A hacksaw is good for pruning a tree branch in an emergency but if it is not an emergency and you have a lot of branches to prune, think about the best tool for the task.

So, to summarise the self-care principles of Chapter 2:

- Small changes are a change.
- Keep it real.
- Be careful with comparison.
- It is hard, but it is worth it.
- Variety is required.
- Care for you so you can care for others.
- Be gentle.
- Be careful not to judge others.
- Embrace daily reflection.
- Check in with yourself.
- It looks different for everyone, and across time.
- Fail forward.
- Every day is a new day.
- Self-care is not a checklist on social media.

Even without the details about each of these principles, you can think of these as a list of 14 mantras or intentions that both help you move through any backslide or 'I'm too busy' moments. These moments will occur because we all have them. The key will be how you acknowledge these moments, and what you will do next. Let's explore what some of these approaches may be.

DO: *Small safety net choices*

Intention: That no matter what is happening for you, small choices can be made that help you.

Attention: To changing patterns of ignoring your wellbeing.

Attitude: Openness for what is possible.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

When you feel you are too busy, there are always simple strategies you can engage in. Do not do them all. They are a menu of suggestions to help you make small choices at times when you need a guaranteed safety net to help you re-group.

- Gratitude expression
- Conversations with your partner or a close friend
- Slowing down and savouring your meal
- Making a pot of tea from fresh loose-leaf tea
- Observing a colleague support someone else
- Saying a kind word
- Smiling at the barista
- Breathing deeply in the supermarket queue
- Laughing with your children
- Singing along to the radio in the car
- Taking a shower and letting the water roll over your head
- Taking a bath
- Sitting in your garden
- Taking your shoes off and walking on the grass or sand
- Taking your dog for a walk
- Patting someone else's dog
- Taking a mindful walk
- Lying on your back with your feet up the wall
- Stretching
- Buying some flowers and arranging them in a vase where you can see them often
- Lighting a candle

- Burning some incense
- Sniffing an essential oil that brings you back to feeling grounded
- Listening to a guided meditation

There is a deliberate choice involved here based on tiny choices that can nurture you again and begin to support you to move back into your proactive self-care habits and make the time to create self-care as worthy of your attention. Central is mindful awareness that is paired with a selection of a tool that empowers you, makes you feel good and energises you.

Maintenance and protection of our self-care: reflective practice and review

Maintaining your self-care requires regular reviews. We know as teachers that reflection in and on action is essential for our teaching; self-care is the same. Reflection allows you the time and space to consider your experiences. It enables you to notice how you might internalise your experiences or thoughts. The act of reflection allows you to connect deeply with any fear, shame, guilt or vulnerability. It is the reflection that allows you to learn from your experiences. You know this as teachers, but it still does not make it any easier to apply to ourselves when it comes to our self-care.

So, what does this look like? These ideas may help you. Consider these IAA aspects for the following menu of practices:

Intention: Embrace review and reflection as a part of your maintenance and protection of self-care.

Attention: Be curious and courageous.

Attitude: Cultivate a beginner's mindset.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

DO: Restorative questions

You might engage with these restorative questions for when you are not feeling so great, or you are feeling misaligned. They could be a journaling prompt or questions you could use to form a conversation.

- What happened?
- What were you thinking of at the time?
- Who was around you and/or near you and/or engaged with you?
- What was the context?
- What have you thought about since?
- What have you noticed in your thoughts, actions and behaviours since?
- What has been affected and in what way?
- Who has been affected and in what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?
- How can we make this happen for you to support your self-care?

DO: Making self-care a part of your professional reflective practice

Intention: Cultivate a maintenance of your self-care that has you continually learning.

Attention: Be curious and courageous.

Attitude: Cultivate a beginner's mindset.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A, H

Cultivating the time to make your self-care a part of your professional reflective practice will be crucial. This action will assist you in its maintenance and protection. These next two models are great for self-assessment on your learning, especially for debriefing and checking

in with yourself. Both will resonate with you in different ways. They can also support one another and work in partnership.

The Experiential Learning Cycle developed by David Kolb provides opportunity to engage with experience-based learning that facilitates looking wholeheartedly at a situation.³ I've added in prompt questions connected to self-care as a starting point to assist you. You can enter at any point in the cycle, however, it is recommended you complete the full cycle to maximise learning. The most natural starting point seems to be the reflection element.

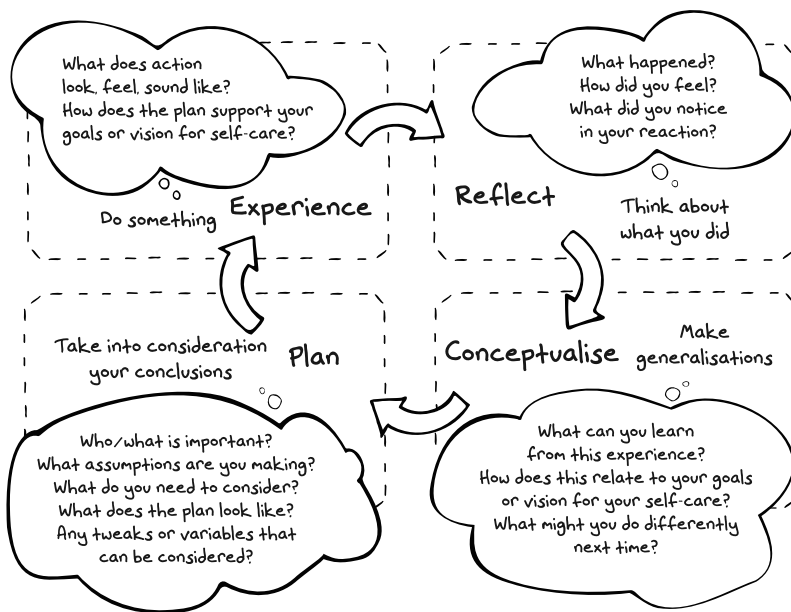


Figure 9.2 Experiential Learning Cycle: how to debrief.

Source: Adapted from Kolb, D. A. (1983). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.

A debriefing model that illuminates how attending to emotions can be helpful to process experiences and situations has been created by David Boud et al.⁴ I've taken their model which draws your focus on how to debrief and added self-care prompt questions as an entry point. As you use the model as a check-in and self-assessment, you

can reflect upon new understandings and appreciations across the three points in time. You may move back and forth between points, especially with the return to the experience and reflective process to assist you to identify what has occurred for you.

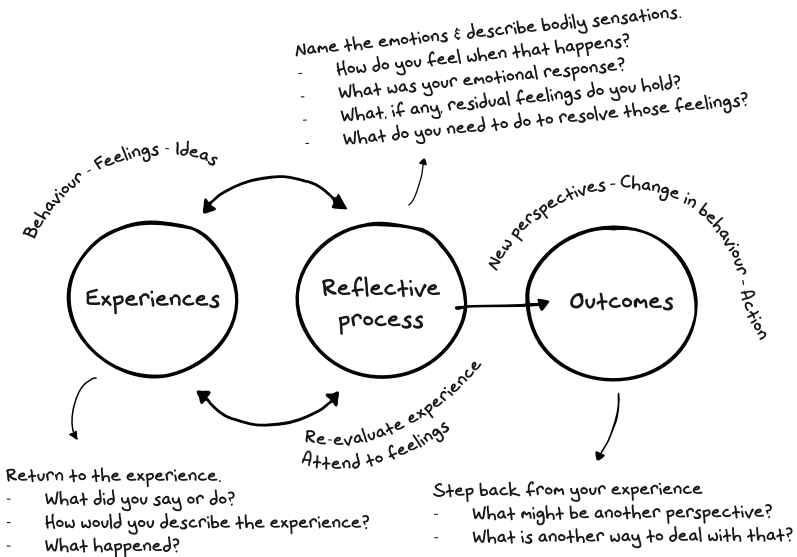


Figure 9.3 Debriefing model.

Source: Adapted from Boud, D., Keogh, R., & Walker, D. (Eds.). (1985). *Reflection: Turning experience into learning*. Routledge.

Both these models are methods of how you can keep reflecting to support your growth in self-care that in turn impacts both your professional and personal lives. In both examples you draw upon your lived experiences and search for possibilities for how you can take control of your own learning.

An ongoing process of refinement

There is no one magical answer with self-care, we are continually learning with and from each other. One of the most important things we can do is to keep the dialogue open so that self-care shifts from being *worthy* of our attention, to it *is* our attention.

What gift are you able to give yourself?

Common curveballs to our self-care include relationships, forgiveness and managing our time. Let's explore these further.

Relationships and forgiveness

When you are hurt by someone you trust, it is difficult to forgive. We can harbour a grudge that has us engaged in resentment. Processing can be hard and draining on our emotional energy.

Forgiveness is making a decision to move on from the hurt. You do not have to tell the person you forgive them, but moving on is a way of letting go judgement and accepting that mistakes can be made. This doesn't mean you support any bad behaviour or accept being treated in a way this is dismissive of you. Forgiveness helps with the release of burden, guilt and shame. It is about valuing your own sense of emotional freedom. It is not about the other person, it is about you.

Mindfully coming to forgiveness allows us to be in the present moment rather than being in the hurt. That hurt can look like rumination, like a script playing over and over in your head. You create what you wish you had said or enter into an internal dialogue with yourself about why someone would behave the way they did towards you.

Forgiveness also reminds you that everyone is different.

It is about you forgiving you as well for being hurt or feeling shame that you are hurt.

DO: *Forgiveness options*

Set the intention to explore how forgiveness is a part of your self-care especially in relation to the development aspect of your toolbox for self-care. Here are some options to consider:

- Journal your thoughts in free writing.

- Write a letter to the person, but do not send it. Write the letter as a way to express to them what has occurred and the impact on you. You may also include solutions for what you are going to do next in proactive ways.
- Consider the strength of curiosity as a way to be in their space or consider from their perspective.
- Give yourself time to thrive. Acknowledge you may need a break from that person or indeed remove that person from being a part of your life.
- Think back to times when you have made mistakes; how did others forgive you? What did this involve? How are you grateful for what those interactions taught you?
- Engage in an LKM for this person.
- Practice gratitude for all the things that are going well in your life.
- Consider how you can respond rather than react. Pay attention to the physical signs of how you react around this person. Be mindful of the triggers. Give yourself permission to pause and not to react immediately (or at all). And make a choice between how you might have reacted in the past and how you can respond now. For example, attack versus listen, anger versus empathise, withdraw versus being present, defensiveness versus curiosity exploring perspective or being emotionally overwhelmed versus connecting to your breath and staying calm.
- Connect with LKM to support you with your self-talk and processing.

Managing your time

Review how you spend your time. Do any of these statements resonate with how you can cultivate maintenance of your self-care, with regard to time?

- Procrastination is my best friend.
- I say yes to everything and am overcommitted.
- I say yes, but do not complete.
- I miss deadlines.

What gift are you able to give yourself?

- I set goals that are not aligned to my *why*.
- I have a lack of motivation.
- I have no structure.
- I have no routine.
- The activity does not bring me joy.
- I often lose focus.
- Foggy brain features often.
- Reacting to requests immediately, dropping what I was working on, features regularly.
- I am easily side-tracked.
- I overwork to complete deadlines.
- I always complete deadlines ahead of time.

What is the impact of these situations? On yourself? On others? How do they influence your self-care?

Let's consider some of these and consider how you can realign your approach to managing time.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Choose priorities carefully

The core idea is to guide you through a reflective process that aligns your personal values, your professional obligations, and your self-care needs. Consider these questions when it comes to prioritising your time for self-care professionally:

1. **What are your core values and personal motivations?** Understanding your deepest drivers can help guide how you choose to spend your time and energy.
2. **How well does your current work align with your values and motivations?** Examining this connection can reveal areas of fulfillment as well as potential disconnects that may drain your energy.
3. **How do you want to ideally structure your time and activities?** Being intentional about allocating your time, both at work and in your personal life, is key to ensuring you're investing in the most important priorities.

4. **What are some practical ways you can reshape your schedule, workflows, and habits to better support your wellbeing?** This involves finding strategies to integrate self-care practices into your professional life.
5. **How can you directly weave self-care activities into your work routines and responsibilities?** Exploring these opportunities can create a more sustainable and holistic approach. What impact are you hoping to achieve, such as increased energy, reduced stress, or improved focus?

Bonus reflective question:

If you have an emotional reaction that sits in the fight, flight, freeze or fawn area of response, what is this telling you? Perhaps you need to go back to a check-in practice to support processing your response.

Relationships in the workplace: opportunity to begin and shift the conversation about self-care

The self in self-care is not just about us. It is not just an internal or individualist action. Self-care involves others in so many ways.

In an education context this becomes blurred. Often, we feel like well-being and self-care are an individual pursuit: something to hide, something that is forgotten, something that is hidden, something very rarely spoken about by our leaders and rarely included in policy or new visions.

Let's take a moment to think through what might be possible in getting started in placing self-care at the forefront of our institutions. This is just a starting point to help begin the conversation. To introduce, maintain, protect and grow our leaders and policymakers requires far more than just a few pages. So, please note that I am simply planting the seeds to help the conversation.

As a member of a team, what can I do?

As we navigate our own self-care, we also want to think about how we can support our colleagues. How might you raise the idea of wellbeing with your peer(s)? Especially in a team that are a bit stressed and overwhelmed . . . do you just bring it up, or is there a better way to start the conversation? How do you respect that some people will not have this type of conversation?

As we think about self-care with our colleagues, we need to acknowledge what wellbeing looks like both from the individual and collective perspectives. What we do individually may not always be translated to the group. Additionally, our own self-care that we enact in our personal time or when alone will not translate into the workplace, and vice-versa. A workplace culture also impacts our wellbeing, our empowerment, how we talk about it and what is valued. In acknowledging this, as you consider self-care with your colleagues think about how you create:

- A safe space to talk about self-care where building a sense of belonging based on mutual respect is established, maintained and protected.
- Time for deep listening.
- Intentions not to compare and shame one another.

- A space for co-construction of approaches that embrace individual needs, and that may or may not work for a team.
- A promise to not make individuals feel guilty.
- Conversations that are mindful and respectful of what may be behind an individual's self-care practices, being careful of making assumptions.
- Consistency (not a one-off) and that opportunity is planned, created and cultivated to think about regular and ongoing authentic actions that support the development of a common language. Consideration of processes, while unpacking the *why* and impact are embraced and respected.

And as you are reading this you might be thinking, what about team strategies? Are there things that teams can do right now?

This is a great question. And it will be different for every team, and every sub-team within the same context as well. We are all different, and every combination of people is different, so please remember this especially when we are talking about our wellbeing. As you have progressed through this book, ideas may be sparked for you as you process yourself, and I invite you to also consider these in relation to your colleagues. To further conversations about wellbeing and self-care with colleagues and teams, I would recommend approaches such as:

- Ask: What excites you about self-care?
- Connect to lived experiences and ask questions such as: What has worked for you? What hasn't worked for you?
- Set goals that work – framed from 'want to' (igniting growth, positive emotions, connections and positive contribution).
- Engage in hope-mapping to explore goals, why (with excitement), obstacles, pathways to solve (visualise it).
- Set up accountability buddies.
- Learn with and from each other formally or informally.

I can also hear the question, as a leader: How can I support my colleagues?

When thinking about self-care and wellbeing I invite leaders to think about creating the time to talk about self-care, and to really, really, really position it as *worthy* and integrated, and not as a productivity mechanism. Lead with compassion and integrity. Tune in to each colleague while developing them.

Connect, and be vulnerable with your colleague(s). Create and cultivate this space for your colleagues, team, educational context and the sector. It has to become 'I can't wait because it makes me feel great and I am doing my best in every way', rather than 'We must, because you should or because this is what I have been told'. Find ways to create new patterns and habits for and with the team. The first of the month could be a trigger for a new pattern as one example. You will have many ideas, and so will your peers, but I will highlight three areas that I think will benefit you as a leader:

1. Invest in individuals' and teams' strengths and follow through with language, modelling, appreciation and acknowledgement. Let colleagues shine.
2. Self-trust and vulnerability as a leader are essential, and the work of Brené Brown and her BRAVING Inventory⁵ is one framework that I have found really works. This framework provides a way to think through and action with authenticity and integrity.

Boundaries: Did I respect my own? Others'? In this situation? What is OK or not?

Reliability: Could I count on myself? Or was my self-talk not so self-compassionate?

Accountability: Did I hold myself accountable or did I blame? Did I hold others accountable when I should?

Vault: Did I honour the vault (ie, confidentiality)? Sharing appropriately? Have I maintained confidentiality? How have I embodied integrity?

Integrity: Did I choose courage over comfort? Did I practice my values? Am I connected to my purpose? Or did I take the easy road out?

Non-judgemental: Did I ask for help when I needed it? When was I judging about needing help?

Generosity: How have I been generous to myself? Others? Did I talk to myself with kindness? To others? Did I offer support appropriately when asked with my heart and head?

3. Walk the talk and talk the walk: model, illuminate and embody self-care. If you are going to make it a priority in your context, action this . . . small but consistent steps are a must.

How might you introduce the idea of self-care to your colleagues?

DO: *Humble inquiry*

Intention: To notice as a formal or informal colleague or leader how you can inquire with others about self-care.

Attention: Focus your attention on how to ask with curiosity rather than tell.

Attitude: Explore with an openness that facilitates recognising, labelling and reflecting.

PERMAH links: P, E, R, M, A

Humble inquiry and the work of Edgar Schein⁶ is an approach that can support this inquiry into valuing self-care in our educational settings. The process involves:

- Gentle asking instead of telling
- Building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person
- Finding out information you didn't already know

Key is an awareness that the act of telling can put people down and infer inequality between colleagues, creating power on one side and vulnerability on the other. Humble inquiry, however, invites us to be present and aware of all perspectives. We consciously inquire by asking.

Asking temporarily empowers the respondent and temporarily makes you vulnerable. It implies that the respondent knows something that you need or want to know. It draws them into the situation and allows them to guide what information is shared and how it is shared. In this way it enables connections to be made, cognitively but also in terms of a relationship. Telling doesn't enable this; it doesn't build a relationship with the other person. However, if part of the goal of the conversation is to improve communication and build a relationship, which is required when we are talking about self-care, then telling is riskier than asking and something you probably don't want to engage

with unless you want to shut people down. I'm not sure that is what we want!

To facilitate humble inquiry, some guiding questions could be:

- Tell me more about your experience.
- What excites you about that approach?
- What do you think about . . . ?
- How could we approach this . . . ?
- Can you help me understand why . . . ?
- Can you think of the major risks associated with this task?
- What mistakes could be made when doing this job?

Empowering you to be a self-care advocate

We have looked at so many strategies and practices to help you grow and maintain your toolbox and protect your self-care. Some may be new, others familiar but revisited. The tools shared are a starting point and hopefully an inspiration for your empowerment. They may assist you in becoming curious to further explore possibilities as motivation for you to (re)position self-care as worthy of your attention.

I really want you to imagine,

actually, it is more than imagine,

I really want you to set the intention that your self-care is important and that it is possible for you to care for yourself every single day.

You don't have to be perfect,

you just have to set the intention to be excited about your daily decisions in a way that supports you to connect with you,

and others, in an authentic way.

Self-care is relational. Others help you, support you or inspire you. Your care for yourself is important to care for others. We have to fill our cup, or as my friend Lisa says, 'overfill our cup and support others from what is in our saucer'. Self-care also involves being an advocate for our colleagues in our school or educational institution. We are all leaders, we don't need an official title to help make change; we can all be the change we want to see. What can this look like in an educational system that is broken in so many ways but worth investing in? How can we learn from and with each other? How will you be a self-care advocate?

I want you to be a teacher who feels great and models this to those around you. I want you to be a teacher who leads with wellbeing and self-care as number one. I want you to be a self-care advocate for: yourself, students, colleagues, leaders, parents, external partners and for those who cannot yet see the value. I am setting the intention for you that you are able to move past a current state of exhaustion and that you are able to shift past not being able to see value or having time and to be the change we want to see and be; that is, wellbeing and self-care are integrated into everything we do. The sector needs you. I need you. We need you. And you need you to do this. Explore. Create. Be empowered.

You may also be interested in . . .

On Instagram

#meditation54321

#swinprofexp

#mindfulmoments

#teacherwellbeing

#dailyselfcare

#teachersofinstagram

On Facebook

Teacher Wellbeing Group: www.facebook.com/teacherwellbeing/

Self-Care for Teachers Group: www.facebook.com/selfcareforteachers/

Self-CareforEducatorsGroup: www.facebook.com/selfcareforeducators/

On Twitter

#selfcare

#teacherwellbeing

self-care is a priority @sciaptweets

5-Minute Self-Care @5minselfcare

The Teacher Well-being Company @TheTeacherWell1

On YouTube

Meaning, Purpose, and Significance with Michael Steger

www.youtube.com/watch?v=anozE_fjaUU

Positive Emotions Open Our Mind with Dr Barbara Fredrickson

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7dFDHzV36g

EMPATHY By Simon Sinek: www.youtube.com/watch?v=pi86Nr9Mdms

Daring Classrooms by Brené Brown: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DVD8YRgA-ck

Why Mindfulness Is a Superpower: An Animation

www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4

Humble Leadership and Humble Inquiry with Edgar Schein www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANMKZsfEeGE

Blogs

When Teachers Experience Empathetic Distress

www.edutopia.org/article/when-teachers-experience-empathic-distress?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=socialflow

Schools, Not Teachers, Must Reduce Stress and Burnout – Here's How

www.edutopia.org/article/schools-not-teachers-must-reduce-stress-and-burnout-heres-how

Sustainable Solutions for Improved Teacher Wellbeing <https://blog.irisconnect.com/uk/sustainable-teacher-wellbeing>

Teacher wellbeing: more than just tackling workload

<https://blog.optimus-education.com/teacher-wellbeing-more-just-tackling-workload>

The Optimus blog

<https://blog.optimus-education.com/>

Websites

Explore and Create Co (Narelle's website)

www.exploreandcreateco.com

Oranges toolkit

www.theorangestoolkit.com.au/

The Mind Room <https://themindroom.com.au/>

Character Lab

<https://characterlab.org/tips-of-the-week/>

Building Resilience in Teacher Education (BRiTE) www.brite.edu.au/

School Well: School Staff Wellbeing <http://schoolwell.co.uk/staff-wellbeing-research/staff-wellbeing-articles-and-blog-posts/>

The highly effective teacher <https://thehighlyeffectiveteacher.com/blog/>

Headspace: free meditations www.headspace.com/covid-19

Greater Good in Education (Berkeley University) <https://ggie.berkeley.edu/my-well-being/>

SeeingHappy: Cultivating Happiness Through Photography <https://seeinghappy.org/>

The compassion capsule: A wellbeing journal <https://unyouth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Wellbeings-Journal.pdf>

Gratitude Practices for Nurses

<https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/gratitudeforurses>

Long reads

Skovholt, T. M., & Trotter-Mathison, M. (2016). *The resilient practitioner: Burnout prevention and self-care strategies for counselors, therapists, teachers, and health professionals* (2nd ed.). Taylor and Francis.

WellAhead. (2018). *Research brief: Promoting the wellbeing of teachers and school staff*. www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/TSWB_ResearchBrief.pdf

Cherkowski, S., & Walker, K. (2018). *Teacher wellbeing. Noticing, nurturing, sustaining and flourishing in schools*. Word & Deed Publishing Incorporated.

Links to Explore

There are of resources to discover in your own time, here is a sample for you:

TeacherSelf-Care inTrauma-InformedClassrooms: PrioritizingWellbeing for Lasting Impact

<https://proactiveapproaches.co.uk/promoting-self-care-for-teachers-supporting-wellbeing-in-trauma-informed-classrooms/>

Mindfulness Strategies for Back to School www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnllqFMw4SI

Cultivate Compassion Through Creativity

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vikrHDnEXE

Caring for school communities in times of crisis – response to COVID-19

<https://cpet.tc.columbia.edu/news-press/caring-for-ourselves-and-others-in-times-of-crisis-cpet-responds-to-covid-19>

Angela Watson's truth for teachers podcast

<https://thecornerstoneforteachers.com/truth-for-teachers-podcast/>

The Science of Well-Being online course

www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being

How to Keep the Greater Good in Mind During the Coronavirus Outbreak

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_keep_the_greater_good_in_mind_during_the_coronavirus_outbreak

How Educators Can Become More Resilient This School Year

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_educators_can_become_more_resilient_this_school_year

Podcasts

The Slow Home Podcast (with Brook McAlary)

<https://slowyourhome.com/the-slow-home-podcast/>

Cass Dunn: Crappy to Happy podcast

www.listnr.com/podcasts/crappy-to-happy

Ten Percent Happier Podcast with Dan Harris

www.tenpercent.com/podcast

The Greg McKeown Podcast

<https://gregmckeown.com/podcast/>

Lead Through Strengths

<https://leadthroughstrengths.com/listen/>

Teachers Supporting Teachers

www.buzzsprout.com/972709

Michelle McQuaid: Making Positive Psychology Work www.michellemcquaid.com/podcast/

Tara Brach

www.tarabrach.com/audio/

Get Out of Teaching Podcasts (stories of leaving the profession) www.larksong.com.au/podcast

Playlists

I have collated some playlists on Spotify for you and will keep adding to them. You can follow for free and listen to them as well:

Self-care: Empowering teachers . . . podcasts https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0qz48Seybh5Xzb8t7S4fBx?si=UJfSdQR-T7y4DeDDX1YgAQ&dl_branch=1

Get things done cool vibes https://open.spotify.com/playlist/62h6e8UNWMhdvW0OGd5ofU?si=0x9YBqOnR0CVmbsrBPS9Fw&dl_branch=1

Study and writing playlist – cool beats for flow https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5hjWLSKZVJWtj0ia0LOkf8?si=-rMYDW7JQPy4V8Amr_YXfg&dl_branch=1

Guided meditations https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1r0z3FJ15uBQkRUX2Oefpb?si=W-yXUnOIS_ijn3tosyFZlQ&dl_branch=1

Sleeping Music (Deep Sleep) https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6b0uRhS4niD43JlwuhBD1?si=uwSdAhJ2Sval6i1mlnmGQg&dl_branch=1

Self-compassion https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3y1YlpOWfiMnIPo63EKel1?si=YLLQFt_yTQaj9zsk1pf_nA&dl_branch=1

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