

The Self-Care Guide

for People Who Don't Know Where (or Why) to Start

A practical workbook for people who are tired of just getting through each day.



INTRODUCTION

You're Not Weak. You're Carrying Too Much.



If you're here, it probably means something in your life feels off. Maybe life feels too heavy, too fast, or too much. Maybe you're overwhelmed. Maybe you've tried "self-care" and it didn't work for you. Maybe you never really started because it felt indulgent, impossible, or like one more thing to fail at.



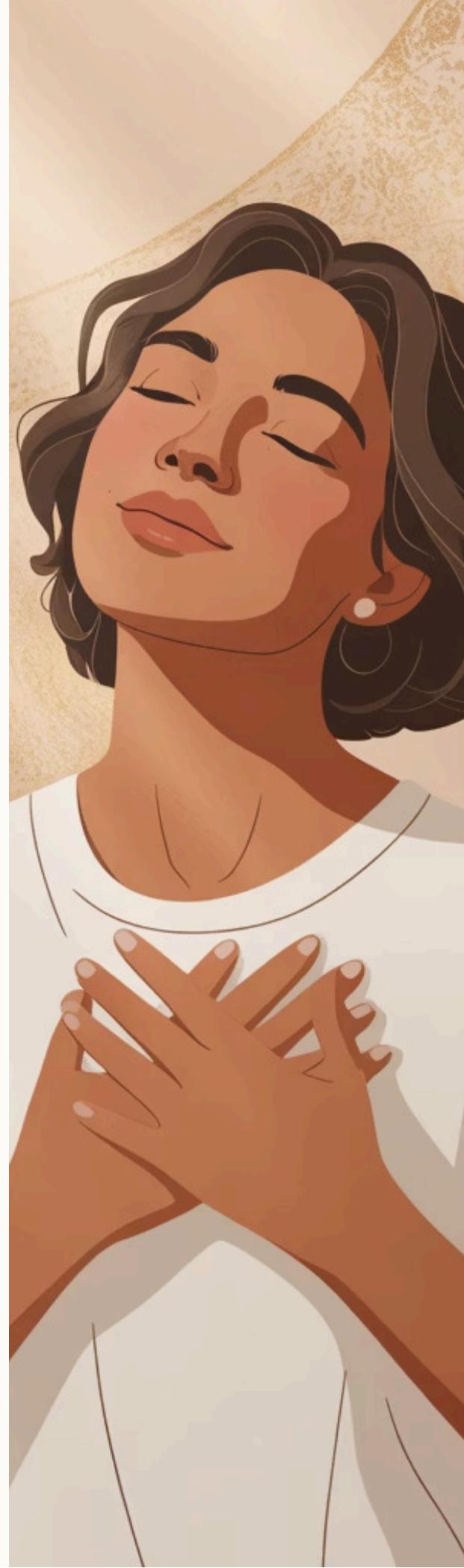
This guide isn't here to add more to your plate. It's here to help you start putting some of it down.



We've been sold a version of self-care that looks a lot like performance: curated routines, expensive habits, and quiet moments that look better on Instagram than they feel in real life. But real self-care isn't about doing more. It's about giving yourself what you actually need.



Real self-care is the practice of making your life feel more livable today.



Why Self-Care Matters

The Backpack and the Battery

Before we talk about what self-care is or how to practice it, we need to talk about why it matters. Most of us are carrying more than we realize. There's work, caregiving, responsibilities, relationships. The pressure to be okay when you're not. All of it adds up.

Picture it like an invisible backpack. You wake up with it every day. All of your obligations and responsibilities are stored in your backpack like weights. And the hard part is you don't always know what's in it. But you feel the weight.

In your body.

In your energy level.

In your patience.

In your ability to think clearly or respond kindly.

This is the load you're carrying. And self-care is how you lighten the load.



But that's only part of the story. Because every day you're not just carrying weight, you're expending energy. How do you track the expenditure of your energy? I call them Soul Points.

You use Soul Points to make decisions, regulate emotions, meet expectations, navigate conflict, and pretend you're fine when you're not. Once you start running low, everything feels harder, no matter how "small" it looks from the outside.

Self-care restores what life depletes. It doesn't fix the whole system. But self-care gives you the capacity to keep going without losing yourself in the process.

You're not selfish for needing rest. You're not weak for running low. You're human. And humans run out and need to recharge.

This guide is here to help you notice when you're depleted and build a rhythm of care that keeps you connected to yourself, even on the days when your backpack is heavy and your soul points are low.

Why Self-Awareness Comes First

Before we can practice real self-care, we need to understand what we're actually dealing with. That's where self-awareness comes in. You can't meet your needs if you don't know what they are.

And for many of us, especially those carrying trauma or chronic stress, our needs have been buried under decades of overfunctioning, people-pleasing, or just trying to make it through the day.

Self-awareness helps you slow down enough to hear yourself. It is the key to making real life changes for the better.

Self-awareness is about listening long enough to know where it hurts, what's missing, and what you're craving. The more honest you are with yourself, the more likely you can care for yourself in the way you need.

1

What?

What am I feeling in my body?

2

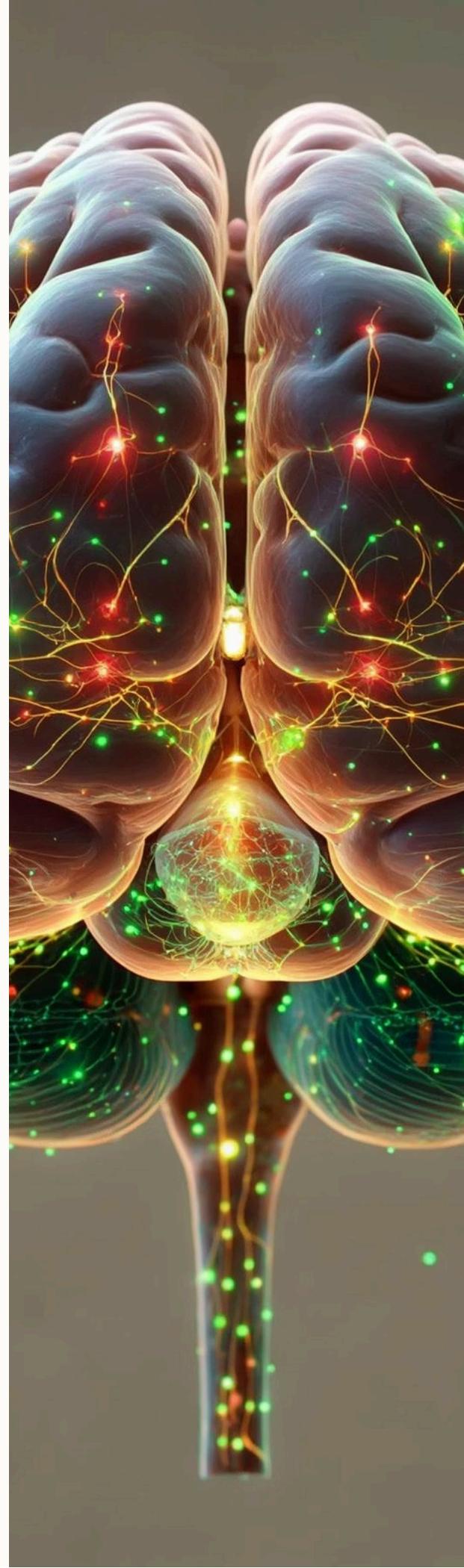
Why?

Why am I feeling it?

Why did I just feel so drained?

What can I do to help myself?

The more attuned you are to yourself, the earlier you'll notice when the backpack gets heavy or your Soul Points get low.



What to Expect

This is a practical guide to developing your own self-care activities. There is no "right" way to do any of it. Honest. And doing something, even for 30 seconds, is better than doing nothing.



A clear breakdown of what self-care really is (and isn't)



Six dimensions of care you can start attending to today

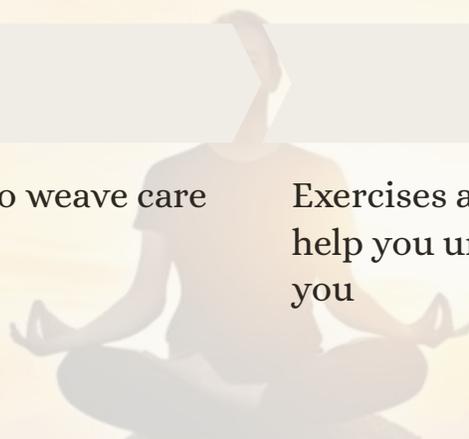


Simple, low-effort ways to weave care into your real life



Exercises and reflection prompts to help you understand what works for you

The goal is to help you see why self-care is important and what you can do to implement basic self-care activities during your day to lighten your load and feel better.



Rethinking Self-Care: Building Capacity

Let's start with some myth-busting. Self-care isn't always what it seems.



A two-hour morning routine



A yoga membership you don't use



A glass of wine labeled "me time"



A perfectly color-coded planner

Those things aren't bad. But they're not the point.

Self-care is anything that helps you stay present, grounded, and functional in the face of your actual life.

Many of us have been led to believe that self-care must look a certain way to "count." This limited view can prevent us from recognizing the many ways we already care for ourselves and discovering new strategies that might be more effective for our unique needs.

When we free ourselves from rigid definitions of self-care, we open up possibilities for more authentic, personalized approaches that truly support us where we are.

Two Functions of Real Self-Care

Every act of self-care serves one (or both) of two core functions:



1. Restoration

Helps you replenish what life has drained, recharging your energy.

Think:

- Sleep
- Nourishing food
- Creative expression
- Laughter with someone who really sees you



2. Regulation

Helps you calm your nervous system and return to a state of balance.

Think:

- Deep breathing
- Grounding exercises
- Journaling
- Moving your body gently when you're stuck

Quick Check-In:

What do you need more of right now, restoration or regulation?

Reflection Prompt

Think about the last week. What's one thing you did that helped you feel better, even for just a moment? Was it restoration or regulation? Did you recognize it as self-care at the time?

You're likely already practicing self-care in ways you don't give yourself credit for. Let's name it and build from there.

The Six Dimensions of Care

Self-care is more than rest. It's more than one activity repeated over and over. Real self-care supports every part of you that life demands something from. That means it needs to meet you on more than one level.

Most of us were taught a narrow version of care. But we need to think about care across six dimensions.



Physical

The care your body needs to function. This includes rest, hydration, nutrition, and movement. It's not about being "fit." It's about giving your body what helps it feel steady.

Examples:

- Stretching your neck during meetings
- Eating something nourishing when you feel off
- Lying down when you're wiped out, even if your brain says to push through



Cognitive

The care your mind needs to slow down, organize, or let go. When your thoughts spiral, your care needs are cognitive. This kind of care clears mental clutter, reduces rumination, and helps you feel capable again.

Examples:

- Journaling to get thoughts out of your head
- Planning one thing instead of five
- Reframing a fear-based thought with something kinder



Emotional

Connecting to what you feel instead of avoiding or suppressing. Most of us never learned how to actually feel our feelings. That doesn't mean we don't have them. It means they stay stuck, weighing us down.

Examples:

- Naming what you're feeling
- Letting yourself cry without judging it
- Saying out loud, "I'm overwhelmed and I don't know what to do yet."



Relational

The care you get (and give) through connection. Trauma often isolates. Exhaustion does, too. But healthy connection is part of healing. Not people-pleasing, but actual connection.

Examples:

- Texting a friend who makes you feel like yourself
- Saying no when you're at capacity
- Letting someone support you instead of pretending you're fine

Reflection Prompt

Look back at the six dimensions. Which ones are you already attending to, even a little? Which ones tend to get ignored when things get busy or hard? What would it look like to give yourself permission to care across more than one area?

You don't need to cover every dimension every day. But the more areas you start to notice, the more supported you'll feel, without needing to "do more."

Micro-Care in Real Life

Most people don't start self-care because they think it requires time they don't have, routines they can't maintain, or energy they've already run out of. But sometimes 30 seconds is all you need to change things for the better.

Micro-care is the practice of tending to yourself in small, doable ways, especially when you're too depleted for anything more.

It's a deep breath before the next thing. A shift in posture. A song that slows your nervous system. It's simple, fast, and real.

It's not the whole solution. But it can interrupt the cycle of overwhelm long enough for you to remember you still matter.

These aren't tasks. They're supports. You can do them in the middle of your life, not outside of it.

Transitions

The best time to do micro-care activities is during your transitions. After you've finished something and before you start whatever is next.

Getting off a phone call before you jump back into work.

Between meetings.

On your commute.

Anytime you move from one place or activity to another is a great time to check in with yourself and see what you need.

Examples of Micro-Care

Physical

- Take three slow breaths before using your computer
- Roll your shoulders while you wait for the microwave/toaster
- Put your hand on your heart and feel your feet on the floor

Emotional

- Name what you're feeling, even if no one else is around
- Say to yourself, "This is hard. I'm allowed to feel this."
- Cry in the car. Let it be okay.

Cognitive

- Write down one thing you don't have to deal with today
- Pause and ask, "What would help me feel 10% less stressed right now?"
- Switch tasks with intention, not just urgency

Relational

- Send a "thinking of you" text to someone you care about
- Let yourself be quiet in a conversation instead of performing energy
- Tell someone what you need, even if it's small

Environmental

- Open a window for fresh air or walk outside even for 60 seconds
- Silence notifications that are making your body tense
- Clean off one small surface that's been bothering you

Protective

- Say no. "No" is a full sentence.
- Block a 30-minute window for lunch time
- Leave a conversation that drains you without apologizing for it

You don't need to do all of these. Pick one. Try it a couple of times and see how you feel. The goal is to build a list of activities that help you feel better, help you care for yourself. They won't all work all of the time, but at least one of them should work when you need it.

Reflection Prompt

Think about the last week. What's one thing you did that helped you feel better, even for just a moment? Was it restoration or regulation? Did you recognize it as self-care at the time?

You're likely already practicing self-care in ways you don't give yourself credit for. Let's name it and build from there.

What's Getting In the Way

If self-care is so important, why is it so hard to do? Most people aren't struggling because they're lazy, disorganized, or undisciplined. They're struggling because they've been trained to override their own needs, and punished, shamed, or ignored when they didn't.

If you're having a hard time practicing self-care, it's not because you aren't able to. It's because something's in the way. Let's name some of those barriers to help you meet yourself with more compassion and less judgment.

Common Barriers to Self-Care



Time Constraints

There aren't enough hours in the day. Self-care feels like one more thing to squeeze in, not something that fits.



Internalized Beliefs

Self-care is selfish. Productivity is what makes you worthy. You don't deserve care unless you've "earned" it.



Guilt

If you say no, someone might feel rejected. If you ask for help, you might be a burden. So you keep going.



Cultural Conditioning

Many of us were raised to believe that sacrifice is strength. That exhaustion is noble. That we'll sleep when we die. These messages require unlearning.



Trauma Responses

When your nervous system has learned to stay on high alert, slowing down can feel unsafe. Rest can feel like weakness. These patterns aren't your fault, but they are your reality and need to be met gently.

These aren't personal failures. They're old survival strategies trying to keep you safe.

Reflection Prompt

Which of these barriers shows up most often for you? Where did that message come from—and does it still belong in your life? What would it look like to approach yourself with compassion instead of criticism when care feels hard?

Sustaining Self-Care

Starting self-care is one thing. Keeping it going is another. Life will get busy. You'll forget. You'll fall off track. That's not failure. That's being human.

Sustainable self-care isn't about sticking to a strict routine. It's about learning how to return—without shame—when you forget to do self-care for a few days.

We're building a self-care system that can be restarted over and over again. Life is challenging and hectic and it's easy to get distracted from what we need. So it should be easy to start up again without any negative self-talk.

When you don't practice care, don't punish yourself. Instead, ask: **What can I do right now for myself?**

Care isn't a performance. It's a relationship with yourself, the most important person in your life. And like any relationship, it's built over time through the easy times and the difficult ones.

Start with this: What helps me feel even a little more steady today? Not perfect. Not fixed. Just better.

Then make it small enough that you could actually do it.

When you do practice care, notice it. Name it. Not to give yourself a sticker (though you can), but to remind your brain and body that it mattered. Positive reinforcement is good for us.



Reflection Prompt

What's one small care practice you could try again this week? What tends to knock you off track and how can you meet that moment with more curiosity than shame? How will you know when your care is working? What shifts, even slightly?

Where Self-Care Fits in Your Healing

You don't have to know the full map of your healing journey to take the next step. But sometimes it helps to know what is coming around the bend. The Integration Path™ is a six-phase model I developed to help people understand how healing unfolds. It's like a blueprint anyone can follow. It is not a checklist, but a structure and direction.

Self-care is part of how healing happens. Here's how care might show up at different phases:

Understanding Impact of Trauma

You realize your reactions make sense based on what you've been through. Self-care here means pausing the self-blame and offering yourself even one moment of compassion.

Self-Awareness

You begin to see your patterns. The choices you didn't know you had. Self-care here means noticing what you need before rushing to meet others' expectations.

Freedom in Choice and Action

You start choosing different responses. Small shifts in how you relate to yourself and others. Self-care here might look like practicing new boundaries or giving yourself permission to rest.

Emotional Reconnection

You feel more of what you've been avoiding such as grief, anger, joy, tenderness. Self-care here is letting those feelings come without shame and being compassionate.

Integration

You stop dividing your life into "before" and "after." You begin to carry your story with more softness. Self-care here means building rituals, rhythms, and spaces that hold you over time.

Living Your Life

Healing isn't a project anymore. It's just how you live. Self-care here is maintenance. Recalibration. Staying connected to yourself in the ordinary days.

CLOSING

You Don't Need More Time. You Need More You.

Self-care is literally the act of caring for yourself, often in a way no one ever did for you, but that you deserve anyway. Self-care is how you stay with yourself when life gets hard. It's how you come back to yourself when you've been stretched too thin. It's how you remind yourself: I matter, even now.

You don't have to change your whole routine. You don't need more hours in the day. You just need to remember you're worth caring for, with the time and energy you already have.

That's what this guide is about. Not perfect plans. Just real support for your real life.

If you want help turning this into something that lasts. If you're ready to look more closely at what's underneath the exhaustion. If you're curious about what it would feel like to be supported by someone who's done this work, too.

This is what I help people with. You don't have to do it alone.

Next Steps on Your Self-Care Journey... with Jeremy

1

Join my newsletter, Awareness, Then Change.

[Awareness, Then Change Newsletter](#)

buildonyourstrengths.com/awareness-then-change

2

Check out my schedule of upcoming workshops or see recordings of past workshops.

[Free Workshops](#)

buildonyourstrengths.com/workshops

Schedule Your Free 30-Minute Clarity Call

You don't have to figure it out alone.

If this guide brought up questions, stirred something in you, or left you wanting more space to sort things out, we can spend 30 minutes together in a free Clarity Call.

It's a mini-session where we can:

1

Talk it Through

Explore what's really coming up for you right now.

2

Get Answers

Ask me anything about my work, my approach, or how coaching might help.

3

Feel it Out

See what it's like to work together with no pressure or commitment.

After the call, I'll send you a short follow-up email with my coaching agreement and a link to my schedule.

You decide whether to continue. If you're not ready, or it's not the right fit, that's okay. I'll still be here if you change your mind.

Book your Clarity Call: buildonyourstrengths.com/contact

You were always good enough.

Let me help you remember that.



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Jeremy is a licensed master's social worker, family therapist, and trauma-informed coach who helps people recognize when their past is running their present—and build new ways to respond when it shows up.

With Master's degrees in Social Work and Family Therapy plus 30+ years of personal healing work, Jeremy brings both professional expertise and lived experience to his coaching practice. As a Psychology Today contributor and creator of The Integration Path™ framework, he specializes in forward-focused approaches that help people reclaim who they've always been underneath the weight of what happened to them.

Through **Build On Your Strengths**, Jeremy offers 1-on-1 coaching, practical guides, and workshops that focus on real self-care for real life, building sustainable practices using the time you already have, not adding more to your overwhelming schedule.

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