

Kowhai Programme

Support for families, whānau & carers

Self Care An Essential Start to Health and Wellbeing

Self Care is a **priority** NOT a luxury! Looking after yourself first helps ensure you are well enough to care for someone else and refills the reserves you need to offer kindness to others. Taking a little timeout for yourself is essential!

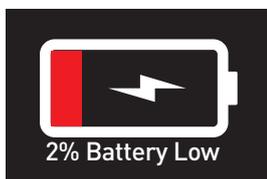
There are several analogies for the need to prioritise self-care. Here are a few to consider. Choose one that resonates, and use it as a daily reminder of how vital this is for you.



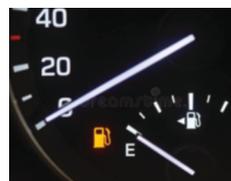
Every airline safety briefing talks about putting on your own oxygen mask first. There is a reason for that – If you don't take care of yourself you may well fall over before you can help those who need it. Worse, you may then be in the way of someone else trying to help.



You cannot pour from an empty cup. If you allow your own self to be drained dry, there will be nothing left, no energy, no compassion, and no ability to continue to support another person, no matter how much you wish to do so.



You wouldn't let this happen to your phone. You charge them up before they get to that point, or they are no use to anyone. So if you won't do that to your phone, your tablet, your computer.... why would you do it to yourself?



A car does not run on an empty tank. Simply put, if you do not fuel up the car then you cannot carry anybody anywhere. You will simply stop still and this is likely to be at the worst possible time and place.

Saying No can be very difficult for many people. It sometimes needs practice. But learning to say No to anything that stretches your resources, be it physical, emotional or psychological, is a powerful tool that enables you to preserve your energy for what matters the most to you. Practice saying No at home, or with a friend, and build your ability to use it when you need it.

You can also **say No to visitors**. Visitors can be a wonderful distraction or they can be a chore. People can turn up to visit that you haven't seen for years. Or turn up every day to 'help'. Or arrive and not know when to leave. And they can be exhausting. You are not required to let them in. You don't owe unexpected visitors anything. People who support you are welcome, those that demand of you are not. The right thing to do is to look after yourself, and your loved one, by saying No to unwanted visitors. Consider signs on the door that state 'visiting hours' or 'rest times' or even limit visiting times to a short period.

Reduce Stress There is plenty of sound evidence to suggest that most self-care activities reduce stress, which amongst other things, helps your body strengthen its immune system. It doesn't need to be big or time consuming. Doing little things often, that help 'refill your cup', will gradually refresh you and give you renewed energy. It may be something to get lost in for a short while, to be in another place. This might be a book, a movie, a podcast, listening to music, anything that takes you away from the stresses of the moment.

By looking after yourself you will last longer in caring for your loved one. You will have a better relationship with them and will manage caring at home for longer. And you will feel better doing so. Less stress means less resentment, and you may find you are more able to simply enjoy being together.

Self-care means different things for different people. Finding what works for you is key.

Spend time doing something that feeds your soul. Reading a book, visiting a gallery, a little gardening, going to a religious service, attending a talk, walking or just sitting in the bush. Think about what you have done in the past that helped you cope or given you some relief. Whatever brings you some peace, then find ways to build it into your life.

Self-care can be built little by little. Taking ten minutes to fully appreciate a good cup of tea or coffee; ten minutes in your garden without your phone; a walk around the block and smile at each person you see. Be in the moment and simply savour it.

Some ideas to get you started

Breathe to relax – Breathe in through the nose for a count of *'one and two and'*

~ Breathe out through the mouth with pursed lips for a count of *'one and two and three and four and'*

~ Pause, and repeat

~ Focus on the count and the breath moving in and out of your body

~ Gently put aside any intrusive thoughts and re-focus on the count and the breath.

Call a friend – Connecting with others helps when you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed. When you are, call a good friend—they'll help you refocus and find a fresh perspective

Wherever possible choose who you spend time with. Some friends fill you up, restore you, others can bring you down. Identify one person you know you could call in the middle of the night and they would be there for you. You will probably never need to do so, but just knowing that there is someone you can call, will help life feel manageable.

Walk around the block – Our minds and our bodies benefit from simple exercise. Some people like to spend time at the gym or the pool but for many a simple five-minute stroll in the fresh air is a wonderful way to relax and recharge.

Use essential oils – Whether you add them to your shower, mix them with lotion or simply take a whiff when stress starts to build - essential oils are a great way to relax. Scents like lavender, rose or ylang ylang are particularly calming.

Listen to your favorite song – Make a playlist of a few go-to songs that instantly calm you, whether they be pop songs or slow piano music. Listening to music that you like is a super easy way to relax and unwind.

Take a Moment – Choose a little time each day to think of 2 or 3 things you are grateful for. This moves your focus to what you have over what you don't. It helps with feelings of anxiety and has ongoing benefit.

Practicing gratitude on a regular basis has been associated with enhanced optimism, better sleep, fewer physical ailments, and lower levels of anxiety.

Laugh Out Loud – A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress. It leaves your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes, and it boosts the immune system. Even pretending to laugh has benefits, and usually leads to genuine laughter. So find funny movies, You-tube clips, cartoons and get together with your family and whānau and laugh.

Take a creative break – Time out for some unstructured creative activities is effective in helping you de-stress and lets your mind wander, something we rarely let ourselves do after the age of 5. You're not striving to achieve any sort of 'result' you're just playing. Some suggestions are: adult colouring-in books or apps; doodle; play solitaire; make some playdough; do a jigsaw, play with paints

Accept help – Letting others help often does not come easily, but now is the time to allow others to give to you. Remember how good it feels to do something for someone else? When someone genuinely wants to help you, allowing them to do so is a gift you give them. Not sure what to ask for? Keep a list, and when someone asks what they can do to help, show them the list. They can choose what fits them best, and know it is something you need.

Remember you have survived 100% of what life has thrown at you so far. You have learned from the tough times and you have gained strengths that will see you through life now. Reflect on what has helped you in the past, and use these strengths again.