

# Self-Care and Your Mental Health



# Self Care

"I'm a mom now - It's not about me."

"I never get a shower or a warm cup of coffee, let alone time to do self-care."

"My baby needs me, it's not the time to be selfish."

"I feel guilty when I take time away from my kids."

**YOU ARE MORE THAN "JUST A MOM."  
Treat yourself as such.**



## **Importance of self-care during pregnancy and the postpartum period**

Self-care not only feels great for all mothers, but it is an important aspect in preventing and / or minimizing the effects of perinatal mood disorders.

Self-care looks different for everyone and is even different for the same person on different days (high functioning and low functioning days, for example.)



*A momma who cares for herself, is better able to care for others.*

# Guidelines for Self-Care

Sometimes people attempt to meet the needs of family members, employers, children, friends, or society in general before meeting their own needs, and working to please and care for others often interferes with one's self-care routine and can take a toll on a person's well-being. This can result in overcommitting, stretching yourself thin, and possibly resentment toward yourself or others.

There are three principles that I like to point out when it comes to self-care, in an age where we seem to be overly-critical of ourselves and continuously compare our lives to what we see on social media:

1. **Self-care looks different for everyone.** Despite what you see on your twitter feed, there are no specific parameters for what constitutes as "self-care." Self-care can be literally ANYTHING that helps you recharge your batteries and makes you feel more like yourself. It helps you "fill your cup" so you can give to others. If YOU feel re-energized after a shower (a basic need) or grocery shopping with a coffee in your hand (a chore), then you can consider that self-care. There are no guidelines except what you set for yourself.
2. **Self-care can and will look different for you on low functioning days versus high functioning days.** Holding yourself to certain standards and not allowing flexibility can perpetuate negative feelings to the concept of self-care. See next slide for what self-care may look like on low versus high days.
3. **Self-care isn't self-care unless it is GUILT FREE self-care.** If you are going through the motions of self-care but your mind is foggy, you're spending the entire time worried, or wondering if you're a bad mom for leaving your family for a small amount of time, then you're not engaging in self-care. Allow yourself the ability to enjoy the moment of peace and allow it to bring you clarity.



# The High & Low Days

Self-care is not a "one and done" thing. There should be consistency and variety, and with continued practice on low functioning days, there will be more high functioning days! Similarly, the more often you practice these tasks on high functioning days, the less likely you will have poor mental health days.

## Low Functioning Days

Self massage

Breathing / guided relaxation with app

Unplugging from social media / work

Read a few pages from a book or magazine

Brush your teeth, shower, brush your hair, change clothes

Open your blinds and curtains / window

Watch your favorite t.v. show or listen to music

Reach out to a friend or family member

Drink a warm drink

Stretch your body

Light a candle, turn on oil diffuser

Plan something to look forward to

## High Functioning Days

Meditate

Practice yoga

Declutter spaces that you utilize often

Walk in nature / hike

Exfoliate and moisturize your skin

Visit a cafe alone or with a friend

Make a smoothie or juice

Attend a fitness class or go to the gym

Visit a spa or give yourself an at-home treatment

Read a book

Practice gratitude and positive affirmations

Check something off your to-do list that you've been putting off

# Setting Boundaries: Another Form of Self-Care

Do you have difficulty prioritizing your needs, setting boundaries, and consistently practicing self-care? These are struggles for many people who have **codependent** traits. We tend to put our needs last, often sacrificing our own well-being to make other people happy or avoid conflict. And when we do consider our own needs, set boundaries, and practice self-care we feel guilty, like we're doing something wrong, mean, or selfish.

## **What are healthy boundaries and why are they important?**

Boundaries create a space or separation between you and someone else. A physical boundary, such as stepping away from someone or closing a door, literally creates more space between you and others. And an emotional or mental boundary helps you separate your feelings, needs, beliefs, and interests from others'. An example of an emotional or mental boundary is not accepting the blame for someone else's angry outburst.

Without boundaries, we run the risk of "losing ourselves" meaning that we don't know how we feel, what we're interested in, or what we want. We let other people make decisions for us. We give and give without receiving in return. And we run the risk of being manipulated, used, and abused because we aren't putting any limits on how others can treat us.

## **Boundaries strengthen your sense of self.**

Boundaries are central to your identity and sense of self. Without boundaries, it's hard to distinguish where you end and someone else begins; you feel like a chameleon always morphing into who other people want you to be rather than having a strong sense of who you are.

**Boundaries are self-care. When you set boundaries, you are taking care of yourself. You are recognizing what you need and asking for it.**

# Setting Boundaries: Examples

Boundaries can help you manage stress, take care of your physical well-being, and create healthy relationships. Here are some examples of healthy boundaries that can improve your life:

- You ask for help with your child(ren) so you can take some time to decompress after a long day of littles - you're re-energizing so you can be a better mom upon return.
- You say no to working late because you're overtired - you're prioritizing your need for rest.
- You deactivate your social media account, unfollow certain accounts, or create yourself time limits - you're protecting your mental space.
- You put your phone down and turn on "do not disturb" when someone is being disrespectful - you're protecting your emotional well-being.
- You say no to things that you don't want to do because you know you'd be stretched thin - you're being mindful of your time.
- You leave the room when someone continues to yell at you - you are respecting yourself and doing what's true and right for you.
- You discontinue a relationship with someone who does not support you and your life's endeavors, and tears you down - you're protecting your inner peace.

If you don't set boundaries, you're likely to become resentful and exhausted. Without boundaries, you'll absorb other people's feelings and take responsibility for their problems; you'll overwork, allow others to take advantage of your kindness, and eventually this will negatively impact your physical and mental health. In contrast, when you set boundaries, you're taking care of your physical and emotional needs.

# Overcoming Guilt

How can you begin to overcome feelings of guilt and begin to prioritize your own needs? Pay attention to your thoughts and behaviors – challenging yourself to think about things differently and taking small steps to behave in new ways that reflect your increasing self-respect and self-understanding.

- **Remember that boundaries are a healthy form of self-care.** You're less likely to feel guilty when you remember that everyone has needs and taking care of yourself is a healthy choice. There is nothing wrong with looking out for yourself! There is reason to feel guilty about doing something that's good for you.
- **Setting boundaries and practicing self-care benefit those around you.** That's right, boundaries and self-care are good for everyone – not just you. Setting boundaries strengthens relationships. Things run more smoothly when expectations are clear and others feel respected when you communicate your needs and expectations clearly. And when you take care of yourself, you're healthier and happier. Everyone benefits when you have more energy and patience, are less reactive; and have fewer resentments.
- **Tune into your needs.** It's nearly impossible to set boundaries and practice self-care if you don't know what you need. Tuning into your thoughts, feelings, and physical body will help you do this. Intentionally pause several times per day to ask yourself: "How do I feel? What do I need?" When you have a better sense of how you feel and what you need, it will be easier to set boundaries and practice self-care.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Setting boundaries is a skill and like any other skill, the more you practice the easier it becomes. Expect that it will feel uncomfortable in the beginning, but stick with it!
- **Self-compassion.** Trying to take better care of yourself and learn new skills is hard work. Be sure to give yourself plenty of self-compassion and encouragement.
- **Don't expect yourself to be perfect.** Setting boundaries and practicing self-care aren't all or nothing endeavors. So, don't get hung up on doing them perfectly. Remember: progress not perfection!

# Reframing Your Thoughts: Cognitive Restructuring to Cope with Negative Thoughts

**Self-compassion** is the ability to turn understanding, acceptance, and love inward. Many people are able to extend compassion toward others but find it difficult to extend the same compassion toward themselves. They may see self-compassion as an act of self-indulgence, but that is simply not the case. In fact, self-compassion can help relieve many mental health concerns such as anxiety or insecurity.

Kristin Neff, a self-compassion researcher and the first to define the term academically, describes self-compassion as having three elements:

- Self-kindness, or refraining from harsh criticism of the self.
- Recognizing one's own humanity, or the fact that all people are imperfect and all people experience pain.
- Mindfulness, or maintaining a non-biased awareness of experiences, even those that are painful, rather than either ignoring or exaggerating their effect.

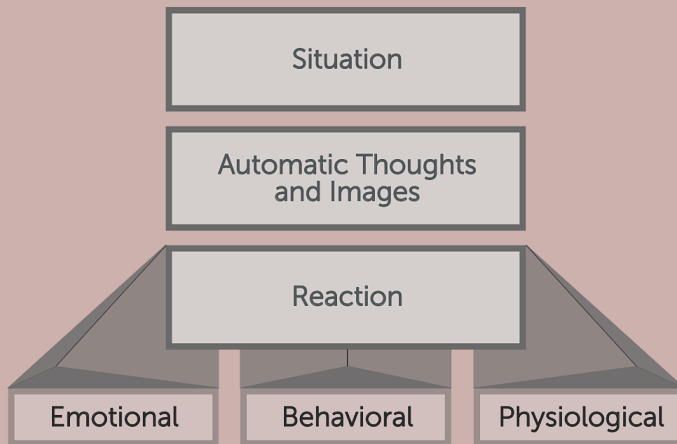
With this information in mind, I want you to take a moment to think about your level of self compassion. Are you often critical of yourself and your skills? Are you compassionate toward others, but not necessarily toward yourself? Do you set yourself to extremely high standards and engage in negative self-talk?

**Mom Guilt Example:** Mom is stressed after a long day alone with her baby, and tries to hand her three month old to her husband so she can go to the gym. Baby continues to cry, and mom feels so guilty she doesn't leave the house. She thinks: I am such an awful mother, I am trying to leave my child who is crying. What kind of mom wants to leave their child? She feels guilt and shame, and like a terrible mother. She starts to cry as she feels resentment toward her husband who doesn't soothe the baby like she does.

What is wrong with this all-too-familiar situation? Mom's thought process is distorted. She is not a bad mom, she is not offering herself self-compassion, nor is she setting boundaries or participating in self-care. When you don't put your needs first, and your thoughts about situations are distorted, you are negatively impacting your life. You deserve peace, happiness, and some GUILT FREE self-care time.



# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



Aaron Beck's Cognitive Model

Your thoughts influence your life tremendously. Negative, anxious, catastrophizing perceptions of, or spontaneous thoughts about, situations influence your emotional, behavioral, and often physiological reactions. When you are stressed (or distressed) these are even more distorted and often do not match the actual issue at hand.

Practicing reframing your thoughts is beneficial for your and your family's emotional well-being. Here are the basics:

- Identifying the situation
- Identifying your automatic thoughts
- Evaluating your thoughts and look for cognitive distortions
- Evaluating and rate your emotions
- Exploring and modify your underlying beliefs
- Differentiating between realistic and unrealistic threats
- Developing alternate perspectives and outcomes

The goal of CBT is to show yourself that your thoughts may not accurately reflect what is truly going on. Sometimes these emotions are triggered by something completely unrelated to the situation (childhood trauma) or you are responding to a past event that you have not yet resolved. Once this has been established, the goal is to develop plans to tackle "triggering" situations, teach coping skills, and foster resilience.

The more mindful you are of your triggers and typical reactions, the more you will be able to respond rather than react.

Reframing your thoughts from "I should feel guilty for taking time to myself" to "I deserve to do this because it makes me a better mom," the better you will be able to find balance and peace in your life as a mom.

# Triggers and How I Cope



According to *Kyle Benson* with the Gottman Institute: Triggers are emotional “buttons” that we all possess, and when those buttons are pushed, we are reminded of a memory or situation from the past, typically subconsciously. This experience “triggers” certain feelings within us and we react accordingly. A person’s triggers are activated through one or more of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste.

Do you have anything that causes you to react emotionally, unexpectedly?  
How do you typically react?

Common triggers to consider:

## WHAT TRIGGERED ME?

- |                                       |                                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 01. I felt excluded.                  | 13. I felt like the bad guy.         |
| 02. I felt powerless.                 | 14. I felt forgotten.                |
| 03. I felt unheard.                   | 15. I felt unsafe.                   |
| 04. I felt scolded.                   | 16. I felt unloved.                  |
| 05. I felt judged.                    | 17. I felt like that was unfair.     |
| 06. I felt blamed.                    | 18. I felt frustrated.               |
| 07. I felt disrespected.              | 19. I felt disconnected.             |
| 08. I felt a lack of affection.       | 20. I felt trapped.                  |
| 09. I felt uncared for.               | 21. I felt a lack of passion.        |
| 10. I felt lonely.                    | 22. I felt like I couldn't speak up. |
| 11. I felt ignored.                   | 23. I felt manipulated.              |
| 12. I felt like I couldn't be honest. | 24. I felt controlled.               |

The Gottman Institute

Identifying possible triggers before the situations arise can help you understand what may illicit unwanted feelings or behaviors, which may be exacerbated by sleep deprivation, stress, hunger, feelings of loneliness, etc... all typical issues associated with the fourth trimester.

**NOTE: If your triggers are intense, overwhelming, and impacting your ability to function or perform daily tasks, please seek counseling from a licensed therapist who can give you in-depth, individualized, trauma-informed care.**





# Mom Guilt



PLAN FOR IT, BUT DON'T LET IT  
STOP YOU

If you're a good mom, you've probably felt a little (or a lot of) mom guilt. Bad moms don't feel guilty. So that right there should be enough stop you from feeling like a bad mom. Since it's never as easy as that, let's remember WHY you do what you do: your mental and physical well-being. **For EACH "guilty pleasure," list why you do this task, and how it positively affects your mood, your situation, or your relationship with your family.**

GUILTY PLEASURE:

GUILTY PLEASURE:

GUILTY PLEASURE:

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GUILTY PLEASURE:

# Questions?



A well-prepared momma is a happy momma.

1:1 Virtual services include education and training on:  
Pregnancy and postpartum mental health and wellness  
Preparing for the "fourth trimester"

Communication with partners, safeguarding your relationships

Infant / Toddler safety and development

Personalized pain management, ergonomics, and home setup tips



<https://mindfulmommatherapy.com/>