

GATEWAY TO MAINTAINING POSITIVE WELL- BEING

A guide for parents, caregivers, and families in understanding and implementing self-care.



Introduction



"Gateway to Maintaining Positive Well-Being" is dedicated to providing the knowledge and understanding necessary for parents, caregivers, and families of individuals with disabilities to start taking their individual wellness into their own hands.

Families have told us that self-care can be complex and an after thought, since the majority of their energy is going towards caring for their loved one with a disability. With the help of their expertise, this guide supports other families in comprehending why self-care is important and defining what self-care means to them.

Understanding Self-Care



What is Self-Care?

Self-care can be defined as the practices or rituals that you engage in to nurture your overall health and well-being. The ways that self-care is engaged in varies from person to person, depending on their individual needs and interests. Your perspective on self-care plays a very large and important role in how you practice it.

A tool that can be used to understand the complexities of health and well-being and how to maintain them is the medicine wheel. This framework originated from and is a common traditional and sacred healing practice within many Indigenous cultures. There are various renditions of a medicine wheel, but typically there are 4 quadrants that focus on physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of the self. The wheel symbolizes the interconnectedness of each area. If one dimension of the self is off or not attended to, it creates an imbalance that affects all the other areas.

Gateway understands and interprets this framework as a "well-being wheel" that carries six interconnected dimensions of wellness.



Well-Being vs. Wellness

Well-being and wellness are two different but overlapping terms. Wellness is understood as a choice or way of life, whereas well-being is the state that you are in and how you feel about yourself. In order to reach a positive state of well-being you must actively practice wellness, which can come in the form of self-care. The areas of wellness illustrated above in the wheel can be seen as a starting place to exploring what wellness means to you and how you want to achieve well-being through your own self-care rituals.

Exploring the Six Dimensions of Wellness



Physical Wellness

- Physical wellness pertains to your body and how you take care of your bodily health. This could mean engaging in regular exercise and establishing healthy eating habits
- Physical wellness can also include the ways in which you take care of the environments you occupy. Keeping your home, work or outdoor spaces clean and organized can increase your productivity and overall happiness
- When your physical wellness is attended to, it allows you to enjoyably and successfully attend to the other important areas of wellness and complete the full circle



Emotional Wellness

- Emotional wellness can be understood as your feelings and overall outlook on life that influence the way you handle certain situations
- It is how you acknowledge and address your feelings in a productive way. This could mean having the skills and ability to relax, de-escalate and express your emotions



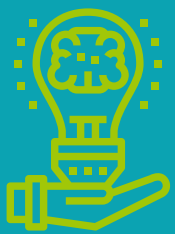
Spiritual Wellness

- Spiritual wellness can include practicing faith and religion if that is something that speaks to you, but spiritual wellness can also mean activating your hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future
- It also includes engaging in and uplifting the values and beliefs that give you purpose in life and support you in obtaining the future that you desire
- The exploration of the mind-body connection is important in spiritual wellness. This means understanding that the state of your mind is reflected in your physical body. For example, if your mind is filled with angry thoughts, then you might experience tenseness all over your body and pressure in your chest
- Being able to recognize and understand your own mind-body connection creates a space for you to better understand your feelings, triggers and recognize when you need support
- Self-awareness can be a helpful skill to develop and practice when engaging in spiritual wellness, especially in regards to the mind-body connection
- This means that you have a clear understanding of who you are as an individual, what your needs are and when to ask for support in order to obtain those needs



Social Wellness

- Social wellness can be directly linked to the relationships that you have with others. This could be your interpersonal relationships with partners, family members, friends, and colleagues
- Such relationships can also include your relationships with the disability community at large or other communities you are associated with
- Having healthy and trusting relationships are an important component of social wellness
- You may have many of these kinds of relationships, or just one. No matter the amount, it is crucial that these relationships create a space for you to share your true thoughts and feelings without judgement and with continued support
- Social wellness is also about being an active member in and contributor to the well-being of your community or communities, and engaging and developing the skill of self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is how you present yourself to the world and to others. It is your voice that supports you in better managing situations you are experiencing and advocating for your needs and what is important to you



Intellectual Wellness

- Intellectual Wellness focuses on creative and mentally stimulating activities
- Just like your body, your mind needs to be exercised as well
- When you engage in intellectual wellness, you are opening your mind to new learning experiences that can be transferred to your daily life such as your personal decisions, community enhancement, and skill improvement
- Self-development can be an important skill within intellectual wellness. It is understood as a process of continuously and deliberately improving yourself. This could mean working to improve your personal skills, competencies, talents, and knowledge. Engaging in self-development encourages and creates opportunity for you to reach your fullest potential



Occupational Wellness

- Occupational wellness can mean experiencing personal satisfaction and enrichment in your life through your work or occupation
- If you do not have an occupation, this can also be applicable towards other roles that you have in your life (i.e volunteer, caregiver/parent)
- A path towards occupational wellness can be described as contributing your individual gifts, skills, and talents to work that is meaningful and rewarding to you personally
- Overall role or job satisfaction plays an important part in occupational wellness. When you are happy with your work environment and/or the role that you play, you are more ambitious towards advancement and reaching your fullest potential

Why is Self-Care Important?

Self-care is an important practice for all individuals to incorporate in their lives, but it is especially important when you are a parent or caregiver of a loved one with a disability. You are constantly giving your attention to the care and well-being of your loved one and advocating for their needs. This can be physically and emotionally exhausting and lead to caregiver burnout. Caregiver burnout is an example of what happens when one is constantly exposed to stress in which their physical and mental health is impacted.

In order to be the best advocate and provide the best care for your loved one, you must remember to take care of yourself. You cannot pour from an empty glass! Your health and well-being matters too.

Regularly engaging in self-care can also support you in developing resiliency so that you have the ability to bounce back from adversity and effectively address the challenges or conflicts that comes your way. Being good to yourself and tending to your needs just a few minutes a day can encourage you to become the best version of yourself, manage the stress that comes with caregiving, and allows you to continue to see your loved one through a brighter light.

When you establish and practice a self-care routine, you are setting an example for your loved one. You are showing them that it is okay to set aside time for yourself to do things that make you feel happy and fulfilled. You are also showing them that it is okay to take a break. Having those conversations with your loved one around the importance of self-care can plant the idea in their minds, but following up with teaching by *doing* can be a powerful tool in encouraging your loved one to actually engage in self-care as well.

"GIVE YOURSELF THE SAME CARE AND ATTENTION THAT YOU GIVE TO OTHERS AND WATCH YOURSELF BLOOM."



Tips, Tricks, and Examples on Establishing a Self-Care Routine



It can be difficult to figure out where to even start when you are looking to engage in self-care activities and create a personal care routine. Especially when you're used to always putting your loved one's needs before your own. **Below are some helpful starting points and examples of self-care that you might consider.**

REMEMBER: your self-care regime should be tailored to what you are interested in and what you feel is needed to support you in being the best version of yourself, so only take into account the areas that resonate with you and your individual needs.

Tips and Tricks



Just because a certain habit is considered healthy doesn't necessarily mean it is good for *you*. Seek out activities that will give you a sense of gratification and fulfillment rather than focusing on what is generally labelled as good or healthy.



Explore and engage in various activities to get a sense of what makes you feel centred or grounded. Remember that self-care is not a one size fits all approach.



Routine is very important in self-care. It can be helpful to have some activities that you are able to practice at least once a day.



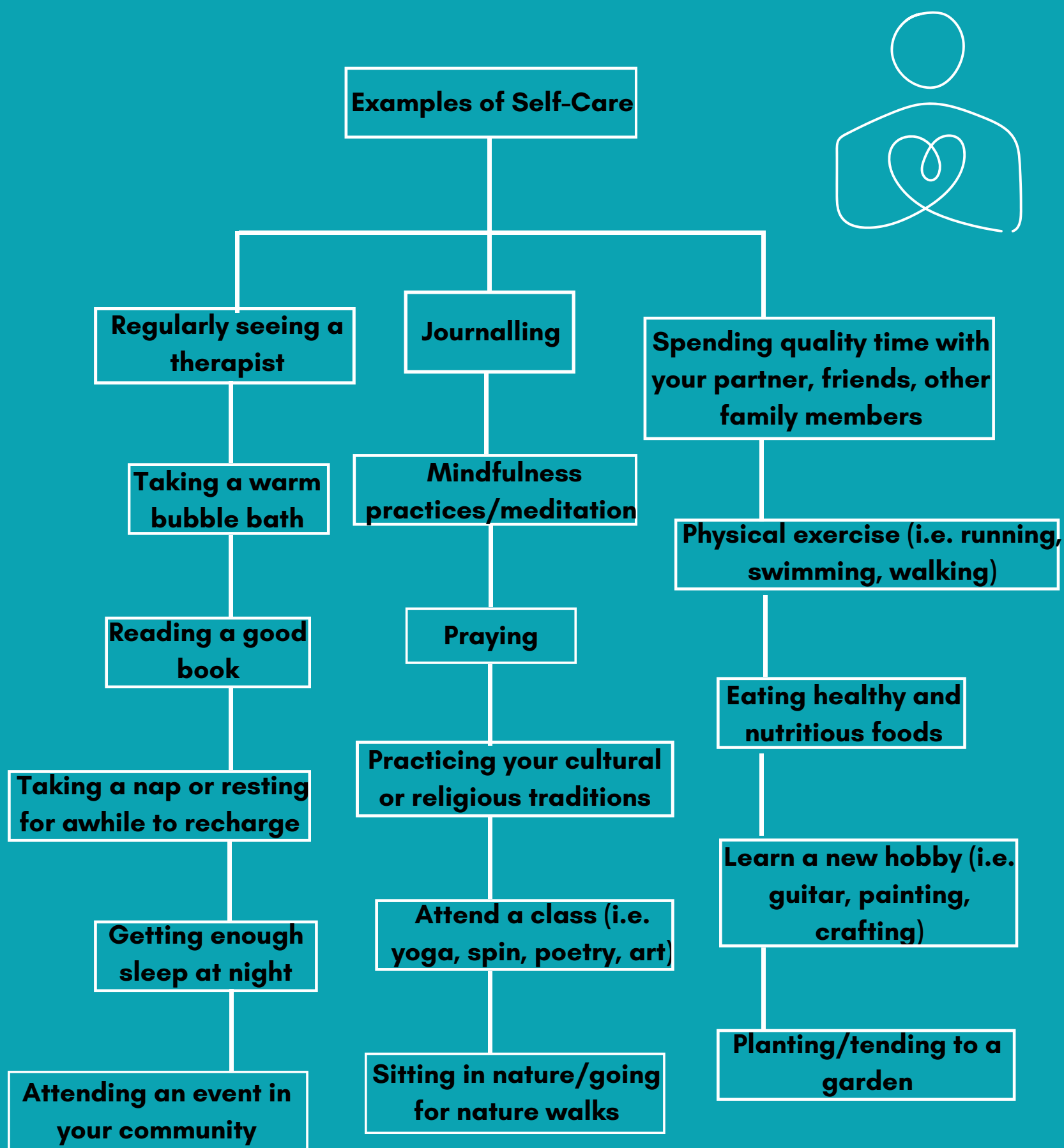
Once you have decided on what self-care activities you think will fill your own cup, set goals for how often and when you will practice such behaviours. When something doesn't feel as fulfilling anymore, remain flexible and adjust your care routine as you go.



If you are experiencing any barriers like feeling stuck on how to get started or difficulty in maintaining a self-care routine, it might be helpful to assess where that roadblock could be coming from. You could engage in independent journaling/reflection, or seek support from a therapist, friend, or family member.



See self-care as a way to develop self-awareness and self-love that you are able pass onto your loved one through the means of compassion, gratitude, and deeper kindness.



Some of the activities that are part of your care regime may involve leaning on others to temporarily fill your role as parent and care provider. *Is there anyone in your support circle that you can think of who would be willing to help out?* Don't be afraid to ask. It is also important to not shy away from using respite services. FSCD contracts allocate specific hours for families to utilize respite, so that support is there for you when you need it. You can speak with your FSCD contract worker if you are looking for more information around this.

Self-Care Guilt

Many parents and caregivers of individuals with disabilities have admitted that a huge barrier to actively engaging in self-care is the guilt that clouds them at even just the thought of stepping away from their supportive role. It is important to recognize that this guilt is completely normal and just a product of how much you care for your loved one. Acknowledge and work through that guilt in the time frame and way that works best for you. Letting go of that guilt is going to help you tremendously in getting started with your self-care and continuing to practice your routine.

Moving Forward

We hope that this guide has provided you with the right amount of knowledge and fodder to begin or perhaps add to your individual self-care practices. Much like your role as a parent or caregiver of an individual with a disability, self-care is a journey that may take some work, but the outcomes are almost always worth it.

So, what's next?

Check out the rest of the **Personal Check-In** section:

- Access and engage in the various activities available to support you in further understanding self-care through your own lens
- Go play some self-care bingo and make it a fun game for the whole family!
- Further explore the **Caregiver Roadmap** and its various supports across the lifespan
- Spread the love and share this guide with others

Remember to take the time to explore activities that speak to you and align with your needs and interests. Self-care is not a chore, so find ways to make it fun and enjoyable for you while also filling your cup!



References

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