

Self-care strategies in times of crisis



By Eve Menezes Cunningham

I often encourage clients and readers to not only use whatever self-care ideas I'm sharing but to remember all the other things that have worked for them. After all, my self-care strategies are likely to be different to yours and you know what's right for you in any given moment.

Using a box, vase, jar or even bag to hold pieces of paper with notes reminding you of the things that help you feel better can be just what we need. After all, sometimes, when low or in crisis, we *know* we would benefit from amping up our self-care but we're not in a resourceful enough state (see Quick Tips, page 5) to remember everything that might be beneficial.

At these times, we might even use the fact that we're not prioritising our self-care as another stick to beat ourselves up with. Instead, pick up a piece of paper or a notebook. Notice how the idea of using that feels, right now. Time and energy levels will also have an impact and you can adapt your self-care strategies accordingly.

You've probably already made several adjustments to old self-care strategies that have been impossible to implement during lockdown.

If you used to reach out to others, suddenly finding yourself on lockdown alone or with just your immediate family/circle means you had to quickly adapt. As well as finding strategies for continuing to work online, you may have started socialising online with Zoom, Houseparty and other ways in which technology has helped us stay connected even when far apart.

Each new strategy may have felt tough to learn. It may feel nowhere near as good as the old equivalent (however many 'butterfly hugs' you give yourself, it's not the same as a proper human hug) and yet, there's a resilience and resourcefulness there.

'Create a self-care compendium where you list and curate everything which constitutes self-care for you,' suggests Neuro Success coach, Marilyn Devonish. 'My compendium contains a jade face roller, a DynaBand, Huna Ha breathing, my ballet shoes, headphones, and fresh lemons.'

'Self-care doesn't have to be anything big. I know people's minds often immediately think about trips to Thailand, spa days, and walks along the beach. Those things are great, but I'm also talking about spending two or three minutes just sitting and breathing, putting ten minutes aside to read a chapter of your favourite book, or going outside and looking at the wonders of Mother Nature, which you can still do even if you live in busy, built-up city.'

In some ways, lockdown has forced/helped us to think smaller and more sustainably in terms of self-care as well as wider living and working arrangements. It also seems to have given many people a newfound appreciation for nature. Maybe you've been fortunate enough to have outdoor space yourself and lovely local walks. Perhaps you're missing it and will prioritise your Nature for



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Sanity strategies as we find our new normal.

Has being 'allowed out' for daily exercise meant you were more likely to prioritise it every day than the old days of endless choices (and pressures)? Maybe a future strategy will be to have a spectrum of daily exercise as we reintegrate old favourites (swimming!) and also at *least* manage a local walk each day.

Remembering that even in the midst of crisis, we're more than the crisis, more than our struggles, can be transformative. This approach is core to my trauma work and in my own life.

It helps us connect with that part of ourselves that's limitless and expansive, even when our situation may feel limited and contracted. Noticing the abundance of nature, whether the first signs of growth or plants and trees coming into their fullness, helps us connect with that part of ourselves that is already whole and complete and that knows each next best step in order to grow to our full potential.

Walking the same lane each day means we get to see the same trees and hedgerows work their magic day by day. Cut back late winter but thriving in spite of everything.

You may miss travel and distant loved ones but what can you do, right here, right now? I've been bowled over (and often moved to tears) seeing the creative ways in which people are connecting online.

One of my favourites was a video of an 81-year-old man and his dance-offs with his little granddaughter every morning. They live across the street from each other and with hugs off limits, they connected in this completely novel way and probably got to know each other better. The daughter/mother who filmed it said she'd never seen her dad move like that but his love for his granddaughter shines through and seems to be giving him a new lease of life.

While Marilyn has ballet shoes and dance experience, we might *all* benefit from dancing around the home barefoot or in slippers – it's a wonderful way to behave our way into a different emotional state. Draw the curtains if need be or connect with others by sharing your efforts online.

When you think back to how you felt when we found out lockdown was imminent, what did you prioritise?

A neighbour leaving me a bag of flour revolutionised my life and I learned to bake a delicious vegan choc chip banana bread which has become a staple. My first ever effort at baking from scratch was painful but, once I learned to convert weights into volume (easier to replicate) and put my own spin on the recipe, it became a joy.

I've been able to apply this strategy that was embarrassingly new to me (actually following recipes) to make big improvements to my cooking in other ways.

I've also become more adept (in a cautious way) around the house. I've done things myself that, in the past, I'd have felt I needed to hire someone else for. What I learned on pre-lockdown beach clean-ups made me a bit more confident in terms of tackling some of the debris that had been left in the field (other bits are too big for me and will wait). I painted my front door. Where I planted six trees last September (with an enormous amount of help) at my tree-planting party, I've since planted another 15.

What healthier, more sustainable strategies have you been implementing? As well as doing new things, your self-care might improve by taking things off your plate.

'It can be easy to absorb other peoples' fears and concerns,' says Empowerment coach, Melissa Howard. 'Setting healthy boundaries around your time and attention is essential during times like this. To do this sensitively, simply utilise the 'Unfollow' button on social media or let friends and family know that you are taking a break from worrying news and will reconnect with them when things are calmer. When you prioritise your needs and fill up your tank, you'll be in a position to offer comfort and care to others when they need it most.' ■



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