

SELF-CARE PLANNING



The Dougy Center
The National Center for Grieving Children & Families

As a term, self-care can seem vague and a little fluffy for what we're really talking about when it comes to being able to sustain ourselves for working with grief. Once we move past social media's version of self-care with a lot of candles, motivating mottos in swirly font, and dried lavender bunches, there's some serious complexity to be explored. That exploring inspired us to think about a new way to conceptualize self-care. One which answers the question: Are my strategies effectively addressing what it is I'm actually needing?

Self-care can help us to:

A: Attend to thoughts and feelings

D: Distract from intensity (aka: take a break)

N: Nurture and nourish the body and brain

ADN isn't super catchy, so think of it as Choose Your Own Acronym — AND, DNA, or DAN. We've chosen AND because we like the idea of being able to do this work AND still have energy, presence, and eagerness for life.

Why is self-care important? Sitting with grieving children, teens, and adults is no small endeavor. It requires intense concentration, flexibility, the ability to withstand emotional intensity, and sometimes the patience to listen to stories that we find moving, worrisome, or even boring. Have you ever noticed that a group you didn't feel connected to leaves you more tired than one that held your attention? Or, that you are exhausted after a group that needed total focus and engagement? All of this can lead to fatigue, impatience, a sense of overwhelm, irritability, difficulty sleeping, and even hopelessness or helplessness. It's a lot. It's also why

a well-balanced AND plan for self-care can support us in this vital work.

Self-care is as unique as grief. What one person does to take an emotional or mental break might be the same thing someone else turns to for nourishment. There's no right or wrong way to categorize your self-care strategies. What's more important is working towards having balance among the three realms.

Keeping in mind that one person's distraction might be another's nourishment, here are some AND self-care ideas:

A: Attending to thoughts and feelings. This can ask us to shift how we think about self-care. Focusing attention on our thoughts and emotions can be challenging, the opposite of the pop culture concept of self-care as relaxation. Give yourself time to adjust to the idea of self-care as actual work.

Ways to Attend

- Ask someone you feel comfortable with to listen (without comment) to the thoughts and feelings you're carrying. If they are Dougy Center fluent, see if they will practice reflecting without asking questions!
- Once or twice a week set aside 10-20 minutes to write or draw the feelings you've had lately.



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Let yourself feel the emotion and notice any thoughts or judgments that come up about that feeling. Ex: *I'm frustrated that I've been sad lately. I should be over this.* Then write or draw a way to shift that negative judgment. Ex: *I am allowed to feel sad. This sadness is just one way I feel, not the only way I feel.*

- Do some movement while consciously connecting with your thoughts and emotions. This could be a walk, stretching, riding your bike, hiking, sitting in a chair while moving your arms and legs, or taking steady, focused breaths. With each movement, let yourself acknowledge thoughts and emotions you'd like to learn more about or discharge in some way. Ex: *Hello anger, what are you trying to teach me today?*

N: Nourishing and nurturing your body and brain.

Since self-care, along with life, can be hard work, nurturing and nourishing your physical, emotional, and mental self is essential.

Ways to Nourish

- Getting good quality sleep. A quick Google search offers a ton of suggestions for improving the quality and quantity of sleep. Here are a few: go to bed at the same time each night, ensure your sleeping space is dark, cool, and quiet, and limit screen time before bed.
- Hydration is necessary for every system in the body including your heart, brain, and muscles. There are some great phone apps that prompt you to drink water at intervals throughout the day.
- Nutrient dense food. Nourishing food is a great way to support both your body and brain. Depending on your dietary preferences, allergies, etc, you can research what foods you can eat that have high concentrations of important nutrients.

- Exercise and movement. There is plentiful research showing that regular and consistent movement is one of the best ways to keep not only our body, but also our brain healthy. Check out [Wendy Suzuki's TED Talk](#) about how exercise changes our brain function.

D: Distracting from the intensity (aka: taking a break).

This can be the favorite category of self-care because it's the one that takes the least amount of effort. A distraction

can be pretty much anything that takes your focus away from whatever is creating intensity or discomfort.

To make the most of your distraction strategies, it's helpful to do them consciously rather than

in a haze of habit. Ex: Said

to self: *Whoa. That conversation was super charged, I need to tune out for a moment so I'm going to check my phone.* It's also helpful to notice if your distraction strategies are attempts to numb out from an experience — these can include substances like alcohol, THC, nicotine, caffeine, and sugar.



Ways to Distract

- Watching TV and movies
- Reading a book
- Creativity (painting, playing music, writing, drawing, coloring)
- Playing video games
- Planning for the future
- Spending time with family, friends, and pets

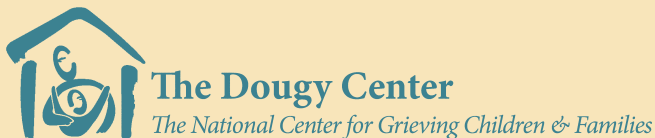
Facilitator Tips:

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Remember, there is a lot of overlap with these categories. What we've listed as a distraction could also be a way that you attend to your feelings or nurture your body and brain. It's the intent behind the strategy that means the most. If you're going to paint, pause and notice your intention — are you painting to shift your focus or to deepen your understanding of your emotions?

With these suggestions in mind, it's important to note that many factors go into whether practicing self-care is more or less accessible for people. Someone who works two jobs and has children may struggle to find the time, money, and space to make self-care part of their lives. For people with mobility difficulty, finding a movement-based self-care practice that's feasible might prove challenging. If making a self-care AND plan seems overwhelming, we invite you to pick just one of these options (or one you create) to focus on for a month. Can you find 15 minutes each week to try out that particular strategy? If you're having a tough time coming up with self-care options, your group coordinator and fellow facilitators can be great sources for ideas. If even with a self-care practice you find yourself really struggling, please reach out for help. Your Coordinator can talk with you about community resources and other options for additional support.

What will be on your AND-DNA-DAN plan? We are continually learning new self-care strategies and would love for you to share some of yours at your next pre- or post-meeting.



Our Mission

The Dougy Center provides support in a safe place where children, teens, young adults, and their families grieving a death can share their experiences. Our Pathways program provides support for families living with an advanced serious illness.

The Dougy Center Bookstore/Resources

The Dougy Center has been helping children, teens, young adults and their parents cope with death since 1982. Our practical, easy-to-use materials are based on what we have learned from more than 45,000 Dougy Center participants. To order online, visit dougy.org or tdcbookstore.org, or call 503.775.5683.