SELF-CARE IRL

We hear a lot about the importance of self-care, but what does it really mean? Some interpret self-care as extravagant experiences—massages, manicures, spa days—which can make self-care feel inaccessible if you don't have time or money to spare. But in fact, Miriam-Webster defines self-care simply as "care for oneself." The Oxford dictionary spells it out a little more: "The practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress." Using this definition, we can see that self-care is easier than we might think. In fact, you might already be practicing self-care, without calling it that! Let's look at some common forms of self-care in real life ("IRL"). Think about which ones you could add to your life and which ones you already use but could protect in your schedule so they don't get cut when you're busy or stressed.

CARING FOR YOUR BODY

There are some very basic elements of care that a body needs for a person to achieve success, yet these are often the things we sacrifice in times of stress. Namely, eating regular, healthy meals; drinking enough water; getting proper sleep; and exercise.

One form of self-care would be to prioritize these things even MORE when you're stressed. Rather than skipping a meal or a workout or skimping on sleep, understand that your body actually needs these things more during times of stress. Use this knowledge to protect your meals, water consumption, sleep, and exercise. If you struggle to remember to eat or drink water, think about scheduling them in or setting a reminder alarm. If cooking or exercising is an activity that brings you joy, prioritize that activity even during your busy times to engage in self-care.

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

Many work-efficiency experts agree that having a cluttered, disorganized work space makes you work less efficiently. You are more easily distracted (by all the junk around you), less creative (because your brain can't focus due to the clutter, whether you realize it or not), and your productivity may be slowed down by difficulty in finding things you need.

We can apply this logic to our everyday living spaces as well. One form of self-care is to simply take some time to clean and organize your space. Another necessity that people often don't make time for or cut out when they are busy is taking breaks. Our brains need breaks to work at their best. Taking a break can refresh your motivation, recharge your creativity, and boost your overall productivity. Breaks are especially helpful if you change your environment or take on a less thoughtful task. The Pomodoro system is one strategy to help make sure you get regular study breaks by setting alarms or reminders. Learn more about the Pomodoro system on the back of this handout.

INTERPERSONAL SELF-CARE

Setting boundaries is a HUGE form of self-care. This can be boundaries with other people, boundaries within your schedule, or boundaries about what you are and are not willing to give up when you're pushed for time. Protect your time to allow yourself to do things that bring you joy. Sometimes we need to prioritize ourselves, and saying no to people when you are unable to take on more is another way of caring for yourself. Try not to let this practice make you feel guilty. Finally, asking for what you need from other people is a form of self-care. Whether that means you need more help from a collaborator, someone to help you stay accountable for your self-care practices, or someone to talk to in times of stress, asking for what you need is a valuable skill.

These are only a few options for everyday, realistic self-care. Think about self-care as caring for yourself and protecting one's own well-being and happiness, and consider what other options you have for implementing self-care. Everyone's self-care practices are unique, so try not to compare yourself with others and focus on what works for you!

TIPS FOR PRACTICING SELF-CARE IRL

ASSESS YOUR SELF-CARE

What are some ways you could improve your self-care? Consider the list below and circle any that you feel you could utilize more. Then write next to it one way you can try to use this more.

Regular, healthy eating

Exercising

Prioritizing time for activities that bring you joy

Drinking enough water

Clean/organize your space

Saying no to other people

Getting proper sleep

Take regular breaks

Asking for what you need

WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY?

What are some healthy activities that bring you joy? Take a minute to identify some, and then think about how you could incorporate them into your life regularly. Are there any barriers that prevent you from doing these activities? If so, how can you remove some of the barriers?

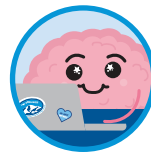## TRY THE POMODORO TECHNIQUE!

The Pomodoro Technique helps you manage time more effectively by alternating segments of focused work with frequent short study breaks. Give it a try!

1. Pick a task

2. Set a 25-minute timer

3. Work on your task until the time is up

4. Take a 5-minute break

5. Every 4 pomodoros, take a longer 15-30 minute break