HELLYEAH SELF CARE

By Meg-John Barker
CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Seriously, Self Care?
3. Audre Lorde
4. Self Care as Political Warfare
5. ""
6. Self Criticism Culture & Selfcare
7. So What Is Selfcare?
8. Meeting Our Basic Needs
9. Cutting Down Selfcruelty
10. Kind Self Care
11. Just Being
12. Reflective Selfcare
13. Different Things For Different People/Times
14. Balance
15. But... I Don't Have The Time/Money
16. But... It Feels Selfish
17. But... I Beat Myself Up For Not Doing It (Properly)
18. Further Resources
I’m writing this zine because things in the world have got really tough right now. I’m guessing they’ll still be tough by the time you’re reading it. We’re all reacting in various ways...

I’m completely overwhelmed. I can’t even.

I’m so shocked that it could come to this.

You’re shocked? Are you kidding me? Many of us have been dealing with this shit our whole lives.

We don’t have the luxury to be overwhelmed. We need to do something now.

Violent protest is the only way.

We have to show them that we’re better than that.

My people were already precarious. Now it’s literally life & death.

I lost my whole family. I just can’t when they voted for this.
SERIOUSLY, SELF CARE?

You might think that self care should be our last priority right now.

We need to do something, not take a bloody bubble bath!

Terrible things are happening to people. I need to focus on them, not me.

I’m finally realising how much people like me, & the systems that privilege us, are the problem. I don’t deserve it.

Everyone looking out for number one is what got us into this mess.
I keep returning to the words of the Black feminist writer & activist, Audre Lorde.

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence. It is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.
SELF CARE AS...

LOOKING AFTER MYSELF MEANS THAT I SURVIVE IN A WORLD THAT DOESN'T WANT PEOPLE LIKE ME TO SURVIVE RIGHT NOW.

CARING FOR MYSELF DEMONSTRATES THAT PEOPLE LIKE ME ARE VALUABLE EVEN IF WE'RE BEING TREATED AS THOUGH WE WERE DISPOSABLE.

SELF CARE GIVES ME THE ENERGY TO RESIST.

WHEN I LOOK AFTER MYSELF I HAVE MORE ENERGY TO LOOK AFTER OTHERS.

PAUSING FOR SELF CARE MEANS I PICK MY BATTLES MORE CAREFULLY SO I HAVE THE TIME & RESOURCES TO ENGAGE IN WAYS THAT ARE MOST LIKELY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
POLITICAL WARFARE

Looking after myself means I can see the ways I contribute to the problems without crumbling under the weight of that knowledge. Then it’s much easier to start doing things differently.

When I care for myself I notice I’m much more able to hear when people point things out about my behaviour instead of instantly getting defensive.

Selfcare means I have the time & energy to protest—not just when the issues impact me directly.

Caring for myself gives me more empathy for other people who are struggling with this stuff, just like I am.

Could we create a ripple effect where we all start being more selfcaring? What might that achieve?
CRITICISM CULTURE & SELF CARE

Finally self-care can help us to personally & politically resist the culture of self criticism - all the messages we get that there's something wrong with us that needs fixing (to sell us things & to make sure we keep looking INWARDS instead of OUTWARDS). It does this in many ways...

Learning how to be KIND instead of CRITICAL

More able to notice TOXIC MESSAGES, INEQUALITIES, etc.

More able to connect with others

Less focused on self-monitoring - more able to turn out towards the world

Lower defences don't have to be perfect

Able to be vulnerable

Spending far less energy on 'self-improvement' - so more to offer

Less toxic shame & fear of it being triggered by others

See my social mindfulness ZINE FOR MORE ON THIS
So What Is Self Care?

We can trace the roots of self care to many different times and places, with different understandings of it. For example...

- Black Feminist ideas of compassionate resistance
- Buddhist practices to enhance compassion and dissolve ego (no self/other split)
- Ancient Greek practices to develop well being & self knowledge
- Foucault’s technologies to consciously construct our selves

Let’s look at 5 meanings in more depth...

- Meeting our basic needs
- Cutting down self cruelty
- Kind self care
- Just being
- Reflective self care

All linked of course.
MEETING OUR BASIC NEEDS

This is the idea that there's some basic mind-body stuff that provides a good foundation for everything else. You might've seen checklists like this...

**Feeling rough?**

- Have you had enough sleep? **No** → Take a nap/make sure you get a full 8 hours tonight/check out sleep advice online.
- Have you eaten in the last few hours? **No** → Have a snack or a meal as soon as you can.
- Are you physically well right now? **Yes**
  - Have you drunk any water recently? **No** → See a doctor/take any medication you need/prioritise rest & recuperation as much as possible.
  - Have you washed today? **No** → Have a drink of water as soon as possible.
- Have you been out & moved your body? **Yes**
  - Have you washed today? **Yes**
    - Have you been out & moved your body? **No** → Go outside somewhere pleasant &/or have a quick dance or similar if you can.
    - Have you washed today? **No** → You could always make your own to match your own mind/body & life better.
CUTTING DOWN SELF CRUELTY

It's so tempting in our culture to do the opposite of self-care, especially when we're not feeling good about ourselves. What things do you do that are self cruel? & how could you avoid them? Again, everyone's answers will be different.

CRUEL → KIND

I check my phone last thing at night when I'm really tired already.

I leave my phone downstairs so I can't check it. It's much easier to get to sleep.

I stay in bed till the last moment, so every day starts with stress.

I give myself 30 minutes in a cafe before work. It's easier to get up for something nice like that & I start the day calmer.

I follow people on social media who make me so angry!

I've unfollowed everyone I find tough. I read diverse views in different ways now & on my terms.

I go round & round in my head thinking of things I should've done better.

When that happens I message a friend who gets it & we support each other through.

I try to do all the activism in order to feel good enough & I burn out.

I'm trying to focus on what I'm skilled at & what I enjoy instead of doing all the things.

What about you?
KIND SELF CARE

In such a self-critical culture, kindness can be a major act of resistance. It demonstrates to us that we're worthy of kindness no matter what & it's a good way to practise for being kinder to others. Here's some ideas...

**Daily Kindness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Weds</th>
<th>Thurs</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Plan one small thing per day that's deliberately kind:
- Watching the birds
- Hot chocolate
- Your favourite sandwich for lunch
- Time with a pet
- Listening to favourite music
- Cute animals online
- Re-reading a book you love
- Skyping a friend...

Last thing at night remember three things you're pleased with yourself for from the day.
Really small things are great.

Join or set up an online (or offline) group to share kind ideas, to offer kindness to each other, or to get together & do kind things.

Make your own journal or mini-zine of small things that lift your mood e.g. songs, items of clothing you wear, quotes, images, etc...

Look at the year ahead with kindness in mind - what things could you plan in that are good for you? E.g. kind people, places, events or activities? What less kind things could you let go of over time?

Practise noticing when you're being unkind to yourself & trying to be understanding of that.

Take photographs or keep objects related to things that make you smile, good memories, or kind things that people say to you.
JUST BEING

This is the idea that it’s useful to spend some time ‘being’ not ‘doing’ - sometimes called mindfulness or being present. It’s a good way to get to know ourselves & our habits better, to show respect to our feelings (instead of trying to get rid of them) & to counter the cultural idea that we’re only OK if we’re producing something or doing something active. Here’s some ways to practice ‘being’...

5 minutes with your favourite hot drink really focusing on the experience of drinking it. Coming back to the sensations if you get distracted.

There are loads of free audio meditations you can try online & through apps. Find one that works for you.

10 minutes on a park bench just listening to the sounds around you.

Stretching, yoga, or similar for a few minutes. Focus on how your body feels.

Bath or shower, just pay attention to the sensation of the water.

When a strong feeling hits give yourself time to feel how it is in your body instead of carrying on, distracting, or trying to get rid of it.

3 minute breathing space a few times a day - just notice the feel of breathing.

See my staying with feelings zine for more on this.
REFLECTIVE SELF CARE

IT'S ALSO GREAT TO TAKE SOME TIME FOR REFLECTING: UNDERSTANDING OUR PATTERNS, CONSIDERING OUR VALUES, PRIORITISING WHAT TO DO, ETC. HERE'S SOME WAYS TO DO THIS...

WRITING ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS, OR CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SIDES OF YOURSELF

PEER-TO-PEER LISTENING — BOTH TAKE TURNS TO TALK ABOUT WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND (YOU CAN GET BOOKS/TRAINING ON HOW TO DO THIS)

HAVE A WANDER TO WONDER—THINKING THROUGH A SPECIFIC THING

JOINING OR CREATING A SUPPORTIVE GROUP AROUND AN ISSUE OR READING GROUP

MAKING A SPECIFIC TIME IN THE DAY, OR WEEK FOR REFLECTION

HAVING A THERAPIST, COACH OR MENTOR — FIND A GOOD FIT FOR YOU & CHECK OUT LOW COST OPTIONS LIKE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

YOU COULD KEEP A NOTE OF THINGS YOU WANT TO REFLECT ON, OR CHALLENGING STUFF THAT COMES UP, IN BETWEEN.
DIFFERENT THINGS... FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE

There's no one-size-fits-all kind of self-care. It's about finding out what works for you, & in what situations. For example...

- Totally restores me: 2 hours of Netflix under the duvet leaves me feeling scratchy & irritable.
- Helps me realise we're all struggling & get support: Going to the pub with my mates is too noisy & alcohol isn't good for me.
- Great when I'm all rewired up: Chatting about world situation online is overwhelming if I'm already feeling bad.
- Helps me feel grounded & check in with myself: Meditation really struggles with self-critical thoughts which make me feel worse.
- Brilliant! Solidarity, mutual support & making a difference: No thanks, going on a March is terrible! Crowds, noise & often inaccessible for me. I'd rather do other kinds of activism.

No right way. Be curious & find what works for you.
BALANCE

It's a good idea to balance the different kinds of self-care because it's hard to do one without the others. For example, it's tough to be kind if your basic needs aren't met. It's difficult to self-reflect if you never pause & take time to notice your experience.

Here's some self-care balances to consider...

Kind

Reflective

With Others

Alone

Getting Something

Giving Something

Doing (Active)

(Just) Being

External Focus (World)

Internal Focus (Me)

Moving

Still

Ones I Find Difficult

Ones I Find Easy

Taking in Information

Taking Information

Putting Out Information/Creating

Offline

On the Spot When Things Get Hard

Online

Planned in Advance

Experiment

You could also think about what self-care works for you in different situations so you have an idea next time you're energised, tired, sad, drawn into conflict, etc.
BUT... I DON'T HAVE THE TIME/MONEY

Let's end by considering 3 reasons we often struggle with self-care:
• First our society is set up so those who need self care most often have least support, time, & resources for it.
• The examples in the zine are as no/low cost as possible.
• Remember you don't have to do everything.
• You could come up with a realistic plan for your life, eg:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAILY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sitting with my cup of tea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily kindness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEKLY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See friends at least twice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the sea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTHLY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet with my group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARLY</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local college course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week away relaxing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perhaps you can think of ways you could help others to get the time/resources/energy for self care:
• Looking after their people/animals to give them time.
• Giving up your seat so they get to sit.
• Offering support or doing listening volunteering.
• Giving practical help based on skills you have.
• Amplifying their voice/s online.
• Taking some of their battles on (if they'd like that).
• Learning about being a helpful ally.
• Creating resources.
• Setting up groups.
But... it feels selfish

As Audre Lorde's quote suggests, we get strong messages that self care is 'self indulgent' & that that isn't okay.

The oxygen mask applies here. On a plane you're instructed to secure your own mask before helping somebody else.

We're generally far better at caring for others if we care for ourselves because...

- We have more energy
- We see the situation more clearly instead of going on autopilot, jumping to conclusions, or exacerbating problems
- We're more likely to know our limits & not burn out
- We won't get resentful
- We're modelling that everyone deserves care instead of acting like some people don't need it
- We're treating ourselves as fellow human beings instead of acting like a saviour (demeaning)
- We'll be better able to handle criticisms or unforeseen problems

Self care is an act of resistance against cultural messages that certain categories of people should serve others, be valued less, put others first, protect others, or do all the emotional labour. It insists we're no more or less valuable than anyone else.

I'm OK - You're OK
BUT... I BEAT MYSELF UP FOR NOT DOING IT (PROPERLY)

DON'T WORRY, MOST OF US DO THIS TOO!
IT'S TESTAMENT TO THE TERRIFYING SUCCESS OF OUR CURRENT CULTURE THAT EVEN SELF CARE BECOMES A THING TO CRITICISE OURSELVES ABOUT...

I'M NOT MINDFUL ENOUGH

I'M SHIT AT MEDITATION

I TELL MY CLIENTS TO DO SELF CARE BUT I NEVER DO ANY MYSELF

WHAT I DO DOESN'T REALLY COUNT

I JUST KEEP BURNING MYSELF OUT & IT'S ALL MY OWN FAULT

AGAIN IT'S AN ACT OF RESISTANCE TO BE KIND AT SUCH TIMES

- TRY TO CHOOSE FORMS OF SELF CARE YOU FIND EASY ENOUGH TO DO
- EXPLORE WHERE THESE MESSAGES THAT WE'RE NOT OK OR DESERVING COME FROM & GET SUPPORT WITH THEM
- GENTLY LAUGH AT THE RIDICULOUSNESS OF BEING UNKIND ABOUT OUR STRUGGLES TO BE KIND!
- SHARE THESE STRUGGLES & VULNERABILITIES WITH TRUSTED OTHERS (WHO DOUBTLESS STRUGGLE TOO)

YOU ARE OK

YOU DO DESERVE SELF CARE
You can find my other zines at megjohnbarker.com, and there's more on self care in my book *Rewriting the Rules*.

Justin Hancock and I are creating a 'Make Your Own Self Care Guide' to include over on megjohnandjustin.com. Meanwhile you can check out our other 'Make Your Own' guides there.

Some useful books about things in this zine include:

Sara Ahmed talks about Audre Lorde and self care here: