

Who Has Time for Self-Care Anyway?

How Modern Day Mom Culture Has Ruined Self-Care and What You Should Do To "Fill Your Cup."



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Chapters

ONE	<i>The Day I Fell Apart</i>	3
TWO	<i>What's the Big Deal About Self-Care Anyway?</i>	6
THREE	<i>Simple Self-Care</i>	10
FOUR	<i>The Cup and It's Spoons</i>	13
FIVE	<i>Spending Your Time Well</i>	17

Chapter One

The Day I Fell Apart

“Amanda, you talk a lot about finding time just for me, but I don’t know how to do it! I don’t have family nearby, my husband works long hours, and we don’t have a lot of extra money to spend on babysitters. I know it’s important, but I just don’t know how to do it!” -Stephanie

Sound familiar?

Yep, I get it. I’m in this exact same boat.

When I became a Mom I *struggled* with self care.

Struggled.

You see, I was just like Stephanie up there.

Being a military spouse, I was used to being independent and managing things on my own.

But then enter a baby...and I was lost.

We had just moved to a new state and I didn't know anyone...no family nearby...and my husband was gone most of the time.

I was truly on my own with a 3 month old baby.

Self-care was the LAST thing on my mind and there was no way to take time away from my baby.

At first, it wasn't that big of a deal.

I was able to manage the day to day feedings, changes, lack of sleep. But eventually it started to wear me down.

I became angry and resentful, especially towards my husband and my baby boy.

It wasn't pretty.

Then one day my husband was late from work and he missed dinner and missed putting his son to bed. He actually didn't see him at all that day.

And I LOST IT.

He walked in after a long day and saw his wife sitting on the living room chair bawling.

I was at the end of my rope and I just couldn't take it anymore.

I was lonely, sad, and frustrated at my life.

This wasn't what I expected when I became a Mom.

I cried and yelled for hours.

I had never felt so lost.

I didn't know what made me happy, I had lost touch with my long-distance friends, my marriage was suffering, and I was miserable.

I had lost my identity.

But there were a few things I knew for sure....

1. I couldn't change where I lived.
2. I couldn't change my husband's job or how often he had to travel.
3. I couldn't change the fact that my baby needed me all the time.

But I could change the way I coped with it all.

That's when I built my self-care plan.

This little plan, along with a few other mindshift changes helped to pull me out of the funk and to start living a more joyful life for both me and my whole family.

And it worked...

I still didn't have a lot of support, so I had to learn how to build self-care into my life, even if I never got a break from my baby.

After a few short weeks of being intentional about my own self-care, I could feel the fog start to lift.

I felt happier and more productive than I've felt since becoming a mom.

It felt like a bit of a miracle!

Since then, we've added one more boy to our family and we've moved 5 more times, each time having to start over with our support systems.

Parenting without support can be difficult, but it's 100% possible to build self-care into your life...even if you can't get time away from your kids.

In this book, I'll share with you my exact steps to finding joy and pleasure in your every day life.

I'll also bust some of the big myths Moms tell themselves about why self-care isn't achievable for them.

At the end of this book, you'll have everything you need to build a personalized self-care plan just for you...even if you think you won't have the time.

Chapter 2

What's The Big Deal About Self-Care Anyway?

Recently, someone asked a group of Moms on Facebook why they don't do self-care.

There were over 300 responses, most of which went something like this.

"I have 4 kids under the age of 5, I don't have time for self-care!"

"I'm the mom to a special-needs kid, I can't put myself first!"

"My husband works a lot and we don't live near family, so I don't have any support to do self-care."

"I work full-time and I can't take off work, and I don't want to miss any more time with my kids than I already do."

Every single one of these reasons are valid reasons for not taking time away to do self-care.

We're busy, and a lot of us are parenting without a lot of support.

But those women have it all wrong about self-care.

The biggest problem with the modern day idea of self-care, is that we're asking Moms to take time out of their day to focus solely on themselves.

I've seen memes on social media touting self-care ideas like staying in bed all day, or binge watching Netflix, and not doing anything all day...all just for you.

As a busy mom, those memes aren't realistic, they aren't doable.

And, they're actually causing more Moms to stop trying to add some self-care into their lives because it's not achievable.

So why even try?

Not going to lie here...that makes me mad.

Somehow we've taken the idea of self-care and made it into something bigger than it has to be.

It's become something only privileged Moms with money for babysitters and a supportive family near by can achieve.

But, self-care can be...and should be...for *everyone*.

Self-care doesn't have to be that involved. You don't have to take hours out of your day to "take care of you".

All that self-care, at it's most simplistic, is intentionally doing activities that make you happy.

That's it, really.

It's that simple.

Just do things that make you happy.

It's going for a run because you love the feeling of the pavement under your feet. It's buying yourself flowers because they make you smile. It's picking up a craft project and getting lost creating something beautiful. It's basking in the sunlight while your kids play around you.

Seriously, it's that simple.

The problem is, we think self-care means time away from our family.

When we think of self-care our mind immediately starts thinking of everything we need to do in order to get time alone. Self-care literally becomes one more thing on our to do list, one more thing we have to coordinate.

And if you happen to be one of the Moms who does plan out time without the kids, when you get stressed and busy, self-care takes a back burner to the things that are more important.

It's hardly ever a consistent thing.

Because you're a Mom, you're busy. You have so much on your to-do list, it's easy not go on that run you're yearning for. You don't take the time to dust off that craft project. Flowers aren't as important as all the other things on your list.

In the end, self-care will always take a backseat to your family and your tasks.

We as a culture make self-care too complicated.

In the following chapters I'll help you simplify your self-care so that it's actually doable, but before we go there, there's one big questions that must be discussed.

What's the big deal with self-care anyway?

When we focus on others instead of ourselves, we lose track of who we are, what our priorities are and can lead us to feeling unfulfilled, and like we're living our lives for others.

Eventually a lack of self-care can lead to feelings of anger and sadness, like it did for me when I was a new mom.

It can also lead to insomnia, anxiety, resentment, and illness.

This is why we say that self-care is important for moms. We're the caretakers and we can not take care of the people in our lives if we're holding onto resentment and anger, and walking around tired and sick.

Now, one thing I do know is that our children need Moms who are both mentally and physically healthy. Without self-care, we can't be the best version of ourselves for our kids.

But in reality, we need self-care because we are humans that deserve it. I recently ran across this quote that sums it up nicely.

"I used to think self-care was important because I can't be a good wife and mother if I am not taking care of myself. Now I realize that I deserve to have my own needs met just so I can be a healthy and happy human being, aside from my roles of caretaking for others as a mother, wife and therapist. I am worthy of love and attention just simply because I'm alive, and I have needs that must be met so I can function." — Laura Reagan, LCSW-C, Therapy Chat

This is why we need self-care. Yes, it's important so that we can take care of our kids, but we need self-care because we deserve it.

That's right...You deserve it. **So let's talk about how to get it!**

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That's right...You deserve it. So let's talk about how to get it!

Since I just harped on and on about why the modern day idea of self-care is off of base, let's dig deep into what self-care really is and how to build it into your every day life.

Chapter 3

Simple Self-Care

Self-care. It's a word that's used a lot around the parenting world these days.

"Mom! Take time for you!"

"Go out with your girlfriends!"

"Make sure to get in that ME time that you desperately need!"

It can be annoying to be preached at to take a break when you're juggling kids, a massive to-do list, and just look at that mountain of laundry over there!

But here are a few truths about all that self-care.

Those parenting bloggers are right, we do need to take care of ourselves, it's super important. Self-care doesn't have to be hard to do.

After being told to take a break and relax over...and over...and over again, it can put a bad taste in our mouth.

I know you work hard and you're doing your best to take care of everyone in your family.

That's what Moms do.

It's hard to find regular time away just for yourself.

Before we get into how self-care relates to yelling, I want you to remove any ideas that you have about self-care from your mind.

You do NOT need to get away from your kids to build self-care into your life. (we'll talk more about that in a bit).

You do NOT need a huge support system in place so you can take care of yourself.

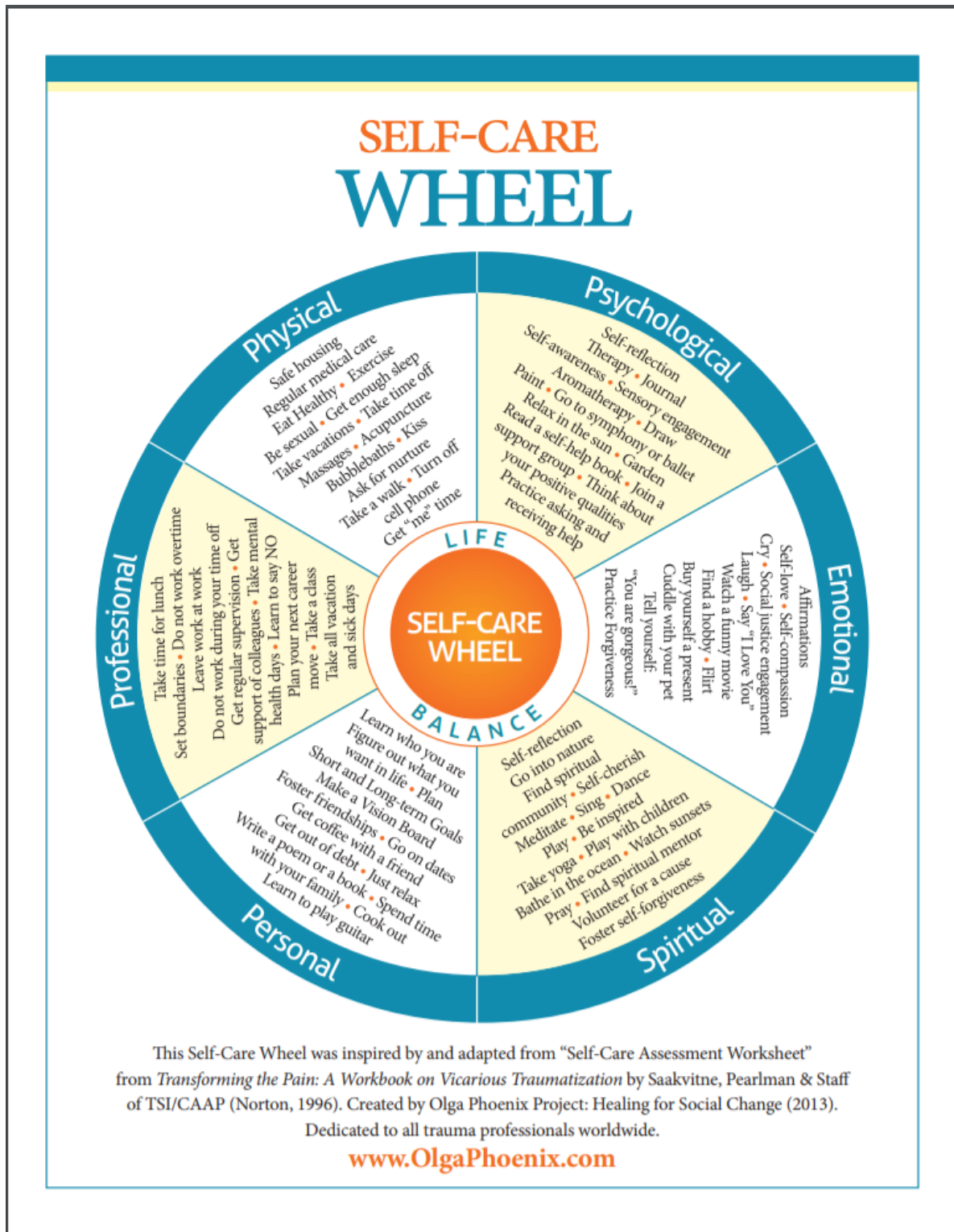
Self-care is NOT a treat or reward.

Erase everything you think you know about self-care, and start over.

This is what self-care is...

Self-care is about taking care of your whole self, emotionally, physically, spiritually, psychologically, professionally, and personally.

Take a look at this self-care wheel (click it to view bigger, download, and/or print)



My first thought when I saw this wheel was, *“yeah right, like I can do all that.”*

I felt helpless and overwhelmed by it. I almost threw it away.

But when I really studied it, I realized that I can do a little bit of all of it, and MOST of it does not require being alone.

I can:

Play, sing, dance with my kids (spiritual)

Make goals and foster friendships (personal)

Take a class...like the online photography class I took last month (occupational)

Take a bubble bath after the kids are in bed (physical)

Think and self-reflect in that bubble bath (psychological)

Watch a funny movie, with or without kids (emotional)

See, I just hit every part of the self-care wheel, and most of it doesn't require a babysitter or hours away from my kids.

Self-care is not about finding time away from your family, it's using the time you already have to build self-care in.

It is possible to incorporate self-care into your daily life without babysitters or a large group of people who can support you.

Self-care is about filling your daily life with things that makes your heart sing.

It's about intentionally focusing on things that bring you joy...and being grateful for them.

But there's two big problems:

1. Finding the time to do these things, and
2. What if you can't remember what you like to do?

Chapter 4

The Cup and It's Spoons

"You must fill your cup first!" - Mom bloggers everywhere

I know it's a tired analogy, but I actually like visualizing a cup when talking about self-care because it's true, you can't give from your cup if your cup is empty.

When your cup runs dry, you're depleted, angry, resentful, and unhappy.

So it's up to us to fill our cup...it's no one else's job but our own.

We can sometimes blame others for not helping us fill our cups, but the truth is that they have their own cup to fill. You must be in charge of your own cup.

We talk on and on about how we should fill our cup, but we don't ever give people the tools they need to get their cup full.

I can give you ideas, like the ones I gave you in the last chapter, but the real key is how do we find the TIME to fill our cup?

What you need are tools. You need a tablespoon and a measuring cup

So imagine your self-care cup sitting right in front of you, and next to your cup are a tablespoon and a measuring cup.

These are the only things you get to use to fill your cup.

Out of the two, my guess is that you'd like to take that measuring cup and fill that sucker up and chunk the tablespoon. I mean a tablespoon is small!

But that measuring cup isn't something you get everyday, it can be elusive and hard to find.

It's a rare treat....but we'll talk more about that in a bit.

The little spoon that could.

Now tablespoons? Tablespoons are always around. Just pick one up, dump it in, and make a little splash.

One tablespoon by itself won't add much to your cup, but 10 might.

Tablespoons are all about doing things, tiny little things, that bring you joy. Things that can be done at home surrounded by your family, in the car, or out running errands.

One little spoon might not make a huge impact, but together they can fill your whole day with joy.

Here are a few of my tablespoons.

Going outside for a breath of fresh air

Having dance parties with my kids

Drinking a hot cup of coffee

Eating ice cream

Playing tag with my kids

Listening to my favorite music

Gardening on a sunny day

Driving with the windows down on a nice day

Each thing on my list is small yet actionable. They are specific things I can choose to do whenever I feel like it.

The best thing about tablespoons?

You can do them with your kids! And you don't need to plan time away.

Enjoy baking? Bake a cake with your kids.

Love gardening? Hand out the trowels and get digging with your kids.

Love to color? Grab crayons and coloring books for everyone!

No one said self-care has to be done without the kids. You adore your children, do something fun with them and fill your cup at the same time!

Tablespoons are just small splashes of joy.

The important thing to remember is that you're doing them, *recognize how great it is*, and how much joy it brings to your world.

Savor that ice cream or cup of coffee.

Be gracious when you're standing outside taking in that deep breath of fresh air.

Laugh and bask in the joy of playing with your kids.

Remind yourself how great it is to be able to do these things.

Do these things intentionally and be grateful for the ability to do them. This is how you infuse your life with joy.

The goal is to be aware of the little things and to be gracious for them. They maybe small little things, but they can pack a powerful punch, especially when combined together.

When I was getting out of the funk, I took the time and wrote down all the little tablespoons I did that day along with my 3 things I was grateful for. It was a nice way to end the day.

The Big Ol' Cup

A measuring cup is still a little cup, but it carries a much bigger load than a little tablespoon.

But, measuring cups are harder to find than tablespoons, especially for the working mom or the mom of littles.

You see...measuring cups are time away from your kids. A time when you can be more than just Mom. A time when you get to do whatever the heck you wanna do.

A measuring cup is freedom, a breath of fresh air.

I firmly believe that everyone needs a break to clear their heads. So, I highly suggest finding time every once in awhile when you can use a measuring cup and get some alone time.

I've heard all the excuses under the sun for not taking time away. Heck, I've even used them. These are my excuses:

My husband is in the military and he's gone a lot. My family is thousands of miles away from us, and since we move so much, I don't have a support network of local friends. I don't have anyone I trust with my kids. I love being a Mom, I don't really need that much time away.

These things are still facts in my life, but I've learned how to find time for me, in spite of the obstacles.

In order to become the Mom my kids needed me to be, I had to. My tablespoons weren't doing enough to keep my cup full. I was still giving faster from my cup than I could fill it up.

I had to start using measuring cups.

I know it's hard to find the time away, but here are a few ideas for you.

Switch babysitting days with a friend. You watch her kids one morning, and she watches them another.

Working Mom? Take your lunch break away from your desk. Find a spot outside or in a quiet place that's just for you.

A good friend of mine earned some extra cash selling products from her home and hired a babysitter who comes over for a few hours each week.

Working Mom? Try to leave work a few minutes early once a week and have a few minutes to yourself before meeting the kids.

Split time with your husband so you both get alone time and time with the kids. My husband and I do this on weekend days when we don't have to be anywhere.. He gets a few hours with the kids while I'm gone and then we switch and he gets a few hours off.

Now that you have some ideas on how to find some time in your day just for you, let's talk about how to make the most of your me-time so you're not wasting it by doing things that drain you.

Chapter 5

Spending Your Time Well

I'm sorry, but unless you're a foodie who LOVES the grocery store, grocery shopping alone is not self-care.

Now, I like a solo trip to the store just as much as the next Mom, but let's not kid ourselves here. Do you really like going to the grocery store? Is it somewhere you'd go just to hang out.

Maybe it is. Maybe you're a foodie like my friend Melissa, and you like going to the grocery store, but for most of us the grocery store isn't really our favorite place to be.

So let's stop calling a kid-free visit to the grocery store self-care. M'kay?

Now, before you roll your eyes and get mad at me for trying to take away your solo trips to the grocery store, hear me out.

You should absolutely go grocery shopping alone, if you want to, but don't call it self-care.

Don't pretend that you're really taking care of yourself. Girl, you're still doing chores that are taking care of your family.

Don't you want to spend your time doing something that actually brings you joy, that rejuvenates your spirit?

When you do those things, you're filling your cup to the point that you CAN take care of your family, by taking care of you first.

The more self-care you do, the more you'll discover that you're more playful, more present, and less frazzled and overwhelmed.

So, what can you do during that time that's just for you?

Well, that takes us to problem #1.

Many Moms just don't know what to do with their alone time, besides run errands.

I know what that's like because I've been there...

I remember it like it was yesterday.

It was 5:30-ish-pm and my husband walked in the door after a long day of work.

He looked at me and saw his once lovely wife, covered in spit-up, hair in a not-so-fashionable Mom bun, with a crying baby on my hip, with a whining toddler wrapped around my legs, cementing me into place. The house in disarray.

Tears welled up in my eyes and my chin started quivering the moment I saw my husband in the doorway. I was in the middle of a full-blown meltdown.

He took one look at me and said "Go, just go. I got this. Get in the car and I'll see you in a few hours."

Thank you dear husband, thank you...

After a quick 5-minute spit shine and a new clean-ish shirt, I pulled out of my driveway, leaving the chaos behind.

Deep breaths, deep breaths.

With tears in my eyes, I drove to the end of my street and stopped. Where was I going anyway?

I have been graciously given a few hours to spend on my own and I had no idea where to go.

I looked left and right, trying to decide which way to turn the car when...HONK!...apparently, the angry driver behind me was tired of my indecision.

So, I turned left and went where all mothers are supposed to go.

Target.

I spent a few hours perusing the aisles, sipping my Starbucks mocha frappuccino, and picking up a few things the kids needed.

I didn't see much that I just had to have, so I meandered, by myself.

Lonely.

As I walked back into my house later that evening, I didn't feel fulfilled or rested. I was still tired and upset and didn't feel any better than before I left.

I sat down on the couch and cried...again. That's when it hit me. I had wasted a precious gift of time that my husband had so graciously offered me.

I was sad. More than that, I was mad.

I was mad that I had let myself get lost in motherhood.

Mad that I had lost grip of all the things that made me me.

I was just a Mom, wife, homemaker and nothing else.

Where was that woman who loved to run outside in the fresh morning air? Where was that woman who enjoyed having intelligent conversations with her friends? Where was the woman who loved learning at museums and getting lost in a great book?

Now, I'm the woman who can't even figure out where to spend one kid-free hour. I had lost touch with the very things that made me me.

I loved my life, but I needed more. My family needed more.

There, sitting in our dark living room with tears running down my face, knew I needed to find me again.

So I ran down to our small office and pulled out my old dusty journal and started writing.

I began that journal entry with the phrase, *If I could do anything I wanted what would I do?*

I wrote and wrote and wrote. For hours it seemed, page after page, I wrote out all of my dreams and desires.

When I was done, I took a deep breath and went back to page one and reread my raw emotion and inspiring dreams.

Reading back over that journal entry, a few things came to light.

I could see that my soul needed me to get outside, treat myself, and to be around good people. I was also reminded of long forgotten hobbies, such as knitting and reading.

Frantically, I tore a page out of my journal and wrote: Things I Love To Do at the top and made a list.

It started with these:

- spend time outside
- run
- treat myself with good chocolate and wine
- walk around a bookstore
- read an actual real book
- have a cup of coffee with a friend
- sit and knit with the old ladies in a local yarn store

My list went on, as I wrote out every thing, little or big, that brought me joy. I tucked that list away and two years later, I still use it often.

Whenever I find myself with alone time, I can go to my list and do something that fills my soul.

When's the last time you filled your cup?

I'm not talking about just kid-free time, but when's the last time you did something that made your soul happy?

After you get some time on your own, do you feel refreshed, happy, relaxed?

If not, it's time to start daydreaming. It's time to make your list.

What is calling out to you?

Start Writing

Writing is extremely therapeutic. It unleashes creativity and helps you dig deeper into your subconscious thoughts and needs.

So take some time and sit with either a pen or pencil and grab something to write on. A journal or even a scrap of paper will do.

Find a quiet place, or wear ear plugs like I do (I love these) and get to writing.

If you need some help getting started, try one of these journal prompts:

If I could do anything I wanted what would I do?

If I had a kid-free day, I'd....

If I had a magic wand and could do whatever I wanted today, I'd...

I've always wanted to...

And just start writing. Don't think too much about what you're writing, just let the words flow.

Write in sentences or just throw words on paper, there's not a right or wrong way to do this, just get your thoughts out.

Create Your List

After spending some time writing, look back on your list. What sticks out to you? Do you see any themes?

Maybe you dream about being in nature, like I do. Maybe you wish to go to a music concert or dance. Whatever it is, notice the things that make your heart sing.

Now, make a list.

Write down all the things, big and small, that make up your daydreams. Keep it handy for when you find some time for you.

I keep mine in my wallet, so it's always close at hand.

With my trusty list, I'm happy to say that you'll no longer find me meandering around Target alone with my mocha frappachino. If you need me, I'll be hiking outside or knitting with the ladies in the closest yarn store, filling my cup.

So what are you going to do for you today?

How will you spend your tablespoons of time?

When's the next time you can plan for your measuring cup time?

How can you find a little joy in your everyday life.

This is what self-care is about.

At it's most simplistic, self-care is intentionally doing activities that make you happy.

So how will you make yourself happy today?