

Vasculitis Foundation Mental Health TOOLKIT

UNDERSTANDING PEER SUPPORT

WITH GIVE AN HOUR



TYPES OF PEER SUPPORT

Group

Facilitated group discussions that promote shared experiences and mutual support. Ideal for fostering community and collective problem-solving.

Virtual

Support via digital platforms, including chat rooms, video calls, or forums. Accessible, convenient, and available across geographic barriers.

One:One

Personalized, individual support focused on building trust and addressing specific needs. Encourages deep, meaningful connections and tailored guidance. Could be a buddy-system.

Informal

Occurs naturally through everyday interactions. Often spontaneous; provides immediate emotional or practical assistance

ROLES IN PEER SUPPORT

Facilitator

Leads and manages group support by guiding discussions, ensuring everyone has a chance to participate; maintaining a safe environment.

Peer

A person who shares their lived experiences and supports others. Peers offer mutual encouragement and understanding by providing a non-judgmental space for sharing.

THE PILLARS OF PEER SUPPORT

1

Mutuality/ Reciprocity

Shared experience, mutual openness and vulnerability, mutual respect and caring, reciprocity of support

2

Empathy

Genuine understanding, connection, emotional resonance, truly listening

3

Empowerment

Recognizing strengths and encouraging autonomy, uplifting, goals setting and milestone marking

4

Hope

Instilling optimism and belief in positive future possibilities, developing a sense of hopefulness can motivate, inspire, heal, and build confidence

ESSENTIALS OF A PEER SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP

Connection

Connection is more than just listening or being present—it's feeling seen, understood, and validated by someone who "gets" you.

Empathy

Has someone just sat with you, quietly listening without trying to fix things? In that moment, you felt like the weight wasn't yours alone—that's empathy.

Presence

It's about being in the moment, offering your undivided attention and focus. You can't show up to support a peer if you're distracted.

Trust

Trust is about balancing caution and openness, not letting fear of the unknown prevent you from forming connections

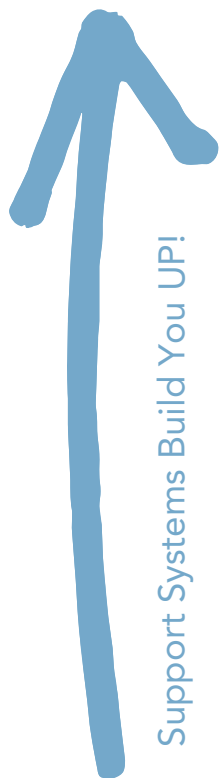
Communication

Communication is a two-way street—it's not just about being heard, but also about making space to hear others.

CREATING SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Rare Caregivers and patients often feel isolated and find it challenging to connect. 51% report difficulty in maintaining friendships and 53% report feeling alone*. Since the rare care journey is often emotional and difficult, it is important to prioritize support. Research has shown that supportive relationships have many benefits. These include reducing stress, depression and anxiety; living longer; having higher levels of well-being; and acquiring better coping skills. So how do you build strong support systems? Figure out what kind of support you need then work on building and sustaining them. Yes it takes energy, but you will get so much in return.

Type of Support Needed



Different relationships check particular boxes. When you have limited time and energy, be intentional about the relationships you build & the people you surround yourself with.



Tangible

A service or a favor; reinforces that it's healthy to ask for help when needed and accept the help



Emotional

Acceptance, understanding, reliable encouragement and empathy; reminder that we are not alone



Affirmational

Feelings that build your motivation and respect your efforts



Informational

Receiving positive, supportive information or new knowledge; provides support without an emotional connection



Belonging

Belonging to a community or peer group that understands your beliefs and/or situation

Tips to Sustain Support Systems

- Respect boundaries
- Accept help
- Be available
- Be honest
- Be patient...it takes time to develop
- Stay in touch
- Reciprocate: support their successes and share appreciation
- Engage when it's healthy

This toolkit was co-developed by Vasculitis Foundation in collaboration with Give an Hour, a national nonprofit whose trauma-informed mental health frameworks informed the structure and tools included.

For more information visit GiveAnHour.org/ContactUs

Reinforcing Self-Compassion

Rare caregivers experience a high burden of care, which can result in high levels of stress, feelings of loss of what they thought life would be like, and simply the feeling of not being able to keep up with all aspects of rare caregiving, family, work, not to mention taking care of oneself.

Self-compassion can play a key role in positive emotional health for rare caregivers. Self-compassion is the act of treating yourself as you would treat a good friend.

Three Components of Self Compassion

Self-kindness: caring and encouraging yourself as you would to others, rather than being self-criticizing.

Common humanity: all humans are imperfect, experience difficulties and pain, and make mistakes. Give yourself a break.

Mindfulness: being in the moment, present, open, and feeling emotions while they are happening.

The Stigma: Self Compassion is...

- A form of self-pity
- Makes a person vulnerable and weak
- Self-centered and selfish
- Creating an excuse

Benefits of Self Compassion

- Improved happiness
- Good mental health
- A stronger immune system
- The secret to resilience
- Creates strength to face hardships
- Reinforces ability to learn from mistakes

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Practicing Self-Compassion

- Take a compassion break
- Forgive yourself
- Stop competing and comparing
- Practice positive self-talk
- Develop a self-compassion mantra
- Focus on your wins



Taking Care When You Are A Caregiver: Tips For Accessing Mental Health Care



WHY SEEK CARE

The daily impact of rare caregiving extends to each aspect of life. The emotional roller coaster that comes along with rare disease makes it even more important to keep your mental health and emotional wellbeing in shape. Think of mental health care as a gym that will give you exercise techniques you need to get through it all. Asking for help can feel vulnerable and bring up many feelings. Seeking therapy is positive. Therapists listen and help you make connections. They may offer guidance or recommendations when you feel lost. There is no single, correct approach in finding care. As a rare caregiver, you probably know all too well that connecting with the right provider may take some time. Prioritize YOU just like you do for the one you care for, and with patience & perseverance, these tips will help you find your provider.

WHEN TO SEEK CARE

- Anytime! Maintenance is essential to your mental health
- You feel like you can't do normal daily activities you previously were able to accomplish
- Thinking about or coping with an issue is taking more than one hour of your day
- You have a major life event
- You've developed habits to cope with your emotional health that are impacting you physically in a negative way

WHO TO CHOOSE

If you have a mental health condition that may benefit from medication, consult a mental health doctor, such as a psychiatrist or mental health nurse practitioner who has experience treating your condition (MD, DO, PMHNP, APN)

If you're seeking help with emotions, behaviors, and patterns, consult with a therapist, counselor, or psychologist. Like medical doctors, these professionals have specialties, so find one who knows about your specific issue (credentials include LCSW, LPC, LMFT, PhD)



**Remember You Cannot Care for Others if
You're Not Healthy Yourself**

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SELF-CARE FOR RARE CAREGIVERS: ESTABLISHING HEALTHY HABITS OUTSIDE OF CAREGIVING

Prioritizing self-care can be a challenge when providing rare caregiving to others. Self-care is essential to prevent burnout as the healthier you are, the more energy you will have to care for others. Self-care does not look the same for every rare caregiver. Try incorporating one of these tips each month and with practice, taking care of yourself will become second nature.



Practice the Healthy Habits
of Emotional Wellbeing



Finding Mental Health Support for Rare Disease Caregivers

Why Mental Health Support Matters

Rare disease caregiving is more than a role, it's an emotional marathon filled with ongoing uncertainty, crisis cycles, and grief. The daily demands can be relentless, and without the right support, burnout can set in quickly.

The **'right fit'** mental health care is designed to *meet caregivers where they are*, offering:

- **Safety:** A nonjudgmental space for all feelings, even the ones that feel “wrong.”
- **Validation:** Recognition of both the pride and the exhaustion of caregiving.
- **Stabilization:** Tools to regulate your nervous system, manage stress, and recover after emergencies.
- **Resilience:** Strategies for sustaining your emotional health long-term.
- **Empowerment:** Support in making choices for your well-being without guilt.

WHO: Choosing the Right Professional

If you're seeking emotional or behavioral support:

- ✓ Choose a therapist, counselor, or psychologist experienced in trauma, chronic illness, and caregiver burnout (LCSW, LPC/CLPC, MFT, LSW, PhD/PsyD).
- ✓ Trauma-informed providers will pace sessions to match your nervous system's capacity and never push you to share more than you're ready for.

If you may benefit from medication:

- ✓ See a psychiatrist, mental health doctor, or nurse practitioner (MD, DO, PMHNP, APN).
- ✓ Look for trauma-informed care that explains options clearly, moves at your pace, and includes your input in every decision.

WHERE: Finding Mental Health Providers

- ✓ Ask your insurance company or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for a list of in-network, trauma-informed providers.
- ✓ Search online for “trauma-informed therapist + [your city]” or “psychologist + chronic illness.”
- ✓ Ask trusted friends, family, or other caregivers for recommendations.
- ✓ Check rare disease advocacy groups, nonprofits, and government websites.
- ✓ Contact local or national mental health organizations for referrals.

Caregivers may have to wait for the “right” provider, in the meantime:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (call or text)
- Caregiver-specific peer support groups (online & local)

HOW: Questions to Ask

Before the First Session:

- ✓ Have you worked with caregivers or people navigating long-term medical crises?
- ✓ What's your approach to trauma-informed care?
- ✓ Do you accept my insurance? Do you offer telehealth?
- ✓ How do you adjust therapy when someone is under chronic stress?
- ✓ Do you have regular openings that can flex around medical appointments?

After the First Session:

- ✓ Do you think you can meet my needs as a caregiver?
- ✓ How will we create my treatment plan together?
- ✓ Will our goals adapt if my caregiving role changes?
- ✓ How do I reach you in between sessions if I'm in crisis?

You don't have to “earn” therapy by reaching your breaking point — you deserve support now.

Caregivers benefit when providers are aware of:

- Medical trauma — both the patient's and the caregiver's.
- Anticipatory grief and ambiguous loss.
- System fatigue — navigating healthcare bureaucracy.
- Isolation — especially if friends/family can't relate to rare disease realities.

Signs for Rare Caregivers to Notice

Being a caregiver for someone with a rare disease presents unique challenges that significantly impact mental health. Over 70% of caregivers experience high levels of stress, with 65% reporting depression and 53% anxiety. Many caregivers feel guilty prioritizing their health, with 72% experiencing self-care guilt. Give an Hour's "Five Signs" provides a common language to understand how emotional struggle can show up for rare caregivers, along with ways to show support and respond. Recognizing these signs is crucial for family members and loved ones, as it enables them to provide timely support, reducing the risk of burnout and promoting a healthier caregiving environment.

Know the Signs and What they Look Like



PERSONALITY CHANGES

Your loved one may seem different exhibiting behaviors that don't align with their usual self.

Stressed-out, checked-out, frequently anxious or depressed, acts differently than 'normal', eerily "at peace" or joyful when previously stressed/depressed.



UNCHARACTERISTICALLY ANGRY, ANXIOUS, AGITATED, OR MOODY

Your loved one may struggle frequent mood swings.

Lashing out, angry outbursts, panic attacks, self-soothing. Always in 'crisis mode', feeling repeatedly triggered. May happen with or without a clear trigger.



WITHDRAWAL OR ISOLATION FROM OTHER PEOPLE

Your loved one might pull away from family and friends, signaling a need for support and understanding.

Not responding to texts, excessive malaise or sleeping, Needing to be alone. Not showing up for planned activities, housebound or signs of agoraphobia, avoidance when questioned.



MAY NEGLECT SELF-CARE AND ENGAGE IN RISKY BEHAVIOR

Financial strain, physical limitations, and emotional distress can contribute to neglecting self-care or engaging in risky behaviors.

Reckless or irresponsible spending, substance use, sedentary lifestyle/lack of physical activity, hair matting from poor self-care, change in appearance, "Depression House", significant weight gain or loss. Excessive sleeping.



OVERCOME WITH HOPELESSNESS AND OVERWHELMED BY CIRCUMSTANCES

Your loved one may experience extreme or prolonged grief, feelings of worthlessness, or guilt.

Verbal expressions of distress: "There's no point in going on", shutting down, masking feelings, making end-of-life plans, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or worrisome verbal statements, "It's hopeless".

WHAT YOU CAN SAY:

"I've noticed that lately when we talk or hang out, you seem distant, you don't seem like your usual self. Can you tell me more about what's going on? I want to find ways to support you."

"I can't imagine how stressful that must be. It's sound like you're having a really tough time dealing with all of this. I want to understand what you're going through. Can you tell me more about how you're feeling?"

"I've noticed that you haven't been responding to my texts like you used to, and you've been spending more time by yourself. It's important to take the time you need for yourself, but you don't have to do this alone. You can lean on me for support, I'm here if you need someone to talk to."

"This might be difficult to talk about, but I've noticed you've been drinking more lately, and I'm really concerned about you. I just want to make sure everything is okay. I'm here for you. Do you feel comfortable opening up about that?"

"I understand it can be hard to open up and I want you to know I'm here for you. From a sincere place of concern I want you to know that I've noticed you've been really struggling lately. Are you having thoughts about hurting yourself?"

RARE DADS: NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES & BUILDING CONNECTION THROUGH

Action

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Rare Dads

Male caregivers make up **39% of caregivers in the U.S.***. Despite their growing numbers, male caregivers often face unique challenges due to societal expectations and misconceptions about caregiving and masculinity. This can lead to feelings of isolation, stress, and an increased mental health burden. Understanding these challenges and knowing where to seek support is essential for maintaining both personal well-being and providing quality care.

Why Connection Matters:

- Reduces Isolation
- Improves Mental Health
- Reinforces Support Systems

Building Connection Through Action

Peer support is essential for all caregivers, but it can be particularly important for men due to the isolation and emotional strain they experience. Men often build strong connections through action, whether it's completing a project together, working on hobbies, or just being there as a support system. Michael, a rare-disease caregiver, highlights a strategy that works:

*"The most powerful get-togethers come from interacting physically, face to face. The guys are just processing things differently. **It's a matter of getting to a common task and achieving a small goal together**—that seems to be the right time to start talking, and sometimes that talk generates itself. As men, we're dealing with the same issues, and deep down, **we really want to talk about it; we just don't know where to start.** If we can get there, it's much more beneficial than something you read."*

Michael Deleon, UCD Rare Dad

Challenges Faced by Rare Dads

Pressure to "Fix" Everything

Men are often conditioned to solve problems, but caregiving—especially in rare disease scenarios—can involve situations beyond control. This can lead to feelings of helplessness and inadequacy when they can't fix their loved one's health issues.

Provider Stress

Many men feel the need to balance their traditional role as the provider with their caregiving duties. This often includes maintaining a full-time job while managing medical appointments and emotional support. The financial strain of caregiving can add an additional layer of stress, with nearly 45% of male caregivers reporting significant financial strain.*

Emotional Stoicism & Isolation

Societal norms discourage men from expressing vulnerability. Rare dads especially may suppress emotions to maintain a "strong front" for their families, leading to emotional isolation and an increased risk of anxiety and depression.

Stigma Around Caregiving

Many men face societal stigma, as caregiving is traditionally seen as a female role. This can make it harder for male caregivers to find the support they need, leaving them feeling alienated from caregiver networks or services designed primarily for women.

Work-life Challenges

Male caregivers often face stigma when requesting flexible schedules or time off, with caregiving duties not always taken as seriously for men. This adds stress to balancing work and caregiving, especially since 62% of male caregivers are employed full- or part-time.*

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How to Build Connections through Action

JOIN A PROJECT-BASED GROUP



Find or start a group where you work on a shared project—whether it's building something, working on cars, or even outdoor projects like gardening or home improvement. These activities create an environment to share experiences while focusing on a task.

ENGAGE IN HOBBIES TOGETHER



Hobbies like fishing, woodworking, or working out can be excellent opportunities to connect. Doing something side by side creates space to talk or simply enjoy the silence together, knowing you're there for each other.

CREATE REGULAR MEET-UPS



Schedule time with a few friends to get together for activities like hiking, biking, or any shared interest. Having a regular commitment ensures you stay connected and continue to build relationships.

TALK WHILE DOING



Men often feel more comfortable talking while doing something else. Whether it's fixing a car, playing sports, or working on a house project, these settings provide natural opportunities to share your caregiving journey.

RARE DADS: NAVIGATING THE CHALLENGES & BUILDING CONNECTION THROUGH ACTION



The Benefits:

Shared Tasks Open Doors to Conversation: Starting with something small—a task, a goal—can be the key to breaking down emotional walls and starting meaningful conversations.

Active Problem Solving: When working with others, you can share strategies on balancing caregiving responsibilities, finding time for self-care, or dealing with stress.

Recharging Together: These activities allow you to step away from your caregiving role for a bit, helping you recharge mentally and emotionally.

Shared Experiences: It helps to know you're not alone. Other men may be going through similar experiences as caregivers, and working together on a project can open up conversations.

***Caregiver statistics are based on data from the AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC) 2020 report on caregiving in the U.S.**



Self- Compassion and Self-care

SEVEN TYPES OF REST ACTIVITY

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The *SEVEN* Types of Rest

Understanding different types of rest can help you recharge and maintain balance in your life. Read through each type of rest below, then reflect on how you currently incorporate these into your routine and where you might need more.



Physical Rest

This involves giving your body a break from physical exertion. It includes passive physical rest, like sleep and napping, as well as active physical rest, such as gentle activities like yoga, stretching, or massages.



Mental Rest

This type of rest helps calm a busy mind. Techniques such as taking short breaks throughout the day, practicing thought diffusion, or journaling before bed can help ease mental fatigue.



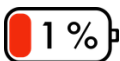
Sensory Rest

In our overstimulated world, sensory rest is crucial. It involves taking intentional breaks from sensory input, such as reducing screen time, spending time in quiet environments, or practicing grounding exercises.



Emotional Rest

Emotional rest allows you to express your true feelings and be authentic. It involves creating space to share your emotions openly and surrounding yourself with supportive people who provide emotional peace.



Social Rest

Understanding your social energy needs is key. Whether you're an introvert or an extrovert, it's important to recognize when to recharge your social battery, especially in interactions that drain your energy.



Creative Rest

This type of rest is especially important for those in creative fields. It involves allowing yourself to be inspired without the pressure to produce. Spending time in nature or stepping away from projects can help rejuvenate creative energy.



Spiritual Rest

Spiritual rest involves connecting with something greater than yourself. This could mean engaging in prayer, meditation, or participating in community or spiritual activities that give you a sense of purpose and belonging.

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Taking *Inventory* of My Current Rest Habits

This worksheet will help you reflect on your current rest habits across the seven types of rest. By identifying what you're already doing well and where there may be gaps, you can develop a more balanced approach to rest.

Physical Rest

-  How much sleep do I get each night? __ Hours
-  Do I take naps or breaks when needed? (Circle one) Yes / No
-  How often do I engage in physical activities (walking/yoga/workout)? __ Times per week
-  What physical relaxation techniques do I practice? (e.g., deep breathing, massages)
-  Is my body getting enough rest? What changes can I make?

Mental Rest

-  Do I experience racing thoughts or mental fatigue?
(Circle one) Often / Sometimes / Rarely
-  Do I take breaks during the day to rest my mind? Yes / No
-  Do I practice any mental rest techniques, like thought diffusion or journaling? Yes / No
-  How can I better support my mind in resting and recharging?

Sensory Rest

-  How much time do I spend in front of screens daily? __ Hours
-  Do I take breaks from sensory input (e.g., noise, bright lights)? Yes / No
-  What practices do I use to reduce sensory overload? (e.g., grounding exercises, quiet time)
-  Am I allowing my senses enough time to rest? What can I adjust?

Emotional Rest

💖 Do I feel comfortable expressing my true feelings?

(Circle one) Often / Sometimes / Rarely

💖 Do I have a support system to share my emotions with? Yes / No

💖 How often do I suppress my emotions to avoid conflict or discomfort? __ Times per week

💖 Do I take on the emotional load of other people?

(Circle one) Often / Sometimes / Rarely

💖 How can I create more opportunities for emotional rest in my life?

Social Rest

👐 Do I feel drained after social interactions?

(Circle one) Often / Sometimes / Rarely

👐 How often do I take time alone to recharge? __ Times per week

👐 Do I feel pressure to socialize even when I don't have the energy? Yes / No

👐 How can I balance social interactions with personal recharge time?

Creative Rest

🎨 Do I feel creatively inspired or blocked?

(Circle one) Inspired / Blocked

🎨 How often do I engage with sources of creative inspiration (e.g., nature, music, art)? __ Times per week

🎨 Do I allow myself unstructured time to rest from creative tasks? Yes / No

🎨 What can I do to better support my creative rest?

Spiritual Rest

🕊 Do I feel connected to something greater than myself? Yes / No

🕊 Do I engage in spiritual or meaningful activities (e.g., prayer, meditation, community involvement)? Yes / No

🕊 How often do I reflect on my values and purpose? __ Times per week

🕊 What activities help me feel a sense of peace and purpose?

🕊 How can I create more space for spiritual rest in my life?

Final Reflection:

Take a moment to look over your responses. What did you discover?

☀ Which type of rest do I depend on the most?

☀ Which type of rest do I shy away from or avoid?

☀ Which type of rest do I feel I need the most right now?

☀ What is one small action I can take this week to improve my rest in this area?

☀ What is one habit I already do well that I can maintain or enhance?

Action Plan:

Identify one type of rest you need more of in your life.

Write down one small action you can take this week to improve your rest in that area.

Choose one area of rest to focus on for the next week.

Write down a small, realistic action to support that area.

Revisit this worksheet in a few weeks to reflect on your progress.

Self-Care Audit

Deepening Self-Care Reflection Worksheet

Step 1: Identify Your Habit

Write down one self-care habit you currently practice at work (e.g., “I step away from my computer for a short break, take deep breaths, and drink water.”).

 My self-care habit:

Step 2: Digging Deeper

1. Purpose & Motivation

Why do I do this? (Is it to reduce stress, improve focus, reset my emotions?)

Does this habit actually help me feel better, or do I still feel drained after?

Is this something I do consistently, or only when I’m already overwhelmed?

Who is someone I’m grateful for at work, and why?

What is one thing another team member does that makes me feel more connected?

Self-Care Audit

2. What's Missing?

Is this habit enough to recharge me, or is there something else I need?

Do I feel guilty when I take this time for myself?

Could I make this more effective? (e.g., adding movement, going outside, disconnecting from screens?)

👉 What I could improve:

3. How Can I Expand This?

Where else in my day could I create intentional space for self-care?

Are there moments where I don't take care of myself but probably should?

What's one small but meaningful way I could deepen this habit?

👉 How I can build on this:

Step 3: Peer Discussion

Swap worksheets with a partner.

Ask your partner one question that helps them think deeper about their self-care habit.

Share one takeaway from your discussion.

Key Takeaways:

- ✓ Self-care should be purposeful, not just routine.
- ✓ Small tweaks can make a habit more effective.
- ✓ Expanding self-care beyond crisis mode makes it sustainable.
- ✓ Gratitude and connection enhance well-being and motivation

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The *SEVEN* Types of Rest

My Self-Care Toolbox!



Physical Rest

☐

☐



Mental Rest

☐

☐



Sensory Rest

☐

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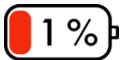


Emotional Rest

☐

☐

Social Rest

☐

☐



Creative Rest

☐

☐



Spiritual Rest

☐

☐

Keeping It *Real*

This is for your personal use to help track how YOU are feeling as you balance work and life, make a check mark if you felt any of the below. Most of these are normal emotions. **However if you've had these feelings more than two weeks, stop and take action to get the help you need.**

Note: this is not a diagnostic tool. The goal is to become aware of your emotions so that you can track your emotional baseline and recognize when you need to reach out for help.

I am feeling...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
"Off"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Moody	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Angry and agitated	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
That I want to be alone all the time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Like I need to escape	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feel like I have very little control over what happens	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overwhelmed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

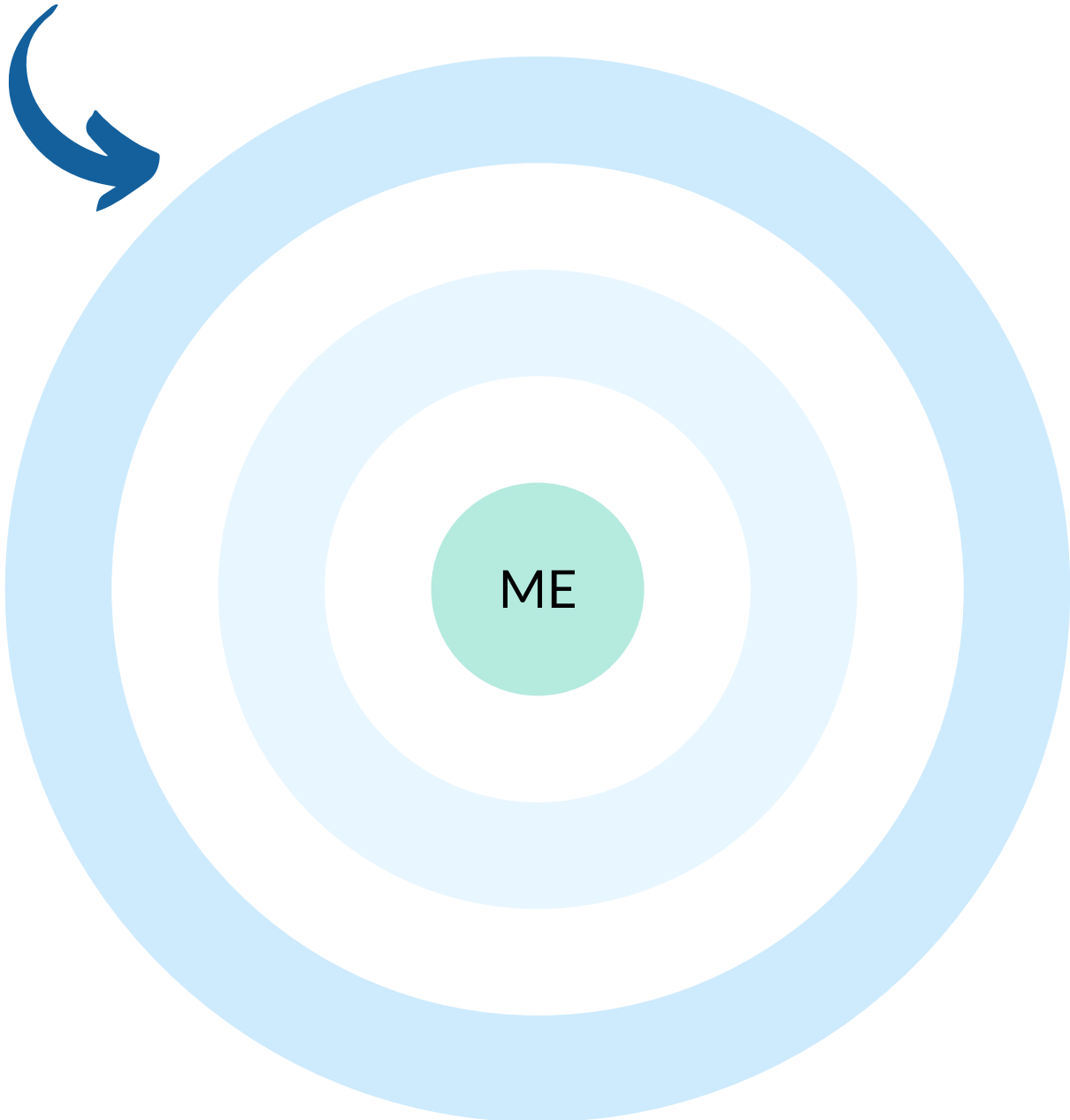
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Building a strong support network is often a lifelong pursuit for many of us. According to researchers, the ability to seek support is closely tied to our mental health. It's important to emphasize that simply having access to social support is not sufficient. What truly matters is actively choosing to utilize and engage with those social supports available to us.

Write down who is in your system and make a commitment to reach out to these people and develop more relationships.

Center to outside: Me, Family, Extended Family & Friends, Acquaintances, Professionals & Helpers



3 people I trust the most:

.....

.....

.....

People I can text sad/happy memes to:

.....

.....

Qualities that I look for in a supportive relationship:

My support needs:

People I want to invest in:

Relationships to reinvigorate:

Relationships to let go of or change:

Gaps in my support system

A person who I will let see me ugly cry and talk about my feelings:

Someone I can VENT to:

An online or in-person community where I can get support:



Rumination: When Overthinking Becomes a Trap



Rumination isn't just overthinking, it's a loop of emotional distress disguised as "problem solving."

It often feels helpful, but it keeps us stuck in the past and disconnected from the present.



What It Sounds Like

- "Why did that happen?"
- "What could I have done differently?"
- "I should have said..."
- "If I could do that again, I would have..."
- "Why do I feel this way?"
- "Ugh, why am I like this?"
- "What if it happens again?"



The Truth

Rumination is often a trauma-informed survival skill.

If you've experienced moments where being unprepared led to pain, your brain may default to replaying events as a way to "prevent it" from happening again. But now, instead of protecting you, it may be costing you peace.



Why We Ruminate

- We feel powerless, and thinking gives us a false sense of control.
- We're trying to make meaning out of pain.
- We believe more thinking will lead to clarity.
- We're conditioned to analyze instead of feel.
- We instinctively keep returning to the moment of distress.



Interrupt the Loop

- Name it → "I'm looping."
- Ask → "Is this helping or hurting?"
- Redirect → Into action, acceptance, or grounding.

"You can't heal by punishing yourself. You heal by listening differently."

WORKSHEET: From Rumination to Reflection

Turning stuck thoughts into self-compassionate insight

Step 1: Name the Loop

Think of three things that make you apprehensive or anxious?

Write the ruminating thoughts exactly as it shows up:

Example: "Why didn't I speak up?" or "I should've handled that better."

Step 2: What's Underneath?

Ask yourself:

1. What emotion is underneath this thought?

(e.g., fear, guilt, shame, insecurity, anger, sadness)

Step 3: What is this thought trying to do for me?

(Is it trying to protect me, prepare me, or make sense of something?)

Step 3: Reframe Your Thoughts into a Reflection Prompt

Flip your rumination into a kind, helpful reflection question.

Use this structure:

"What can I learn from this..." or "What would it look like if I responded with compassion?" Write your new prompt:

Examples:

From: "Why did I mess that up?" → To: "What can I learn from that moment without blaming myself?"

From: "Why can't I do more?" → To: "What would enough look like if I showed myself compassion?"

How did it feel to reframe the thought?

Self-Regulation: Strategies for Emotional Balance and Resilience

Emotional self-regulation is about managing your emotions and reactions in different situations. It starts with self-awareness—noticing and understanding your feelings and what activates them. Once you're aware, self-regulation helps you handle tough emotions and express them in a healthy way.

self-regulation is important for managing stress, communicating well, and staying productive, even when things get difficult. It's not always easy, especially when dealing with competing priorities, unexpected problems, or personal challenges.



Challenge: For the next 6 weeks, practice one of these self-regulation techniques per week.

Self-Awareness: Understand and Recognize Emotions

- ☐ **Check-In Regularly:** Take short breaks to notice how you're feeling. Are you stressed, calm, frustrated, or content?
- ☐ **Recognize Activators:** Notice what sparks your emotions, whether it's a specific event, interaction, or thought. Understanding these activators helps you prepare for and manage your emotional responses more effectively.
- ☐ **Label Feelings:** When you feel a surge of emotion, identify it. Simply naming feelings (like anger, anxiety, or joy) can lessen their intensity and help you think more clearly.

Use Positive Self-Talk

- ☐ **Reframe Negative Thoughts:** If you're feeling overwhelmed, change your inner dialogue. For example, replace "I can't do this" with "I'm finding this hard, but I can take it one step at a time."
- ☐ **Affirmations and Encouragement:** Remind yourself of past successes, and use affirmations to build confidence, like "I am capable" or "I have managed challenges before."

Practice Gratitude and Self-Compassion

- ☐ **Focus on Positives:** Spend a few minutes each day reflecting on things you're grateful for, as this can shift your mindset toward positivity.
- ☐ **Forgive Mistakes:** Be kind to yourself when you fall short. Accept that setbacks happen, and focus on learning from each experience.

Develop a Healthy Routine

- ☐ **Establish Regular Sleep and Nutrition Habits:** Adequate rest and a balanced diet play a big role in mood and resilience, helping you stay in control when faced with challenges.
- ☐ **Set Time for Reflection:** Daily or weekly, take time to reflect on what went well and where you could improve, allowing you to make adjustments with intention.

Pause Before Responding

- ☐ **Use a Cushion Before Responding:** When emotions are activated, your rational brain needs time to catch up. Responding in the heat of the moment can escalate conflicts. Instead, create a "cushion" by pausing—take a brief walk, sip some water, or give yourself a moment to cool down—before you react.
- ☐ **Don't Feel Pressured to Respond:** When our buttons are pushed, we might need some time to percolate before we respond. Sleep on it (if you can), what seems critical in the moment can seem like no big deal after a good night's sleep.

Build a Support Network

- ☐ **Talk It Out:** Find a trusted friend or mentor you can turn to for advice or a listening ear. Sharing challenges helps you find solutions or see.
- ☐ **Encourage Accountability:** Having someone who knows your goals can help you stay on track and offer encouragement. Find an accountability partner!

Reflect: Which one(s) worked the best for you?
