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**WHAT’S IN YOUR SELF-CARE TOOLBOX?**

Everyone experiences occasional changes in mood; it’s a perfectly normal part of being human, not an indication of a “mood disorder”. It’s good to be prepared, though, in case your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or relationships become a source of concern to yourself or to those around you. Everyone can benefit from putting together a “self-care toolbox” that includes (and reminds you of) lists of your best coping strategies, your “normal” routines, and the people and places to whom you can turn for help.

* **Emergency Numbers**
* **List of trusted adults**
* **List of close friends and confidantes**
* **List of local healthcare resources**
* **List of personal coping strategies (music, walking, art, writing, etc.)**
* **Checklist for daily routine (eat, sleep, hygiene, study, play, relax)**
* **Checklist for HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired)**

Self-care requires self-awareness, honesty, and the willingness to ask for help.



# The Jed Foundation - Wikipedia

# **Create a Plan to Take Care of Your Mental Health**

Most of us have strategies for taking care of our physical health (whether we are conscious about it or not). For example, most of us brush our teeth, feed ourselves, and sleep regularly. Many of us are mindful about getting regular exercise and do our best to eat healthfully, and many of us schedule regular annual physicals and check-ups. We reach out to our doctor about pains or concerns, and we manage treatment or preventive measures related to any ongoing problems with prescriptions, over the counter treatments or through daily activities like stretching.

We need to do the same with our mental health. There are six core elements to a mental health plan: Circle of Care, Professional Support, Work or School Self-Care, Physical Self-Care, Emotional Self-Care and Relationship Self-Care.

**Create a Circle of Care**

Humans are deeply social creatures, even if we are introverted, so having a support network is an essential part of any mental health strategy. Being conscious about identifying people you can lean on when things are hard and asking them to be part of your circle of care is a powerful tool in your mental health care toolbox. Making a care pact with a friend can be especially helpful when we are struggling and wanting to both pull inward and not burden someone else with our problems. Make a commitment that you’ll reach out to someone in your circle if you’re having a hard time, and that you’ll do your best to take a call from a member of your circle if they’re struggling. Simply knowing you have someone there for you can sometimes make all the difference.

**Physical Self-Care**

While making sure that our minds and emotions are healthy is critical, it is impossible to do this without taking care of our physical body as well. Being active and being sure to assure adequate sleep, exercise, and nutrition has mental and physical benefits. Some things we should include in our physical care include:

* Getting enough quality sleep every night (most sources recommend 7-8 hours).
* Making sure that you eat healthy, nutritious foods (especially fruits and vegetables) daily. For some guidelines and suggestions, [check out these from health.gov](https://health.gov/our-work/food-nutrition/2015-2020-dietary-guidelines/guidelines/chapter-1/key-recommendations/).
* Getting outside and being in nature or just breathing fresh air (incorporating moving more by yourself with friends or with pets).
* Not sitting (or standing, if able) endlessly by taking breaks that get us away from screens. Try setting a timer on your phone and getting up to stretch or walk away from the computer every 30 minutes.

**Emotional Self-Care**

Knowing how to understand and regulate emotion can be confusing for many of us. Most of us have internalized rules about when, where, and how we should and should not express certain emotions. Depending on what your culture or family was like, you may have learned that some emotions are entirely off limits — like anger or sadness. If you grew up in a place and time that looked down on emotional displays, you may have learned to suppress your feelings altogether — meaning that not only did you show them, you may have tried to stop yourself from feeling them in the first place. Such constant suppression can have drastic consequences on emotional (and physical!) well-being. Being able to express how we’re feeling and process all that comes along with it is a necessary component of a healthy life. Some ways you can start to tap into your emotions and truly feel and express them include:

* Journaling: Sometimes we know we are feeling something but it is not until we are writing about it that we see the full picture. Feelings that show up on the surface are rarely alone – they often have deeper stories and perhaps a rainbow of feelings that accompany them. Allowing yourself to simply start writing is a powerful way to lean into challenging emotions and to reflect on them, learn from them, and/or accept them. All feelings have stories but if you have one or more persistently challenging emotion, chances are good that the stories attached to it need to be found and spoken. If you start by writing until you find the stories you need to understand, it can help you figure out how to most healthfully respond.  Here’s a simple structure to get you started: sit for 5 minutes each evening and reflect on any highs and lows from your day, write down any moments or feelings that stand out. Start simple, remembering that consistency is key, and grow your journaling practice from there.
* Maintain, expand, and deepen close friendships and relationships: The value of long-term and close friendships can’t be overstated. Knowing you have people you can trust, count on, and spend time with is so important for our emotional health. It’s important to surround yourself with a diverse ecosystem of people and voices who can love and champion you. You can build on friendships you have by simply sharing more openly, reaching out a little more to check in, and doing fun activities together. As much as you need your friends and family, they also need you. Be sure to carve out time to spend with them, attend important events and functions in their life, and try to create some balance or boundaries between work/school and friends/family.
* Meditate: In stressful moments, our minds get cluttered with all sorts of negative thoughts. Simple meditation exercises help clear out some of that junk so we can be more present and think more clearly. Here’s a quick 5-Step Meditation:

1. Find a quiet(ish) spot where you can sit or lie comfortably.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Breathe naturally, don’t try and control it.
4. Spend 3 to 5 minutes focusing on your breath and how your body inhales and exhales.
5. If your mind wanders, gently return your focus back to your breath.

**Work/School Self-Care**

In order to perform the way we want, in the classroom or as a professional out in the world, we need to be sure that the basic supports we need for optimum performance are in place. Here are a few things you can do:

* Set up support systems at school or work that provide advice, help, accountability, and support. This might include but is not limited to co-workers, study groups, or peer groups.
* Try finding a mentor or sponsor at the office, someone older and more experienced who can guide you and advocate for you.
* Reach out to teachers or TAs if you need extra help with classwork or assignments.
* Participate in professional development classes or seminars, conferences, and other events that support your professional vision – this can help you feel like you are staying on track.

**Professional Support**

In almost every area of our lives, seeking help is seen as a sign of strength. We reach out to doctors to be proactive about our physical health, we look to financial advisors for help managing our money, and we rely on trainers and instructors to help with exercise and nutrition. Our mental health should be the same. Mental health professionals aren’t just trained to help when we’re in crisis or experiencing a mental health condition like depression or anxiety disorders. They’re equipped to help us strengthen our overall mental health, feel better and cope with any challenges we might face. If you’re able to, consider checking in regularly with a mental health professional so that you have that support available if you need it. If you need immediate help, text START to 741741 or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for a free, confidential conversation with a trained counselor anytime.

**Create a Mental Health Plan That Works for You**

Customizing your own plan, using ideas we have provided here, or building one entirely from scratch, is a first good step in creating a Mental Health Plan that works for you.  You do not need to build anything fancy, just start with an area that you think needs the most work or help right now or with an area you are struggling with. Remember, there’s no cookie-cutter plan, only the one that’s right for you.

[Create a Plan to Take Care of Your Mental Health | JED (jedfoundation.org)](https://jedfoundation.org/resource/create-a-plan-to-take-care-of-your-mental-health/)

*The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation’s teens and young adults, giving them the skills and support they need to thrive today…and tomorrow.*