

THE SHORT GUIDE *to* UNDERSTANDING SELF-CARE



TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT SELF-CARE?

You can rarely read an article about grief without hearing about the importance of self-care. It may seem a bit repetitive and one might think that all grief professionals have been tricked into this same school of thought, that honestly, sometimes feels like it works and sometimes feels more like a flop.

So why do so many mental health professionals "push" the idea of self-care? Because there is actually brain science to back up the fact that our bodies, brains, and hearts crave these kinds of outlets to help our system release helpful chemicals into the brain and body. So the grand scheme of self-care is to find outlets through self-care activities that help us activate these brain chemicals. In doing this, these chemicals help us to endure some of the heavy experiences in grief, build resilience during uncertain times, and learn to cope as we walk along this journey. You'll see there are some activities that will come up over and over allowing us to activate multiple chemicals at once - who doesn't like to be efficient! Take some time to reflect on activities that help you, when you see changes in yourself, and what new ideas you can add to your routine.

BREAKING DOWN SELF-CARE BRAIN CHEMISTRY

There are four brain chemicals we will focus on here as we think about how they can help our grief journey. Some basic outlets are highlighted to help us think of ways we can aid our bodies in producing these great natural chemicals.

Dopamine which is often referred to as the reward or motivation chemical. A rise in dopamine can help us feel more accomplished, focused, and mentally on point. Feeling a bit low in this area? Try these:

- Finishing a task
- Exercising
- Meditating
- Sleeping
- Listening to calming music
- Learning something new

All of the activities above help to clear our brains, allowing us to feel a bit sharper and more able to take on whatever comes our way.

Oxytocin is called the love and bonding chemical, as it helps us embrace feeling connected, trusting, and comforted. At a time when social bonding may feel difficult, it's nice to know we are loved and cared for. Try increasing your levels:

- Bond with people/pets/plants
- Remind people you love them
- Watch a heart-warming movie
- Embrace gratitude
- Cuddle in
- Practice yoga

These outlets can help us focus on getting in touch with our emotions, leading with our hearts, and helping us to get that wonderful warm feeling in our chests.



Serotonin is known as the mood stabilizer. As grief takes us on quite an emotional rollercoaster, it can be nice to enlist this chemical for a little more aid. Try getting:

- Exercise
- Bright light
- Massage
- Fresh air
- Recalling or talking about happy memories

Our bodies, brains, and hearts look for ways to stimulate that "happy stuff" that helps to reduce our stress levels and get back to the feeling of living.

Endorphin is the natural "pain killer". This can help us relieve emotional and even sometimes some physical pain, so why not try:

- Laughing
- Creating
- Exercising
- Eating dark chocolate (*no lie*)
- Meditating
- Massage

These outlets help us release our emotional pressure valve that can get so heavy during grief. Take sometime to release it and embrace some of the great feelings life has to offer.

WHEN THE WORLD FEELS LIKE AN EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER,
STEADY YOURSELF WITH SIMPLE RITUALS.

DO THE DISHES.
FOLD THE LAUNDRY.
WATER PLANTS.

SIMPLICITY ATTRACTS WISDOM.