SELF-CARE ON THE INSIDE

Tips & Activities to Take Care of Yourself



Self-Care on the Inside Guide

First Edition

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Positive Affirmations:

Positive affirmations – or positive statements – are helpful in reprogramming our subconscious mind. Our brains and bodies often hold on to the trauma, pain, and hate associated with traumatic experiences. Sometimes this means we have automatic negative or painful thoughts that may pop up in our day-to-day life without us even being aware of it. When we practice positive affirmations, we are working to reprogram our brain to heal from the abuse or trauma. Positive affirmations should fit your particular wounds, experiences, and/or insecurities. For example, a positive affirmation should interrupt the pattern of getting stuck in harsh beliefs by replacing the negative thought with a loving one.

Positive Affirmations in Practice:

When you look in the mirror and think "I am worthless," look at yourself with strength and say instead, "I am worthy of love and respect." This isn't easy! If you keep having negative thoughts, that's okay! That's just trauma still living in your body. Choose any affirmation you'd like and practice saying it out loud daily or whenever a painful experience/memory happens.



Positive Affirmation Examples:

I am strong, courageous, and brave. I am an incredible person. I am loved and supported. I am grateful for my body and everything it does to support me. I am beautiful. I am powerful. It was not my fault. I am worthy. I have a right to

exist. I am (your name) and my identity is valid. I am valued. I am resilient.

Breathing Exercises:

Sometimes memories of trauma or abuse can come back to us and make it feel as if we are re-living them. When that happens, it is important to try and return back to the present. One way to do that is through controlled breathing. Controlled breathing not only keeps your mind and body functioning at their best, but it can also lower blood pressure, promotes feelings of calm**,** and helps you relax. Breathing exercises can be something you do every day or you can do these when you are feeling very heightened and triggered in any moment.

Breathing Exercises in Practice:

Try inhaling slowly through your nose for a count of four, and then exhale through your mouth for a count of four. If you have not tried breathing exercises before, start with just inhaling and exhaling for one minute. Work your way up and try for at least 10 minutes a day – it may take some practice and time before you can do controlled breathing for 10 minutes at a time. Sometimes it can be nice to close your eyes, to do them in a quiet place, to do them looking out a window or while sitting on a blanket, mattress, or pillow. But find the way that works best for you!

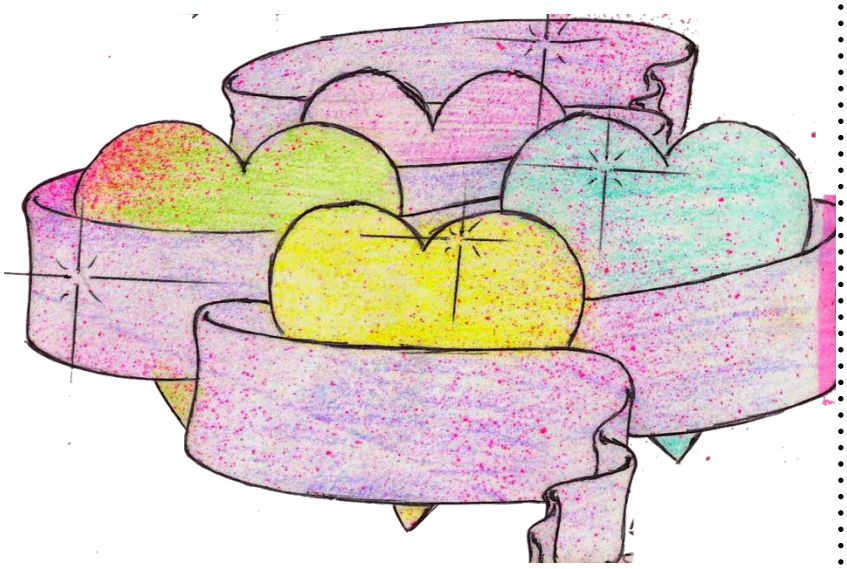


You can also try another breathing technique by putting one hand on your chest and the

other on your stomach. Take a deep breath in through your nose and try to fill up air through your chest and stomach. Repeat this deep and slow breathing pattern six to ten times per minute and try to work your way up to 10 minutes each day. As you get used to doing this, it can be nice to take note of your heartbeat and feel it calming down and to give yourself a compliment for your great work taking care of yourself!

Meditation & Mindfulness:

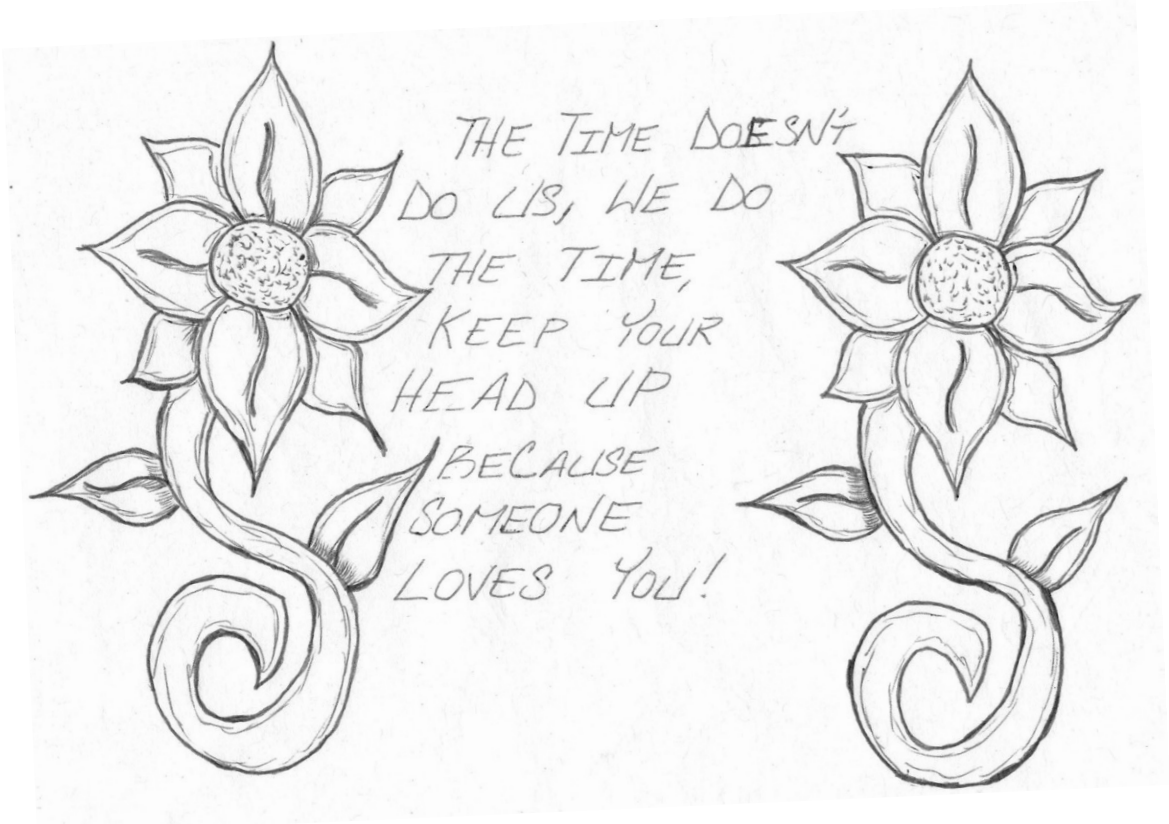
Meditation and mindfulness are self-care tools that can be practiced anywhere. Like breathing exercises and positive affirmations, they help you to take your body and brain back from the experience of trauma. Meditation is a practice that allows the mind to exist in a calm and natural state. Mindfulness is the art and science of paying complete attention to the one thing you're doing in any given moment.



Meditation in Practice:

Start by sitting down and allow yourself to become very still, relaxed, and alert. Try to focus your attention on one thing. It can be anything, but two good places to start if you are new to meditation are either focusing on your breathing or on a word or phrase (called a mantra) that you repeat over and over for the duration of your meditation. Some examples could be: "I am

loved" or "I am enough." Sometimes people prefer to make sounds that don't have a meaning but are soothing, like making a noise as you breathe out or humming. As you do this, your mind will wander and that is okay! Try to allow these thoughts to pass by, like a bird flying past clouds or cars passing on the road. Your only job when you practice meditation is to bring your attention back when it strays from your object of focus. You may find yourself falling asleep at first and that's also okay. As you practice, try to remember to stay relaxed, still, and alert.



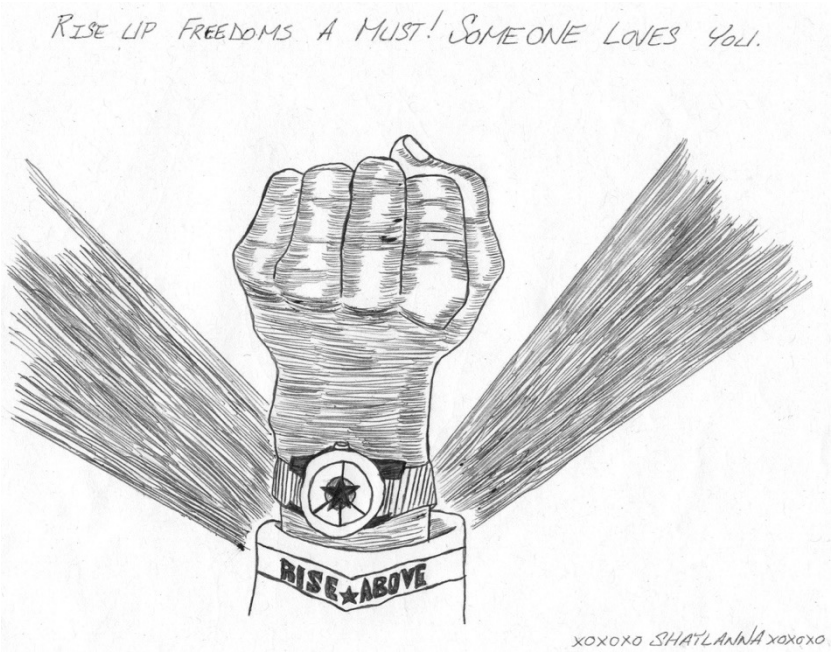
Meditation and mindfulness can also include other activities:

<u>Body Scan</u>:

A body scan allows you to pay attention and notice each part of your body. This can help you to reconnect to parts of your body that might still hold painful memories or be difficult for you to think about. Start by laying or sitting in a comfortable position. Pay attention to your body. Start at your toes

and move up your body to your head. Focus on tightening each body part and muscle group as you move up your body. Then, release it. As you release your body part or muscle group, allow yourself to feel it getting heavy and relaxed as you let go of the burden of carrying it.

Guided Meditation/Visualization:



This practice is like meditation but you are imagining – or visualizing – a story instead of just a word or sound. Many people will visualize a relaxing place or the process of healing happening. Sometimes people will tell themselves a favorite soothing story as they visualize it happening. Maybe you want to visualize healing by imagining a ray of light coming to you and touching your body wherever it hurts, bringing you a warm glow and the feeling of safety. Maybe you want to imagine yourself with a loved one, making a favorite meal together. Think of something soothing that allows you to feel calm and at peace.



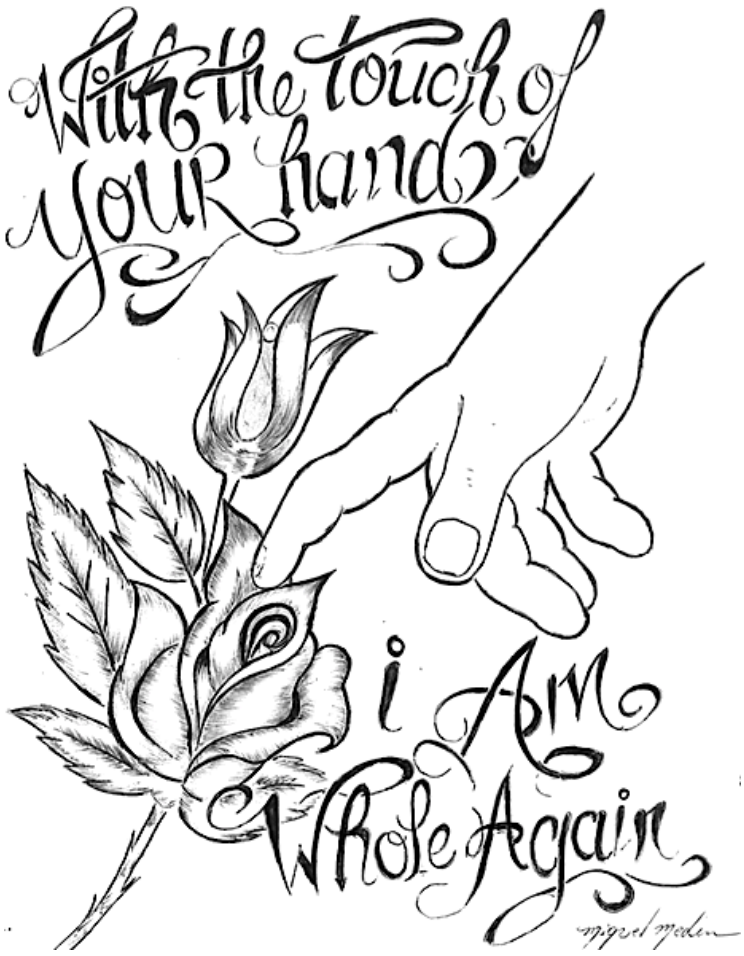
Praying:

If prayer is important for you, it can be a

great way to integrate mindfulness and meditation. The next time you pray, be aware of straying thoughts and calmly bring yourself back to your prayers. If your prayers are physical in nature, become aware of the movement of your body as you pray. Think about how your hands feel when they move: Do you feel graceful? Do you feel strong? Make your prayer take up your whole body.

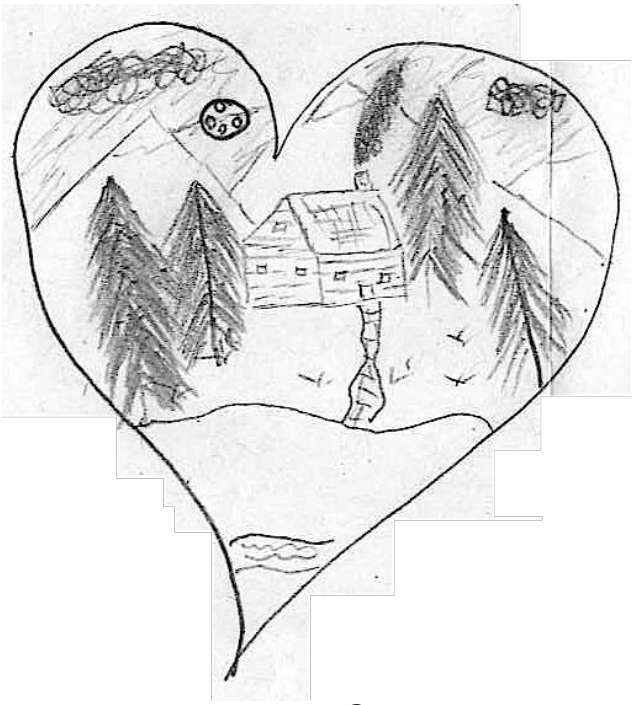
Reflecting:

If you are having a day where your thoughts seem very fast or very scattered, it can be helpful to describe your day to yourself. Include small things that you did and give yourself credit for all the work you put into surviving the day (examples could be: today I woke up. I opened my eyes, I stretched my arms, and I got out of my bed. I made my bed. I washed my hands and splashed water on my face, etc.). This kind of detailed description can help you to feel centered and it can remind you of the many things you have power and control over, the things that you *chose* to do with your day like open your eyes or stretch. Those are choices you make for your body and you deserve credit for them!



Grounding Techniques:

Grounding is an exercise that helps keep you in the present moment and in reality. It can be helpful in managing overwhelming feelings, intense anxiety, or nerves. It can also help you regain control of your mental focus from a place of intense or high emotion. Grounding techniques can also help bring you back to the physical space where you are. When memories of trauma make you feel outside of your body, these activities can bring you back. Here are some grounding activities to try:



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Name 5 things you can see in the room with you, 4 things you can physically feel against you, 3 things you can hear right now, 2 things you can smell right now, and 1 good thing about yourself.

Questions:

Ask yourself questions to help bring you into this moment. Where am I? What day is it? What is the date? What is the month? What is the year? How old am I? What season is it? It is okay if you do not know the answers to these questions. If these questions are difficult, you may want to try another activity listed in this guide.



Description Game:

Plant your feet firmly on the ground. Physically hold an object and try to describe each detail of it out loud like you wanted someone on the phone to be able to see it. Try this with a comforting object like a blanket or a favorite shirt. Now try it with an object that is cold. Try it with an object that is rough.

Get Creative:

Whether it's writing, drawing, or making music, expressing our story or experiences can be an important tool to help us let go of emotion, pain, and/or trauma. Creative expression can use our whole body and brain and this helps us to remove trauma from where it may be stuck inside of us. When we create something, we have the option of sharing our art with our community. Whether it's a beautiful drawing or a letter, turning our pain into creativity can be a powerful experience – both for us and for others.

Make Music:

Music does not have to be made with a traditional instrument. We can make music using our bodies, our hands, our voices, and items like pens or pencils. You can try to make a familiar tune you love, or you can write your own piece.

Physical Exercise/Movement:

Sometimes our experiences can't be captured on paper. Use your whole body to express what is inside of you. Try wiggling your toes and fingers, stretching different parts of your body, shaking out your arms and legs, or walking around. Notice the rhythm of your steps and breath and use this natural beat to create movement.



Write Letters:

Write letters to people who care about you and support you. Write letters to your idols, your past or future self, people who have hurt you. In the letters, you can say what you wish you had known, what you wish you had said, what you want to say one day. You can choose to send these letters, keep them, destroy them, or throw them away.

Journal:

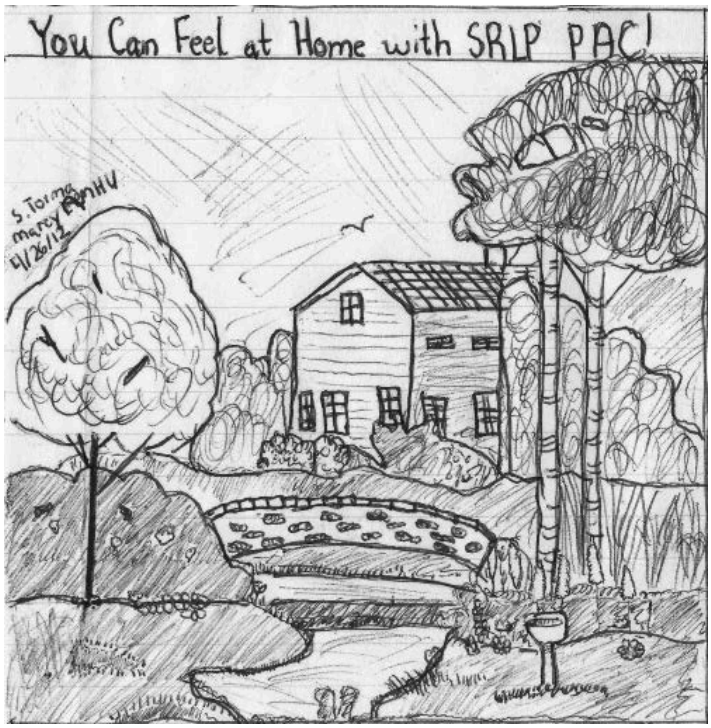
Document your daily interactions, important events, or whatever comes to mind at the moment. Allow yourself to write freely without judgment. If words don't come to you, use drawings.

Read:

Read something new or re-read something that makes you feel good. Memorize a favorite line and use that line to inspire you during meditation.

Stay in Contact:

Stay in contact with at least one person & ask for support when you need it. You can stay in contact with Sylvia Rivera Law Project's Prisoner Advisory Committee, contact a friend or loved one, or write to other pen pal organizations including:



Black and Pink,

614 Columbia Rd,

Dorchester, MA 02125

Beyond These Walls,

PO Box 13006,

Portland, OR 97213

Prisoner Correspondence Project,

QPIRG Concordia c/o Concordia University,

1455 de Maisonneuve Ouest,

Montréal QC H3G 1M8 Canada

(extra postage necessary)

Ask for Additional Resources:

Healing is an ongoing process. As you work your way through these tips you may want to move on to other work. The work that you are doing is fantastic. Below are a few examples of places to reach out to when you are ready.

Yoga:

Many people find yoga to be a helpful and healing practice. You can write to the Prison Yoga Project and ask for a free book: The Prison Yoga Project, P.O. Box 426, San Quentin, CA 94964.

Writing:

If you have found that writing is a helpful tool, you may want to reach out to the PEN America Program, which publishes the work of people in prison and has a free handbook for aspiring writers: PEN America, 588 Broadway, Suite 303, New York, NY 10012.

LGBT Books to Prisoners:

If you want to learn more about healing and trauma – or anything else – you can write to the LGBT Books to Prisoners program and ask if they have books on certain subjects. They might not, but they may be able to find other books for you: LGBT Books to Prisoners, c/o Social Justice Center Incubator, 1202 Williamson St #1, Madison, WI 53703.



WHEN YOUR LIGHT DIMS OUT DONT DROP YOUR HEAD. IT'S A SIGN TO SHOW YOU'VE BEEN DEFEATED,

KEEP YOUR HEAD UP HIGH AND FIND YOUR LIGHT AGAIN.

Notes/Journaling Space:

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