

SELF-CARE PLANNING GUIDE FOR GROUPS

A GUIDE TO PLANNING A GROUP SELF-CARE RETREAT



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THE HEALING TRUST

The Healing Trust is a private, nonprofit grantmaking foundation in Nashville, Tennessee with the purpose of facilitating access to compassionate healthcare services for the most vulnerable people in Middle Tennessee. We fund nonprofits focused on physical health; recovery from alcohol or drug addiction; healing from abuse, neglect, or violence; and mental health. Since 2003, we've awarded more than \$90 million to our grantees.

In addition to providing grants, we provide resources (for health-related nonprofits and other service agencies) including technical assistance, retreats, leadership programs, and sabbatical grants to help these nonprofits operate and serve their communities. We also engage in systems change advocacy around issues of healthcare access and mitigating Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in partnership with our grantees.

We believe that you must care for yourself to care for others. Once a month, we host a free Healing for the Healer retreat for people in the helping professions to devote a day to their personal self-care. This guide was crafted to support the ongoing self-care of these folks, as well as to provide guidance for others who are searching for practical ways to improve their self-care, no matter their profession. Our desire is for this guide to spark or deepen your practice so you can live more holistically.

To learn more about our work, visit our website at www.healingtrust.org.

Our mission is the sacred work of fostering healing and wholeness for vulnerable populations through strategic investing, philanthropy, and advocacy.



AN INTRODUCTION

This guide was created to help you design and implement a day of mission centering rest for your team. Because of the ever changing landscape of self-care and its personalized nature, this guide is not comprehensive, nor will everything in it be a fit for every participant. The contents of this guide are based on the structure of the Healing for the Healer retreats hosted by The Healing Trust.

Every Healing for the Healer retreat incorporates elements of the following components:

Rest

We do our best work when we feel comfortable, non-threated, and cared for. Slow down, allow space for pause, and breath. Meditations, restorative yoga, and other relaxation experiences can help get your team to a place of rest.

Remember

We believe that every person is born knowing how to care for their soul. In the rush of life, it's easy to forget that this is necessary to human thriving. Offering time and space for intentional self-care provides opportunity to create persona rhythms of self-care.

Reflect

current moments are important for developing sustainable self-care plans. Reflection is an important component of a day of renewal.

Recreate

We believe every retreat should build in time for the elements of play, wonder, and laughter Sometimes neglected due to the demands of work, these elements can help bond the group together.

THE GIFT OF A TEAM RENEWAL RETREAT

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you." - Anne Lamott

A regularly scheduled team retreat day can provide a grounding and unifying opportunity for group and personal renewal. Retreats are best offered as a gift and with a spirit of invitation. Offering the retreat time during working hours is a critical component of the gift element, where the space can create the opportunity for an organization to remember their core mission and shared values.

Additionally, the space away from the day-to-day work may allow for creative thinking that results in renewed energy and overall engagement. As we learn to be with each other in different contexts, we develop deeper understandings of who we are as individuals and as a group. Spending time with coworkers in a way that is relaxed and reflective can be nourishing as well as productive. Rarely do we take the time to simply pause from the frantic pace of our actions. A commitment to pausing on an organizational level can lead to the manifestation of an entirely different and powerful orientation toward work, mission, vision, community, and self.

The commitment to taking an entire day for staff contemplation and rejuvenation can have a noticeable impact on an organization, especially if repeated at regular intervals throughout the year. It may require an act of courage to take a day out of the month (or the year), but that level of commitment signifies an understanding of the importance of self-care and a willingness to invest in the long-term sustainability and health of your workplace. Some organizations find that monthly retreats are ideal. You may want to start with four retreat days per year, one for each quarter or season, as the seasons provide thematic variation, helping to ensure that the staff retreats remain pertinent.

DESIGNING YOUR RETREAT

Thoughtfully designing your retreat will improve the participant's experience. Attention to group size, facilitation, location, and atmosphere, and more will set the tone for your retreat and will remove barriers to relaxation.

Group Size and Dynamics

Group size makes a big impact on the quality of your retreat. The larger the retreat, the more difficult it can be to find an adequate space and provide enough supplies and food for the day. Additionally, larger groups lose the intimate feel among participants. If possible, we suggest maxing out the retreat participant list at 16 people.



It is also important to consider group dynamics.

If your retreat extends beyond the members of your own organization, be thoughtful about who is invited to attend by considering the likelihood of conflict, tension, or participant uneasiness. Take your knowledge of your organization and others to compliment each other, and try to include others or match organizational mission when possible.

While large group discussions with all participants can be productive and powerful, it is also important to have small-group or paired conversations. This can conserve time and allow for more intimate conversation between participants. Often people feel more comfortable sharing their personal perspectives in small groups. Breaking the group into dyads - groups of two participants - can help people get to know one another in a more intimate way.



Retreat Facilitation

Generally, it is ideal to have someone outside of your organization facilitate a retreat day in order to allow your entire team to not have to "be on" for the day. Creative ways to make that come to reality could include partnering with another organization to agreeing to lead a day of renewal for their team, if they would provide the same for your organization. It may be possible to ask one of your board members to facilitate. Another option: allow team members to sign up for a part of the day they'd like to facilitate based on their interests or favorite self-care practices. This way, no one individual is responsible for the entire day's activities and flow.

Location and Atmosphere

Ideally, your retreat will be in a different location than your everyday workplace. Leaving the office helps place a margin around the day. It is essential to allowing your team to truly exhale and not inhale the pressure and distractions the office environment may stimulate.

Consider utilizing locations that may be available in your community for little to no fee, such as:

- Places of worship
- Public libraries with meeting rooms
- Public parks, weather permitting
- Community Centers
- A friend's home or farm
- Nonprofit retreat centers

Additionally, when designing the retreat environment, it is important to create a space that is welcoming to all participants and conducive to collective communication. Having spaces where your team can be together, as well as spaces that allow for individual reflection and stillness, are ideal. For collective activities, consider creating a circle of chairs so retreat attendants can all see each other and communicate face-to-face to develop a sense of community among participants.







In the middle of the circle, place various symbols that represent hope, healing, and renewal, as a physical marker of the day's intention. These symbols can include:

- A lit candle for hope
- A vase filled with water for renewal
- Greenery from nature, such as herbs or flowers, for beauty and growth
- Stones and shells for creation
- Chimes or singing bowl for mindfulness

Additionally, consider asking retreat participants to add personal symbols that represent the self or their intentions for the day. As a beginning activity of the retreat, participants can share what their symbol is and why they chose it, and then place it on the table.

Consider the senses as you "set the table" for your retreat. Light candles or use an essential oil diffuser to incorporate aromatherapy. Check with all retreat participants for any allergies or sensitivities. Paying attention to the details of natural light, limited over-head light, view of the outdoors, and comfortable chairs all help to set the mood. Softening overhead lighting and allowing as much natural light as possible into the space help set the tone of a day of renewal. String lights and open blinds are a quick and cost-effective way to transform a space. Small lamps are a portable soft lighting option. Place blankets and pillows in the middle of the circle as an invitation for participants to take off their shoes and be comfortable. Chairs are optional as some people prefer to sit on the floor and use pillows as support. If possible, provide small side tables throughout the retreat room to allow folks to have a place for their beverage, journal, or snack. Consider having a video playing of natural scenes or instrumental music playing softly in the background.

Invitational Nature and Flexibility

One key aspect of the retreat experience is the opportunity for participants to make the day their own. While retreat designers and facilitators provide structure to the day, the retreat experience should be unveiled by the decisions of the participants.

Options to make the retreat flexible and invitational include:

- Dressing comfortably
- Arriving early for breakfast (8:30 am) or right as the retreat officially begins (9 am)
- Choosing their place in the circle and any blankets or pillows for comfort
- Taking food requests and preferences prior to the retreat and honoring them with the food provided for lunch or snacks
- Allowing for activity options during silent reflection time
- Making space for participants to process and reflect out loud collectively, in dyads, or individually, as they choose



Retreat Goals

General elements to consider including in your retreat may be meaningful time to reflect (often in silence); engaging in meaningful conversation (including generous listening); and having fun. Typically, all of these elements are taken up with the spirit of "practice" – with the deliberate intention of maintaining a deep engagement and a sacred presence in the activities. Arrive at each activity as fully as possible with respect for the activity and those who designed it, care and consideration for fellow coworkers, an interest in deepening one's own wisdom and compassion, and a desire to manifest the full potential of the larger group.

As you create a different kind of environment from your regular work, it is important to take special care that everyone feels secure. Because these kinds of contemplative spaces are so uncommon in our hectic world, sharing silence, for example, with a group of people can be challenging and uncomfortable for many of us at first, even if you know others in the group well. The challenge is to negotiate a balance between creating a space that feels comfortable and protecting time for reflection and contemplation.

Personal Technology Use

Consider asking retreat participants to avoid personal technology use throughout the retreat. A technology free day can act as a brief sabbatical from email, social media, and a ringing cell phone. Encourage smart phones, watches, and tablets to be put on airplane mode or silenced. Let participants know in advance if you choose to implement a technology free space.



In case of emergency, provide participants with a contact number they can share with friends or family who may need them. Check in advance if the phone number of the meeting location can act as an emergency contact for the duration of the retreat or let one member of your organization serve as the emergency contact. If it is unreasonable for participants to completely disconnect from technology, consider asking them to limit technology to set break times. Our experience has been that keeping technology devices out of the circle allows for participants to be more fully present, adding to the mindfulness tone of the retreat experience.

Food and Drink



Treating your team to a thoughtfully sourced meals can be a key element of a retreat day. In the spirit of mutual respect, honoring food aversions, allergies and preferences can help participants feel comfortable and honored. Take note of specific food allergies or preference prior to the retreat. Consider starting the day with breakfast treats that can be left out throughout the retreat, such as scones, muffins, or cinnamon rolls, as well as coffee, tea, water, and any other drinks attendees enjoy. Have lunch prepared and ready at lunch time so no additional effort has to be made the day of the retreat. Make arrangements for delivery or pickup if you are ordering your meal. Allow participants to choose to eat alone or with the group in a variety of settings, including outdoors if possible.

BOUNDARY MARKERS



In effort to honor your retreat goals, develop boundary markers to provide structure and "draw a line in the sand" for what will and will not be part of your team's retreat. Depending on the purpose of your retreat, you may or may not want to discuss work-related issues. If you have scheduled this retreat in effort to prevent burnout, then work conversation may be off limits for the day while the focus stays on self-care. If you've scheduled this retreat after a hard change, transition, or crisis within the organization, you may choose to provide space during the retreat to honor, celebrate, or grieve together as a form of collective-care for your team.

Boundary Markers that originated from the Center for Courage and Renewal are used during The Healing Trust's retreats. Consider using them as a framework for your retreat. Print them and give each participant a copy (see the following page for a printable list). Write them on a poster and hang it on the wall in your retreat space. Read them aloud together during your retreat.

Boundary Markers

Give and receive welcome. People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this retreat we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.

Be present as fully as possible. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

What is offered is by invitation, not demand. This is not a "share or die" event! Do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.

Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth. Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the circle, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.

No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other. This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us who like to "help." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.

Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions. Do not respond with counsel or corrections. Using honest, open questions helps us "hear each other into deeper speech."

When the going gets rough, turn to wonder. Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, "I wonder why they feel/think this way?" or "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.

Attend to your own inner teacher. We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.

Trust and learn from the silence. Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the retreat. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

Observe deep confidentiality. Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.

CRAFTING YOUR AGENDA



When designing a staff retreat day, it is important to pay attention to balance and flow throughout the day. Try to create a structure that supports your team in their natural tendencies and needs. During the day, schedule time for silence and time for speech, time for stillness and time for movement, time for reflection and time for production, and you'll discover you've created a balanced day.

Sleepiness tends to make the early afternoon a difficult period. Sometimes it is helpful to give people a little extra time to rest after lunch, followed by movement or an activity that is energetic and inspiring. After periods of intense discussion, it can be nice to have a break or at least time to spend in personal unstructured reflection.

Generally, it is good to end the day with a ritual or another cohesive activity that allows everyone to share their voice and have the opportunity to express their gratitude and appreciation for the day and each other. Consider asking participants to verbalize what they are thankful for from the retreat or how they are feeling moving forward after this renewing experience.

SAMPLE **AGENDA**

8:30	Arrival (begin later than typical work day)
9	Introductions
10	Mindful movement
10:30	Poetry and shared silence
	Team building exercise
12:30	Lunch hour
1:30	Silence (journaling, creativity, walking meditation)
3	Mindful movement
3:30	Meditation
4	Closing and sending forth

GROUP AND SELF-CARE PRACTICES

This section describes a variety of practices that can be included into your retreat. This is not an exhaustive list, but can be used as a starting point in crafting your agenda.

Introductions

Intentional introductions are a meaningful way to allow everyone in the room to have their voice heard. They encourage us to bring more of who we are to the group, which can lead to greater group cohesion. Even if many people in the room know each other, the following methods for introducing oneself around the circle can encourage a deeper level of knowing one another.

A good introductory circle process is for the each person to share their name and offer one thing about him or herself that he or she thinks no one else in the room knows. Again, this allows each participant to offer something personal to the group without feeling overexposed. Each individual has full discretion around what they offer. Often, new discoveries about a co-worker's hobbies and talents are made, creating new opportunities to connect.

If the group is just coming together for the first time, considering asking participants to pair off in dyads with a new friend—someone they did not know prior to the retreat. Then, ask each person in the dyad to interview each other. Finally, invite each person in the dyad to introduce their new friend to the group.

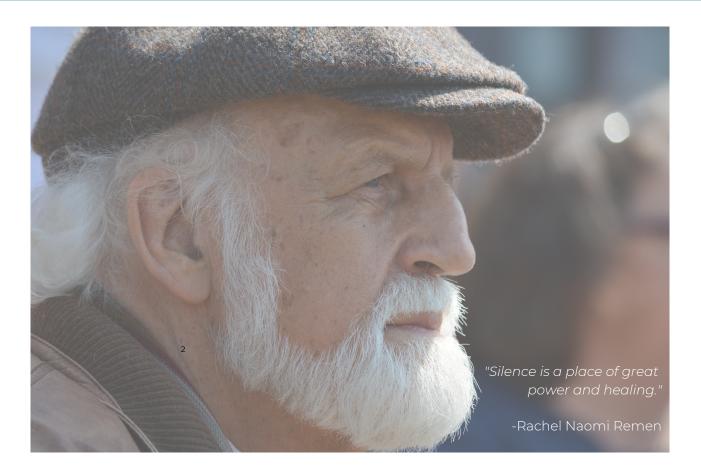
If you prefer to go around the circle and have everyone simply answer a question, consider using one of the following questions as a starting point:

When was the first time that you knew what you wanted to be in the world?

What song do you find most inspiring when you are feeling overwhelmed?

What's your favorite feeling, and what sparks that feeling in you?

Reflection Time



Time for reflection is an important component of a renewal self-care retreat. To encourage reflection, allow time for silence, not in the sense of the environment (as it is unlikely you can create a perfectly silent space void of distractions), but rather as a quality of mind, a way of being, and a powerful type of presence in the world. You cannot control the cars driving by or the birds chirping, but you can control your own voice.

When you practice silence, there is a self-consciousness that is often ignored in daily life. Embracing silence allows each retreat participant to be with him or herself in a way that is simply observant – not judgmental or mindless. This quality of observation can make your appreciation for life more subtle and profound and can transform the group experience.

As you share silence with each other, it is important to be careful that you are not "silencing" others or yourself. For some people, this may seem like an unnecessary distinction. But for people who have been silenced in their lives due to racial, sexual, or political oppression, this distinction can be deeply important. The silent dynamic you are trying to embody here is not one of "power over", where you are not permitted to speak, but rather of "power with" coworkers and friends, with whom you have made a commitment to understanding the value of sharing space and time in a way that is supportive, meaningful, and infused with respect.



Poetry Reading

Poems have a way of knocking down defenses to create a common language that the entire group can access. If you chose to read poetry collectively with your retreat participants, first introduce the poem and encourage participants to have an open mind. Provide every participant with a copy of the text. The invitation is to read and listen to the poem as if it were a sacred text.

Allow everyone to read the poem silently. Then, the facilitator can read the poem aloud in a mindful fashion, allowing silent reflection at the end of the reading. Next, invite another voice to read the poem, or consider going around the circle having each participant read a line or so, followed by silent reflection at the conclusion of the reading. Finally, invite the circle to share a word or stanza from the poem that caught their attention or imagination. The invitation is to share the words or stanza without commentary - just the words from the poem followed by a reflective silence. Another option is to allow commentary on the poem – why certain words stuck out or the feelings that arose during the reading, for example. All of this is by invitation.

Here are some poems to get you started if you are unsure where to begin.

- "Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou
- "The Gift" by Zoraida Rivera Morales
- "Happiness Makes Up in Height For What It Lacks in Length" by Robert Frost
- "Human Existence On Earth" by Julius Babarinsa
- "The Healers" by Laurence Binyon
- "The Peace of Wild Things" by Wendell Berry
- "Sleep Peacefully" by Alfonsina Storni
- "Peace of Mind" by Robert M. Hensel
- "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver
- "The Journey" by Mary Oliver
- "Love After Love" by Derek Walcott
- "Sometimes" by David Whyte

Creative Activities



Another way to invite rest for your team is to provide opportunities to be creative. Offer watercolors, paper, markers, and other art supplies during your retreat. Emphasize that the creative process is a judgement free zone. Time spent engaged in artistic expression can prove to be fun and fulfilling even for those who do not consider themselves to be artistically gifted. Provide adult coloring books or stickers to provide a no pressure creative outlet.

One project idea is to create a collage based on visioning the future of your organization or self. Provide magazines that participants can cut up in search of images that answer the question, "What would the world look like if I could show up to work as my best self?" After compiling the collage, invite team members to share their works of art. Set aside time for discussion around the differences and similarities. Remember to allow silence between sharing and utilize deep listening.

Additionally, remember that creative activities are not only visual artistic expression. Allow retreat participants to engage in creative writing or journaling if that is their preferred method of expressing their creativity. Provide puzzles for participants who want to create something without using artistic mediums.

Meditation



There are many forms of meditation that can be incorporated into a retreat day. In fact, it is important to apply a meditative quality of mind to all activities while on retreat. Formal meditation practice can also deepen the quality of contemplative mind. Meditation can help you meet the changing conditions of the world with ease and come from a place of deeper truth and tranquility when engaging with others. In many ways, meditation can be seen as a core practice for individuals and groups alike. Guided meditations can be practiced collectively by being read by a facilitator or listened to online.

Here are some resources that may be beneficial to meditation practice:

The Mindful Awareness Research Center

MARC's mission is to foster mindful awareness across the lifespan through education and research to promote well-being and a more compassionate society. Access meditations and more at: www.uclahealth.org/marc

One River Wisdom School

Online access to guided meditations in the Perennial Tradition. Access meditations at: www.oneriverwisdomnashville.org/meditations

The Meditation Podcast

Founded in 2006 by husband-and-wife team Jesse & Jeane Stern, The Meditation Podcast uses guided meditation, binaural beats, mindfulness, and 20+ years experience in Healing Arts. Search wherever you get podcasts.

Mindful Movement



Mindful exercise is another great activity to consider incorporating into your retreat. For many people, movement helps get them get out of their heads, into their body, and re-energized when feeling sluggish.

Offer these options by invitation to maintain the ambiance of voluntary relaxation, since for some, mindful exercises may not seem appealing or possible.

Yoga

If you are unable to have a yoga instructor teach a lesson, consider using a DVD version or online video. Search "Yoga with Adriene" or "Fightmaster Yoga" on YouTube for free recorded yoga sessions.

Tai Chi

Similarly to yoga, if you are unable to have an instructor teach a class, consider using a DVD or video that can be found online. Search "Taiji Zen" on YouTube.

Walking

If possible, walk outside while listening to music or do a walking meditation. Learn about walking meditation at www.ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/ walking_meditation

Hiking

Go to a state park and hike a short trail. Be sure to prepare participants for the weather.

Journaling

Journaling in silence can help people concentrate their thoughts on a particular idea and aid in quieting the mind. Journaling can also be good preparation for a conversation, allowing people to center their thoughts and get to the essence of the conversation more quickly. If you have a large group discussion planned and would like the group to thoughtfully prepare, try asking people to spend 20 minutes writing in response to a guiding question. Journaling does not need to be in the service of conversation. In and of itself, it can be a powerful way to connect with our inner lives and our world.

Consider providing journal prompts that play off a poem you have shared. Emphasizing that the prompt is completely optional allows for freedom in whatever direction an individual may feel led in their writing. For example:

In "The Peace of Wild Things," by Wendell Berry, the narrator contemplates a space in nature he or she retreats to escape the grief of this world. Take a moment to think about where your place of refuge would be. Describe it in detail and what you feel when you retire to it.

Additional Prompts

How would I like to feel today? What's one small step I can take to cultivate this feeling?

What makes my heart come alive? When do I feel most whole and like myself?

Take time to free write. Start with a guiding question, and write whatever comes to mind. No editing! This is for your eyes only. Write down whatever naturally flows from the pen.

- If I knew I could not fail, I would...
- The most important thing in my life is...
- If I could say one thing to _____, I would say...

Create a reverse bucket list. Write down a list of accomplishments from your past that you feel proud of. Add big and small accomplishments, as well as events or experiences that brought you joy. Make note of moments you felt proud to be yourself.



Take a moment to reflect on your life-where you are in this moment. Consider how you are different today from a year ago. What changes have shaped you? How have you grown? What are you most grateful for that has changed?

Setting boundaries is important for self-care. Create a "say no" list. What things can you take off your plate? Consider small adjustments you can make to live a more restful live. Next, make a "say yes" list. What things are life giving and should be made a priority in your life?

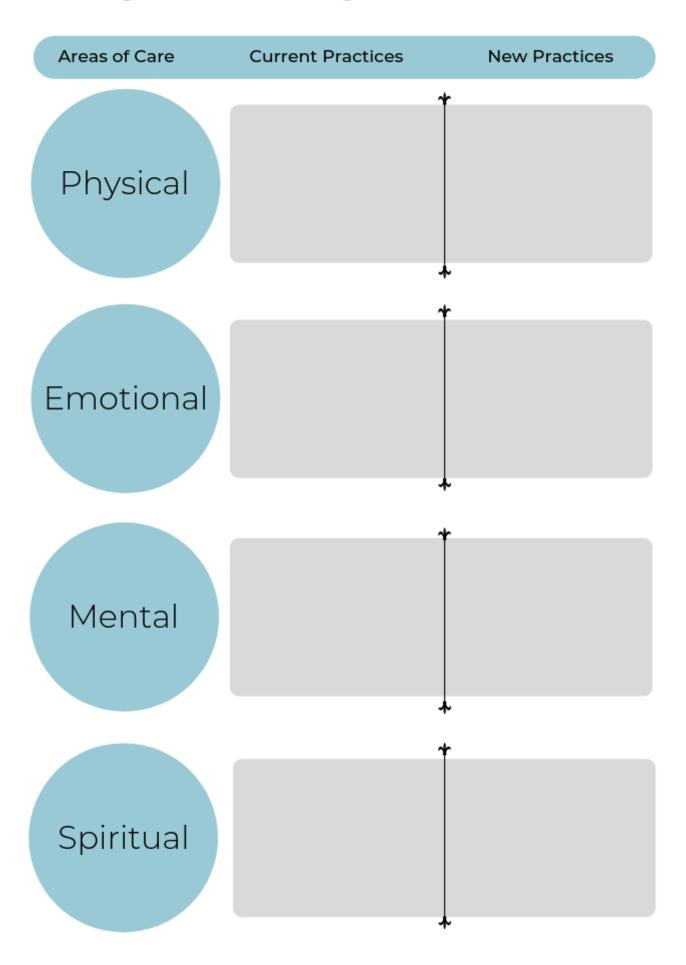
We all have a voice inside our head that tells us who we are and how we are doing. This voice tends to be our inner critic, telling us negative lies about our value that just aren't true. Describe the lies and bad advice you've received from your inner critic and respond with truth statements of your value.

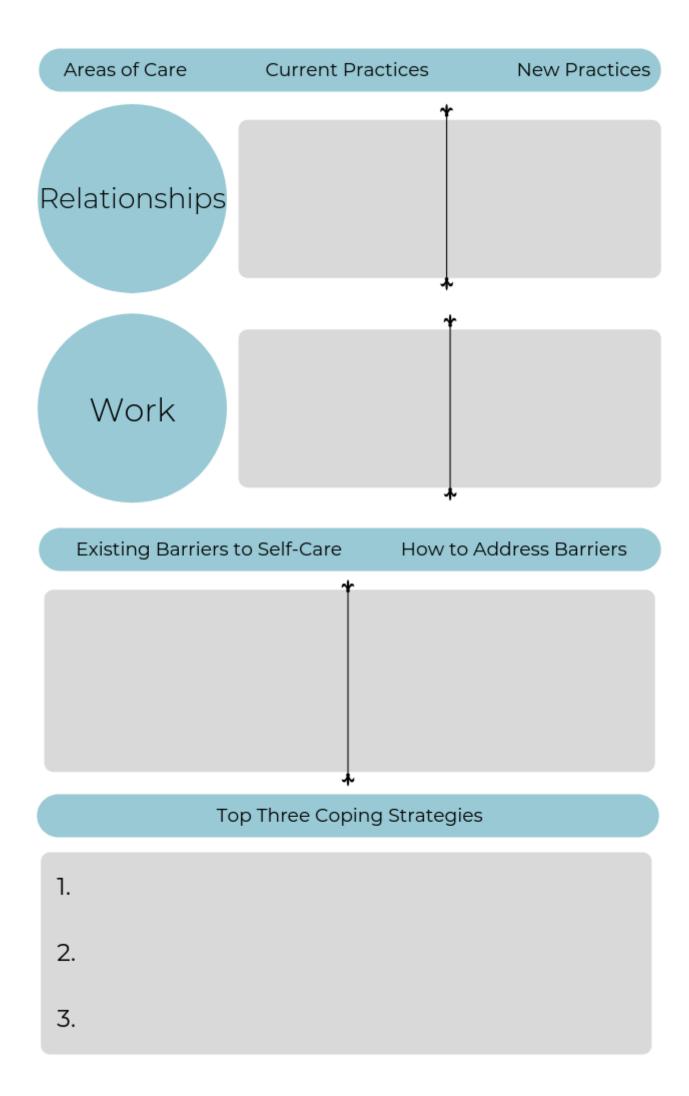
Self-Care Plans

As an activity during your retreat, have participants complete a self-care plan. For ongoing self-care, complete the weekly self-care worksheet on the following two pages. After a traumatic event or heightened period of stress, consider completing the emergency self-care plan for a shorter, more immediate self-care response.

When completing your self-care worksheets, consider personal needs, desires, and values. Ask participants to consider what self-care practices are practical and likely to be able to be implemented in their life. Remember, even small acts of self-care can make a big difference. The less glamorous things, like making healthy food choices, saying no, and going to therapy are also acts of self-care. Encourage participants to consider these actions as components of their self-care plans.

My Weekly Self-Care





SENDING FORTH

Within the final hour of the retreat it is helpful to join together for a concluding time of reflection before departing. During this time, ask participants to verbalize what they are thankful for from the day's experiences. Provide opportunity for participants to speak out what self-care practices they plan to continue with. This is also a good time to ask for feedback that can be utilized in future retreats.



"Taking care of yourself doesn't mean me first, it means **me too.**"

-L.R. Knost

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Additional Resources

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More from The Trust

Visit www.healingtrust.org to download the Self-Care Toolkit and the Self-Care Planning Guide for Individuals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the following people:

John Allen served has the facilitator of the Healing for the Healer retreat at the date of publication. His experience includes design and implementation of employee wellness programs, employee assistance programs, professional development initiatives, behavioral health plans, talent management initiatives, and leadership formation. Learn more about John at www.linkedin.com/in/johnalleniii/

We are grateful for the contributions of previous facilitators to The Trust's Healing for the Healer program.

Atarah Abdullah-Muhammed served as a program intern at The Healing Trust during 2018-2019. Learn more about Atarah at www.linkedin.com/in/atarah-abdullah-muhammad/

Abigail Siegel Hyman served as a program intern at The Healing Trust during 2018-2019. Learn more about Abigail at www.linkedin.com/in/abigailasiegel/

