

HOPE

Support Through Grief & Loss

*This information is provided courtesy of Hamilton's Academy of Grief & Loss:
Information, Resources, Education & Support.*

Top 10 Ways to Care For Yourself

By Carrie Bauer, LBSW

- 1. Breathe.** When we are stressed, our breath is often more shallow. This is a way our body is telling us to slow down.
 - When you are feeling stressed, do some deep breathing exercises at least 3x/day.
 - Try to step away from the situation of possible.
 - *Try this...*Breathe in and say to yourself "Let." Breathe out and say to yourself "Go." Repeat 3-5 times.
- 2. Gratitude.** Taking time to notice and reflect upon the things you are thankful for can greatly improve your emotional and physical health.
 - There is always something to be grateful for, it just may look different than we think. Look for gifts in unexpected things or places.
 - *Try this...*Gratitude journal - write down five things every day that you are grateful for. Think of physical, emotional and spiritual things.
- 3. Sleep.** Develop a regular sleep pattern. Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning as much as possible.
 - 7-8 hours of sleep is optimal, or try to get a 10 minute catnap when possible.
 - *Try this...*Track your sleep for two weeks. Write down the time you went to bed and the time you got up each day. Note how you slept - did you sleep through the night, did you get up often, etc.? Look over your notes, are there things you can change to improve your sleep? Limiting your screen time before bed, not drinking caffeine in the afternoon, etc.
- 4. Mindfulness.** Become fully present in whatever you are doing - meditation, prayers, etc.
 - Try to do for 15 minutes/day. This can be split throughout the day, or all at once.
 - *Try this...*Mindful eating. Eat a meal in silence, without distractions. Think about the food you are eating, truly enjoy the taste of each bite. Think of where the food came from, who produced it. Thinking of how grateful you are for being able to eat it, being thankful you have the ability to enjoy the meal.
- 5. Self-Compassion.** Often we can be our own worst critics, but negative self-thinking can be very damaging to our well-being.
 - Forgive yourself for not being perfect, and be even more forgiving with yourself when you are going through a difficult time.
 - *Try this...*Write a compassionate letter to yourself. In the letter, help your current self know that you are loved and you do not need to suffer. Put the letter away and read it again at a later time.



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- 6. Social Connection.** Find a healthy work and life balance. Find other people who “get it” or are in the same field as you, but also find those who can support you outside of your field.
- Be okay with saying “no” to others, and know who the people are in your life who may drain the energy from you. You may have to avoid these people at times when you are struggling.
 - *Try this...*Make a list of people you can call or reach out to when you are having a difficult time. Write down 3-4 people you know you can contact, and how to contact them. Have this list in your phone or wallet so you can look at it when you are struggling. If you don’t have a good list of people to contact, work on the list so you know who to turn to when you need support.
- 7. Exercise.** Find something that you enjoy doing and try to do it at least 3 times/week.
- This also includes healthy food choices and regularly scheduled meals.
 - *Try this...*Go on a mindful walk. Walk on a trail or down the street for even just 10 minutes. Be mindful of your surroundings during your walk. Pay attention to what is going on around you; what do you hear, what do you see, what do you smell, etc.?
- 8. Laughter.** Laughing is similar to crying in that it is a release of emotions and can help release endorphins and boost your immune system.
- Find things that make you laugh every day, several times a day. Avoid “heavy” topics on extra tough days, as these may increase your suffering.
 - *Try this...*Laughter yoga; fake a smile, giggle, then laugh slowly and gradually increasing in tempo and volume. Our bodies can’t detect fake laughter vs. real laughter so you get the same benefits.
- 9. Focus on the Positive.** Make a conscious effort to find the positive, even in negative situations.
- Remember T.E.A. - Thoughts create Emotions that cause Actions.
 - *Try this...*Write down the negative or difficult situation you are experiencing. Now write three positives that came from the experience or situation.
- 10. Hugs!.** Hugs can actually help us physically and emotionally. Hugs can boost serotonin levels that help create happiness. They can build trust and a sense of safety.
- A hug can help us be present in the moment, and can encourage understanding between two people.
 - *Try this...*On a stressful day, make it a point to give and/or receive eight hugs. Be purposeful when seeking them out, and truly embrace the physical and emotional feelings you feel from the hug.