



# SIBLING SELF-CARE TOOLKIT & WORKBOOK

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# WELCOME

In life, we often find ourselves navigating through uncharted territories that test our strength and resilience. As siblings of individuals with disabilities, we embark on a unique and rewarding journey, one filled with a blend of joy, compassion, and a commitment to supporting our loved ones. This journey is undoubtedly a profound experience that shapes us in ways we could never have imagined.

Although we share a deep connection with our brothers and sisters, we must also acknowledge the complexities that come with this role. As we advocate alongside them for their rights, provide unwavering support, and celebrate their triumphs, we may find ourselves sometimes neglecting our own well-being. In the midst of caregiving, it is easy to forget that we, too, need care, compassion, and understanding.

At the Sibling Leadership Network, we strive to provide siblings with tools and resources that can be applied in everyday life. Building on the resources available on our website, we created this toolkit and workbook to put together these different lessons in one place and provide space for personal reflection.

Within these pages, we hope you find tools and practices to nurture your own well-being. Self-care is not selfish; it is a necessary act of love that allows us to better care for others. Just as we tend to the needs of our siblings, so must we tend to our own.



# what is self-care?

“Self-care means taking the time to do things that help you live well and improve both your physical health and mental health. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower your risk of illness, and increase your energy. Even small acts of self-care in your daily life can have a big impact.”

—National Institute of Mental Health

Source/Further Reading:

- Caring for Your Mental Health:

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/caring-for-your-mental-health>

# the importance of establishing a self-care plan

Taking time for self-care builds emotional resilience, allowing you to bounce back more effectively from challenges and setbacks. A self-care plan helps establish boundaries. This is particularly important if you are in a caregiving role as this helps maintain the balance between caregiving responsibilities and personal life. This balance is essential to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

A self-care plan encourages you to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself and with others, and encourages you to reconnect with and nourish yourself before you go out and give to the world.

When you take care of yourself, you will have so much more to give and with much more quality.

**Why is it important for you to establish a self-care plan?**

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# the first step is self-awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to introspect and recognize your own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and characteristics. It involves having a clear and honest understanding of yourself, including strengths, weaknesses, values, beliefs, desires, and motivations. It is a fundamental aspect of human consciousness and plays a significant role in personal development, emotional intelligence, and decision-making.

Self-awareness is a crucial component of self-care because it provides the foundation for understanding your needs, recognizing when you are stressed or overwhelmed, and making informed choices about how to care for your physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Being self-aware also helps in monitoring your energy levels and recognizing signs of burnout or exhaustion. Furthermore, it can help you establish and maintain healthy boundaries in relationships and in other areas of your life. When you know your limits, you can assertively communicate and protect your personal space and time and respond to stress or difficult emotions in healthy ways, such as through relaxation techniques, mindfulness, or seeking support from others. This empowers you to make choices that align with your values, priorities, and goals.

According to a 2016 study, positive characteristics that result from high self-awareness can lead to improved well-being.

Reflecting on your role as a sibling and where and who you are as an individual is a good place to start your journey in building your own self-care plan as it helps deepen your understanding of yourself and your needs. In the next few pages, you'll find some questions to reflect on to enhance your own self-awareness.

Source & Further Reading:

- Measuring the Effects of Self-Awareness: Construction of the Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5114878/>

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

**When did you first become aware that your sibling had a disability, and how did you feel about it at that time? How has your understanding of your sibling's disability evolved as you've grown older?**

**What role do you have in supporting your sibling, both emotionally and/or practically? Have you ever advocated for your sibling's needs or rights in any way?**



**What emotions have you experienced in relation to your sibling's disability?**

**How do you typically cope with the challenges and stressors associated with having a sibling with a disability?**

**In what ways has having a sibling with a disability shaped your personal growth and character? Have you developed any skills or qualities as a result of this experience? What lessons have you learned about love, resilience, and diversity through your sibling's disability?**

Feel free to express or explore different sides of this experience. For example, on the one hand, it's possible that you have become more patient or compassionate. On the other hand, you may find it difficult to say "no" even when you are feeling overwhelmed.



**What is causing you stress or discomfort right now?**

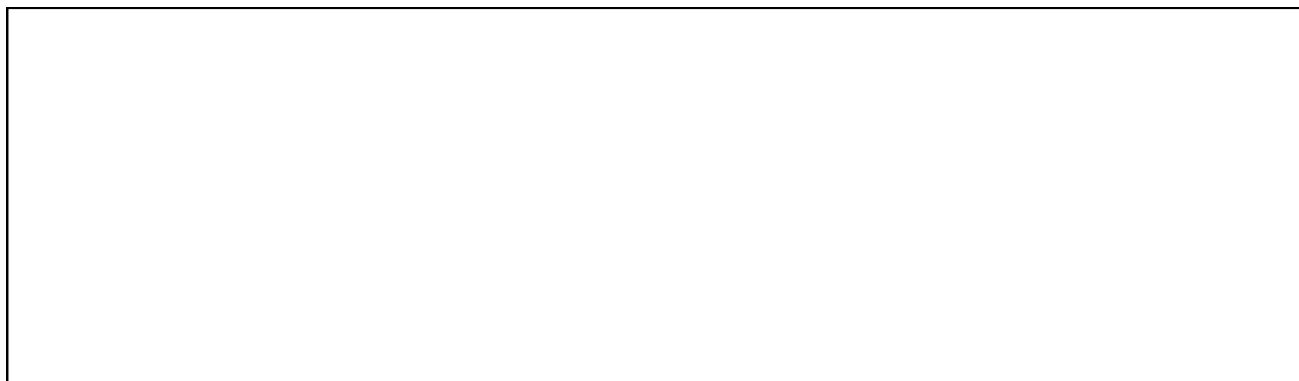
**What do you look forward to each day?**

**Who or what energizes and inspires you?**

**Who or what takes your energy?**

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**Who or what makes you feel safe, supported and valued?**

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**Who or what makes you feel unsafe, unsupported or devalued?**

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**Looking at your life holistically, what brings you the most joy and fulfillment?**

**In general, how do you handle stress and adversities? What about failure and setbacks?**

**What are your priorities in life, and how are you allocating your time and energy accordingly?**



## OTHER WAYS TO INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS

**Note:** Feel free to use a separate notebook or a few sheets of paper for the next exercises.

**Keep a Journal** - Writing down your thoughts, feelings, and experiences allows you to reflect on them. It gives you the opportunity to process and make sense of them, leading to a deeper understanding of yourself. Over time, journaling can also help you identify recurring patterns in your thoughts, behaviors, and emotions. This can provide insights into your habits, triggers, and reactions. You can also write down your goals, intentions, and aspirations. Doing so can support you in aligning your actions with your values and desires, and better articulate what you want to achieve. Here are a few journal prompts to get you started:

- What happened today?
  - What were my dominant emotions today/this week/this month?
  - What was meaningful about today?
  - What are my strengths and weaknesses?
  - What do I love about myself, and what would I like to change?
  - What are my goals for this week/month/year? What are my longer-term goals?
- 
- **Identify Your Core Values** - Identifying your values requires introspection. This process deepens your self-awareness by helping you understand why certain things are important to you and how they influence your thoughts and behaviors. One way to determine your values is by examining your most meaningful experiences. Why do these experiences stand out? What emotions did you feel? By looking at these defining moments, you can determine what values were at play. Once you have identified your core values, you can use them to guide you as you make decisions in your daily life. You may discover that life feels good when you are aligned with your values, and when you're not, there's a sense of discomfort and imbalance.

Source and Further Reading:

- How to be Self-Aware and Why it's Important:
  - <https://psychcentral.com/health/how-to-be-more-self-aware-and-why-its-important#tips>
- What Are Your Values:
  - <https://www.mindtools.com/a5eygum/what-are-your-values>

## OTHER WAYS TO INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS

- **Identify your Glimmers and Triggers** - A trigger can be a person, place, thing, or situation that affects your emotional state, often significantly, by causing extreme overwhelm or distress. While a glimmer is the opposite of a trigger - it is an internal or external cue that brings back your sense of joy or safety. For example, it could be hearing your favorite song on the radio that puts you automatically in a good mood. Or it could be catching a cool breeze that makes you feel calm and peaceful.

By recognizing your glimmers and triggers, you can better understand why you react the way you do in certain situations. This understanding helps you become more aware of your emotional responses and their underlying causes. This exercise may also help uncover patterns in your thoughts, emotions and behaviors and provide insights into your beliefs and values. Once you know your triggers, you can begin the work of managing your reactions in a more constructive and conscious way, while being aware of your glimmers can encourage you to see the good in situations or infuse more of these in your daily life.

Source and Further Reading:

- Understanding Glimmers & Triggers:
  - <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-glimmer-5323168>

# exploring self-care

Self-care is essential for siblings of individuals with disabilities as it provides a vital lifeline for their own well-being. By practicing self-care, siblings can manage stress, foster emotional resilience, and prevent caregiver burnout. This self-nurturing creates a balance between caregiving roles and their own personal lives, ensuring they have the strength and energy to provide ongoing support to their siblings.

It's important to note that self-care encompasses a wide variety of activities. From listening to music to simply taking time to breathe. There isn't a one-size fits all strategy. Different types of self-care are usually interconnected (for example, what's good for the body is oftentimes good for the mind) but it's important that you create your own self-care plan that is tailored to fit your preferences and what is going on in your life.

When integrating self-care practices in your daily life, remember to be patient with yourself. Breakthroughs don't happen overnight. The goal is to take it one step at a time and engage in activities that would help you face challenges and manage stress in a healthy way.

In this section, we will explore a number of self-care practices, strategies for managing stress and anxiety, and exercises to enhance joy and well-being in everyday life.

Sources and Further Reading for this section:

- Creating a Caregiving Self-Care Plan
  - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/two-takes-depression/202205/creating-caregiving-self-care-plan>
- 5 Self-Care Practices for Every Area of Your Life
  - <https://www.verywellmind.com/self-care-strategies-overall-stress-reduction-3144729>

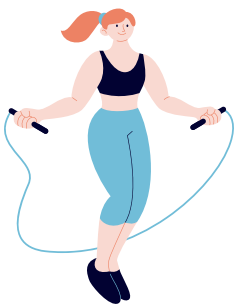




## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-CARE

Self-care can be divided into several main categories, each encompassing various practices and activities that contribute to overall well-being. These categories help individuals address different aspects of their physical, mental, and emotional health. Here are the main categories of self-care.

**Note:** Feel free to use a separate notebook or a few sheets of paper to write down your thoughts as you go through this section.



### Physical Self-Care

Physical self-care refers to actions and practices aimed at promoting and maintaining physical health and well-being. It involves taking deliberate steps to care for your body and address your physical needs.

As mentioned earlier, there is a strong connection between your body and your mind. For example, exercise has been shown to boost cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and problem-solving. It increases blood flow to the brain, which can enhance mental clarity and cognitive performance. Movement can also elevate your mood and reduce stress hormones. Regular physical activity can act as a stress buffer, making you more resilient to the effects of stress.

Besides exercise, physical self-care can include how much sleep you're getting, eating nourishing food, and attending healthcare or wellness appointments.

#### Questions to Consider:

- Are you getting adequate sleep?
- How is your body feeling at this moment?
- Is your diet fueling your body well?
- What makes you feel energized?

#### Examples of Physical Self-Care:

- Exercise and physical activity
- Proper nutrition and hydration
- Adequate sleep and rest
- Regular medical check-ups
- Personal hygiene and grooming
- Relaxation techniques like deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-CARE



### Mental Self-Care

Mental self-care encompasses a variety of activities aimed at nurturing your cognitive well-being and preserving your mental health. This includes engaging in activities that stimulate and keep your mind agile, such as learning a new skill or delving into subjects that captivate your curiosity.

Most importantly, mental self-care extends to practices that promote your overall mental health. Cultivating self-compassion and acceptance, for instance, contributes to fostering a more positive and constructive inner dialogue. This self-compassion allows you to embrace your imperfections and navigate life's challenges with a kinder and more resilient mindset, ultimately enhancing your mental well-being.

#### Questions to Consider:

- What activities mentally stimulate or challenge you?
- Are you able to concentrate on one task at a time? Or do you feel overwhelmed when you have a lot of things on your plate?
- What topics do you like diving into or discussing?
- What thoughts cross your mind in times of stress or challenges?
- What thoughts cross your mind when you accomplish something?

#### Examples of Mental Self-Care:

- Continuous learning and skill development
- Reading
- Time management and organization
- Avoiding over-commitment and excessive multitasking
- Keeping a planner - breaking down big projects or goals into smaller, doable action items
- Engaging in creative outlets such as music, art, or dancing
- Practicing self-compassion by treating yourself as a friend - give yourself grace when things don't go according to plan and celebrate wins, big or small.

#### Further Reading:

- How to Practice Self-Compassion:
  - <https://positivepsychology.com/how-to-practice-self-compassion/>

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-CARE



### Social Self-Care

Social self-care refers to actions and practices that focus on nurturing and maintaining healthy, meaningful, and supportive relationships with others. It involves engaging in activities and behaviors that promote social connection, communication, and well-being. Social self-care is an important aspect of overall well-being because human beings are inherently social creatures, and our relationships with others significantly impact our mental and emotional health.

Social self-care involves cultivating and sustaining healthy, positive relationships with friends, family members, colleagues, and other individuals in your life. Your social group could also include support groups and communities that share your interests, advocacies, and passions. Parts of social self-care include setting and respecting boundaries, communicating openly, and resolving conflicts constructively. It also means spending quality time with others through activities, conversations and shared experiences.

#### Questions to Consider:

- Who are the people you often share experiences with?
- Are you comfortable saying “no” to friends and/or family?
- What are you doing to nurture your relationships?
- Are you getting enough face-to-face time with your friends?
- Who are the people you share your interests, advocacies, and passions with?

#### Examples of Social Self-Care:

- Seeking social support when needed
- Participating in social or group activities such as clubs and organizations, volunteering etc.
- Exploring support networks and communities
- Setting boundaries in relationships
- Practicing effective communication - being open and honest about your opinions
- Limiting the use of devices and social media and instead prioritizing in-person quality time with loved ones



## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-CARE



### Spiritual Self-Care

Spirituality is the broad concept of a belief in something beyond the self. It explores the meaning of life, how people are connected to one another, and other mysteries of human existence. It suggests that there is something greater that connects all beings to each other and to the universe itself.

Spiritual self-care is a deeply personal and individualized practice. It's about connecting with what brings you a sense of meaning, purpose, and inner peace. Whether you follow a specific religion, have a more general spiritual belief, or consider yourself spiritual but not religious, nurturing your spiritual well-being can contribute to a richer and more fulfilling life, and can make you feel more connected to the world around you.

For example, many find peace and connection in nature. Others may consider meditation a spiritual experience that helps with feeling more present and connected with their inner self.

#### Questions to Consider:

- What activities or places make you feel the most at peace?
- What questions do you ask yourself about your life and experiences?
- What experiences do you think connect us as people?

#### Examples of Spiritual Self-Care:

- Spending time in nature or green spaces
- Meditation, prayer and mindfulness
- Reflecting on your values and purpose
- Practicing gratitude and appreciation
- Acts of kindness - experiencing compassion and empathy towards others

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SELF-CARE



### Emotional Self-Care

Emotional self-care involves recognizing, validating, and addressing your emotional needs and feelings in a healthy and constructive manner. It starts with recognizing and acknowledging your feelings, whether they are positive or negative, without judgment.

It's important to have healthy coping skills to deal with uncomfortable emotions, like anger, anxiety, and sadness.

Emotional self-care may include activities that help you acknowledge and express your feelings regularly and safely, and establish healthy coping skills to deal with emotions such as stress, anger, anxiety, or sadness. These may include activities that were outlined in the previous pages - from talking to a close friend about how you feel, to going for a walk to help process your thoughts and emotions.

#### Questions to Consider:

- How do you usually express or process your emotions?
- How often do you check-in with yourself and consider how you are feeling?
- What makes you feel comforted?
- What makes you feel inspired or energized?
- What makes you feel recharged?

#### Examples of Emotional Self-Care:

- Journaling and self-reflection
- Expressive arts such as painting, singing or dancing
- Breath work
- Seeking therapy or counseling
- Positive self-talk and self-compassion

**What self-care practices do you currently do or would like to do more?**

**What other self-care practices would you like to try? Are there any areas in your life that could benefit from more attention and care?**



# Mindfulness & Relaxation

Mindfulness is a state of awareness characterized by being fully present and engaged in the current moment without judgment or distraction. It involves paying deliberate attention to your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and the surrounding environment, allowing you to experience each moment as it unfolds.

Key characteristics of mindfulness include:

1. **Present Moment Awareness:** Mindfulness involves focusing your attention on the here and now, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. It encourages you to immerse yourself fully in whatever you are doing at the moment.
2. **Non-Judgmental Observation:** Mindfulness encourages an attitude of non-judgmental observation. It means accepting your thoughts, emotions, and sensations without labeling them as "good" or "bad." This non-reactive stance allows for greater emotional and mental clarity.
3. **Awareness of Sensations:** Mindfulness often involves paying close attention to bodily sensations, such as the breath, the feeling of the ground beneath your feet, or the sensations of touch and taste. This helps anchor your awareness in the present moment.
4. **Observing Thoughts:** Mindfulness also involves observing your thoughts as they arise without getting caught up in them or trying to change them. You simply notice your thoughts as mental events.
5. **Breathing as an Anchor:** Mindfulness often uses the breath as an anchor for attention. By focusing on the rhythm of your breath, you can stay centered in the present moment.

For siblings of individuals with disabilities, mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing and meditation, can help reduce stress and provide a sense of calm in the face of challenges and responsibilities related to caregiving, advocacy, and emotional support.

Mindfulness can enhance emotional regulation, helping siblings manage complex emotions associated with having a sibling with a disability. In the next pages, you will find a number of mindfulness exercises and relaxation techniques that you can begin incorporating as part of your self-care practice and to soothe stress and anxiety.

Sources and Further Reading for this section:

- Mindfulness-based practices with family carers of adults with learning disability and behaviour that challenges in the UK: Participatory health research
  - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6737767/>
- What is Mindfulness
  - <https://www.healthline.com/health/mind-body/what-is-mindfulness#how-to-practice>

## MINDFUL BREATHING - 3-4-5 BREATHING

When experiencing a stressful situation, notice that breathing becomes fast, irregular, and shallow. Sometimes, you may even hold your breath unknowingly. Becoming aware of your breath and practicing breathing exercises can increase the supply of oxygen into your brain and stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, which in turn promotes a state of calmness.

Breathing helps connect with our bodies and the present moment. And the beauty of it is that it can be done anytime and anywhere - before facing a stressful situation, during the situation itself, or after. It can be done before starting the day to feel calm and focused, in the middle of the workday as part of a coffee break, or at the end of the day to quiet our thoughts.

The 3-4-5 breathing technique is an easy one to remember.

1. Begin with one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. If sitting down, make sure your back is supported and your feet are firmly on the ground.
2. Observe the rise and fall of your chest and stomach.
3. Take a deep breath counting to three. Feel the air as it enters your lungs and expands your stomach.
4. Hold your breath for four seconds.
5. Slowly exhale through your mouth for five seconds.



## MINDFUL BREATHING - BOX BREATHING

Another version of mindful breathing is box breathing, also known as square breathing or four-square breathing. It is a simple and effective relaxation technique that involves regulating your breath to create a calming and balanced effect on your nervous system. Here are step-by-step instructions for box breathing:

1. **Find a Comfortable Position:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable and relaxed position. You can also practice box breathing while sitting in a chair with your feet flat on the ground and your hands resting on your lap.
2. **Close Your Eyes (Optional):** If you feel comfortable, gently close your eyes to minimize distractions and enhance your focus on your breath.
3. **Begin the Breath Cycle:** Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for a count of four seconds. As you inhale, imagine filling your lungs from the bottom to the top. Your abdomen should rise as you breathe in.
4. **Hold Your Breath:** Once you've completed the inhalation, hold your breath for a count of four seconds. During this pause, keep your airways relaxed; don't tense up.
5. **Exhale Slowly:** Exhale slowly and completely through your mouth for a count of four seconds. As you exhale, imagine releasing all tension and stress from your body.
6. **Pause After Exhaling:** After you've exhaled completely, pause and hold your breath out for another count of four seconds. This brief pause allows you to experience a moment of stillness and reset.
7. **Repeat the Cycle:** Begin the cycle again by inhaling for four seconds, holding for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds, and pausing for four seconds after exhaling. This completes one full box breath cycle.
8. **Continue for Desired Duration:** Continue the box breathing pattern for several minutes, or for as long as you feel comfortable. You can start with a few cycles and gradually increase the duration as you become more accustomed to the practice.
9. **Finish:** To conclude your box breathing session, take a few natural breaths, and then return to your regular breathing pattern.

Box breathing is a versatile relaxation technique that you can use whenever you need to reduce stress, calm your mind, or regain focus. It's especially helpful in situations where you may be feeling anxious or overwhelmed.



## MINDFUL LISTENING

Sounds can illicit strong thoughts or emotions. For example, you might have a strong dislike for a song because you've heard it too many times. Perhaps the beat or rhythm sounds too repetitive.

When doing this exercise, open your ears and free your mind of any judgments about the sound. This exercise can be done even when there are background sounds present. The important thing to remember is to try to hear the sounds for only what they are.

1. Find a comfortable space to sit. Close your eyes and tune in to the sounds around you.
2. If you're hearing music, try not to judge it by its genre or artist. Instead, allow yourself to explore the dynamics of each instrument. Try to hear them separately and then together. Discover the textures that each instrument has. Apply the same approach to voice. If you're hearing chatter around you, explore the different tones and cadences. Focus not on what is being said but on the sound of the voice of each person.
3. If you're hearing nature, experience how the wind sounds as it slows down and picks up. How it sounds against plants and trees around you. The different sounds from the birds or animals around you.
4. As you listen, slowly breathe in and slowly exhale.





## 5-4-3-2-1 GROUNDING EXERCISE

The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise is a mindfulness technique that quickly and effectively brings back your attention back to the here and now. This is especially helpful when you're feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or disconnected from the present moment. It can be a valuable tool for managing stress and promoting mindfulness in daily life.

1. **Find a Quiet Space:** Choose a quiet and comfortable space where you can sit or stand in a relaxed manner. If possible, close your eyes to minimize distractions.
2. **Take a Deep Breath:** Begin by taking a slow and deep breath in through your nose. As you inhale, focus on the sensation of the breath filling your lungs.
3. **Acknowledge Five Things You Can See:** Open your eyes if they were closed, and look around you. Identify and mentally acknowledge five things that you can see in your immediate environment. It could be objects in the room, people, or any details around you.
4. **Notice Four Things You Can Touch:** Pay attention to four things you can physically touch or feel. This might include the sensation of your clothing against your skin, the texture of a chair or table, or the feeling of the ground beneath your feet.
5. **Listen for Three Sounds:** Tune in to your sense of hearing and identify three distinct sounds that you can hear at that moment. It could be the hum of an appliance, birds chirping, or distant traffic.
6. **Identify Two Things You Can Smell:** Focus on your sense of smell and identify two odors or scents in your environment. These could be the aroma of a nearby plant, a meal being cooked, or any other smells present.
7. **Recognize One Thing You Can Taste:** If there's something you can taste or have recently tasted, acknowledge it. It might be the lingering taste of a snack or a drink.
8. **Take Another Deep Breath:** After going through these steps, take another deep breath in through your nose and exhale slowly through your mouth. As you breathe out, release any tension or stress.
9. **Return to the Present:** Open your eyes if they were closed, and take a moment to reorient yourself to the present moment. Notice how you feel and any changes in your sense of calm or relaxation.

## MINDFUL WALKING

Mindful walking is a form of meditation that involves walking slowly and deliberately while paying full attention to each step and your surroundings. It can be a great way to cultivate mindfulness in motion. Here's a simple mindfulness walking exercise you can try:

1. **Choose a Location:** Find a quiet and safe place to walk. It could be a park, a garden, a nature trail, or even a quiet area in your neighborhood. Ensure that the path is free from obstacles and distractions.
2. **Stand Still:** Start by standing still for a moment. Take a few deep breaths to center yourself and bring your attention to the present moment. Feel the ground beneath your feet.
3. **Begin Walking Slowly:** Start walking at a slow and comfortable pace. Focus on the physical sensations of walking. Pay attention to the movement of your body, the lifting and placing of your feet, and the shifting of your weight.
4. **Pay Attention to Your Feet:** As you walk, bring your full awareness to your feet. Notice how they feel as they make contact with the ground. Feel the sensation of each step, from the heel touching down to the toes lifting off.
5. **Observe Your Breath:** Pay attention to your breath as you walk. Match your steps with your breath, taking one step with each inhale and one step with each exhale. For example, as you inhale, say to yourself, "Inhale, step. Inhale, step." Then, as you exhale, say, "Exhale, step. Exhale, step."
6. **Engage Your Senses:** Open your awareness to your surroundings. Notice the colors, shapes, and details of the environment. Listen to the sounds around you, whether it's the rustling of leaves, birdsong, or the distant hum of traffic.
7. **Stay Present:** If your mind starts to wander or you become distracted, gently bring your focus back to your walking and your breath. It's normal for the mind to wander; the key is to notice when it happens and return to the present moment.
8. **Continue Walking Mindfully:** Keep walking mindfully for as long as you like. You can set a specific duration for your practice or simply walk until you feel a sense of calm and presence.
9. **Conclude Mindfully:** To conclude your mindfulness walking exercise, gradually slow down and come to a stop. Stand still for a moment and take a few deep breaths, savoring the sense of presence and calm you've cultivated.

## MORE EXERCISES TO SOOTHE ANXIETY:

### Relax Your Muscles

Similar to holding your breath or uneven breathing in times of stress, anxiety can cause tension or strain in your muscles. This muscle stress can make your anxiety more difficult to manage in the moment you're experiencing it. Relieving the stress in your muscles can help reduce your anxiety levels.

To quickly relieve your muscle tension during moments of anxiety:

1. Sit in a quiet and comfortable place. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Breathe slowly into your nose and out of your mouth.
2. Use your hand to make a tight fist. Squeeze your fist tightly.
3. Hold your squeezed fist for a few seconds. Notice all the tension you feel in your hand.
4. Slowly open your fingers and be aware of how you feel. You may notice a feeling of tension leaving your hand. Eventually, your hand will feel lighter and more relaxed.
5. Continue tensing and then releasing various muscle groups in your body, from your hands, legs, shoulders, or feet. You may want to work your way up and down your body tensing various muscle groups. Avoid tensing the muscles in any area of your body where you're injured or in pain, as that may further aggravate your injury.

## MORE EXERCISES TO SOOTHE ANXIETY:

### Interrupt Your Anxious Thinking

Thinking clearly can be difficult when you're feeling anxious. Anxiety can also result into harmful thoughts that are untrue or keep you from taking action on important matters. Interrupting your anxious thoughts can bring you down to a calmer state and help you react appropriately to your thoughts.

Here are a couple of ways you can break your anxious thought cycle:

- Movement - physical movement such as dancing, walking, or a light exercise can shift your attention or focus.
- Listen to music or read a book
- Art - engaging in creative activities such as coloring, painting or drawing
- Recall a positive thought to focus on such as an event, a person, a place, or even something that you look forward to doing later that day, such as eating a delicious meal.

Observe when you shift your attention from your anxiety to a task at hand and notice how you feel.

Source and Further Reading:

- Anxiety Exercises
  - <https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety-exercises#thought-cycle>



# establishing boundaries

Recognizing and setting boundaries is an important aspect of maintaining healthy relationships and personal well-being. Boundaries is a combination of your limits, values, and expectations in various areas of your life.

As a sibling, you may experience a range of emotions, including love, concern, frustration, and guilt. Setting boundaries can help maintain and nourish your own emotional and mental well-being, ensuring that you don't become overwhelmed or burnt out by the caregiving responsibilities or emotional challenges that can come with supporting your sibling.

Setting boundaries can also help with maintaining your own identity and pursuing your own life path without feeling guilty about dedicating time and energy to your own aspirations. Clear boundaries can lead to healthier sibling and family relationships. They allow for open and honest communication about the roles, responsibilities, and expectations within the family, helping reduce misunderstandings and conflicts.

## BENEFITS OF HEALTHY BOUNDARIES



Good mental & emotional health



Developed autonomy & identity



Avoid burnout



Healthy relationships

Source and Further Reading:

- Siblings caring for siblings with Intellectual Disabilities: Naming and negotiating emotional tensions
  - <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953619302229#preview-section-snippets>

## 7 TYPES OF BOUNDARIES



### TIME

How much time you can spend with someone or doing something.

Ex. "I can only stay for 20 minutes."



### CONVERSATION

The topics you do and do not feel comfortable discussing.

Ex. "I don't feel comfortable answering that question."



### MENTAL

Freedom to have your own thoughts and opinions.

Ex. "I respect your opinions but my concern is..."



### INTERNAL

Energy you spend on yourself versus others.

Ex. "I need some time alone."



### EMOTIONAL

How emotionally available you are.

Ex. "I just don't have the emotional capacity at the moment."



### PHYSICAL

Personal space, privacy and your body.

Ex. "I prefer you don't enter my room."  
"I don't feel comfortable hugging strangers."



### MATERIAL

Financial decisions, giving or lending money or material possessions to others.

Ex. "I can only give you \$20."

## TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES



### DEFINE

What is the boundary



### COMMUNICATE

Inform the person/people involved what you need



### KEEP IT SIMPLE

Don't over explain



### EMPHASIZE

Stress why it's important and possible consequences if boundary is crossed

When establishing your boundaries, start by understanding your own needs, values, and limits. Reflect on what makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in different situations and relationships.

Consider the different areas of your life where boundaries are important, such as personal space, time, emotions, and values. Determine what behaviors or actions from others are acceptable and unacceptable to you in these areas and then clearly and assertively communicate your boundaries to others.

Pay attention to your emotions and physical reactions. If you feel uncomfortable or stressed in a situation, it may be a sign that your boundaries are being crossed or need adjustment. Consistency is key to maintaining boundaries. Stick to your boundaries even when it's challenging or when others try to push them. If someone repeatedly disrespects your boundaries, be prepared to set consequences, such as reducing contact or seeking distance from that person.

Remember that setting boundaries is a process, and it may take time to become comfortable with it. If circumstances change or as you gain a better understanding of your needs and limits, it's okay to reassess and adjust your boundaries to better support your physical and emotional health.

Just as you expect others to respect your boundaries, make sure you respect theirs as well. Open communication can help find compromises when necessary.



Boundaries should be based on your values or the things that matter to you the most. For example, if you value spending time in nature, you set firm boundaries about allocating weekend mornings to nature walks.

Knowing your boundaries can help you navigate different situations, keeping you from making decisions or engaging in tasks that you're not comfortable with.

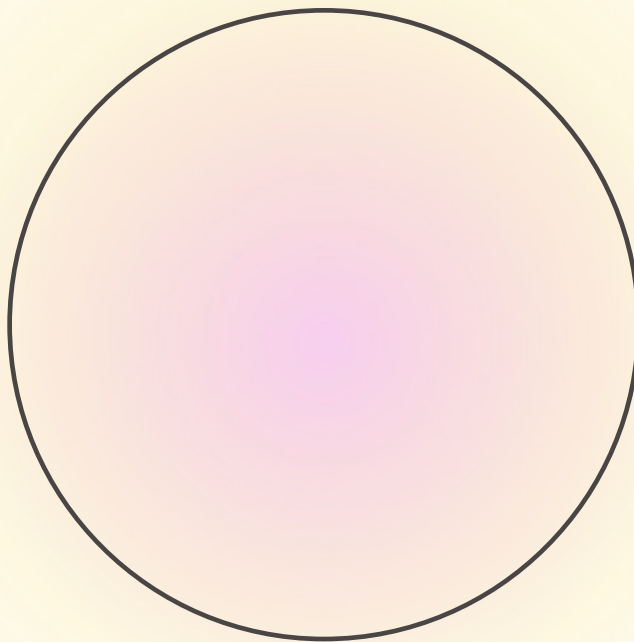


## VISUALIZE YOUR BOUNDARIES

This exercise by Dr. Jo Nash can help you define your boundaries. Visualizing your boundaries can clarify where you need to set limits.

**Note:** Feel free to do this exercise on a bigger sheet of paper.

1. **Step 1:** Reflect on your current life situations. Go over your responses on the self-reflection questions in the first part of this workbook.
2. **Step 2:** Inside the circle, write down the things that make you feel calm, supported and relaxed. For example: listening to music, quality time with friends etc.
3. **Step 3:** Outside the circle, write down anything or anyone that makes you feel stressed, uncomfortable, or unsafe. These are the people or situations that are pushing your boundaries and need further attention.



## ESTABLISHING YOUR BOUNDARIES

In what areas of your life could you strengthen or establish boundaries? What boundaries would you like to set moving forward?

Source, and Further Reading for this section:

- How to Set Healthy Boundaries & Build Positive Relationships
  - <https://positivepsychology.com/great-self-care-setting-healthy-boundaries/>

# building a support network

A support network offers a vital source of emotional support for sibs. When facing challenges, stress, or difficult times, having people who can empathize, listen, and provide comfort can significantly reduce emotional distress. It can help alleviate stress knowing that you're not alone and that there are people willing to help can reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Siblings can also benefit from connecting with others who are in similar situations. Support groups and communities provide opportunities to share experiences, exchange advice, and form meaningful connections with people who understand the challenges you face.

In this section, explore your existing support network, learn how you can expand or strengthen your network and discover online support groups for sibs.



## YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK

This exercise by the University of Wisconsin helps you determine who is currently in your support network.

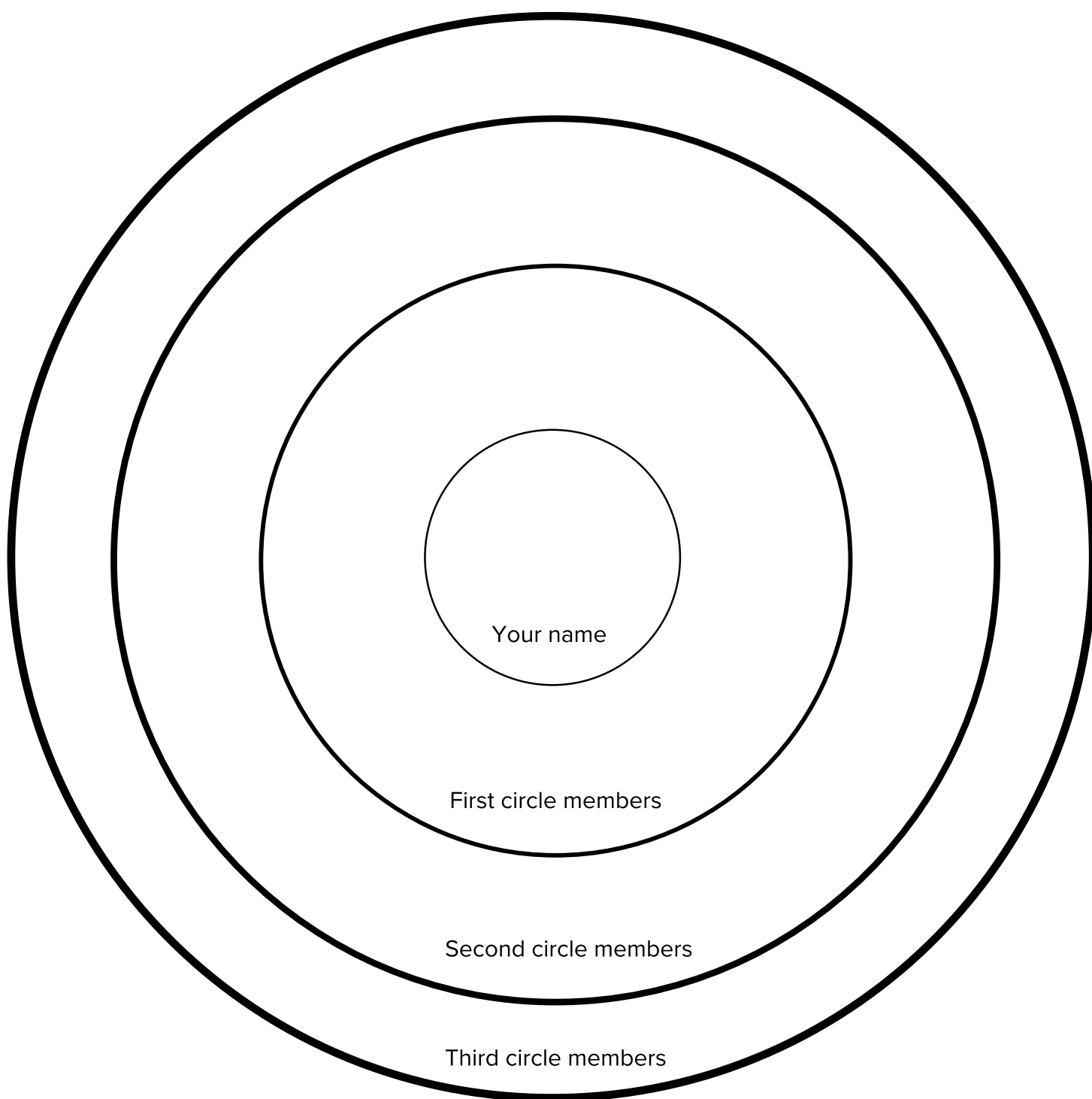
**Note:** Use the next page or a bigger sheet of paper for this exercise.

1. Write your name inside the center circle.
2. In the first ring from the center, write down the names of those individuals you confide in the most and depend on for emotional support. These are the individuals you love and care about. For example, these could be your significant other, best friend, or close family members.
3. In the second ring, list those individuals you are not as emotionally close to as first-circle members, but who still might be helpful to you. For example, these may be classmates, co-workers or distant relatives.
4. In the third and outermost ring, list those individuals or groups you have little personal involvement with, but could provide you with needed assistance. For example, these could be your doctor or members of a group you are a part of.

Source for this section:

- Who is in your support network?
  - <https://oconto.extension.wisc.edu/files/2011/02/Support-Network.pdf>

## YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK





## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

You can dive deeper into your circle of support by considering where each person falls in the different categories of social support. A person can fall into several different categories.

**NOTE:** Feel free to use a notebook or another sheet of paper to write down notes or thoughts as you go through this section.

Social support encompasses various types of assistance, encouragement, and resources that you receive from your social networks. Different types of social support can address various needs and circumstances. Here are some common categories of social support:

- 1. Emotional Support:** These are individuals who provide you with empathy, comfort, reassurance, and encouragement during challenging times.
- 2. Instrumental Support:** These are individuals who offer tangible assistance such as help with chores, transportation assistance and other practical matters.
- 3. Informational Support:** Individuals who provide knowledge, advice and/or resources to help you make informed decisions.
- 4. Appraisal Support:** These are individuals who provide feedback and external perspective on a situation or problem.
- 5. Companionship Support:** These are individuals who provide social companionship and interaction. They help reduce feelings of isolation through friendship and companionship.
- 6. Esteem Support:** These are individuals who build and boost your self-esteem and self-worth. They provide compliments and praise, and encourage a positive self-image.
- 7. Network Support:** These individuals facilitate social connections and networking opportunities. They introduce you to new people or groups.
- 8. Affectionate Support:** These individuals provide expressions of love, affection and physical closeness.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

**9. Validation Support:** These individuals acknowledge your emotions and experience. They confirm that your feelings and reactions are legitimate and understandable, reducing feelings of invalidation or dismissal.

**10. Respite Support:** These individuals provide relief or break from caregiving responsibilities. They offer temporary care or assistance to someone who is typically a caregiver.

**11. Crisis Support:** These individuals respond quickly and effectively in crises and emergencies. They offer immediate assistance and comfort during times of distress or danger.

**12. Advocacy Support:** These individuals support you in defending and representing causes, rights, or needs. They promote fairness and access to resources.

A well-rounded support network often includes a mix of these different types of support, as they can complement each other and provide comprehensive assistance through various challenges in life.

Source and Further Reading for this section:

- Types of Social Support
  - <https://www.verywellmind.com/types-of-social-support-3144960>

## GROWING YOUR NETWORK

Once you have filled in your support network circles, you can evaluate your current support network to determine if you would like to strengthen or grow any areas or particular relationships. Here are some questions to consider:

**Do you feel satisfied with the number of members in each circle of support within your support network?**

**Do you feel satisfied with the quality of your relationships? Are your needs for emotional support being met?**

**Do you need/want to strengthen certain friendships or relationships?**

**Do you need to discover more about possible support in your community to build a better circle of support?**

## GROWING YOUR NETWORK

- **Self-Assess:** Start by assessing your own needs and the needs of your sibling (if the area you would like to nurture applies to them). Consider emotional, informational, practical, and advocacy-related needs. Understanding what you require will guide your search for support. You may also find that your needs are in the areas of friendship and companionship and not necessarily connected with supporting your role as a sibling.
- **Close Communication:** Discuss your concerns and needs with family or individuals who are closest to you. They may have insights or be aware of support resources that you haven't considered.
- **Local Support Groups:** Search for local support groups or organizations dedicated to siblings of individuals with disabilities or groups or organizations related to the area in your life that you would like to nurture. These groups can offer a sense of community, information sharing, and a platform to discuss your experiences.
- **Online Communities:** Explore online forums or social media groups. Online communities can provide valuable information, a sense of belonging, and a platform to ask questions.

## PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

While having a strong support network is essential, there may be times when professional support may be helpful in navigating or processing certain life challenges. Professional support can also be beneficial when you are having difficulty establishing boundaries, managing caregiving responsibilities, or when you feel that your own well-being is compromised.

Therapy can provide a safe and supportive space to explore emotions, develop coping strategies, and gain valuable insights, ultimately enhancing your ability to provide effective support for your sibling and maintaining your own mental and emotional health.

For more information, please visit this resource:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/therapy-for-every-budget>

## SUPPORT GROUPS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **SLN State Chapters:** Sibling chapters are the grassroots of the national Sibling Leadership Network. They provide state and local connections for siblings to get peer support and information. Each chapter has its own feel and flavor and each of their website contains additional resources, books, and articles that you can access. For more information and links to each state chapter, please visit our website: <https://siblingleadership.org/about-the-sibling-leadership-network/state-chapters/>
- **Sibling Support Project:** Founded in 1990, the Sibling Support Project is the first national program dedicated to recognizing, promoting and addressing the life-long and ever-changing concerns of millions of siblings of people with developmental, health, and mental health concerns. Their work spans books and publications, online communities for teen and adult siblings, and workshops and training. They are best known for helping local communities start Sibshops—lively peer support groups for school-age brothers and sisters of kids with disabilities and health concerns. For more information and resources, please visit their website: <https://siblingsupport.org>
- **SibNet:** Sibnet is the Internet's first and largest online community for adult brothers and sisters of people with disabilities. Since 1996, SibNet has connected tens of thousands of sisters and brothers from around the globe with their peers, providing members with validation, information, and advice. It is a remarkably thoughtful, nonjudgmental community of adult sisters and brothers of people who have disabilities. To join the online support group, please visit: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SibNet>
- **SLN Facebook Group:** The SLN Facebook group is a place where siblings can find information, support and tools to advocate with their brothers and sisters, and where they can promote the issues important to them and their entire families. To join, please visit: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sibling.leadership.network/>



# putting it all together

Think about what you do now for self-care, what you have learned from this workbook and your own self-reflection. Identify new strategies that you will begin to incorporate as part of your ongoing maintenance self-care plan. On the last page, identify barriers that might interfere with ongoing self-care and how you will address them and stay motivated.

## **Physical Wellness**

Current Practice:

New Practice:

## **Mental Wellness**

Current Practice:

New Practice:

### **Social Wellness**

Current Practice:

New Practice:

### **Spiritual Wellness**

Current Practice:

New Practice:



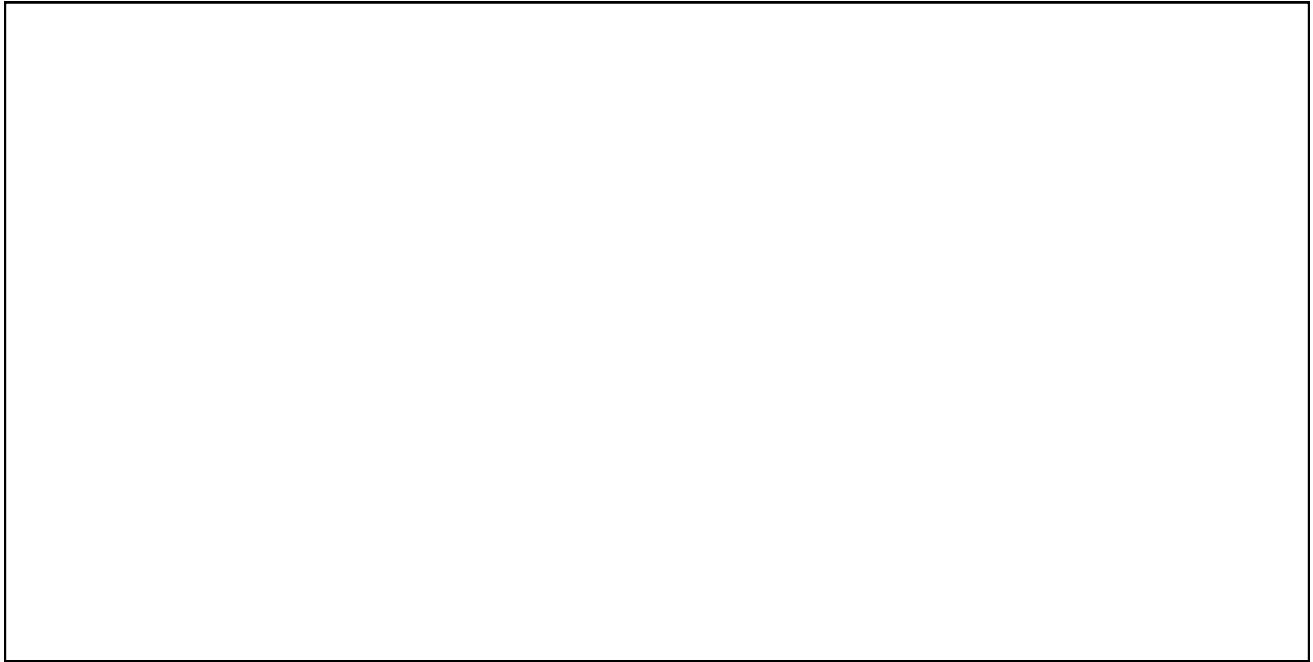
## Emotional Wellness

Current Practice:

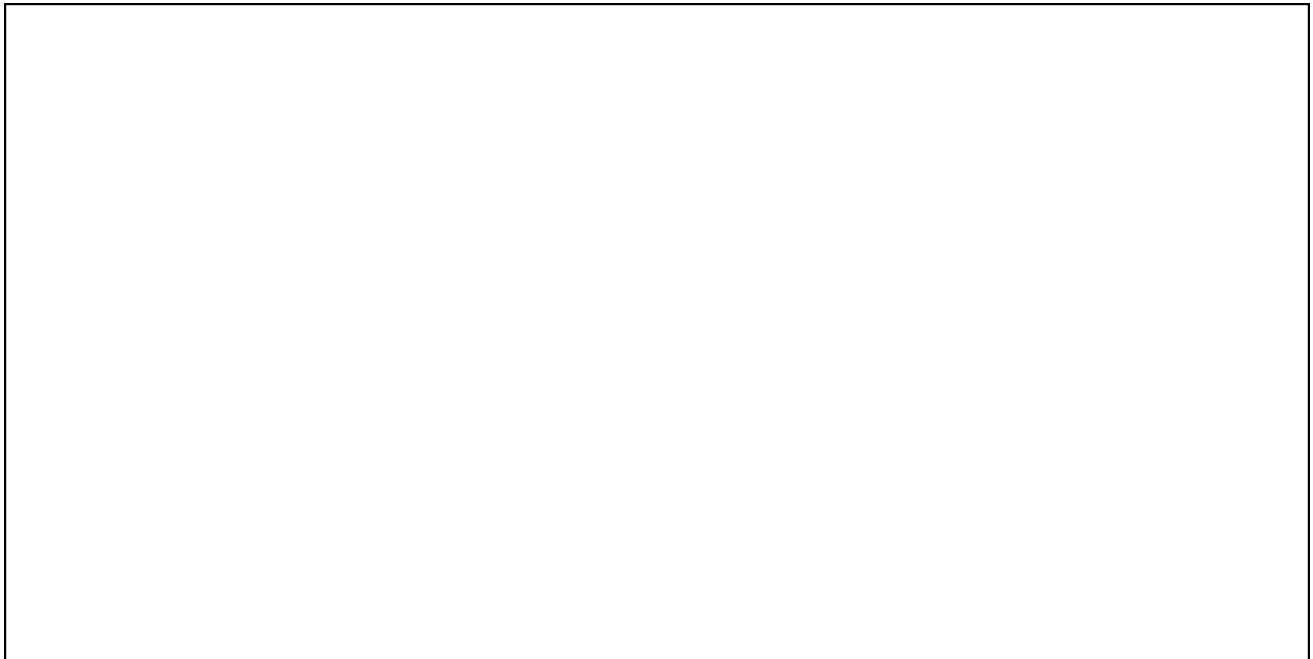
New Practice:



**What are your barriers to maintaining your self-care plan?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their barriers to maintaining a self-care plan.

**What will you do to overcome these barriers? What inspires you to maintain your self-care plan?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their strategies to overcome barriers and what inspires them to maintain their self-care plan.

# in closing

This self-care workbook combines learnings and resources from different sources to empower siblings of individuals with disabilities on their life's journey. By prioritizing self-care, setting boundaries, seeking support, and embracing tools and strategies to holistically nourish your well-being, you are equipping yourself to be a stronger caregiver, advocate, sibling, and individual.

Thank you for investing time and effort in your well-being by using this workbook. We hope that you found it helpful in your pursuit of balance, self-discovery, and resilience. Remember that self-care is an ongoing journey, and the commitment you've shown to yourself is a testament to your strength and dedication.

As you continue on this path, know that your journey is supported by a community of fellow siblings who understand and celebrate your unique role. Together, we can navigate life's challenges with grace, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to our own growth and well-being.





## EMPOWERING SIBLING ADVOCATES

PROVIDING SIBLINGS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES  
THE INFORMATION, SUPPORT AND TOOLS TO ADVOCATE  
WITH THEIR BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND TO PROMOTE  
THE ISSUES IMPORTANT TO THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES.