

## **Self Care: The Beginning, Middle, and End of Recovery**

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One thing drives me crazy. See if this sounds familiar. We shell out hundreds or maybe thousands for psychotherapy hoping to get some relief from flashbacks, disrupted relationships, and alienation.

Then our therapist tells us there is no road map to recovery, that we just have to flounder along and muddle through and hope for the best.

I hate that. Not only is it patently untrue, it's the cruelest thing someone can say to a person trying to make sense of child abuse or cult involvement. And these are the people who are supposed to help us!

**Self Care is the Beginning, Middle, and End of Recovery.**

**The Beginning, Middle, and End of Recovery is Self Care.**

The Self Care path IS the path to recovery.

Not only is Self Care THE single most important piece of the recovery puzzle, it's the ONLY piece. We can't recover from our child abuse or cult trauma without Self Care. We can't do ANYTHING without Self Care. It's the only thing we really need to do to recover.

This isn't rocket science and it sure does help when people who are supposed to be psychotherapy professionals keep telling us there's no road map at all.

If we don't know what to work on in our recovery, if we're at a standstill, or lost, or in despair, we can always work on Self Care. If we do nothing else, we'll make incredible progress toward healing from our experience.

This system works no matter where we are in our recovery. If we aren't sure how far we've progressed, these few basic concepts will ensure we're gaining ground. In the end, we'll merge back in with the rest of the population. We'll be working on the same issues everybody else is working on, so we'll always have something to talk to people about and a way to relate to them. We won't be living on Planet Recovery for the rest of our lives.

## **Child Abuse and Mind Control teach us to be our own worst enemy.**

Child abuse and mind control manipulation teach us that we exist to serve others and that our needs mean nothing. Even if we suffered a single incident of inappropriate behavior isolated in a beautifully loving childhood, our experience still taught us this lesson.

Our task in recovering from past abuse or a controlling relationship is simple: undo that message and replace it with the opposite message. Each of us IS worthy of care and consideration. We have value for our own sake, beyond caring for and catering to others. We deserve every investment of time, money, and effort that anyone can make in our well-being and happiness.

Self Care teaches us this lesson and it's really the only lesson we need to learn to overcome our past, no matter how horrendous it was.

Who's life are we living? Are we making ourselves into avatars for our parents? Do our abusers still control us with calculated comments about our bodies, our jobs, or our parenting?

Why are we miserable? Why shouldn't we be happy? We only get to live these days once, so why shouldn't we savor them in peace and happiness? What's stopping us?

## **The Beginning**

When we first start on our recovery journey, Self Care takes center stage. We desperately need safety from self-destructive behaviors, terrifying memories, dysfunctional relationships, and possibly ongoing abuse.

We can't work on anything else until we establish a safety zone, inside ourselves and out. We need to get intrusive memories under control so we can think. We have to set up safety measures to keep harmful relationships from controlling us. We need to ensure that nothing can harm us anymore—not even ourselves.

We don't need to identify all the forces threatening us. Concentrating on the one we're most afraid of is hard enough. Are we addicted to some substance, be it food, alcohol, marijuana, or adrenaline? Are we starving ourselves of food or something else we need to be truly healthy? Are we in another dysfunctional relationship?

In the early stages, Self Care means putting our own safety first. Safety inside and safety outside. We have to be safe enough to relax, to think our own thoughts and to make our own decisions.

This means removing harmful substances from our bodies and our environment. It means stopping reckless driving and self-harm. It means establishing accountability contracts with trusted friends and advisers to lock these habits into place. We can set protocols for when and how much we eat and sleep. This doesn't mean turning over control of our lives to someone else. It means taking back control for ourselves.

Do weekly or daily check-in with mentors or family. Rewrite the ground rules of key relationships or turn off the news. Do some Prolonged Exposure Therapy so intrusive memories don't pack such a punch.

That's a major project, but it starts with a simple mental shift.

## **Whose life is this, anyway? Who's going to take care of US?**

The world will never again experience the God-given miracle that is each and every one of us. It's up to each of us to preserve that miracle. The world needs each of us and it needs us excellent—not just making it through the day.

Remember the clichéd adage: Put on your own oxygen safety mask before helping anyone else. If we don't take care of ourselves, no one else will do it for us.

Other people will suck the life out of us, whether they intend to or not. We can always find someone who will take without giving back. Our job is to keep ourselves in ultimate shape or we won't be any good to anyone else.

## The Middle

Once we establish our safe zone, we're ready to get to work on those thorny spots where we still don't fully believe we're worthy of care. We've got our substance abuse and self-harm under control, so why do we still put everybody else's needs ahead of our own?

We start by giving ourselves what we probably think are frivolous luxuries. Do we eat the best food we can get to make our bodies as healthy as possible? Do we get enough rest? Do we set aside time for recreation and good friends, just for the pleasure of it?

The concept of pleasure gives most survivors the heebie-jeebies. What feelings does the word "pleasure" arouse for you? Most survivors want to scream and run from anything that might give us pleasure. Why?

Try this little experiment.

Lift up your arm and drag your fingertips over the delicate, inner skin of your forearm and elbow. Let the sensation of human touch penetrate into your deepest being, and feel—really feel—what it's like to be touched. Feel the pleasure of human touch.

Most survivors won't even go through with this experiment. Human touch—that simple contact with human skin that should give us so much pleasure—is terrifying, disgusting, repulsive.

The meat of recovery is attacking this revulsion at our own physicality, our own humanity, at its core.

We all need to experience pleasure for its own sake. We need to soak in a hot tub. We need to lie on the beach. We need to sleep in a freshly laundered feather bed.

Each of us needs to experience the pleasure of healthy intimate relationships. We need to enjoy a good meal of healthy food in the company of loved ones. We need to experience the full measure of human fulfillment in our lives. We need to wake up every morning with a song of joy, gratitude, and purpose for the days and years ahead.

## The End

Self Care is the nexus where cult and child abuse recovery ends and we experience the same ups and downs as everyone else in the world. Everyone in the world struggles with Self Care.

Blogs, YouTube channels, podcasts, and social media hubs aimed at successful, wealthy people all focused on Self Care. These people have everything humans could dream of and more, so why do they need help with Self Care?

They need it because they are human, just like us. Everyone on the planet needs help with Self Care. We can all benefit from Self Care. We aren't less than anyone else because we haven't mastered Self Care. We're exactly the same as they are.

Self Care is part of human development. We can't live on this planet without struggling with Self Care. We'll all be working on Self Care for the rest of our lives.

The good news is that everyone else is doing the same thing. Everyone needs to eat right and exercise. Everyone struggles to balance work and home life. Everyone needs to give themselves gifts of pleasure. Everyone wants fulfilling relationships.

Everyone has people in their lives how take and never give back. Ask anyone with children. Children take and never give back. That's what raising children is all about. This isn't dysfunctional. It's normal. It's life.

We can't expect children to understand our needs or to give back. Our job as parents is to give, but if we don't take care of ourselves, we'll have nothing left to give.

We have to walk a tightrope between giving and taking care of ourselves. Everyone on the planet, everyone we meet on the street, everyone we work with is walking the same tightrope.

That's the beauty of the Self Care path. It brings us together with everyone else. It erases the isolation and loneliness and heartache of the recovery process.

We're not alone. We're human and that makes everyone else out there our brothers, our sisters, our teachers, our soul mates. We're all in this together.

May God Bless You All.

