IT ISN'T ABOUT THE BUBBLEBATH: DEPARTING FROM CONVENTIONAL SELF-CARE WISDOM TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF YOURSELF

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CONVENTIONAL SELF-CARE WISDOM

YOU *JUST HAVE TO* MAKE TIME FOR IT!

(Has that ever felt impossible?)
CONVENTIONAL SELF-CARE WISDOM

IT WILL FEEL AWESOME WHEN YOU DO IT!

(Ever not really felt relief? Unsure of what even to do? Felt more stressed while trying to do self care?)
CONVENTIONAL SELF-CARE WISDOM

IF YOU'RE EXHAUSTED OR BURNT OUT, IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF!

(Ever felt shame for knowing you “should be taking better care of yourself” while not actually being able to make it happen?)

(Ever felt like you couldn't have space to report struggle without being told to “just take care of yourself?”)
CONVENTIONAL SELF-CARE WISDOM

(or, maybe you love it, it works great...and you want to build on what is working!)
THE SELF-CARE TRAP

Self-care presented as the elusive cure-all that you're obligated to perform prior to expressing exhaustion, stress, or overwhelm.

(Yes, caring for ourselves IS important... but... a lot of the narratives and conventional wisdom around self-care aren't super useful.)
TODAY:
Why traditional self-care narratives and practices often fail us.
What frameworks and knowledge we can use instead
WHO I AM

PSYCHOTHERAPIST
SPECIALIZED IN THE RELATIONAL NEUROSCIENCES

CREATIVE TRAINER & FACILITATOR (WITH A COMMUNICATION SCIENCE DEGREE TO BACK IT UP)

MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST
- Applied Improv
- Circus
THE NERVOUS SYSTEM: THE MISSING LINK
1. Our brains' #1 goal is survival.

2. To survive, our brain uses unconscious tools to scan our environment for safety information.

3. The information our nervous system picks up is used to dictate action (which is often initiated without conscious thought).
THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY
THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY

YOU'RE WALKING ALONG IN THE WOODS
THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY

YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM IS SCANNING THE ENVIRONMENT AND RESPONDING (NEUROCEPTION)
THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY

YOU SEE A BEAR
Body responds automatically (fight-flight)
THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY

BEAR CHASES YOU --> YOU RUN FOR YOUR LIFE
THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY

NERVOUS SYSTEM THINKS:
RESTING = DANGER,
MOBILIZATION = STAYING ALIVE
THE SELF-CARE TRAP, CONT.:  

If we're running from a metaphorical bear - and we try to get our body to slow down and enjoy a bath - it makes PERFECT SENSE that it isn't easy to do.

Your subconscious nervous system may be associating rest and stillness with DANGER, and might be actively working to prevent that danger.

(Sometimes, rest doesn't "feel" like the most important thing for survival - even when we need it)
LIVING THE BEAR-CHASE LIFE WHEN THE BEAR ISN'T THERE
BEAR CHASE LIVING WITHOUT THE BEAR

REASON #1
- Our brain's "scanning mechanism" gets shut off to prioritize survival energy.
BEAR CHASE LIVING WITHOUT THE BEAR

REASON #2

Our system is used to being in FULL SPEED AHEAD mode.
BEAR CHASE LIVING WITHOUT THE BEAR

REASON #3:
We don't have a FEEL sense of safety - even if we're physically safe.
KEY FOR SURVIVAL = SAFETY

- SAFETY
  - FELT SAFETY
    - INTERNAL
    - ENVIRO.
    - INTERACT.
  - PHYSICAL SAFETY
    - DO THEY FEEL SAFE?
MANAGING THE PARADOX
I need rest and restoration v. my body is fighting against it
Step 1: Knowing and Naming What Is Happening

If self-care is hard for you - especially when you're most stressed - you're not alone.

- And this makes sense neurobiologically.
- Nothing is wrong with you, your nervous system is trying to do an important job.
STEP 1

KNOWING AND NAMING WHAT IS HAPPENING

EXTERNALIZING THE INTERNAL CREATES ROOM FOR CHANGE & REMOVES SHAME & BLAME

- It makes sense that self-care has been hard for me. My nervous system has been mobilized and activated for so long that it has lost touch with the practice of resting without it feeling dangerous.
- I recognize the feelings that come up around stillness and rest - and can name them for what they are.
- I will seek small, progressive ways to help my nervous system re-awaken to rest as safety
WAKE OUR BRAIN UP TO SCANNING

- Help our brain ID and see markers of safety
- Validate the feelings that prevent ease with this - but encourage brain to see counter-evidence
STEP 2
TAKING ACTION

ID THE SMALL STEPS

- Drinking water = I'm not in danger
- What things bring in felt safety proactively for me?
- What things can I integrate re-actively to help myself find felt safety? (without waking the bear)
- Start SMALL Ex: Three deep breaths
- Lower stress level: do something with people that bring feelings of safety
YES AND VACATION
CONJURE MAGICAL SPACES WHEN NEEDED
IMAGINATION AS A “LOW-BAR” ASK FOR A STRESSED BRAIN
ID THE “THRIFT STORE” VERSION OF THE IDEAL

HOMEWORK
EXPLORE “YES AND” / CREATIVITY TO BREAK TUNNEL VISION

PLAY WITH OTHER GREAT FOR ALL AN
LOOK FOR LITTLE WAYS TO SAY “YES” TO WHAT YOU SEE, NOTICE, AND FEEL. LOOK FOR THE “YES.”

BACK DOOR SENSORY SAFETY SIGNALS: LISTEN TO MUSIC, COMFY CLOTHES ETC.
STORY INSPIRATION
RIFF OFF OF OTHERS' IDEAS/STORIES
TAKEAWAYS

CONNECTIVITY TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS = NERVOUS SYSTEM SOOTHING

- It is easy to “lose ourselves” in the daily grind
- Rooting into what you know /knew can be grounding
Look at old pictures that connect to happy times.

Revisit and tell old stories.

Avoid talking solely about stressors.

Name truths: I am someone who...

Homework:

Re-visit previous enjoyments.

Old hobbies.

Old friends.

Childhood favorites.

Mix up your routine.

Get something special.
WHEN DO YOU FEEL BEST?
IDENTIFYING FELT-SAFETY MARKERS
Reflect on safest, best feeling places

Seek more high-safety experiences

Add in high-safety markers in regular day

Homework

Explore safety markers

People
Clothes
Texture
Activities
Food & drinks
I KNOW VS. I WONDER

HOLDING CURiosity AND POSSIBILITY
Pick random things to wonder about
(Wonder = Brain awake)

Wonder about what might feel restorative and attainable

Wonder about your caregiving role

Homework

Wonder about how you might re-define your relationship with self-care

Yourself  Others  Activities  Random Items  Your caregiving relationship
MIRRORING

FINDING PRESENCE
1. THE WINDOW OF TOLERANCE
WOT BASICS
The WOT is the “zone of arousal” in which we function most effectively.

IN THE WINDOW
We're able to receive, process, and integrate information and respond to the demands of daily life without much difficulty.

OUTSIDE OF THE WINDOW
Our nervous system responds by going into survival mode - and we feel driven to fight, flight, or flee.
THE ACCELERATOR AND BRAKING SYSTEM

THROUGHOUT THE DAY, WE ENCOUNTER THINGS THAT “ACCELERATE” OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

AND ALSO THOSE THAT ENGAGE THE “BRAKING” SYSTEM OF OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM
Zone of Hyperarousal

Window of tolerance

Small sympathetic peak

Small parasympathetic valley

Zone of Hypoarousal
Window of Tolerance

When We're in Our WOT

- Optimal Arousal Zone
- Calm, but not tired
- Alert, but not anxious
- Ready for Social Engagement (VVP)
- Relaxed
- Flexible
- Ready to Problem-Solve and learn
- Able to manage the stressors and soothers of the day
- Connected & Communicate well
WOT HIGH STRESS DAY

Zone of Hyperarousal

Window of tolerance

Accelerator → Brakes → Accelerator → Brakes

Zone of Hypoarousal

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SHRUNKEN WOT

Zone of Hyperarousal

Shrunken WOT
Accelerator
Brakes
Accelerator
Brakes

Zone of Hypoarousal

@yesandbrain
Window of Tolerance

When we're in our zone of hyperarousal:

- Overwhelmed
- Anxious
- Stressed
- Can't access logical brain (but maybe has racing thoughts)
- Anger/agitation
- Sympathetic activation
- Ready to mobilize away from threats
- Physiological changes: heart rate increases, blood pressure etc.
- Struggles to communicate well/listen
Window of Tolerance

When we're in our zone of hypoarousal:

- Zoned Out
  - Can't access logical brain
  - Body wants to shut down, freeze, or immobilize

- Spacey
  - Survival state
  - Physiological changes
    - Mixed and varied

- Numb
  - Parasympathetic activation
  - Dissociative collapse