

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

Lacy Alana, LCSW, yesandbrain.com

KEY BASICS:

- Conventional Self-Care Wisdom often sets us up for failure. It tells us that we "just have to make time" for self-care, that it will feel great when we do, and that it'll be a "cure all" to the stress we're facing. However, this isn't often how things work out.
- On top of that, self-care can be unintentionally used as a blaming-tool when we're feeling stressed.

Self-care IS important. AND, in order to have success with it, and *really* make it work- we have to consider the nervous system.

IMPORTANT NERVOUS SYSTEM BASICS

- Our brains number one goal is to survive
- To ensure survival, our brain uses unconscious tools to scan for safety - and takes action accordingly.

THE BEAR CHASE ANALOGY

If you're being chased by a bear, your body would be SMART not to rest. To stop would be dangerous. Sometimes, when we're in super-high-stress-modes, trying to do self-care feels a lot like asking your body to stop while being chased by a bear. And our body resists it, even though we DO need rest.

LIVING THE BEAR-CHASE-LIFE WHEN THE BEAR ISN'T THERE:

Sometimes, even when there isn't a bear chasing us, and we DO need rest - our body may not find it easy to slow down. This can happen for several reasons:

- Our brain scanning mechanism gets turned off to prioritize survival energy
- We're used to FULL SPEED AHEAD mode
- We don't have a FELT sense of safety - even if we are physically safe.

FELT SAFETY

- Internal Scanning/Noticings
- The environment around us
- The relationships/interactions with those around us
- Whether the other person feels safe

WHEN YOUR BODY NEEDS REST, BUT IS ALSO FIGHTING IT

1. Know you're not alone. It neurobiologically makes sense that your body may be resisting self-care during stressful times.
2. Externalizing the internal: Name the reality that you're facing. This helps open doors for change.
 - a. E.g. "It makes sense that self-care has been so hard for me recently. My body has been working really hard to keep up with everything, and it is probably locked in "GO mode" that makes resting feel unsettling. It makes sense that I feel like rest and self-care is unattainable and unfamiliar right now."
 - b. While you can't talk yourself into regulation or safety... naming and pointing out key elements is useful for our subconscious brain.
3. Wake your brain up to jumpstart scanning (to discover and orient into more felt safety)
 - a. Intentionally notice markers of safety. ("Take note, body, we're taking a break to eat, and drink. That means I'm NOT running from a bear right now...because this went okay!")
4. ID small steps that help give your brain the experience of safety. E.g.:
 - a. Drink your favorite drinks/eat your favorite foods
 - b. Listen to music or soundscapes that send back-door brain signals
 - c. Look for places to add in cues of safety (e.g. carry a small relaxing item in your pocket, curl up under your favorite blanket, wear clothes that bring comfort etc.)
5. ID micro-steps towards safety/self-care/relaxation. If you slam on the breaks while running from the bear, your body will likely rebel. But, if you can help your body see that there *isn't* a bear there (hey, look, I'm drinking water and taking a few deep breaths), then your unconscious mind will catch up and open the door to more self-care!)

TOOLS!

- **Activating your Yes And Brain**

- Create the most relaxing place in the world
- Notice how it feels/what it brings up for you
- Imaginative rest can be a “low-stakes” way to explore self-care for a resistant brain
- Look for the “thrift store” version of your most-relaxing-place (You can’t maybe run away to a beach and lay in a hammock to read for two weeks, but can you find a little time to read? Or play wave sounds? Or make yourself a pina colada?)
- Exploring creativity can help break stress “tunnel vision.”
- Explore ways that you can say “Yes” to the needs you notice (yours, others etc.)

- **Story inspiration**

- Connectivity to ourselves/others can be soothing and grounding to our nervous systems
- Rooting into what you know can bring felt-safety
- Ideas:
 - Look at old pictures that connect you to happy times, tell old stories, avoid talking solely about stressors, name truths (I am someone who...I was always...), revisit past enjoyments (old friends, old hobbies, childhood favorites etc.)

- **ID Felt Safety Markers:**

- When do you feel best and safest? What is there? What is that place like?
- Can you tap into that place in your imagination – and/or bring elements of that into your present life?

- **Holding Curiosity:**

- When we’re stressed, it is easy for our brain to get “stuck” and not see outside of the tunnel vision of stress.
- Explore topics you “know” and perhaps don’t think often about.
- Notice what happens when you wonder about those topics.
- What do you wonder about yourself, your loved ones, your caregiving relationship, the things you love, your regular environment etc.?Etc. How can your wondering guide your action?