

What Are We Talking About?

Section 2

What Were Your Childhood Messages About Self-Care?



Throughout the toolkit we will share examples of self-care strategies while we are looking at the important organizational support for compassion. As we think about our self-care practices, it is helpful to reflect on how our childhood upbringing may be playing a role in our adult self-care behaviors and thought patterns. Here are some questions to help us reflect:

What messages, direct and indirect, did you receive from your parents or other adults growing up regarding self-care?

Did their words and behavior signal that it's OK to relax and recharge, or that you're failing to meet expectations if you do so?

Did you ever get to see your parents take a vacation? How did they behave?

How has your cultural upbringing influenced your philosophy around self-care? Some of us come from cultures that tell us "Work hard, play hard," while some of us grew up hearing "Work hard, then work harder." There are also cultures that have different messages for different genders; for example, telling men that they should relax, while expecting women to clean and tidy or prepare food during down-time. What are the norms for self-care from your cultural heritage?

What responsibilities did you have during childhood, and how have they shaped you now? Did you have the standard chores like washing dishes or taking out the trash? Were you expected to take care of younger siblings or run family errands such as grocery shopping? Did you also have obligations to help with the family business or otherwise support your family financially? How did these responsibilities shape your thoughts and behaviors as an adult?

Did you experience any trauma in your childhood that may be preventing effective self-care now? This is a deeply personal question, so be thoughtful if you are reflecting in a group setting. Some of you may have gone through childhood abuse, neglect, witnessed domestic violence, or forced to take on emotional responsibilities, such as playing counselor to your parents, among other things, that kids shouldn't have to endure. These traumas, if unresolved, may significantly block your self-care and may require counseling to work through.

How do your childhood experiences affect the way you perceive other people's self-care?

What messages are you passing on to the people around you? Besides thinking about how our childhood and cultural upbringing affect our self-care practices, we can also think about how our self-care practices and philosophies may be affecting the people around us, including our kids.