

Emergency Self-Care Worksheet

Why do I need to do this? It is very hard to think of what to do for yourself when things get tough. It is best to have a plan ready for when you need it. What should be in it?

You need to consider 3 general areas: what to do, what to think, and what to avoid.

1. Make a list of what you can do when you are upset that will be good and/or helpful for you.

a. *What will help me relax?*

For example:

- Breathing, muscle relaxation, music
- Reading for fun, watching a movie
- Exercising, taking a walk

b. *What do I like to do when I'm in a good mood?*

For example:

- List all the things you like to do so you remember what they are when you need to think of something to do.

c. *What can I do that will help me throughout the day?*

For example:

- Avoid too much caffeine if feeling anxious
- Remember to breathe
- Watch my thoughts
- Stay in the moment

d. *Other: What else do YOU need to do that is specific to YOU?*

2. Make a list of people you can contact if you need support or distraction.

For example:

- Your best friend, other friends, sibling, parent, grandparent etc.
- Other: relative, therapist, priest/minister/rabbi/imam, etc.

Divide the list of people into categories by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who can I call if I am feeling depressed or anxious?
- Who can I call if I am lonely?
- Who will come over to be with me if I need company?
- Who will listen?
- Who will encourage me to get out of the house and do something fun?
- Who will remind me to follow my self-care plan?
- Other:

3. Next, make a list of positive things to say to yourself when you are giving yourself a hard time.

Examples of negative self-talk:

- “Everyday my child yells at me. I must be such a terrible foster parent” **CHANGE to:** “My self-worth is not dependent on what my child/youth says to me. I am doing the best job that I can.”
- “When I look at other foster parents, they have clean homes, cook fresh meals and seem to have it all together. I have to spend more time to get myself together but I am so tired. I can’t do this. Maybe I’m not cut out for this.” **CHANGE to:** “Perfection doesn’t reach into a child’s heart. Love, care and encouragement goes a lot further than a clean house. Don’t be so hard on yourself. Take a deep breath, maybe even take a nap and tell yourself one positive aspect of who you are.”
- “I can’t do this! I just burned dinner in the oven, the kids are having a melt down and all I want to do is cry.” **CHANGE to:** “I recognize I have limitations. Burger King sounds like a great option for dinner tonight and I am going to preserve all of us by changing the scenery and letting everyone run off some steam at their play center. Perspective will shift, this kid will be sleeping in a few hours and I can choose to relax and enjoy some *ME* time.”
- “It doesn’t matter what I do, I can’t seem to bond with this child. Every time I try, he pushes me away and screams at me. I am obviously not the best parent for this child. I am going to have to call for another placement.” **CHANGE to:** “I am doing a great job. I am not going to give up. I remember that kids that have complex trauma have huge attachment issues. This is not me. This is their trauma speaking. I can keep trying and keep giving. Stability, consistency, a lot of love and my continued efforts can make a difference.”
- You get it. Try to think about what you would say to another foster parent with the same struggles and apply it to yourself.

4. Next, make a list of *WHO* to avoid when you are having a hard time.

Examples of people to avoid:

- My foster kid just had another epic meltdown. I won’t call my mom because she’ll tell me again that I shouldn’t stretch myself beyond my capacity and that some kids just can’t be helped.

- I am surrounded by chaos and feeling low. I don't think I should talk to my best friend because her home is immaculate, her life is uber-scheduled and she doesn't seem to fully understand the challenges of foster children and the unpredictable nature of their behavior.
- I am discouraged about the way I spoke with my kid last night. I won't talk to my sister-in-law because she is often angry at her kids and always minimizes her outbursts. I need someone who will really understand me and help me see all of this objectively.

You get this too. Not everyone can be supportive or helpful with every situation. Go to the ones who can be supportive about the specific issue you are dealing with.

5. Next, make a list of *WHAT* to avoid when you are having a hard time.

Examples of things to avoid:

- I should not stay in the house all day.
- I should not stay in bed all day. I should open the shades and let the light in.
- I should not listen to sad music.
- should not drink too much alcohol.
- Other:

Again, you get it.

Write this plan on a 3"x5" card. Keep it in your purse/wallet (and on your phone if you can). Look at it often. Add any good ideas to it whenever you can. USE IT!

(Prepared by Elaine S. Rinfrette, PhD, LCSW-R and scenarios adapted by CTR)