

ACTIVISM

Activism can be a meaningful way to channel feelings of anger and frustration by uniting with others to effect social and political change. Working together toward a shared cause that's bigger than ourselves also helps us remember we are not alone. One of the most challenging aspects of activism is sustaining the mental health and energy of the activist.

Caring for yourself is central to your ability to continue to engage in activism without sacrificing your emotional and physical needs. Self-care can sometimes be viewed as an act of privilege. A common misconception is that a good activist is selfless and should spend most of their time working to relieve the suffering of others. This belief can cause feelings of guilt when using time and resources to meet your own needs which can contribute to burnout over time.

Signs of Burnout:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Physical exhaustion
- Depressed or anxious mood
- Numbing or avoidance behaviors
- Health challenges
- Feelings of isolation or alienation
- Cynicism or hopelessness
- Shame or guilt
- Persistent hypervigilance or panic
- Difficulty focusing or concentrating

Self-care is about the activist's right to be well, safe and fulfilled. Caring for yourself is a way of preserving yourself in environments that are challenging, demanding, or even hostile to your identity, your community, or your way of life as you strive to create change. It is about developing sustainable practices, and it may involve challenging yourself to step outside of your comfort zones.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you practice self-care in stressful times?
2. Who might be a self-care role model for you, and how might you emulate their behaviors?
3. How do you hold yourself accountable to practicing your own self-care?
4. How do you promote self-care in your community?

Tips for caring for the mental health of the activist:

Check in with yourself.

Ask what you need to nourish yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Take time to breathe, stretch, exercise, eat well, get rest, unplug from social media and care for your body. Maintain healthy boundaries. Create balance in your life by developing meaningful hobbies, activities, relationships and interests outside of the work.

Create space to reflect on and process your emotions.

It's common to experience a variety of conflicted emotions while engaging in activist efforts including enthusiasm, hopefulness and compassion, as well as anger, frustration and sadness. When you feel overwhelmed, consider what helps to ground you in the moment. Try box breathing (in for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4) or focusing on your senses: [5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique](#).

Invest your energy into conversations, actions and roles that you feel make a difference.

It's important to recognize there are many ways to practice activism. Honor what fits best for you. It's ok to say no. It's also ok to step away when something becomes unproductive. Provide yourself with permission to acknowledge when you are engaged in ways that detract from your well-being. Connect your activism to what you value and what energizes you.

Celebrate victories, no matter how seemingly small.

Activism includes both big and small acts. Progress can be slow and frustrating. Be mindful of setting unrealistically high standards. It's common to feel like you are not doing enough or making enough progress. Any progress is progress. Keep a list of the accomplishments that make you feel proud and reaffirm the value of your efforts.

Promote wellness and connection in your community.

Encouraging wellness in activism helps to build a sustainable, supportive community. Community care and connection are essential. Working and standing together as a community cultivates a space in which its members can lean on one another for support as well as celebrate shared successes.