

Self-care is about the things we can do to look after our own mental health

Advice from the Anna Freud Centre

Encourage children to - Think about things

It can be really stressful to feel as though you are constantly having to react to new situations or events, without a chance to process how you really feel about them. It sounds simple, but taking some time to think can help you to feel more in control again. Lots of people find that it helps to find a quiet spot where you won't be disturbed. Others find that listening to classical or ambient music can help focus their thoughts, too. You could try asking yourself the following questions:

- How do I feel about myself? Why might I feel that way?
- What sorts of things have I been coping with recently? How have I been spending my time?
- Is there something I might need that I'm not getting enough of? Is there someone or something that could help me with that?

You can find relaxing music for stress relief on [YouTube](#) and if you feel you would like to talk to someone you can find instant support on our [Urgent Help page](#) or free local support on our [Youth Wellbeing Directory](#).

Get children to write things down

Writing things down, by using a journal or a diary, can help you to defuse a situation that you have kept inside you. For some people, they use journals as a way of sharing difficult feels, expressing words that they would not be able to say out loud. Others use journals to track their mental health, highlighting the good days and the bad so that they learn more about themselves and their mental health.

Get children to be kind to themselves

If a friend was upset, you wouldn't want them to beat themselves up over it. You may have advice that you know they find helpful - or sometimes all they need is a hug.

The same applies when you are upset. You may feel you are judging your emotions, leading to you piling up more difficult feelings. Or you may just feel sad. Perhaps you want comfort, and don't really know where to find it or how to ask for it. Sometimes it might be hard to know what you need!

You could try treating yourself differently, offering kindness to yourself. This could be in the form of calmly 'telling' yourself or your difficult thoughts a kind thing. You could pick out something you're proud of, and remind yourself of it, or you could say something nice to yourself that you know others often say to you.

It's important to try not to argue with your negative inner voice - this might make it worse. Instead, you could gently repeat an affirmation, either out loud or in your head. This could be something like 'let whatever you do today be enough', or 'I don't have to change myself'. Whatever works for you, whether it's simple or complex.

Self-kindness can also be called self-compassion, being your own best friend. How you use it really depends on you - are you struggling with critical thoughts and want to remind yourself of nice things? Or perhaps you really need a pick-me-up like a treat. Just like if your friend was upset, you would try to find what would help them feel better, and do kind things for them. Action for Happiness have monthly calendars with positive actions which may help provide a daily reminder to be kind to yourself.

Self-kindness won't necessarily stop your thoughts or feelings from being difficult, but it might provide some small comfort in the midst of them.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy

Halina Rooney

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