

I MATTER

Self-Care Cards for GBV Staff



"How do you survive war," I ask?

"I talk to the water," she says.

"When we tell the water something bad,
water takes it from us.

When I was a kid & I would have a
nightmare, I would run to my
grandmother, & she would tell me:

'Go to the water and tell that to the
water. Let the water take it from you and
carry it away.'

Water carries everything bad away.'
And that is why even though I'm already
a grown up, all my life I do this and it
works for me."

Alona Stoyanova, GBV Advisor

"I have always wondered
how women who carry war
inside their bones
still grow flowers between their teeth."

Ijeoma Umehinyuo - Poet

We need different things at different times.

Sometimes we are upset and want to be
alone, or quiet,
or paint, or sing.

Other times,
we want to talk or write.

These self-care cards will give you
different things to reflect on.

Self-care should not feel like a formula.



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How to use these self-care cards?

These cards are about self-care & avoiding burnout.

Each card is different.
Each card invites you to
try something different.
Feel free.

In response to any card, you can:

1. Write (Thoughts, poems, stories)
2. Share & discuss with a friend
3. Move (dance, walk, stretch)
4. Draw or paint
5. Sing, hum, or whistle to yourself

ALL of you is welcome here!

These cards are divided into 4 themes. You can write, discuss, walk, draw or sing through any of the cards.

The themes are:

1. The ways my work changed me



2. Stress & strong emotions



3. Finding Balance



4. Joy & Meaning



You can go card by card.
You can use the same card as many times as you want.
Or, you can just close your eyes & choose any card.

Close your eyes.
Feel your feet on the ground.
Let the chair support your back.
Take a big breath deep from your belly.
Hold it. Now fully exhale.

Now, think back to when you chose to become a GBV aid worker. Who were you at that time?

Now, think about what it is like for you now doing this work.

How have you felt seeing suffering & hearing horrible stories?

How does it feel being a person who gives to other people?
How does your heart feel?

Notice the thoughts, feelings and memories that come into your mind.

-Adapted from the Headington Institute



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*Burnout looks different for everyone.
It changes how we act & feel.*



"I knew nothing about self-care and burnout. Instead, I wondered why I was so **irritable & tired** all the time, & dreaded hearing one more tragic story."

Maria - Aid Worker



"Aid workers often suffer from the *I-don't-have-needs-syndrome*.
Let's define it.

No matter how unwell you feel, or what you are going through in your personal life, you will show up at work.

The mission is to make sure that no one will ever suspect that you have personal needs beyond serving those in need."

Alessandra Pigni - Aid Worker, Psychologist

In what ways do you relate to this?

Everything we experience is
inside us.

The ugly moments.
The magical moments.
We carry it all everyday.
It's our invisible baggage.



What are you carrying around?

"So many of us are used to living from one crisis to the another.
We have become so accustomed to crises and deadlines that we feel almost lost if we are not putting out some kind of fire."

Anne Wilson Schaefer - Psychologist



How do you feel when you are not involved in a crisis?

The ways my work changed me



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The ways my work changed me



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The ways my work changed me



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The ways my work changed me



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In what ways has GBV work had positive influences on the way you see the world, see yourself or what matters to you?



When I feel I need to cry,
I find a quiet place.
I remind myself that
it's okay to cry.
And I let myself cry.



What do you do?

I am...



“The thing about aid work is that they don't tell you, you can't un-see or un-experience what you've seen, good or bad. And the truth is, I don't want to - all of those experiences have made me who I am.”

Becca - Aid Worker



*Who has this work made you into?
Who have you become?*

The ways my work changed me



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The ways my work changed me



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*What wounds AND gifts has GBV
work given you today?*



Who are you when no one is watching?



Reach as far as you can to the sky.

Reach down to your toes.

As you stretch, think about:

Why do you do this work?



*GBV work changes how
you see the world & how you relate
to others.*



*How have your relationships &
friendships been affected by your
GBV work?*

The ways my work changed me



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Sometimes our hearts hurt
from the stories we hear.

It's okay to feel whatever you are
feeling. There is no 'normal' or 'right'
way to feel.



We are all affected differently
by working with trauma
survivors.



*"Resilience is the ability to 'fall
7 times and stand up on
the 8th fall"
as a Japanese proverb says.*



Sometimes you don't have the words.
You just feel it.
Draw the feeling.

Stress & strong emotions



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Take a walk.

As you are walking, pick an emotion you felt today & gently ask yourself "why?" five times, diving deeper into the root cause of this emotion. Remember emotions are messengers.

Ask yourself:

"What does this feeling I have want me to know?"



Many GBV staff learn to freeze their feelings.

They believe they need to: 'push through,' 'hang in there,' & 'be tough.'



*When was a time when you 'pushed through' strong feelings when doing GBV work?
How would it have been different if you did not push through?*



Right now I need

"It is not possible to suppress some feelings and not others. When we push anger down, joy can go with it. Trying to hide our feelings is like trying to tie down the wind."

Anne Wilson Schaeff - Psychologist



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The conversation I've been carrying around in my head today that I haven't been able to have with others is...



Take a Breath



What does *stress* feel like for you?

Draw the story of your day today.



Stress & strong emotions



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Share one recent moment
when you felt lost in your work
and did not know what to do?

How did you find your way?



“It is normal for us to feel anger.
Anger is only harmful if it’s held in
and ‘starved.’

When we hold it in, it builds and
we find ourselves
exploding on innocent people.
We need to find safe places to let
our anger out.

It is our friend.

It lets us know when
something is wrong.

Anger is not the problem.

What I do with it is.”



Anne Wilson Schaeff - Psychologist



*How do we let life in, when life is
really really dark?*

The feeling I’ve been carrying
around in my heart that I have not
been able to share with myself and
others is....



Stress & strong emotions



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*What are your feelings right now?
Imagine you can stretch any feelings-
anger, sadness or fear- out of your body*

Now try it.

Stretch in response to your feelings.

Move them through your body.

*As the feelings move,
imagine what these feelings are saying
to you?*



*What does it mean to emotionally
prepare myself for doing GBV work?*

*How do I 'prepare' my eyes, my ears
& my heart for painful stories?*



*You go to very dark places when you
work with survivors of war.*

It's easy to get lost in that darkness.

*Sometimes for
no understandable reason,
do you just feel like yelling?*



*How do you find your way through this
darkness?*



You are not alone.

Stress & strong emotions



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"You must not be frightened if a sadness rises in front of you larger than any you have ever seen."

Rainer Maria Rilke - Poet

What are warning signs that you are overwhelmed and need to reach out for support?



Sit in a quiet place for 5 minutes.
Take a few deep breaths.
Close your eyes or focus on a object.
Let your shoulders relax.
Imagine sitting somewhere where you feel good.
This could be a real or imagined place.
What does it look like and feel like in this place?

Draw a picture of what you imagined, & keep this as a reminder of your own private place where you feel comfortable.
At times when you feel frightened or sad look at the picture, breathe slowly & remember what it is like to feel good.



Stretch your hands to the sky
right now.
Let go of whatever you need to.



You are not alone.



Stress & strong emotions



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1. Burnout is not simply too much work.
2. Burnout is not the same as stress.
3. Burnout doesn't go away with a holiday.
4. If you are just tired you are not burned-out.
5. Burnout is an existential issue, not simply a stress problem.

Alessandra Pigni - Psychologist,
Aid Worker

You do not want burn out.



"Avoiding burnout isn't about getting three square meals or eight hours of sleep. It's not even necessarily about getting time at home...
I tell people find your rhythm. Your rhythm is what matters to you so much."

Marissa Mayer - Author

What rhythm do you need to successfully balance:
work, personal life and playtime?



- You must let the pain visit.
- You must allow it to teach you.
- You must not allow it to overstay.

Ijeoma Umebinyuo - Poet

How did you create balance in
your day today?



Finding Balance



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"Smile, Breathe and go slowly."

Thich Nhat Hanh - Monk



When we feel down, it can be the little things that bring us back to ourselves like smiling with a friend, watching a child play, sitting in the sun, staying quiet, a cup of tea, a good book, listening to a special song, a walk, a sunset, or laughter.

*What brings you back?
What makes you feel better?*



When you take care of yourself, it feels easier to take care of everything else.



Sometimes in GBV work, we put ourselves last, at the bottom of the barrel. We say, "I'll eat, if there is time. I'll sleep if I finish this report. I'll go out with my friends, if I finish this meeting."

Sound familiar?



Finding Balance



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Have a conversation with a close friend about a hard moment at work.

Do an activity with this friend that makes you smile.



The key to keeping your balance is knowing when you have lost it.



Create a buffer between work and home.

Have a ritual that marks the end of the work day - such as changing your clothes, drinking a specific type of tea, walking home, playing a certain song - find something that marks the difference.

What is a buffer you can create for yourself?



The little things?
The little moments?
They aren't that little.

Jon Kabat-Zainn -Author

What "little thing" matters to you?



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Sometimes we do not have the
words to describe our day.

That's fine.
Draw it. Sing it.



If you only give, you will feel
drained.

If you only receive, you won't
enjoy what you have.

What have you given today?
What have you received today?



*"When your world moves too fast and you
lose yourself in the chaos,
introduce yourself to
each color of the sunset.*

*Re-acquaint yourself with the earth
beneath your feet.*

*Thank the air that surrounds you with
every breath you take.*

*Find yourself in the
appreciation of life."*

Ask yourself, "What do I need right now?"



Christy Ann Martine - Poet



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What made you smile today?



Think of your favorite
childhood song.

Sing it.

Get lost in the song.



Draw whatever is in your heart
right now.



Just like children, adults need to “play”

How will you ‘play’ today?

Joy & Meaning



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*What was one small, but meaningful
moment that happened to you
this week?*

Why was that moment meaningful?



Breathe



Put joy in the center of all that you do.

*What was the best sound you heard
today?*



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Stand in front of a mirror, look into
your eyes,
and list five things out loud you
love about yourself.

It can be ANYTHING!



“It’s the taste of the broth that makes
the tongue stick out.”
(Good food leads to good
conversation)

Haitian Proverb

Just a little reminder that eating a
really good meal is also self-care .



Working in trauma filled environments
makes it hard to feel joy.
We might even feel guilty to be happy.

Write or draw one thing that brings
you happiness.
You can color, sketch, scribble,
whatever works for you.



Sometimes GBV work can make us feel
like we are on a never ending treadmill.
We forget to celebrate things.
We are so focused on what we have
not done.

Think of one thing you can celebrate
today.
Now, GO CELEBRATE IT!



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"I don't have a simple recipe for healing, and I believe any short, standard set of steps to avoid burnout is nonsense..."

There is no standard recipe. Yet recipes can give us a sort of 'roadmap.'

Alessandra Pigni - Aid Worker,
Psychologist



Dance.

Dance in the mornings
or whenever.

Imagine while dancing, that your body is being filled with enough joy so that you can handle the painful stories of the day.



Choose a favorite song or sound. Close your eyes & open your ears. Separate each sound one by one.

Listen to each instrument or voice separately.

Feel the music instead of thinking about the music.



"Dance in the mornings," she told me,
"Dance around your room. Play your music."

Fill your body with enough joy so that you can handle the painful stories of the day."

It was good advice.

I still dance in the mornings.

It helps me to stay joyful.

We all need things we can do to find our way back to ourselves when we get lost.

I hope these cards help you to explore ways to take care of yourself.

-Serena Thomas

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