



Resilience for
Advocates through
Foundational Training®

The RAFT Guidebook to Human-Centered Anti-Violence Workspaces

Part 1: Individuals and Advocates

A Collection of RAFT Resources



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ABOUT RAFT

RAFT supports organizations and advocates to cultivate human-centered workspaces through foundational wellness practices, resources, and training to build resilience and promote a healthier gender-based violence advocacy ecosystem.*

*We define the gender-based violence advocacy ecosystem as encompassing all types of survivor advocacy organizations, i.e. Coalitions, Direct Support, Government, Military, etc., as well as all people involved in this work, i.e. Survivors, Advocates, Leaders, Funders, etc.

Our Vision

RAFT envisions a future where gender-based violence advocacy organizations empower advocates to live balanced, supported lives while doing meaningful work to provide exceptional care for the communities in which they advocate and themselves.

Our Values

Fail. Learn. Grow.

The RAFT team takes discerning and intentional risks with the expectation that there may be failures, and we will learn from those failures. This allows the team to take chances, speak out, and suggest new ideas. This empowers our team to take the lead and provides ample opportunities for our team to learn and grow collectively.

Support.

Support is RAFT's guiding light. We are empathetic to our team's humanity and express when we need support. We support team members and their families, clients, organizations, and collaborators. We uplift team members' by utilizing their strengths, supporting their growth, and rooting for their success within RAFT and in their personal endeavors.

Transparency.

The RAFT team is completely transparent about our internal processes, systems, and policies, as well as our setbacks, deficiencies, and successes. We welcome all input and feedback, whether positive or negative. We are clear about our boundaries, our feelings, and our needs.

How to Use this Guidebook

Incorporating self-care into our daily practices is essential — but it cannot be the whole answer. Through our work with advocates, we’ve seen that true sustainability requires both: individual tools for self-care and systemic change within organizations and across the gender-based violence ecosystem.

Our RAFT team is passionate about being part of that change, but our six voices can only reach so far. To strengthen our impact, we create free resources that fortify the resiliency of advocates, leaders, and sv/dv organizations.

That’s why we’re sharing this guidebook and why we will continue building on its contents. This and our other resources are designed not only to equip advocates with practical strategies for resilience, but also to give leaders tools that spark meaningful conversations, shape policies, and drive organizational change. When advocates and leaders use these resources together, they help create conditions that reduce burnout, strengthen staff morale, and make lasting impact possible.

We encourage you to keep the RAFT guidebook visible, in staff spaces, in leaders’ offices, and available digitally, so it can be a living tool for your team. Share it widely, print and adapt pages, and use it to start conversations that matter.

This guidebook is not a final solution, but it is a launching point for transformation: helping individuals care for themselves, while equipping organizations to care for the people who make this work possible.

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Resources for Advocates and Individuals

The burden of caring for, supporting, and standing up for survivors often falls on advocates and those working across the advocacy ecosystem. It is a weighty burden - one that no one should have to carry alone.

In an ideal world, advocates would not face burnout, vicarious trauma, and chronic stress. But we know the reality: this work is heavy. We also know that there are incredible people in this field - people who bring light, strength, and the kind of steadfast support survivors need and deserve.

Our hope is that your organization surrounds you with human-centered policies, flexibility, and compassion. We also know, from our RAFT "RAW" survey research, that too often this is not the case. You deserve to work in a supportive, positive, and compassionate environment where your wellbeing matters as much as the survivors you serve.

This guidebook is one way RAFT is committed to helping close that gap. Since early 2024, our team has been working together to curate resources that strengthen advocates, leaders, and organizations. And we'll keep building on it.

- Part I focuses on Advocates and resources for Individuals. (This document)
- Part II focuses on Leadership and Relationships.
- Part III focuses on Organizations and Community.

Our vision is that these resources will not only support you personally, but also ripple outward — sparking conversations, fueling change, and reminding us all that when advocates are cared for, survivors receive the care they truly need

1. Resilience and Self-Care

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Mindfulness

By Maegan Bradshaw, RAFT Events and Outreach Coordinator

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of being present and fully engaged in the current moment, without judgment. It involves paying attention to our thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and surroundings with curiosity and acceptance. We will explore a few ways that mindfulness can combat burnout, but how do you practice it?

Mindfulness is often associated with meditation, but you can practice it in various ways. For example, breathing exercises, exploring curiosity, exercising self-awareness, or simply focusing attention on the present moment while engaging in everyday activities are all practices to relax the mind and body.

How Can Mindfulness Help with Burnout?

When you're experiencing burnout, it's easy to become overwhelmed and lose sight of what's important. Mindfulness can help you become more aware of your thoughts and feelings, which can help you identify the source of your stress. By recognizing your stress triggers, you can take steps to reduce your workload or prioritize your tasks, making you feel more in control.

Here are just a few ways incorporating practicing mindfulness in your workday can be beneficial:

Reducing Stress: Mindfulness can help you to become more aware of your thoughts and emotions, allowing you to recognize and manage stress more effectively.

Increasing Resilience: Mindfulness can help individuals build resilience (the ability to adapt and bounce back from difficult situations.)

Improving Focus: Mindfulness can improve focus and concentration, making you more productive and efficient.

Enhancing Well-Being: Mindfulness can improve overall well-being by reducing negative emotions and increasing positive ones, such as gratitude and compassion.

How Can You Practice Mindfulness at Work?

Embodying mindfulness into your workday doesn't have to take much time. By taking a few moments throughout the day to practice mindfulness, you can reduce stress, increase productivity, and improve your overall well-being.

Here are some ways you can practice mindfulness at work:

Take mindful breaks: Take short breaks throughout the day to check in with yourself.

Take a few deep breaths, stretch your body, or take a short walk to clear your mind (and remember to turn off your notifications!)

Focus on your senses: When you're feeling overwhelmed, take a few minutes to focus on your senses. Take note of what you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel.

Practice gratitude: Take time to acknowledge the things you're grateful for at work. This can help shift your focus away from negative thoughts and increase positive emotions.

Single-task: Instead of multitasking, try focusing on one task at a time. This can help you stay present and focused on the task at hand.

Mindful communication: When communicating with colleagues, practice active listening and engage in meaningful conversations. This can help build stronger relationships and reduce misunderstandings.

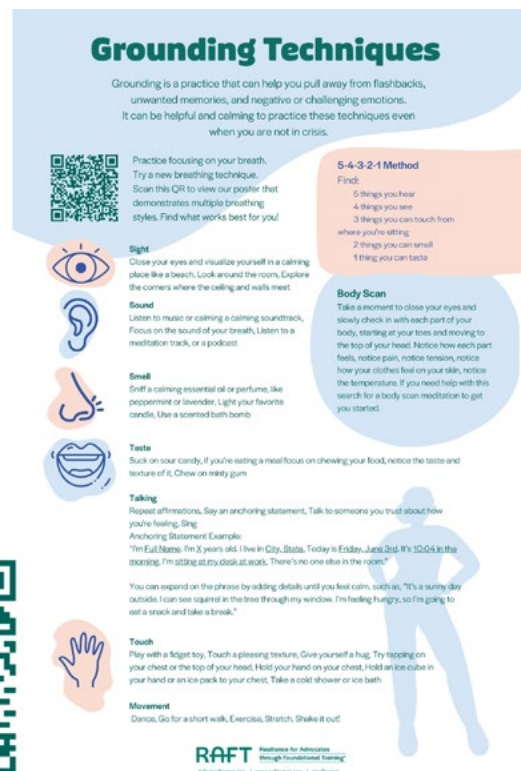
Mindful breathing: Take a few minutes to focus on your breath. Slowly inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth (or practice box breathing. *) This can help give your mind a reset.

Mindful eating: Take your lunch! When eating at work, take time to savor your food and enjoy the experience. This can help you be more present and mindful during your workday.

Mindful commuting: Use your commute to/from work to decompress and enjoy your individual time in the present. Avoid mind wandering, reminiscing over the day, or planning for the day ahead. Instead, practice tuning into your experience; take in the sights, colors, sky, or nature around you.

Burnout is something most of us will experience sometime in our careers. Actively recognizing the signs and taking steps to promote our overall mental health is critical. Remember to take mindfulness beyond just the yoga mat and embrace it throughout your days; **the goal is thriving, not just surviving!**

Download our Grounding Techniques poster for more mindfulness practices:



Breathing Techniques

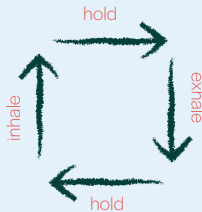
Use the QR code to download our Breathing Techniques poster:



Breathing Techniques

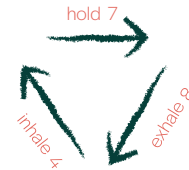
Box breathing

Repetition of inhaling, holding, exhaling and holding for equal counts of two, three, or four counts each.



4-7-8

Inhaling for four seconds, holding for seven seconds, and exhaling for eight seconds.



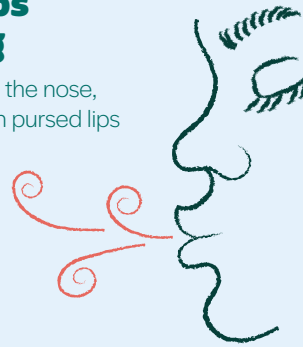
Belly breathing

Lie on your back with knees bent. Place a hand on your belly and a hand on your chest. Breathe in slowly through your nose, letting air in deeply so that your belly rises. Exhale through pursed lips. Repeat.



Pursed lips breathing

Inhaling through the nose, exhaling through pursed lips

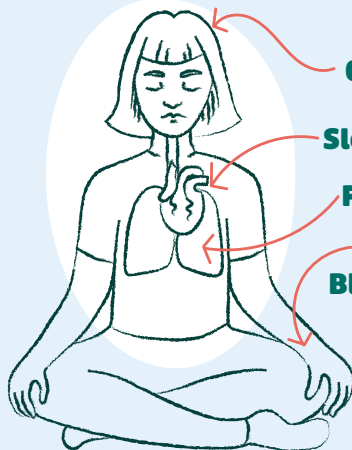


Alternate nostril breathing or Nadi Shodhana Pranayama

Using two fingers, one at a time, hold one nostril closed, while inhaling through the other, switch nostrils and exhale through the opposite one. Inhale again before switching, to exhale through the first nostril. Repeat.



Benefits of breathing practices



Quells Stress

Slows heartrate

Fresh Oxygen

Lowers Blood Pressure

By invoking the “relaxation response” through breathing we can calm our body’s fight or flight response. Deep abdominal breathing fills our lungs with fresh oxygen, and in turn slows our heartbeat and lowers blood pressure.

Other techniques to achieve the relaxation response:
Progressive muscle relaxation
Mindfulness meditation
Yoga, Tai chi and Qi gong
Guided Imagery

Sources



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How to Ask for Help

Asking for help is part of “being resilient.” Resilience is a process of adapting well to life’s challenges. To actively build personal resilience, we focus on what we can control, like making decisions and taking actions that support our wellbeing. When we need help, asking is an important skill that empowers us to get the support we need to adapt to challenges.

When we begin to understand and work intentionally on building personal resilience, there is a common realization of being overwhelmed by our responsibilities and the need for support to navigate our lives.

A More Accurate Perspective When Asking for Help

Self Reflect

Check in with how you feel emotionally and physically when you think about asking for help. Self-reflection prompts:

- ★ Think of a time recently that you needed help. Whether or not you asked for help at that time, reflect on the feelings and thoughts that came up when you considered asking for help.
- ★ Think of a time when you wanted to ask for help, but didn’t. What made you hesitate? What feelings or thoughts came up for you?
- ★ In what context is it easy to ask for help? In what context do you struggle to ask for help? Consider the context and answer questions like where/when/who/why/what?

Examples:

- ★ If I do ask someone, will they support me in the way I need? Will they tell me what to do or help me figure out what I want to do?
- ★ My friends/family lack knowledge of the challenge I'm facing or available resources.
 - ☆ Men don't talk about mental health* so there is not much information about relevant being shared among friend-groups or passed down from parents/dads.
- ★ I don't want to look stupid, so I'll just google it instead of asking.
 - ☆ Specifically in entry-level positions or as the newest/youngest person on the team (interns, volunteers)
- ★ It feels like I'm bad at asking for help. I don't do it when I know I should. I'm working on asking for help with parenting and gathering my community to help me as a parent. If I ask for help, I'm not a capable mother.

*This anecdotal example is supported by research that shows men access formal mental health resources at a lower rate than women. SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey, 2019–2021.

Barriers to Asking for Help

Individual Barriers to Asking for Help

If asking for help is hard for you, take some time to consider the following:

- ★ While you were growing up, what kind of messages did you get about asking for and receiving help?
- ★ Did your family/school/community place more value on "doing it yourself" or "letting others in"?
- ★ When you attempted to reach out for support in childhood, how did the people around you respond?
- ★ Did the people available to support us know the answer to our questions, know how to help or have access to the resources to help?

Examples:

- ★ Negative response to asking for help
- ★ Not receiving help at all after asking
- ★ Receiving some support, but not the help you needed

Systemic Barriers to Asking for Help

Help is not as easy to obtain as we think sometimes. There are practical, systemic barriers that prevent us from accessing the support we need:

- ★ Stigma (I will be perceived as needy, incompetent, or burdensome. 'we should not need help,' 'it is shameful to ask for help,' 'people who need help are burdens')
 - ☆ Tied to shame categories (Ex: category-age, want to avoid assumptions about age: younger people don't have valuable experience, older people need help to use tech, may be uncomfortable to ask for help from a younger person)
- ★ Cultural complexities ('the type of help I need is not available')
- ★ Lack of access to relevant resources. (Health, education, financial, etc.)
- ★ Not knowing who to ask/what to ask/what resources are available.

Additional Psychological Barriers to Asking for Help

- ★ Fear of rejection
- ★ Fear of disconnection
- ★ Inability to reciprocate
- ★ Trying to manage emotions of others
- ★ Feeling like a burden/weak/lazy/failure
- ★ Seeing self as a giver
- ★ Prioritizing others' needs over self-care
- ★ Perfectionism

Effects of Going it Alone

What happens when we need to ask for help, but we don't?

- ★ Self-isolation, loss of connection in relationships
- ★ Hyper-independence – a trauma response that tells us based on past traumatic experiences that we can't rely on others for support.
- ★ We react to what we experience and then learn from that and adapt our approach.
Ex: After asking for help and hearing "no" so many times, we give up, feel defeated, disappointed, let down, stuck, etc.

Why We Help

We are “Helpers”

Heidi Grant, author of Reinforcements: How to Get People to Help You (Harvard Business Review). “People underestimate the odds that others will help us.”
Based on RAFT’s Roadmap to Advocate Wellness survey results, advocates like you love to help. In your own words:

“If someone asks me for help, I’m all in.”

“I am assertive, knowledgeable, and organized.

I am also always willing to help my colleagues.”

“That I am genuinely compassionate and want to help as much as I can.”

“I value how I respond to those who seek my help. Meaning I don’t expect anything from them, but I do require me to listen, not make judgments, to be culturally aware and engaged, and to be sensitive to the needs of our clientele and myself. If I’m having a bad day, as we sometimes do, I STAY HOME!!!” [Boundaries]

When asked ‘What do you value most about your colleagues?’ advocates said,

“How we are able to support and help each other.”

“They are very supportive and help to fill in gaps where I am unsure.”

“They’re so kind and resourceful and helpful, I never feel like I’m alone in what I do.”

“The way they support each other. If someone is having a hard time, someone is always willing to help.”

Take a moment to reflect on why you choose to help others. Recognize that more often than not, people want to say yes to a request for help. Reflecting on your positive experiences of helping others can get you into the right mindset to dispel your fears of disconnection, and give you the motivation to ask.

In your journal, jot down a positive experience of helping someone. What made the experience positive for you? (work and/or personal)

Benefits of Helping

Scientifically Proven Benefits of Helping Others

- ★ Point of Connection
- ★ Emotionally Rewarding
- ★ Improved Physical Health
- ★ Gives a Sense of Purpose & Satisfaction
- ★ Increases Self-Accountability [Fail. Learn. Grow. opportunity with follow-through]

Additional Benefits of Helping Others

- ★ Honored that someone trusts me. Building connections in a relationship
- ★ Excited to use my strengths
- ★ Accomplished upon completing request
- ★ Fulfilled in my values [of support, service, love, connection, trustworthiness, expertise, kindness, reliability, knowledge, making a difference, helpfulness, etc.]

Benefits of Asking for Help

Scientifically Proven Benefits of Asking for Help

- ★ Boosts happiness & lowers anxiety by improving connections with others
- ★ Asking for help means sharing our challenges which helps to reduce stress around an issue
- ★ Receiving help can lead to feelings of gratitude
- ★ Practicing vulnerability improves relationships
- ★ Getting support is part of self-care
- ★ Healthy relationships support our physical health

The Art of Asking

Making a Request Example

Requester: Can I ask you a favor? I know you're about to clock out, but...

Helper: Uh... what is it?

Requester: Will you help with this grant report? Pretty please?

Helper: Now?

Requester: Yes, it's due this week. I'll buy you dinner!

Breaking Down the Request

Below answer the following questions:

What issues stand out to you in this request?

What could be improved in this request for help?

Asking for Help is a Strengths-based Skill

- Amanda Palmer

Tips for Asking

How to Ask

- ★ Be direct.
 - ☆ Avoid should language or hints (According to a 2010 study on the benefits of helping others, personal volition is critical.)
 - ☆ Avoid hidden requests, being overly polite, apologizing, putting yourself down.
 - ☆ No need to offer additional motivation or reward
 - ☆ Don't avoid asking and just let things fall apart.
- ★ Remain open-minded to a "No, but..." offer of support
- ★ You don't need to ask for a favor at work. Teamwork and working together are part of our work responsibilities in a collaborative work setting. Helping our coworkers is not a favor, it's what we do.
- ★ Find someone you trust and practice making a SMART Request.

When to Ask

- ★ When you are prepared
 - ☆ Plan ahead: write a list of tasks to help articulate what you need help with, prioritize your needs and establish support for essential needs first.
 - ☆ Practice relaxation techniques
- ★ With more time than you think is needed
 - ☆ Your support needs may require multiple requests for help over time and from multiple people.
- ★ Face-to-face can make people feel more comfortable and provide a more formal setting (Heidi Grant, pg. 25)
 - ☆ Consider best format: in-person, video, email, instant message

Who to Ask

- ★ Start with someone from your trusted network.
- ★ Someone who has the skills/tools/resources needed
 - ☆ Research the resources and professional help around you.
- ★ Someone who has the information/power/expertise needed

Making a SMART Request

Adapted from SMART Goals

(Doran, George T., November 1981. Management Review.)

S

Be Specific.

Assess the situation you need help with and break it down into specific requests.

Example: Vague request – Can you help me apply for jobs? ->

Specific request: Will you please review my cover letter for the Workshop Facilitator position at RAFT and give feedback?

M

Make it Measurable.

How does your supporter know they've helped enough?

Example: It's a one page cover letter and I need it back by next Thursday.

A

Must be Achievable.

Ask someone with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to accomplish the tasks.

Example: I know you have experience copy editing and I could use that type of support.

R

Be Realistic/Reasonable.

Your request should be respectful of individual capacity.

Example: Please consider formatting and grammar in your feedback.

T

Set a Timeline.

Your request should be timebound so set a due date and/or check-in/ follow-up dates to ensure follow-through.

Example: My application is due in two weeks and I'd like to get your feedback by next Thursday so I can make edits.

Why Take the Time to Develop a SMART Request?

- ★ Helps the task feel more manageable for you and the person being asked. Knowing specifics makes it easier for them to determine if they have the capacity to help.
- ★ Manages expectations and avoids miscommunication. The more specific your request is, the clearer the expectation for fulfilling it.
- ★ Prioritize your needs and establish support for essential needs first.
- ★ Helps you figure out if there are multiple people who can help instead of relying on one person or just yourself. (Note: This is key for people in leadership positions. Be transparent with your team about the big picture and what it takes to get there so they know where to support.)

About this Tool

- This sheet combines two of the tools RAFT teaches in our workshops to help with communication.
- There may be situations where you might fill this sheet out and share it with other people, and other times where you will just reference the sheet without filling it out.
- If you are a leader, or in any situation where you have potential power over someone you are making a request too, use this sheet to help to give that person time to respond, and reduce some of the pressure from the difference in power
- We recommend that you share this tool with your team one-one, or during a staff meeting.

Make a SMART Request

S

Be Specific

Assess the situation you need help with and break it down into specific requests.

- Who are you asking for help? Are you sure this is the best person to help you?
- What do you need help with? Be as specific as possible in this request.
- How do you want to receive this help? What don't you want from them when they help you?

Example:

Vague request – can you help me apply for jobs?

Specific request – Will you please review my cover letter for the workshop facilitator position at RAFT and give feedback?

M

Make it Measurable

How does your supporter know they've helped enough?

- How will the person you are asking for help know when they are done?
- How will you know when the person is done?
- If there is something that can be measured to show completion, what is it?

Example: It's a one-page cover letter and I need it back by next Thursday.

A

Must be Achievable

Ask someone with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to accomplish the task.

- Why is this person the best choice to help you?
- What resources are needed for this request?
- What skills do they have that are needed for this request?

Example: I know you have experience copy editing and I could use that type of support.

R

Be Realistic/ Reasonable

Your request should be respectful of individual capacity.

- When setting a timeline for this help pick a timeline that is reasonable for the person considering everything else they are doing.
- Be realistic for when you need this request completed by. Don't adjust your timeline in the hopes they say "yes".

Example: Please consider formatting and grammar in your feedback.

T

Set a Timeline

Your request should be timebound so set a due date and/or check-in/follow-up dates to ensure follow through.

- Look at your timeline and make sure that your request for help will be completed in time for you to meet any of your deadlines.
- What is the deadline you have for this request to be completed? Is it a specific time and date, or is there a range?

Example: My application is due in two weeks and I'd like to get your feedback by next Thursday so I can make edits.

SMART Request template

What support, information, and/or resources do you need to complete your task?

Who's help/expertise/support could you use? Whose involvement or approval is required to complete your task? (Check your organizations' SOPs, team profiles, etc.)

Jot down details about your support need using the SMART Request template.

Specific (what tasks do you need help with? what type of support do you want?, best communication methods):

Measurable (scope of the task, what does completion of the task look like?):

Achievable (aligns with personal/organizational mission/goals/values):

Realistic (doable within the timeline and current capacity, with available resources):

Timeline (due dates, schedule follow-up discussion):

Using full sentences, write out your SMART Request:

SMART Request Email template

Email Structure	Example Text
To: (select personal and/or professional email address, consider who should be included, preferred communication boundaries)	Info@raftcares.org, outreach@raftcares.org Advocate Email List Recent Contacts Email List
Subject: (brief intro to email. Incl: title of project, reminder, upcoming date)	New Workshop! How to Ask for Help Paid Opportunity: Participate in RAFT's newest Workshop
Greeting (brief greeting in language relevant to your as sender and your recipients)	Hello! Hola! Dear _____,
Friendly Check-in ([optional] callback to previous meeting/discussion topic, question expressing interest in recipients' work/personal life)	It was great meeting you at last year's NCADV conference. How is your (ongoing project/growth endeavor) going?
Main Details (succinct introduction including when, what, where, who)	I'm Nicole Crespi, the Lead Workshop Facilitator for RAFT: Resilience for Advocates through Foundational Training. We're hosting a new virtual resilience-building workshop called How to Ask for Help on Friday, June 21, 2024 from 12pm to 2pm (CST).
Make SMART Request (direct, clear sentence requesting support that includes the specific support need, a measurable task that is achievable and realistic for that individual's knowledge, experience and capacity, and a due date or timeline for follow up.	We are looking for advocates to join us for 2 hours to participate in this new workshop. You will be compensated for your time, and we hope you can provide feedback afterwards via a survey. Please respond to the invite by June 12th at the latest.
Contact Info for Questions (simple sentence offering preferred method of contact if recipients have questions)	Please email me with any questions that come up. If you have any questions about participating, please call (###) ###-####.
Thank You (offer general a general thank you or thank recipient for their time/attention/support)	Thank you, Thank you for your continued support of RAFT! Thank you for the work you do!
Signature (Include your name and additional relevant details like your pronouns, credentials, position title, organization, phone/email/socials, website/resources link, org. mission, required confidentiality notices, etc.)	Nicole Crespi (she/her/ella) Lead Workshop Facilitator RAFT: Resilience for Advocates through Foundational Training

7 Types of Rest

If you're feeling exhausted, whether physically or mentally, your first instinct might be that you need more sleep, or that you need a lazy day in bed. While it may be true that you aren't sleeping enough; sleeping or bed rotting isn't always the best way to rest. You may be in need of another type of rest to recover your energy. In *Sacred Rest* by Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith, she reveals the 7 types of rest that fulfill different needs, why rest is essential to our lives and how it can transform your life.

Let's take a look at the 7 Types of Rest according to Dr. Sandra Dalton-Smith, and how to fulfill each one:



Physical - If your body feels tired

You might need to sleep or take a nap, but you can also practice restorative activities like yoga, stretching or getting a massage.



Mental - If you're irritable and having trouble focusing

Schedule short breaks throughout your day, keep a notepad nearby to brain dump, take a walk to clear your mind, practice mindfulness.



Spiritual - If you're feeling alone or lost

You may need to connect with something greater than yourself. Whether it's prayer, meditation or community - reflecting on your purpose and values can help to connect you with meaning so you can find your way back to a path.



Emotional - If you're feeling compassion fatigue

Be honest, say no and set boundaries when you feel like you are at your emotional capacity.



Sensory - If you're feeling overwhelmed

Unplug, turn off your computer, close your eyes for a few minutes, step away to somewhere quiet.



Social - If you're feeling unfulfilled by your relationships

Connect with positive and supportive people and be fully present while you're with them. Set boundaries with people that drain your energy and spirit.



Creative - If you're out of ideas

Get outside, explore a beautiful place or take a stroll through an art museum. Hang art on your walls at home or in your office. Peruse Google Arts and Culture online if you don't have any museums nearby.

Brainstorm ways you can or do fulfill each category of Rest:

Physical - If your body feels tired

Mental - If you're irritable and having trouble focusing

Spiritual - If you're feeling alone or lost

Emotional - If you're feeling compassion fatigue

Sensory - If you're feeling overwhelmed

Social - If you're feeling unfulfilled by your relationships

Creative - If you're out of ideas

2. Building Blocks to Advocate Wellness

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The Importance of Personal Boundaries

Defining Boundaries

Personal Boundary

Guidelines, rules, or limits created by a person for herself that are reasonable, safe, and permissible ways for other people to treat her, as well as how she will respond when someone steps outside those limits. Statements of what a person will or won't do, and/or what they like and don't like.

Three Types of Boundaries



Physical Boundaries

Pertain to personal space, your personal bubble, and privacy. Examples: feelings around hugging, how close people can stand to you, who can touch you, who can be in your home, when people can be in your home, your private emails, etc.



Mental Boundaries

Pertain to beliefs, emotion, and intuition. Your right to have your own feelings, thoughts, and opinions. Examples: letting other's feelings dictate your own, sacrificing your needs for others, choosing what to share and with whom, not being forced to agree with other's opinions.



Spiritual Boundaries

Pertain to self-esteem, sense of identity, and faith. Protecting your right to believe in what you want and who you are. Examples: how you present yourself to others, feeling comfortable in your body, pronouns, saying a silent prayer.

Examples of Personal Boundaries

Healthy Boundaries

- ★ Standing up for your personal values
- ★ Giving as much as you can without depleting yourself
- ★ Taking as much as you need
- ★ Defining yourself and letting others know who you are
- ★ Fulfilling your own needs
- ★ Asking for help when you need it
- ★ Speaking up when you are mistreated - when it is safe to do so
- ★ Asking for consent before giving hugs or touching someone's hair

Unhealthy Boundaries

- ★ Going against your personal values to please others
- ★ Giving as much as you can for the sake of giving
- ★ Taking as much as you can for the sake of taking
- ★ Letting others define you
- ★ Expecting others to fill your needs without asking
- ★ Not speaking up when you are mistreated
- ★ Hugging or touching someone without their consent

Going to the Movies Exercise

ACTIVITY

Think of a recent situation, of light to medium intensity, where you were talking to someone and said "yes" to their request when you would have preferred to say "no", allowing one of your boundaries to be crossed. Now, imagine yourself walking into a movie theatre: getting your ticket, going to the concession stand and buying some popcorn or candy, walking down the dark aisle of the theater looking for an open seat. Once you find a seat you set your popcorn down, take off your coat, and settle in to watch.

The curtains part, the previews finish up, and finally the feature film begins: and there you and this person are, on the big screen, playing out the conversation you had where you said "yes" instead of saying "no".

Remember, you are watching a movie, so without any judgement watch the scene play out before you and do nothing except observe yourself in the situation:

Continues next page...

Reflection

What is happening to you during the conversation?

How are you standing/sitting? What are doing with your hands, eyes, your mouth?

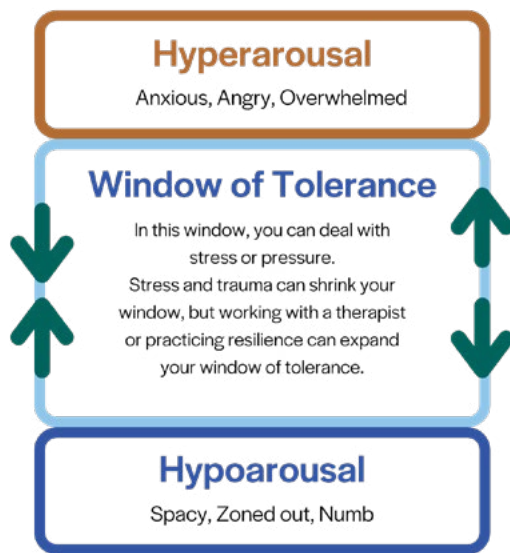
What are you hearing the person say? What are you saying back?

What are you thinking and feeling during the beginning of the conversation? At the moment when you say "yes" instead of "no?" As the conversation wraps up and after you have said yes?

During the conversation what did you notice about yourself? About your body language/thoughts/feelings?

What did you notice about the other person?

Window of Tolerance



The window of tolerance is a concept originally developed by Dr. Dan Siegel, MD to describe the optimal zone of "arousal" for a person to function in everyday life. When a person is operating within this zone or window, they can effectively manage and cope with their emotions.

The best way to expand your window of tolerance is to practice setting boundaries, and by utilizing other tools to help build your resilience.

Effects of Unhealthy Boundaries

Reasons for not setting boundaries

- ★ Fear.
- ★ Selfish to do so.
- ★ Unclear about your own values and beliefs.
- ★ Put other people first.
- ★ Confused.
- ★ Low self-esteem.
- ★ Cultural norms.

Why should you set personal boundaries?

- ★ To be physically safe and healthy.
- ★ To be emotionally safe and at peace.
- ★ To have a strong sense of identity and self-esteem.

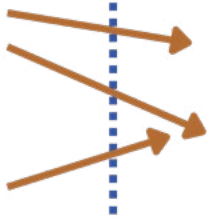
When you do not set personal boundaries, you can/will experience:

- ★ Fear, feelings of being unsafe, never at peace, anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, humiliation, and confusion.
 - ★ Physical manifestations like feeling sick, weak, and tired.
 - ★ Loss of confidence and self-esteem.
 - ★ Diminished intuition, belief structure, and values.
 - ★ Physical abuse, manipulation, coercion, and violation.
- * Note that not everyone will respect boundaries, no matter how well they are set.

The effects of continual stress/trauma on your body include:

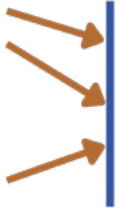
- ★ Chemical release (hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis).
- ★ Diminishing ability to make healthy decisions.
- ★ Organs awash with cortisol and adrenaline cause health problems.
- ★ PTSD, anxiety and depression.

Four Types of Psychological Boundaries



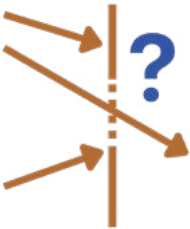
SOFT Boundaries

A person with soft boundaries merges with other people's boundaries. It is difficult to tell where one person ends and the other begins. Someone with a soft boundary is easily manipulated. **Example: always eating food your friend likes to avoid a conflict.**



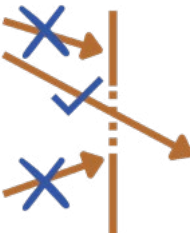
RIGID Boundaries

A person with rigid boundaries is closed or walled off so nobody can get close to him/her either physically or emotionally. This is often the case if someone has been physically, emotionally, and psychologically or sexually abused. Rigid boundaries can be selective and depend on time, place or circumstances. They are usually based on a bad previous experience in a similar situation. **Example: never eating food you didn't cook yourself.**



SPONGY Boundaries

A person with spongy boundaries is like a combination of having soft and rigid boundaries. Boundaries are inconsistent and can be erratic. They permit less emotional contagion than soft boundaries but more than rigid. People with spongy boundaries are unsure of what to let in and what to keep out. **Example: a person who enforces rules differently depending on their mood.**



FLEXIBLE Boundaries

This is the ideal. Similar to selective rigid boundaries but the person has more control. The person decides what to let in and what to keep out, is resistant to emotional contagion and manipulation, and is difficult to exploit. Flexible boundaries are controlled, intentional, and are made by choice. **Example: not accepting phone calls after 10pm unless it is your best friend.**

Reflection

What ways are you currently setting boundaries? (Soft, Rigid, Spongey, Flexible)

What are the reasons you do not set boundaries?

What would be the reasons for setting boundaries? What is the purpose?

Where can you start setting boundaries in your life?

What challenges do you foresee in implementing personal boundaries?

Download our What We Need to Thrive Poster using this QR code:



What We Need to Thrive



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow posited that in order to meet our higher psychological needs, we first need to satisfy our basic survival needs like food, water, shelter and sleep. When our basic needs aren't met we don't have a foundation for safety, socializing, self-esteem and therefore will have a difficult time finding meaning, motivation, and the means to thrive.

The order of each level is flexible. For some, self-esteem outweighs love, and others may self-actualize despite physiological needs not being met.



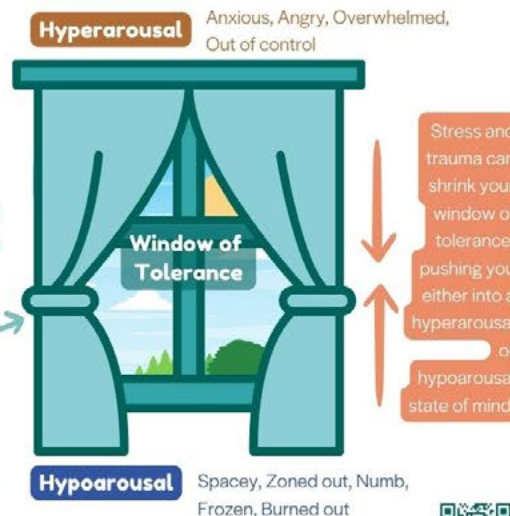
Read more about the model here:

Window of Tolerance

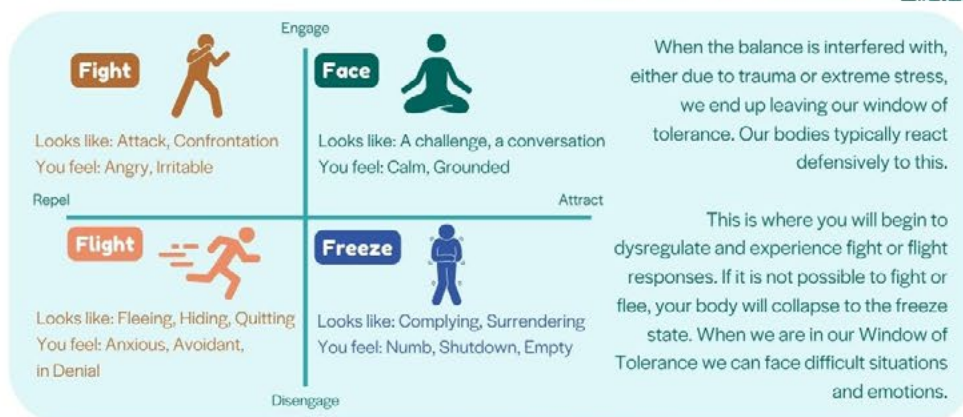
The window of tolerance is necessary to surpass the safety and security level of Maslow's Hierarchy. When you are not operating within your window of tolerance, you cannot thrive.

The window of tolerance was originally described by Dr. Dan Siegel as the optimal zone of arousal in which a person would be able to function and deal with day-to-day stress most effectively.

Most people can deal with the demands and stress of everyday life without much difficulty. However, for those who have experienced trauma, anxiety, or other mental illness, it can be difficult to stay in your optimal zone.



Read more about the window of tolerance here:



Discovering Your Values

Defining Values

There are numerous definitions of “values” available in dictionaries, books, and across the internet. Values are a subjective concept, what one person sees as a value another person may see as irrelevant.

For this exercise we will use the following definition for “Values”:

Values are **any idea or theme** that is important enough to you that **it affects how you think, how you act, and how you feel.**

Why are Values so Important?

- ★ Foundations of laws, customs, and tradition
- ★ Reflect your sense of right and wrong
- ★ Influence your attitudes and behaviors
- ★ Give your life purpose, meaning, and passion

Find Your Top 3 to 5 Core Values

To start discovering your core values, take five minutes to scan the list of values on pages 4 - 5 of this workbook. When you see a value that resonates with you, circle it!

Questions to help you find them:
Who am I or who do I want to be?

What do I stand for? What do I want to stand for?

How do I relate to the world around me?

Core Values Exercise

Step One:

Scan the list of values below and **check off or circle** the values that immediately grab your attention. Try not to pause and think about each value, circle only the ones that immediately have an impact on you.

Acceptance	Affection	Accomplishment	Adventure	Adoration
Adaptability	Achievement	Trust	Abundance	Acknowledgement
Aggressiveness	Agility	Being the Best	Appreciation	Ambition
Amusement	Vivacity	Attractiveness	Approachability	Awareness
Cheerfulness	Belonging	Assertiveness	Balance	Clear mindedness
Camaraderie	Attentiveness	Beauty	Commitment	Closeness
Warmth	Bravery	Compassion	Contribution	Connection
Calmness	Confidence	Encouragement	Credibility	Challenge
Contentment	Wealth	Dependability	Cleanliness	Courage
Fairness	Determination	Composure	Devotion	Family
Trustworthiness	Consistency	Dignity	Friendliness	Discipline
Creativity	Empathy	Fun	Eagerness	Curiosity
Faith	Truth	Education	Daring	Flow
Growth	Excellence	Depth	Focus	Helpfulness
Expertise	Wisdom	Freedom	Hospitality	Financial Independence
Enjoyment	Giving	Humour	Fortitude	Enthusiasm
Grace	Intimacy	Impact	Winning	Holiness
Kindness	Independence	Fidelity	Honesty	Love
Ingenuity	Zeal	Honour	Loyalty	Inquisitiveness
Fitness	Hopefulness	Maturity	Intelligence	Happiness
Humility	Mysteriousness	Justice	Harmony	Imagination

List continues on next page...

Obedience	Knowledge	Health	Inspiration	Playfulness
Logic	Liveliness	Intuition	Popularity	Making a Difference
Mindfulness	Joy	Practicality	Mastery	Recreation
Openness	Reliability	Motivation	Reflection	Optimism
Respect	Organization	Relaxation	Passion	Security
Perseverance	Self-Reliance	Peace	Self-control	Proactivity
Significance	Sexuality	Sensuality	Professionalism	Simplicity
Presence	Service	Resilience	Rest	Prosperity
Skillfulness	Strength	Solitude	Spontaneity	Sincerity
Structure	Spirituality	Support	Thoroughness	Success
Thankfulness	Teamwork	Timeliness	Unflappability	Temperance
Thoughtfulness	Variety	Vitality		

Write down any thoughts or takeaways that come up while scanning the list and thinking about your core values:

Step Two:

Transfer your selected values to the space below. Take a break and return to step three with fresh eyes and a clear mind.

Step Three:

Revisit the list of values above and **choose the top ten values** from that list. Transfer those values below.

Note: this is a great time to use meditation or a spiritual practice to sit with the above values and select your top ten!

Step Four:

Copy each of your top ten Core Values below, then **write why that value is important to you.**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Step Five:

After writing why each value is important to you, **select the five values that now feel most important.**

Step Six:

Write each of your remaining five Core Values below. Think about a situation in your life where you needed to make a choice. Write why this Core Value was important in making that decision.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Step Seven:

Looking at your top five Core Values, and how you used those Core Values to make decisions, rank them from 1 to 5 in order of how important you feel they are in your life.

Note: this is a great time to use meditation or a spiritual practice to help with this decision.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Step Eight:

Finally, you want to turn this list of Core Values into a tool that you can use as a filter when making important decisions in your life. This is your Core Value Statement and you craft it by turning your Core values into an easy to remember sentence that you can repeat, as needed, without having to reference it.

If you have difficulty remembering your top five Core Values, pick the three that are the most important to you (the number three pops up in brain and memory science a lot) and use them to craft your Core Value statement.

Core Value statment example:

I seek **Knowledge, Inspiration** and **Playfulness** through **Adventures** with my **Family**.

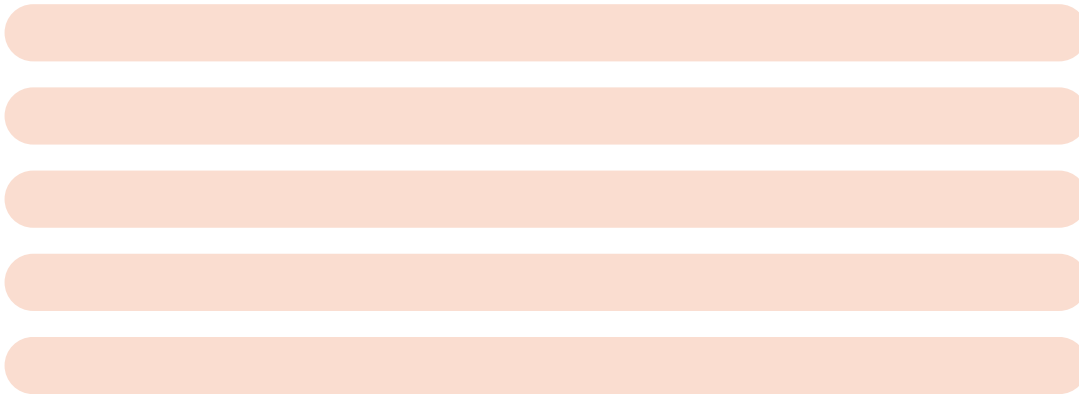
5 Reasons I Value Myself Worksheet

Recognizing and celebrating our own worth strengthens our commitment to self-care and personal growth. It can empower you to embrace who you are, free from the constraints of external expectations and societal pressures.

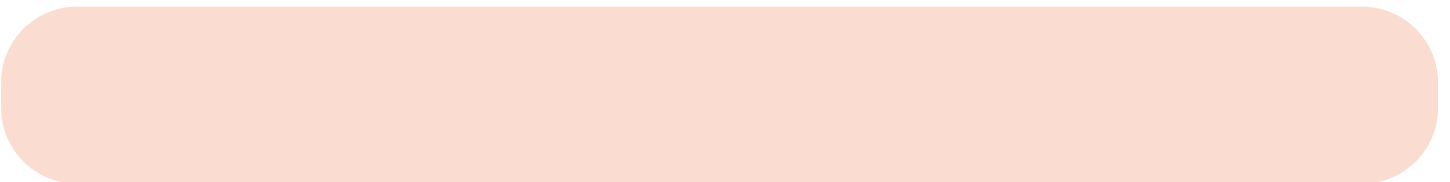
Discover your Core Values

Values are any idea or theme that is important enough to you that it affects how you think, how you act, and how you feel. Complete this worksheet to discover your core values.

List your top five core values:



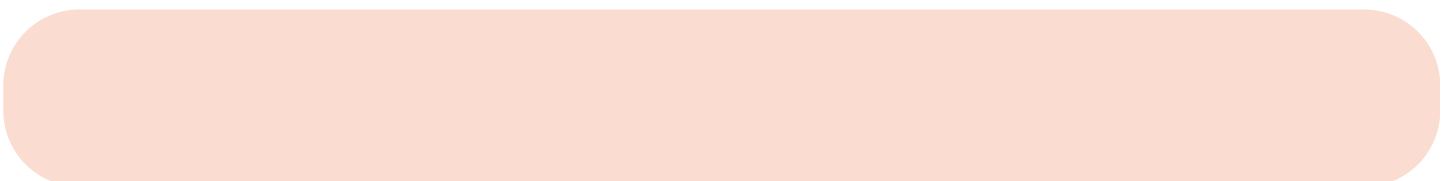
Write out your Core Value Statement:



Create your Personal Mission Statement

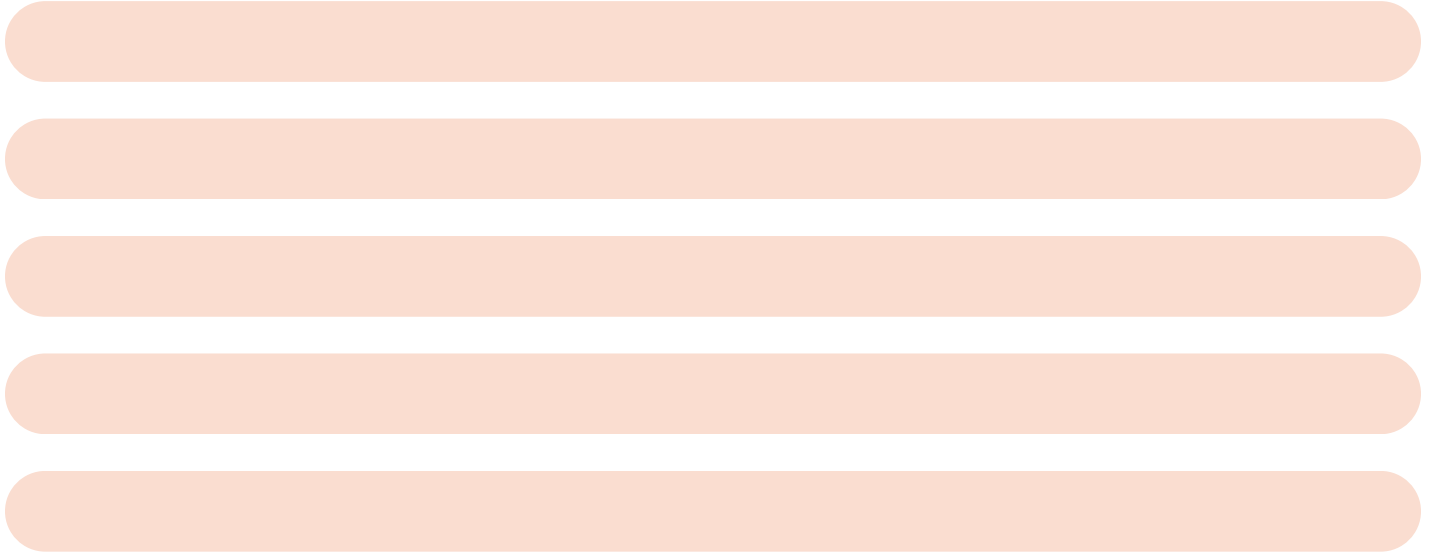
“A personal mission statement is a written declaration of our unique direction or purpose. This statement makes it clear not just what you intend to do in this world, but how you intend to do it. It's sometimes just one sentence, but it can be as long as you want.” Follow the directions here to write your personal mission statement.

Write your personal mission statement below:



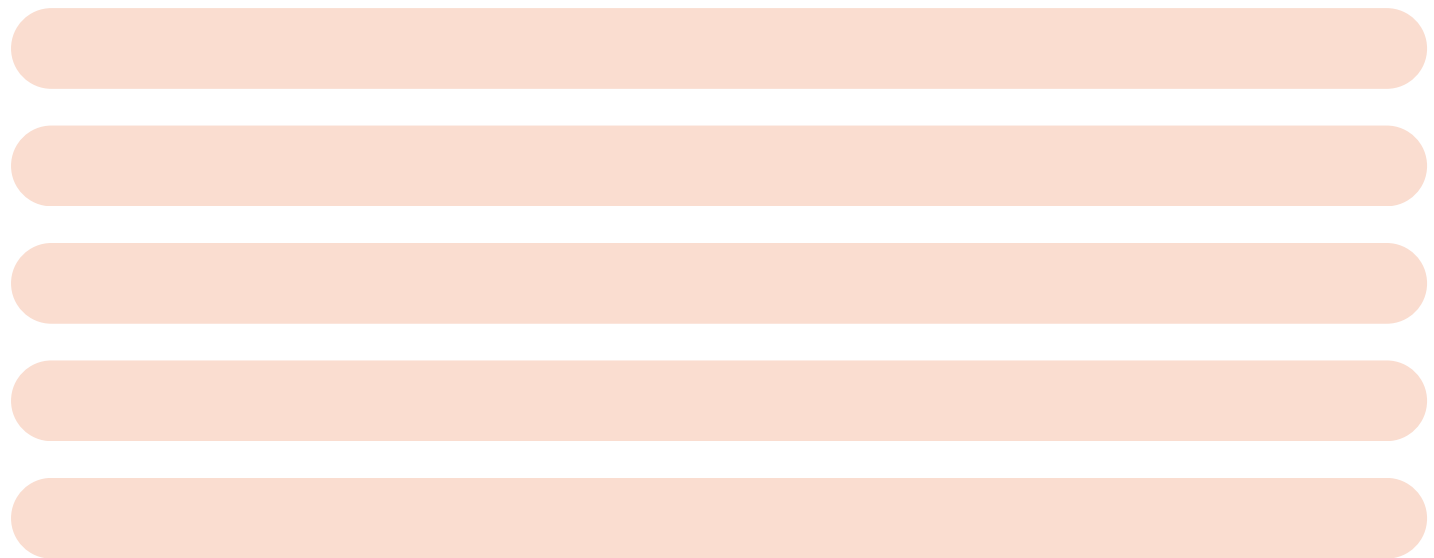
5 Life Goals

Based on your values, and your personal mission statement, create 5 life goals to accomplish your mission.

Five horizontal orange rounded rectangles stacked vertically, intended for writing five life goals.

5 Reasons I value myself

Finally, write out 5 reasons you value yourself. This is different than your core values. Reflect on your own personal qualities, and think about what you value most about yourself.

Five horizontal orange rounded rectangles stacked vertically, intended for writing five reasons for valuing oneself.

Keep these answers close by, hang them by your desk, or by your bed so you can refer to them regularly. Use them as a guide for when you're making decisions, in tough situations, or need some motivation!

Saying “No.” in a Positive Way

What is a positive “No.”

A positive “No” starts with what you’re for instead of what you’re against. Focus on what you want, your core interest, and what really matters to you. This way you are not in opposition to someone else’s demand or behavior. Instead, you can rely on the personal core values you’ve established today.

Yes!

Yes to your
core values.

No.

No, I cannot.

Yes?

Is there another
solution?

Yes!

Always begin with a “yes” first. Your first yes is saying yes to one of your core values.

This first “Yes” is the basis for your “No.” Uncovering your “yes” first will ground you in something positive, give you a sense of direction, and give you energy.

No.

Deliver a clear “no” to the request the other person has made.

Yes?

After you have said “no,” create an invitation for a positive outcome. Tell the other person not just what you don’t want but what you do want. So, as you close one door, you may be able to open another. This second “Yes?” must be something you are comfortable and willing to do, it is not a compromise or an accommodation that will stress or upset you. In some situations, there may not be a second “Yes?” to offer.

Note: It is ok to take your time delivering a positive “No.” In some situations, you may not be ready or able to deliver your “Yes! No. Yes?” immediately. You may need time to think. Take a few breaths while you think, or, if needed, ask to give the person an answer later so you can take time to think through your “Yes! No. Yes?”

Download our Yes! No. Yes? Poster using this QR Code:



Yes!

No.

Yes?

Or how to deliver a "Positive No."

Before we learn how to deliver a positive "No.," we need to discover our values.

We define Values as: **Any idea or theme that is important enough to you that it affects how you think, how you act, and how you feel.**

Use the QR code to complete the Values discovery exercise.



We also need to understand how we are currently saying "No."

The three A's according to William Ury's book "The Power of a Positive NO"



Accommodate
Instead of saying "no" you accommodate the person's request.



Attack
Instead of saying "no" you attack the person.



Avoid
Instead of saying "no" you avoid the person.

Deliver a positive "No."

A positive "No" starts with what you're for instead of what you're against. Focus on what you want, your core interest, and what really matters to you. This way you are not in opposition to someone else's demand or behavior. Instead, you can rely on the personal core values you've established today.

Yes!

Always begin with a "Yes!" first. Your first yes is saying yes to one of your core values. This first "Yes" is the basis for your "No." Uncovering your "yes" first will ground you in something positive, give you a sense of direction, and give you energy.

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Here is an example:

A colleague has sent you a message, 5 minutes before the end of your shift, that reads,
"Hey, could you take a look at this before you go home? The deadline for this grant is tomorrow, so I need to submit it tonight."
The document attached is a 50 page grant application, with numerous spelling errors, 5 different typefaces and you feel a pit in your stomach because you know you don't have enough time or energy to help.

You decide to say "Yes!" to your value of mindfulness, to take a moment to check in with yourself. You say "Yes!" to your value of health and recognize that staying late tonight will push you beyond your capacity and cause too much undue stress.

You deliver your clear "No."
"No, I will not be able to help you today with this grant application."

You offer an alternative.
"I understand that this doesn't help your immediate situation, I wish I had the capacity to help today. In the future, if you give me at least two weeks notice I would be happy to review your grant application materials."



We cover this topic in more depth during the second workshop in our Building Blocks to Advocate Wellness Workshop series. If you are interested in bringing our workshops to your organization, please email Outreach@raftcares.org.

RAFT Resilience for Advocates
through Foundational Training

info@raftcares.org / www.raftcares.org / [@raftcares](https://www.instagram.com/raftcares)

Building Resilience to Shame and Guilt

At some point in our lives, we have all faced feelings of shame. Whether it was because of a school bully, because we disappointed our parents, or because we made a mistake at work, the feelings are the same. It hurts, you blush, you feel sad, you have that sinking feeling in your stomach, and you want to hide. Instead of giving into shame, and spiraling into depression or anxiety, we can work to overcome shame with a tool called Critical Awareness.

According to Dr. Brene Brown, [we cannot become resistant to shame or get rid of it all together](#), but we can develop shame resilience: The ability to recognize shame when we experience it and move through it in a constructive way that allows us to maintain our authenticity and grow from our experiences. In the process of consciously moving through our shame, we can build stronger and more meaningful connections with the people in our lives and ourselves.

Self-Empathy is the strongest antidote for shame. According to Dr. Brown, the opposite of experiencing shame is experiencing empathy. In her research, people with the highest levels of shame resilience were both givers and receivers of empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand, be aware of, be sensitive to, and vicariously experience the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another. Self-Empathy is about turning those abilities inward and offering yourself the same empathy that someone else would.

It can be a challenge to practice self-empathy, especially if you believe that you don't deserve it. We can overcome shame and heal from it by using Critical Awareness to promote self-empathy.

What is Shame and Guilt?

Dr. Brene Brown, research professor and expert leader in the study of courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy, provides the following definitions:

Shame:

Shame is an intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance, love, and belonging. Shame is a fear of disconnection.

Shame says, "I am bad."

Guilt:

Guilt is a remorseful awareness of having done something wrong. Guilt is uncomfortable but helpful as you can heal from and change when you do something bad by apologizing, communicating, and using empathy.

Guilt says, "I have done something bad."

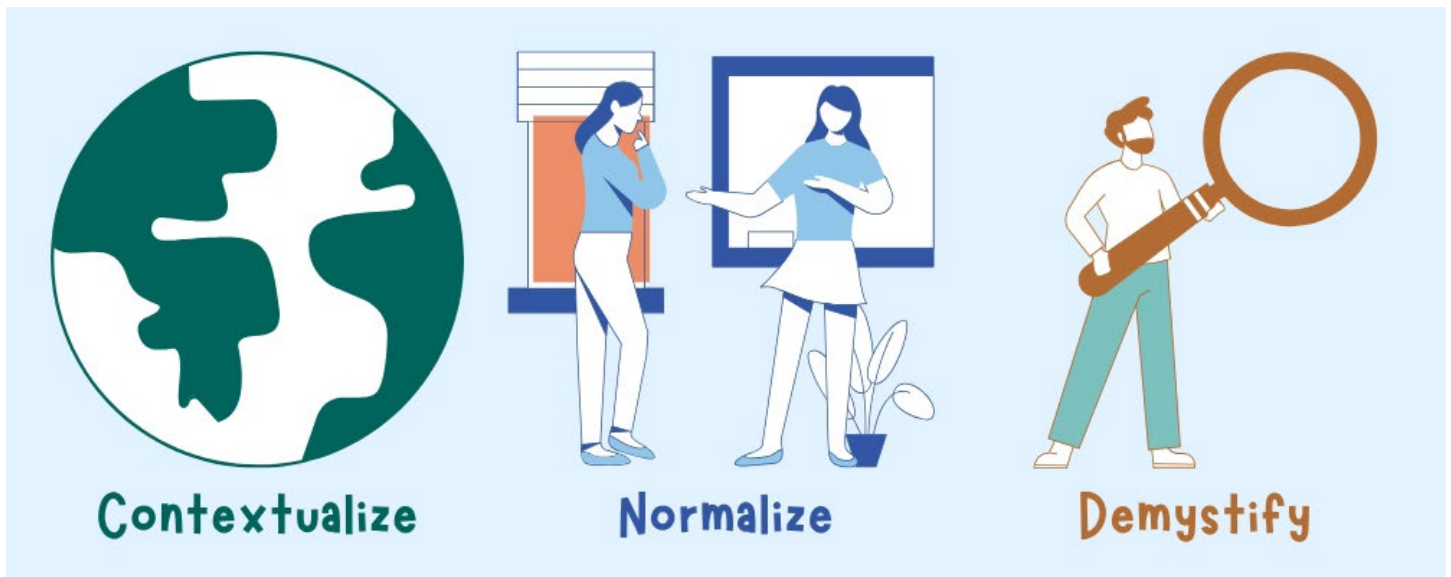
The difference between shame and guilt is a difference between “being” something negative and “doing” something negative.

“I am a mistake” is shame.

“I made a mistake” is guilt.

Having the ability to identify feelings of shame and guilt can guide you toward your next steps. If you’re feeling guilty, and you have truly done something wrong, hurt someone, or made a mistake apologizing or talking with someone about it is a great next step to resolve those feelings. Sometimes we can confuse shame and guilt and think we’re guilty when we haven’t done anything wrong.

If you have endured abuse, or struggled with mental illness, you might be more prone to confuse the two feelings. When your brain is already hardwired in a negative way, we tend to feel mistakes or shame about ourselves much more strongly. This only means that it might take more effort to overcome confusing feelings around shame and guilt if you struggle with negative thinking already.



Utilizing Critical Awareness to Overcome Shame

Critical Awareness is defined as knowing why something exists, how it works, how our society is impacted by it, and who benefits from it. Practicing critical awareness increases our personal power in three ways by giving you the ability to:

Contextualize – See the big picture: What is the context in which this situation happened? What else is going on in the room, in this building, with your family, in your city, in the world?

Normalize – Realize you are not alone or the only one who has experienced the same situation through research or conversation.

Demystify – Understand the origin of your shame and share it with others, like your therapist or a trusted person, or journal to reflect on it.

“One of my early breakthroughs in therapy was using critical awareness. I learned that my experiences, my feelings, and my struggles weren’t unique. Knowing that other people experienced the same things that I did helps me to feel less alone. Normalizing my mental health challenges, almost instantly dissolved the feelings of shame that I felt on a daily basis.”

Let’s look at a few scenarios that you might face in the workplace and apply critical awareness.

Scenario 1

A direct service advocate has a sick child at home, and they are also running a fever with a cough, but there is no one to cover their shifts. They called their supervisor to call out of work, but their supervisor does not understand their situation and threatens their position if they can’t come to work or figure something out. There is no way the advocate can leave their sick child, or work through their illness, so they feel guilty for staying home to rest and get better, especially because their supervisor is upset with them.

Apply Critical Awareness

Contextualize: It is flu season, and school season, and people are sick more often because of that. The organization will not come to a halt just because one person is out sick for a few days. Staying home will also prevent spreading the illness, so they don’t infect their coworkers.

Normalize: The advocate thinks about when another coworker was out sick a few weeks ago and thinks back over the past year about other people being sick. Even if the supervisor was upset about it, everyone else didn’t mind and were supportive in their absence. Staying home from work to get better is not wrong or something we should feel guilty about, it is good for us.

Demystify: They texted a trusted coworker about the situation and their coworker shared a similar experience they had with the same supervisor. They realize the supervisor used to work as manager at a for-profit company and has brought their professional expectations from that field of work. Working through illness is a symptom of a capitalist mindset. The feelings of shame around missing work are caused by this unrealistic expectation that an employee’s life should revolve around their job.

Scenario 2

A hotline advocate spoke with a client who shared a very traumatic story, and it triggered thoughts of their own assault. After they ended the call with the client, they cried in their office. They wanted support but felt ashamed for becoming emotional. They thought they should be stronger, and that they should toughen up and move on.

Apply Critical Awareness

Contextualize: As an advocate they helped someone in need, who was in an incredibly difficult situation. Working as a hotline advocate is a tough, emotionally taxing job, but it's necessary and meaningful. Before the call they also supported two other callers in difficult situations with no break in between.

Normalize: It is a natural human reaction to empathize with other people when we hear their stories of pain and struggle. It is difficult to always be strong, especially when we can relate to the stories that we hear every day similar to our own trauma. They remember supporting their coworkers through tears after tough calls and realize their coworkers would be there to support them now.

Demystify: Looking at their past they remember their parents shaming them for crying. "There is nothing to cry about." "Toughen up." "I'll give you something to cry about." They realize that they are just repeating that cycle of shame with negative self-talk. They talk to their therapist about the situation, and the therapist validates their feelings and reassures them that emotional responses like that are completely normal.

Keep Practicing

Acknowledge feelings of shame and guilt - and identify which one you are feeling. Practice critical awareness to overcome shame and promote feelings of self-empathy. [Seek out connection with trusted people in your network.](#) Learn more about cultivating your trusted network here. To overcome shame and feelings of guilt is not an easy task, but it gets better with practice, and support from people around you.

Treat Yourself Like Your Best Friend

Imagine your best friend comes to you struggling with a big issue or stressor.
Write down how you would comfort your friend.
What do you say to them? What is your tone?

Now imagine a time when you were struggling with a situation or difficult emotions.
Reflect and write down how you comfort yourself.
What do you do? How do you take of yourself?

Was there a difference between how you treat others and how you treat yourself?
What are those differences? Why are they different or similar?

What would happen if you started treating yourself like your best friend?
What would change? What can you change today?

Identify Shame Sources

Identify categories where you feel or experience shame. Who and what cause you to experience shame, and why do they cause shame?

Examples: parents, social groups, media, appearance, sexual preference, race, trauma

Who

What

Why

Identify Shame in Your Body



I physically feel shame in or on my:

Shame feels like:

I know I'm ashamed when I feel:



If I could taste shame, it would taste like:



If I could smell shame, it would smell like:



If I could touch shame, it would feel like:



If I could see shame, it would look like:

Building Your Trusted Network

Reaching out and experiencing empathy is an important part of shame resiliency. It requires that you choose to share your story and create change over separating and isolating yourself. In doing so, connections are built, and we start to see that we all experience challenges and need support. [When reaching out and sharing your story it is important to do so with someone you trust.](#) Who should you reach out to?

Journal:

To help you recognize who is in your trusted network write down:

[Note: Some people may fit in more than one category.](#)

[Some people you love may not fit in any of these categories.](#)

**Three People at
Work you can
connect with:**

**Three People
who share your
worldview:**

**Three People you
can call when
having a hard time:**

Staying Positive

Positive thinking helps us be more optimistic, face obstacles and challenges, and become more resilient to stress. If we focus on the good things about ourselves and our lives, then we are more likely to see the light at the end of the tunnel during difficult times.

“Positive psychology is not about denying difficult emotions. It’s about opening to what is happening here and now, and cultivating and savoring the good in your life.” — Ron Siegel

Focusing on our strengths, the best aspects of ourselves, is pivotal in shifting our perspective on our lives, capabilities, and possibilities.

Benefits of Recognizing Your Strengths

- ★ **Efficient Problem-solving/decision making** – using strengths to make decisions leads to more efficient problem solving and a positive impact on well-being. Using your strengths for decision making can help reduce the stress around the situation, to a level where you can deal with it, and build resilience towards that stress in future situations.
- ★ **Enhanced well-being** – using one’s strengths contributes to greater well-being and lower psychological distress.
- ★ **Self-acceptance** – using one’s strengths helps us look past our perceived deficiencies and know that we are enough
- ★ **Greater happiness** – identifying and utilizing core strengths can improve positive affect and boost life satisfaction
- ★ **Improved Mental Health** – using one’s strengths plays a role in reducing depression
- ★ **Positive Work Experiences** – the more signature strengths are put into action at work the higher people’s positive subjective experiences of work are, regardless of the nature of that work.
- ★ **Positive Affect at School** – using character strengths leads to positive moods at school, and overall academic achievement as well as dealing with negative affects at school.

Identifying Your Character Strengths

Character Strengths are the positive parts of your personality that impact how you think, feel, and behave. You possess all 24 character strengths in different degrees, giving you a unique character strengths profile.

Use the link to take the VIA Character Strengths Survey:

<https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>



When complete list your top five strengths below:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Journaling Exercise

Think of a decision you made in the past, of light to medium intensity, that did not get the result you wanted. Revisit that decision, but this time, use some, or all of, your top 5 strengths in making that decision. Journal on your own or use the following guiding questions:

What was the decision you made that did not get the result you wanted? What was the outcome of that decision?

Example: I wanted to participate in creating our organization podcast. I signed up for a small task that would fit in my schedule. When I tried to work on the task, I noticed myself avoiding it.

Which of your five strengths could you apply to how you view the decision you had to make?

Example: I could have considered my "creativity" strength when trying to decide how to get involved with the podcast.

How would using your strengths have resulted in a different decision, and a different possible outcome to this scenario?

Example: Instead of choosing a solo, data entry task, I could have participated by developing the podcast outline, recording the podcast, or even creating marketing materials. These tasks would have been more enjoyable for me because they utilize my strengths in "creativity" and "love" and "zest."

How can you set boundaries to protect your strengths and not deplete yourself?

Example: Noticing when I feel my "love" strength is not being reciprocated/respected.

RAFT Team Character Strength Profiles Tracking Sheet

How to fill out this sheet:

1. Get your organization or team to complete the VIA character strengths test here: <https://www.viacharacter.org/> (Click on “Take the Free Survey” in top right corner).
2. Have each team member send you their top three strengths, and single sentence descriptions, from the survey.
3. Add each team member’s name in the “Team Member” column.
4. Add each team member’s top three strengths and the single sentence description beside that team member’s name.

If your team has completed the RAFT Core Values exercise:

1. Have each team member send you their top three values, or their value statement, if they wrote one.
2. Add each team member’s values or values statement to the final column.

How to use this sheet:

1. When preparing to meet with a team member or team members, review their strengths and values, and think about how to bring those strengths into the discussion.
2. When scheduling, troubleshooting, or making plans that involve a team member review their strengths and values.
3. Incorporate a team member’s strengths and values into decisions made that involve that team member.
4. Use the strengths and values to check in with team members and how their work is going. This could be used for scheduled or random check ins. (These are check ins, not evaluations)
5. Use the strengths and values during a team members evaluation.



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Example of a completed row of the Strength Profiles tracker:

RAFT TEAM CHARACTER STRENGTH PROFILES				
TEAM MEMBER	STRENGTH 1	STRENGTH 2	STRENGTH 3	VALUE STATEMENT
JEREMIE	<p>Love of Learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows.</p>	<p>Perspective: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself/others.</p>	<p>Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.</p>	<p>To provide my FAMILY with the SUPPORT they need to have amazing ADVENTURES together</p>

TEAM CHARACTER STRENGTH PROFILES

TEAM MEMBER	STRENGTH 1	STRENGTH 2	STRENGTH 3	VALUE STATEMENT

30 Days of Gratitude

Challenge yourself to write down something you are grateful for every day for 30 days. It doesn't need to be super deep, it could even be your cup of coffee in the morning.

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16

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New Year Gratitudes

Take a moment to reflect on your personal highlights of the past year.
What were the standout moments that made the year unique for you?

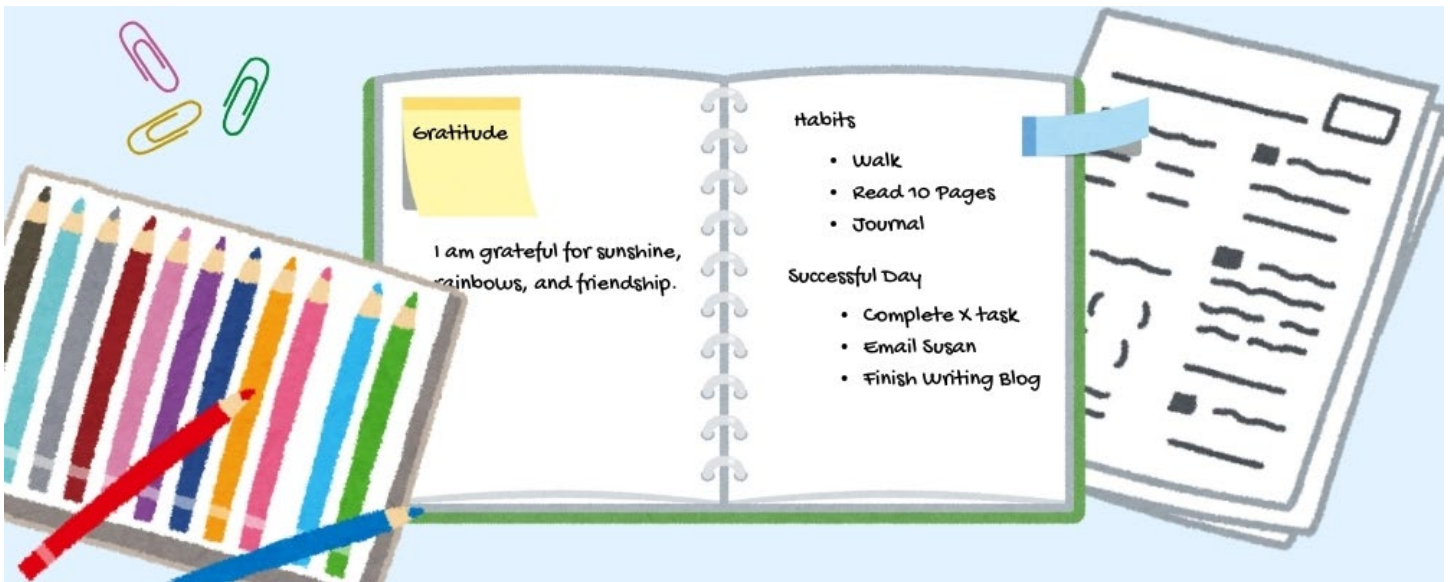
Challenges have a way of revealing our strengths and our support system around us. It's in those tough moments that our gratitude can shine brightest. How has embracing gratitude helped you navigate some of the unexpected twists and turns of this year?

Reminding ourselves to take a breath and pause during the chaos of work, life, family, and social responsibilities can be so hard.

What practices or rituals do you have in place to remind you to “stop and smell the roses”? If you don’t have a practice, what would you like to commit to practicing in the new year?

How can gratitude be a guiding light as we step into a new year of unknowns?

How to Start a Gratitude and Success Journal



By Jeremie Miller, Executive Director

I heard about gratitude journals years ago and brushed them off as a waste of time (I have a very “left-brain” background).

After starting my work with Indrani’s Light Foundation I would hear Indrani talking about her gratitude journal, but still filed it away as “something I didn’t have time for.”

Last year in October, I finally decided to give the gratitude journal idea a try but didn’t really have any idea how to get started. I knew that writing a traditional journal entry in complete sentences didn’t feel like something I would actually do, so I worked through a few ideas, and finally landed on something that worked.

Now, when I say “worked,” I mean that I successfully journaled for 17 out of 61 days in October and November before stopping completely in December.

You must get started somewhere right?

In episode 15 of the Caring for the Caregivers Podcast Indrani, Amy, and I discussed some of our self-care practices. One of the self-care practices I want to improve upon in 2018 is keeping a gratitude and success journal. When I started keeping my own journal in late 2017 I had no idea what I was doing, but over time I managed to find a system that works for me.

To kick off 2018 I thought I would share how I am using my gratitude and success journal in the hopes it might help you give the idea a try.

How to start a gratitude and success journal (the Jeremie way)

1. Buy a journal - I found an empty journal we had sitting around the house (see the image at the start of the post).
2. Decide what you want to track daily in your journal – I track gratitude, habits, and successful days.
3. Create a template for your journal entries on the first page – or if you are less worried about structure skip this step. Remember this is YOUR journal.
4. Pick how often you want to write in your journal – I am committed to writing in mine every week day, if I make entries on the weekend that is a bonus. I also try to write in mine first thing in the morning before starting my work day.
5. Start using your journal – I am re-kickstarting my journal Friday January 26th.
6. Don't beat yourself up when you get off track. Just start again.

How I Use my Journal:

Section One: Gratitude

I start each day's entry by reflecting on the previous day and writing down three things that I am grateful for from that day.

I reflect on my previous day for a couple of reasons:

- ★ I find I am usually too tired before bed to properly reflect on my day and write down my thoughts. If I try to journal at night, I just don't do it.
- ★ By writing these three things down first thing in the morning I get an instant boost of energy to my day.

Section Two: Habit Formation

This middle section of my journal entry is dedicated to forming new positive habits. Currently I am trying to go for a walk, drink 4-8 glasses of water, and take my vitamins and other meds every day.

To form these activities into habits I know I have to repeat them enough times that they become routine: actions I take without even having to think about them. By recording my success with each habit in my journal I am reminded to complete each daily task and eventually (hopefully) form a new habit.

Section Three: Successful Day

Every day I select 3-5 tasks from my much longer task list that, if I finish them, will make me feel like I accomplished something and made my day successful.

This section is super important to my day. In the past I have always worked through my day using a long list of tasks I need to complete. What I discovered was, even when I finished a lot of the tasks on that list, I wasn't feeling very accomplished. There were so many more tasks on the list.

For the end of 2017, and for 2018 I have stopped working of my long task list. Instead, I record 3-5 tasks that I need to complete each day that will make me feel like the day was successful.

If I manage to get more tasks done...great! But achieving more than the five tasks listed in my journal is not a requirement. Only the three to five in the journal need to be finished for my day to be successful.

At the end of 2017 this tweak to my daily routine made a big difference. I found that, at the end of the day, while wrapping things up and transitioning to family time I was feeling much more accomplished and had higher levels of energy.

By limiting my expectations of myself (which usually were not very realistic or fair) I have set myself up to succeed and put myself in a better headspace for the rest of the day and evening.

Journaling every day

Right now, I have a one-day-in-a-row streak going for my 2018 gratitude and success journal.

I am hoping that I can make writing in this journal a successful part of my self-care routine. However, I am also not going to beat myself up for not getting this self-care practice "right". I think that is an important piece of any self-care routine: if the self-care routine makes you feel worse because you aren't doing it, then find something different to try.

A self-care routine that makes you feel guilty isn't doing its job.

PERMA Poster

PERMA



Learn more here

Dr. Seligman's PERMA™ theory of well-being is an attempt to answer these fundamental questions. There are five building blocks that enable flourishing – **P**ositive Emotion, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishment (hence **PERMA™**) – and there are strategies to increase each.

RAFT has compiled some ideas to fulfill each category, and categorized them by how much time they take, how much energy they require, and approximately how much money they will cost.



Use the QR code to download the poster file!

	Low Time / Low Energy	Low Time / High Energy	High Time / Low Energy	High Time / High Energy
Positive Emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Watch cute animal videos on Youtube or TikTok - \$ ◦ Do a breathing exercise or close your eyes for 5 minutes - \$ ◦ Call a friend for a quick catch-up - \$ ◦ Read an excerpt from a favorite book - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ 5-minute dance party - \$ ◦ Take a 20 minute run or jog - \$ ◦ Share and explain your gratitude for someone - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Watch a funny movie or read a feel-good book - \$ ◦ Get a massage or have a spa day - \$\$\$ ◦ Take a nap - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Take a hike or go on a long walk - \$ ◦ Take a day trip to somewhere new - \$\$\$ ◦ Prepare a home cooked meal and sit down to eat it - \$\$\$\$\$
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Doodle, color a coloring page or do a zen tangle for 10 minutes - \$ ◦ Journal about things that are on your mind - \$ ◦ Reflect on your gratitudes and write them down - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Watch and participate in a short YouTube fitness/workout/dance video - \$ ◦ Stroll through a garden or garden center at a local store. - \$ ◦ Review your day and plan tomorrow - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Read a book on a subject you're interested in - \$ ◦ Stroll through your favorite store. Just stroll and look. - \$\$\$ ◦ Re-watch your favorite movie or one that's been on your list - \$\$\$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Work on a creative project - \$\$\$\$\$ ◦ Play a board or video game (you already own) - \$ ◦ Buy and play a new board or video game - \$\$\$\$\$ ◦ Write (journal, story, poem, etc.) - \$
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Text a friend or family member - \$ ◦ Grab coffee with a coworker - \$\$ ◦ Tell someone you appreciate them - \$ ◦ Find a quiet spot in your house and be alone - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Call a friend or family member - \$ ◦ Chat with a coworker for 10 minutes - \$ ◦ Answer emails \$ ◦ Call a friend to make plans (energy level depends on the friend) - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Get dinner or lunch with a friend or family member - \$\$ ◦ Invite someone over for a movie night - \$ ◦ Celebrate a friend or family members accomplishment - \$\$\$\$ ◦ Celebrate your own accomplishment - \$\$\$\$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Go Shopping with a friend or family member - \$\$ ◦ Do an outdoor activity with a friend or family member - \$ ◦ Have a challenging conversation you have been avoiding - \$
Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Take a moment to reconnect with your values - \$ ◦ Take a moment to review your strengths - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Donate to a local charity - \$\$\$\$\$ ◦ Keep a daily reflection journal - \$\$\$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Read a book that connects you to your faith - \$\$\$ ◦ Listen to a podcast about something you care about - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Volunteer at a local charity or organization - \$ ◦ Work in your own garden or a community garden - \$ ◦ Call someone and have a meaningful conversation - \$
Accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Post/repost a link on social media to something you participated in that you are proud of. - \$ ◦ Do a 5 minute language lesson on DuoLingo \$ ◦ Solve the daily Wordle - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Spend 10 minutes decluttering/cleaning/fixing something in your home. - \$ ◦ Organize the pile of papers on your counter - \$ ◦ Stretch for 10 minutes, or every time you get out of your chair - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Start reading that book that's been sitting on your nightstand for a while - \$ ◦ Complete a puzzle - \$ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Finish a project you've been putting off - \$ ◦ Compete in a marathon or similar activity - \$ ◦ Enroll in a class and learn something new - \$\$\$\$\$ ◦ Sign up for an exercise class - \$\$\$\$

Free : \$ \$1 - \$50 : \$\$ \$51 - \$200 : \$\$\$ \$200 + : \$\$\$\$

PERMA

Martin Seligman describes five specific life domains where restorative practices will impact your well-being and ability to flourish (or thrive):



Positive Emotions

What we feel. Those feelings that make you feel the best. Feelings that lack negativity and discomfort. Examples: pleasure, warmth, comfort, gratitude, joy, amusement, etc.



Engagement

Refers to the state of being in “flow”, or the state of being so engaged with something that you lose track of time and things going on around you. **The loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity.** Examples: reading a book for a few minutes, then realizing 2 hours has gone by.



Relationships

The relationships that we develop with other people that contribute to our well-being. The people that matter in our lives. Examples: your partner, children, co-workers, friends, parents, etc.



Meaning

Belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self. Being part of something larger than yourself. Examples: your family, your job, religion, volunteering, living green, etc.



Accomplishment

Those things that we pursue because they seem worthy of our stretch. Accomplishment can be recognized internally as well as by others. Examples: doing your job well, writing a short story, climbing stairs, receiving an award, losing weight, etc.

No single element of PERMA defines well-being. Each of the five categories contributes to your well-being, and the impact and importance of each category will be unique for each person. The more you increase each category in your life the more resilient you will become and the more you will flourish.

PERMA Journal Reflection

Which PERMA categories feel the most important to you and your well-being?

Why do these categories feel important to you?

Write a list of self-care activities you are currently doing, are trying to do, or would like to do. Example: reading, taking a walk, exercise, volunteering, etc.

Look at the list of activities you have written down. For each activity write the PERMA categories you are meeting by doing that activity. Note: There may be more than one PERMA category for each activity.

Write down a list of the tasks and activities you carry out at work. (client meetings, staff meetings, paperwork, etc.)

Look at the list of activities you have written down. For each activity write the PERMA categories you are meeting by doing that activity. Note: There may be more than one PERMA category for each activity.

Using PERMA

When trying to fit self-care into our busy lives it is helpful to have a list of activities to select from that differ in their time commitment, energy commitment, and how they match up with the PERMA categories.

If you only have 15 minutes free and try to commit to an activity that takes longer, you are going to skip taking care of yourself. If you are feeling low energy and try to do something that requires a lot of energy, you probably aren't going to follow through.

If you are craving a sense of meaning, then selecting a self-care activity that provides only positive emotions isn't going to be a good fit.

If you can create a list of self-care activities that vary in the time commitment, energy commitment, and PERMA categories you will give yourself a wider range of activities to choose from and increase the likelihood that you will take care of yourself.

PERMA at Work

As you are completing your different tasks at work try to think about how those activities connect to the PERMA categories. This will help you realize that there is more to your work than just the tasks you are completing. You are also experiencing positive emotions, in a state of flow, being with other people, bringing meaning to your life, or accomplishing something.

Not all work tasks may have a PERMA category you can associate with them but try to find as many tasks as possible that match up with your PERMA categories and mix them into your day with the more mundane tasks.

If you are finding very few of your tasks at work match up with PERMA categories it may be time to talk to your leadership and find if there is a way to make changes to your job, so you are feeling more fulfilled. This can be a scary request to make, and feel challenging, but finding more PERMA categories in your work will help you build resilience and be more satisfied in your work.

PERMA Grid

Use this grid to map out different activities and tasks that fit within your PERMA categories.

Make note of whether an activity requires high, medium or low energy, and how much time it takes to complete it.

	In Life	At Work
Positive Emotions		
Engagement		
Relationships		
Meaning		
Accomplishment		

3. Advocate Career Planning

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The Professional Resume

Definition and Purpose

A resume is a professional document that showcases your relevant skills and experiences for a specific job you are applying for. Its purpose is not to be an exhaustive list of every job you've ever had, but rather a tailored presentation designed to get you an interview and demonstrate your qualifications.

Best Resume Writing Practices

Tailor Your Resume to Each Job:

Customize your resume for every application to highlight the skills and experience that match the role for which you are applying. Carefully review the job description to identify key requirements, keywords, and skills. Then, design your resume's summary, work experience, and skills sections to align with those needs, highlighting relevant accomplishments and using specific, quantifiable examples.

Use a Clear, Professional Format:

Keep the design simple, clean, and easy to scan for recruiters and ATS (Applicant Tracking System) software. Use standard fonts (10-12pt) and sections like Contact Info, Professional Summary, Experience, and Education, with bullet points and action verbs for readability. Use chronological format to emphasize experience and save as a PDF for maximum operating system compatibility. Keep margins at 0.5-1 inch, avoid complex formatting, and keep it to one page unless you have extensive (10-15 years) work history.

Start with a Strong Summary/Profile:

This 2–4 sentences "sales pitch" quickly highlights your most relevant skills, years of experience, and quantifiable achievements. It's a concise overview that emphasizes your value and qualifications for the specific job, helping recruiters decide whether to read the rest of your resume.

Focus on Achievements, Not Just Duties:

Use measurable results to showcase your impact rather than listing responsibilities. This helps you stand out to employers by demonstrating professional value and tangible results, rather than just listing tasks you performed.

Use Keywords from the Job Description:

Carefully read the job posting and identify words and phrases related to skills, responsibilities, software, and industry terminology. Integrate these keywords, especially action verbs like "Managed" or "Developed" and hard skills like "Monday.com" "Canva" or "Excel" throughout your resume's professional summary, skills section, and work experience bullet points to pass ATS and attract hiring managers.

Keep It Concise:

Limit to one page (or two if highly experienced) prioritizing recent and relevant experience. Use action verbs and quantifiable achievements, eliminating filler words and irrelevant information. Organize information with bullet points, keeping each section to a few bullet points, and use simple formatting to ensure it's easy to read and ATS-friendly.

Highlight Relevant Skills:

Identify the key hard and soft skills the employer seeks, using keywords from the posting. Then, include these skills in a dedicated skills section, as well as within the work experience section with bullet points starting with action verbs and specific, quantified examples. Ensure all listed skills are relevant and specific to the role, avoiding unnecessary buzzwords.

Quantify Results Whenever Possible:

Replace general statements with specific numbers, percentages, dollar amounts, or time frames to show your impact. For example, change "Improved customer satisfaction" to "Increased customer satisfaction scores by 15% within six months".

Proofread Carefully:

Effectively proofread your resume by reading it slowly, checking for grammar and spelling errors. Ensure consistent formatting and terminology and look for clarity and conciseness. It's also beneficial to read your resume aloud, print it out, use editing tools, and have a friend review it to catch mistakes you may have missed.

Include Only Relevant Information:

Include only the experiences, skills, and education that directly support your suitability for the role for which you are applying. Remove personal, outdated, unrelated, or excessive details to ensure the most impactful information is visible.

Update Regularly:

Update your resume every three to six months, or whenever you achieve a significant accomplishment like a promotion, new skill, or relevant certification. Regular updates ensure your resume is always current with your latest professional developments and accomplishments, making the process less daunting and saving you time when you're actively job hunting. Refresh with new achievements and skills so you're always ready for opportunities.

Addressing Short Employment Stints:

Do not include employment that lasted less than 3-6 months. To address short tenure on your resume, use strategic resume formatting like [functional](#), grouping similar contract or project-based roles under a single heading to show temporary work, focus on quantifiable achievements instead of duties, and employ clarifying language such as "contract," "temporary," or "project-based" to explain the short duration. In interviews, be prepared to briefly and professionally explain the circumstances of your departure, emphasizing that you gained valuable skills or that external factors, like a company sale or restructuring, were the cause.

Career Changes:

When changing careers, focus on a combination resume format to highlight transferable skills, write a compelling career summary/objective that explains your transition, and tailor your resume to each job using keywords from the description. Emphasize achievements and quantifiable results, showcase relevant projects, certifications, and courses, and support your resume with a custom cover letter to tell your unique story.

Don't Use the Indeed Resume Builder

Do not use an Indeed resume because they are generic, create poorly formatted, and lengthy documents, and prevent you from standing out to employers. Instead, create your own professional resume, tailor it to each position, and use a well-formatted PDF version to apply according to company guidelines. If you are unfamiliar with or lack experience creating a resume, a Google search will give you information on sites that will provide you with templates and instructions for creating a standout resume.

Don't Put Your Photo on Your Resume

In most professional fields, especially in the United States, it is not recommended to include a photo on your resume because it can lead to bias, distract from your qualifications, and take up valuable space that could be used for more pertinent information. The exception is for roles in certain creative industries, such as modeling or acting, or in countries where including a photo is standard practice. If a photo is required, it should be a high-quality, professional headshot with good lighting and a neutral background.

4 Websites to Help You Create Your Resume, Cover Letter, and Reference Page

Resume Genius: [Resumegenius.com](https://www.resumegenius.com)

Zety: [Zety.com](https://www.zety.com)

IHire: <https://www.ihire.com/resourcecenter/jobseeker/pages/job-reference-page-template-and-tips>

Kick Resume: [Kickresume.com](https://www.kickresume.com)

The Compelling Cover Letter

Definition and Purpose

A cover letter is a one-page introductory document, submitted with your resume (specifically when requested), that acts as a personal introduction to a potential employer. It highlights your skills and experience for a specific job, explains why you're a strong fit, and shows your enthusiasm for the position. The cover letter, in conjunction with the resume provides additional context, showcases your personality, and demonstrates your strong written communication skills, which can increase your chances of getting an interview.

Best Practices for Cover Letter Writing

Tailor Every Cover Letter

Just like your resume, you should tailor your cover letter for each position, as recruiters can easily spot a lack of effort in a generic letter. To tailor effectively, adapt the cover letter's content, including keywords and examples, to match the specific requirements in each job description. This customization increases your chances of getting past the ATS and capturing the hiring manager's attention.

Address the Right Person

If it is not provided in the application instructions, search on the company website or LinkedIn for the hiring manager's name. If you find it, use a formal salutation like "Dear Mr./Ms. [Last Name]" or simply "Dear [First Name] [Last Name]". If you can't find a name, use a professional generic salutation like "Dear Hiring Manager" or "Dear Recruiting Team" instead of "To Whom It May Concern".

Start Strong with a Hook

To start a cover letter strong, hook the hiring manager by highlighting a mutual connection, showcasing an impressive accomplishment with quantifiable results, or conveying authentic enthusiasm for the company's mission or products. You can also express your passion for the field, begin with a belief statement relevant to the company, or tell a brief, creative story that connects you to the role.

Show, Don't Just Tell

Provide specific, quantifiable examples and details from your experience to demonstrate your skills and accomplishments, rather than making vague claims. Instead of saying you're a "strong communicator," describe a situation where your communication skills led to a positive outcome. This approach is more convincing to a hiring manager and helps them understand your capabilities and how you can contribute to the company.

Connect Skills to Their Needs

First analyze the job description to identify key skills and keywords. Then, research the company to understand its values and current projects. In your cover letter, explicitly state a company need and follow it with a specific example from your experience that demonstrates the relevant skill(s) you possess, quantifying your achievement whenever possible. This approach provides tangible proof of your capabilities and shows the employer how you can solve their specific problems. Showing skills and needs alignment makes you a stronger candidate.

Keep It Focused and Concise

Hiring managers read quickly and often spend around 30 seconds to 2 minutes reading each cover letter. Limit the cover letter to one page and 3-4 short paragraphs. Clearly state the position you are applying for and how you know about the position and explain why you are a strong fit for that specific company and role. Focus on how your skills and experiences align with the company's needs, using specific, quantifiable examples to demonstrate your value, and always personalize each letter.

Use a Professional but Authentic Tone

Balance formal language with genuine enthusiasm and personality by aligning your skills with the company's values and mission, using engaging and positive language, tailoring the letter to the specific job and company, and incorporating specific, relevant anecdotes that showcase your unique qualifications and motivations without being overly casual or negative. Avoid overly formal jargon while still keeping the correspondence professional.

End with Confidence and a Call to Action

Closings leave lasting impressions. Clearly express your enthusiasm for the role, highlight how your skills align with the company's goals, and state your availability for an interview to discuss the opportunity further. The call to action should be professional, direct, and purposeful, nudging the hiring manager to take the next step without sounding presumptuous or pushy. It should essentially reaffirm enthusiasm, thank the reader for considering you, and invite the next steps.

Proofread Carefully

Errors can cost you opportunities. Proofreading a cover letter is crucial because it ensures a professional impression by eliminating errors, demonstrates attention to detail, and helps the hiring team understand your message clearly. Grammar, spelling, or punctuation mistakes can make you appear careless and unprofessional, potentially causing your application to be overlooked despite your qualifications. A polished, error-free cover letter helps you stand out, shows respect for the recruiter's time, and presents your strengths effectively. Be sure to double check names, grammar, and formatting. Also, read the cover letter aloud or have someone else review it.

Professional References

Definition and Purpose

A professional reference is a person, such as a former supervisor, colleague, or client, who can speak to a candidate's professional skills, work ethic, and experience in a work-related context. The purpose of a professional reference is to provide prospective employers with an objective and authoritative testimonial about a candidate's capabilities, reliability, and suitability for a position, thereby helping to validate their qualifications and distinguish them from other applicants.

Best Practices for Cover Letter Writing

Use a Separate Page: Present your reference list on a separate page rather than directly on your resume. List the reference's full name, their official job title, the company they work for, and their contact information (phone number and email).

Ask for Permission: Always ask potential references if they are willing to be a reference for you before adding their contact information to a list. Provide references with a copy of your resume, the job description for the position, and any other relevant documents to help them understand the role and highlight your relevant accomplishments.

Choose Wisely: Select people who know you well, can speak positively about your skills and potential, and have good communication skills to articulate your value clearly. Consider past managers, colleagues, or clients who can attest to different aspects of your professional abilities.

Show Your Gratitude: Thank your references for their time and effort in providing a recommendation. Send an email or an actual card to each person you listed as a reference.

Keep in Touch: Maintain good relationships with your references throughout your career, as this builds a network of people happy to support your professional growth.

Making Enough Money to Live

By Sophie Strachan, Content Marketing and Project Manager

We know funding issues are rampant in the SV/DV field. 38% of participants in our [Roadmap to Advocate Wellness survey](#) mentioned issues related to lack of funding at their organizations or within the SV/DV field in general.

Lack of consistent funding for organizations leads to an inability to pay staff adequately, hire enough staff to cover workloads, and rely on volunteer workers. Advocates work in demanding, high-stress environments with tremendous responsibilities, and to not be properly compensated for that is a recipe for burnout.

To add to the funding issue, the rising cost of living due to inflation of healthcare, groceries, rent/mortgages, and utilities further exacerbates our financial predicament. Most working adults are also paying towards debts, like student loans, car loans, credit cards or some other financial burden.

Here's the reality:

- ★ Inflation of goods and services has risen by 24% in [just five years, since 2020.](#)
- ★ The home price index is up 47% and [rent prices are up 26%](#) since 2020.
- ★ 58% of adults aged 18 to 34 have an average of [\\$39,000 in federal student loan debt.](#)

The bottom line is that as humans living in a capitalist society, we need money to live. Let's look at a breakdown of the average income and expenses as of 2025 for someone living in the US, working in the SV/DV field.
(All numbers calculated September 2025)

[Average Hourly Rate: \\$21.58](#)

\$44,886.40 / year before taxes (working 40 hrs/week)

\$40,397.76 / approximately per year after taxes

\$3,391.48 / take home per month

\$111 / [average employee-sponsored healthcare premium cost](#)

\$1,749/2 (assuming you have a roommate) = 874.50 [average rent payment](#)

\$400 / [average grocery cost](#)

\$583/2 (assuming you have a roommate) = 291.50 [average utilities cost](#)

\$1,015 / [average cost of owning a car \(gas, maintenance, car payments, insurance\)](#)

\$536 / [average monthly student loan payment](#)

Leaves you with:

\$163/month

If you never went out to eat, bought new clothes, bought toiletries, etc., you could potentially save \$1,956/year. But that's not realistic. Things break, expenses come up, clothes get worn out, you have a social life, whatever it is, this isn't living. This is surviving. If you are one of the lucky ones that don't have student loan payments, you have a little more to work with in this scenario.

Of course, the numbers will vary if you have a partner that you share expenses and income with or if you have children (human or pet), or depending on the state you live in, and whether you make more or less money than the national averages. Making a monthly budget is always helpful to get an overall picture of your finances. Here is a Google Sheets budget template.

You Deserve More Than Survival

We know from our survey research that advocates aren't in this line of work for money, but that doesn't mean you should struggle to survive. You are here because you care about people, because you want to make the world a better place, because you want to help, and because you have a good heart. In order to continue doing the amazing work that you do, you need to be able to sustain yourself financially.

Practical Tips for Financial Resilience

Here are a few suggestions, and hopefully some helpful advice to help you become more fiscally fit! We acknowledge that this isn't what you should have to do, you deserve to be paid more. We are sharing these ideas because change doesn't happen quickly, and you will need money before it does.

1. Part time jobs (Something that is flexible, that doesn't take up too much of your mental energy, but can bring in some extra cash)
 - ☆ Delivery driving (Uber Eats, Door Dash, Amazon Flex)
 - ☆ Remote jobs (data entry, call rep, customer service)
 - ☆ Babysitting (For neighbors, friends)
 - ☆ Dog walking or pet sitting (Rover or Wag)
2. Online side-hustles
 - ☆ Sell digital products:
 - ☆ Etsy – Templates, Patterns, Digital papers, Printables, Coloring pages
 - ☆ Canva – Design Templates, Graphics
 - ☆ Amazon – Journals, Notebooks, Coloring books, etc.
 - ☆ Resell clothing or antiques (on Etsy or Ebay)
 - ☆ Sell handmade items (on Etsy or Big Cartel)
3. Coupon clipping apps – Fetch, Ibotta (any app for the stores you shop at)
4. Open a High-yield savings accounts for short term savings, use Rocket Money to manage your subscriptions, and finances and open a Roth IRA for retirement if you don't already have a retirement account.
5. Research income assistance opportunities
 - ☆ <https://www.findhelp.org/>
 - ☆ <https://www.usa.gov/benefit-finder>
6. Seek out lower cost groceries that last longer (Rice, pasta, produce, frozen fruits and veggies, oatmeal, cheaper cuts of meat, tofu, beans, etc.)

7. Seek out new job opportunities at other organizations

- ☆ <https://www.idealists.org/en>
- ☆ <https://workforgood.org/>
- ☆ <https://jobs.humanrightscareers.com/companies>
- ☆ <https://www.democracyjobs.org/jobs>
- ☆ <https://careers.councilofnonprofits.org/>

If the numbers feel overwhelming, you're not alone. Many advocates are carrying this same weight, and it's not a reflection of your worth or ability - it's a systemic issue. Your financial health matters just as much as your emotional well-being, because sustainable advocates create sustainable change.

You Love this Work, but you need a Break.

By Joy Ingram, RAFT Workshop Facilitator

How to Step Back Without Stepping Away

To walk beside survivors is both an honor and a heavy responsibility.

Working in direct client services as a victim advocate in the anti-gender-based violence field is immensely rewarding. Yet it can be extremely hard. You have a hand in helping people discover strength and resilience they never knew they had. You watch them transform from victim to survivor. At the same time, you're constantly exposed to other's trauma - and asked to hold space for them during some of the hardest moments of their lives.

Even when advocates feel called to this work, it takes a toll - mentally, emotionally, and even financially. The weight of direct services work can lead to compassion fatigue, burnout, or even worsen existing mental/physical health challenges. Sometimes, despite a deep love for advocacy, these pressures push advocates to step away from direct client work - at least for a season.

Why You Need a Break, and How Long Should It Last?

Taking a break from direct service work isn't a sign of weakness, it's a sign of humanity. Advocates give so much of themselves, often pouring heart, mind, and energy into supporting others. But the reality is that no one can sustain this intensity forever without rest.

There are countless reasons you might need to step back. And just as every advocate's journey is unique, so is the length of time needed to recover, regroup, and decide what comes next.

Burnout is one of the most common reasons advocates need to take a step back. Experts say recovery can take anywhere from a few months to a few years, depending on the severity (mild, moderate, or extreme) and the supports you have in place. Having a strong support system can shorten recovery time and make the process less overwhelming. As you think about your own needs, ask yourself:

- ★ Do I have friends or family I can lean on?
- ★ Am I connected with a therapist or mental health professional who can walk alongside me?
- ★ Does my organization offer trauma-informed policies or reasonable accommodations that can ease the load?

Other mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, or bipolar disorder may also require time away. Advocates are constantly exposed to trauma, which can worsen existing conditions or bring new ones to the surface. These challenges might affect your sleep, concentration, or ability to regulate emotions - making it

harder to show up for clients in the way you want to. Having a trusted mental health practitioner is crucial for identifying treatment options, creating a recovery plan, and setting realistic expectations for your return. Some advocates benefit from short-term breaks combined with therapy or medication adjustments, while others may require extended leave to heal fully.

Physical health issues can also prompt advocates to take a break. In advocacy, where the work is often fast-paced and emotionally heavy, it can be especially difficult to balance healing with professional demands. Whether it's your own illness or that of a loved one, anything from a seasonal illness like the flu to long-term treatment such as chemotherapy or recovery after a car accident may require a pause from direct service. The length of leave can range from a few days (minor illness or outpatient surgery), to a few months (major surgery, cancer treatment, or long-term rehabilitation), or even indefinitely if a permanent disability makes direct service work unsafe or unrealistic.

Financial stressors are another common reason advocates step away from direct services. While the work is deeply meaningful, many direct service roles come with low salaries, limited benefits, and little room for financial growth. This reality can leave advocates juggling multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Sometimes advocates step into another field temporarily to cover a large bill, pay down debt, or save for a major life change. Other times, financial pressures - such as supporting a family, managing medical expenses, or planning for retirement - require a longer-term or even permanent shift away from direct service.

Relocating may inadvertently cause you to take a break from working in direct services. This can be especially challenging if the move is out of your control, such as relocating for a partner's job, to be closer to family, or for more affordable housing. Unlike retail or grocery stores, where you can usually find multiple employers in the same town, most communities have only one DV/SV agency serving the area. Moving to a new city may mean options are limited - and rural or remote areas may offer no opportunities at all.

...and sometimes, people simply need a change and that change may be permanent. Providing direct services is incredibly meaningful, but it's also demanding - and it isn't the right fit for everyone long-term. It's okay to recognize that the direct service work takes more of a toll than you are willing or able to carry. Choosing a different path doesn't erase the impact you've already made, nor does it mean you stop being an advocate.

If direct services isn't your jam, there are still countless ways to advocate and support survivors outside of agency walls. You don't have to be a social worker, case manager, counselor, hotline worker, or shelter coordinator to make a difference. Advocacy can look like spreading awareness in your community, volunteering at events, donating money or supplies, mentoring the next generation of advocates, or using your voice to influence policy and cultural change.

The Legacy of Advocacy

As advocates, most of us don't see the work we do as just a job. Advocacy is woven into who we are - sometimes through lived experience as survivors, sometimes through passion for justice, and often through both. For some, the work is a way of paying forward the support we once received. For others, it's about offering survivors the care we never had ourselves. Survivor or not, our shared goal is the same: to ensure that those we serve are never alone on their journey.

Because of this deep commitment, stepping away can feel almost impossible, even when the work is breaking us down. But advocacy must also include advocating for ourselves. Sometimes that means recognizing our limits and stepping back. Whether we step away for a little while or forever, if we know that we gave our best while we could, then we can rest assured that survivors have felt our dedication, and we can extend the same compassion and appreciation to ourselves.

Stepping back doesn't erase your work - its legacy lives on in every survivor you've impacted.

7 Questions to Ask When Interviewing for an Advocate Job

By Joy Ingram, RAFT Workshop Facilitator

You got called for the interview. You dressed for success (at least from the waist up) for the Zoom interview. You wowed the interview panel with your answers to all of their questions. And now, it's your turn to let them show you that they're as good for you as you are for them.

"So, do you have any questions for us," they ask.

Of course, you do.

When interviewing for any job, you should always ask your interviewer questions. Asking questions shows interviewers several things, including:

You're really interested in the job and not just seeking a paycheck,
You're inquisitive and willing to learn.
You're concerned about company culture and your ability to thrive in it.
You're considering if the company will be a good fit for you now and in the future.
With that in mind, here are seven questions to ask when interviewing for an advocate position at a nonprofit organization.

1. How do you measure success in this role?

Success looks like different things to different people. While your interviewers may not be able to provide a specific rubric, they should give you a general picture of what you must do to succeed at the job.

2. How is the position funded?

Many nonprofit organizations pay their employees via grant funding. This funding can increase, decrease, or disappear depending on various factors, such as if the grant is renewed once the cycle ends, how much the grant is renewed for, and if the organization wants to continue to focus on the area to which your position relates. These changes can affect your salary and position. If the funds are cut and/or allocated to a different program, your salary may decrease, or your position could be cut.

3. Who is my go-to person when I have questions or need assistance?

This question tells the interviewer that you're not a know-it-all and you understand that even if you've had this role at another agency for multiple years, you still need new information and help as you assimilate into the position here. Their answer will also tell you about the agency's culture. Is it only one person that you can turn to for help, or are there multiple people? Do they operate in silos or as a collaborative team? Also, if that person(s) is on the call, it gives you an opportunity to ask them specific questions about their collaboration, management, leadership, and teaching

4. Is this a new or existing position? If new, why was it created? If existing, why did the person who previously held the position leave?

A new position means the organization is growing, restructuring, or both. New positions often bring great opportunities and challenges. You may even have the opportunity to create your own program in the position.

If it's not new, knowing why the previous person left is beneficial. If they were promoted, that's an indicator of growth opportunities in the company. If they left because "they weren't a good fit", you'll want to delve deeper into that by asking "How were they not a good fit?" or "What qualities would make me a good fit for this company and position?"

5. Where do you see this organization 5 years from now?

Often, interviewers will ask candidates where they see themselves in five years.

It is perfectly fine for you to ask the interviewers the same thing. This will help you decide if you see potential growth with the company and in your career with them. Does their focus align with your values? Are they moving towards a future you want to be a part of?

6. What types of professional growth and development programs do you offer?

Do they offer tuition reimbursement for you to complete a degree or certificate program? If so, is it only for certain degrees (ex: counseling vs. communication)? Do they support you in attending trainings, workshops, and conferences in your field? By support, I mean paying for/providing transportation and lodging if needed. Will they purchase books for you to enhance your knowledge of relevant topics? Is their training ongoing, or does it get you to a certain point and stop?

7. What does the agency do to promote advocate wellness?

As an advocate, you deal with difficult topics and situations that can deplete your mental and emotional wellness. Just as construction companies equip their workers with protective gear to keep them physically well due to the nature of the work, advocacy agencies should equip advocates with mental and emotional safety gear. Some ways that agencies can promote advocate wellness are:

- Mental health days
- EAP
- Employer-paid mental health services
- Time during the workday for self-care
- Company policies that promote self-care.

Remember, the interview is a two-way street. You are there to gather as much information about how the agency can benefit you as they are to see how you can benefit them. So, be sure to ask specific, relevant, and meaningful questions. It's a great way to help you decide if this could be your dream job or a work nightmare.

4. More RAFT Resources



Bring Our Virtual Workshops to Your Organization!

When you invite RAFT to work with your sexual and domestic violence organization, we truly become a part of your team. At RAFT, we design virtual workshops to be interactive, empowering, and focused on creating meaningful change.



Join Us on a Support Call!

Working in sexual and domestic violence services can be isolating—but it doesn't have to be. RAFT's monthly support calls offer a grounding space for advocates, survivors, and leaders to connect, reflect, and support one another through real conversation and community care.

Whether you want to share what's on your mind or simply listen in, you're always welcome.



Find more Free Resources on our Website!

You can find all of our coloring pages, data reports, worksheets, blogs, podcasts and more on this webpage.



Submit Your Advocacy Questions and Stories for Anonymous Advice from the RAFT team!

A new series called "Dear RAFT," where you can turn to for thoughtful insights, heartfelt advice, and a compassionate perspective to YOUR questions.

So why ask RAFT? Well, just like a sturdy raft helps us navigate rough waters and stay afloat, "Dear RAFT" is here to provide a steady anchor amidst life's storms. We believe in the power of community, empathy, and shared wisdom to help us weather the ups and downs of life with resilience and grace.

So, I offer you my written word. It may not always be evidence-based or researched, but I'm hopeful you'll be inspired by my vulnerability.



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