REFUEL: Self-Care Strategies

Make schedules and establish a routine. It may look different than before, but intentionally choose parts of your routine and schedule that affirm who you are and help to build in structure and a feeling a predictability especially in times that are so unpredictable.

Practice self-regulation. Our mind can often turn into “monkey brain” – bouncing around from one thing to another or sometimes emotions seem to crash on top of us like a wave. Take time to practice deep breathing (breath in for 4 seconds, hold, out for 4, hold, repeat), mindfulness, yoga, or other grounding techniques to slow down and regulate.

Own and name your feelings. Allow yourself to feel and name what you are feeling. Take time to check in with yourself through mindfulness, journaling, art, or talking to a friend.

Connect to others. Talk to people and be with others if/when you can. See people’s faces either in person or virtually. Use the time to talk about what you are feeling and thinking but also simply to laugh and have fun.

Respond vs React. Once you notice what you are feeling whether it be in your body or an emotion and name it, then you can make an active and intentional choice as to how you want to respond vs it being a knee-jerk reaction or no response at all.

Take space. Take a break from the constant media stimulation to protect yourself from being overwhelmed. Turn off the news and social media feeds.

Create space. Find a space that is uniquely yours where you can go and clear your mind or cry or reflect. Perhaps that a chair in the corner of a room; perhaps it’s your favorite park; or perhaps that space is in community with people who you feel safe with.

Feel alive in your body. Move, dance, sing, run, exercise. We tend to hold trauma and stress in our bodies, let it out through movement. Helpful techniques can be placing hands palms down on a wall and pressing the wall like you’re trying to move it. Another technique is to imagine a small punching bag in front of you and rapidly punch it with mini alternating air punches.

Nourish. What we put in our body has a profound impact on how we feel physically, mentally, and emotionally. Chamomile tea can bring calmness. Seasoning with turmeric and black pepper can reduce inflammation and contribute to a stronger immune system. Berries are powerful antioxidants. Dark chocolate has mood boosting compounds. Try to make small changes by cutting back on overly processed foods and opting for whole grains, fresh fruits, and veggies when you can. Email SingleStop@guttman.cuny.edu if you need groceries.

Productivity. While it’s important to have moments of rest, doing something productive is also a way to care for self as it gives you a purpose or goal which can help keep you motivated and lift your mood. Perhaps it’s reading a book, researching local organizing efforts and getting involved, attending a skill-building webinar, working on an art project, cooking/baking, or caring for a plant.
Laugh and smile. Cultivating moments to experience joy is also resistance and an important element of self-care.

Set and maintain boundaries. This includes physical, mental, and emotional boundaries. This could mean taking a step (or steps) back from certain individuals or it could mean setting a boundary with yourself regarding how you engage with social media. Regardless, check in with yourself, ask yourself what you need, what is healthy, and then set the appropriate boundary. Other people may not like your boundaries, but they can still respect them.

Connect with art. Art has a unique way of connecting to our emotions and can be healing, empowering, or simply allows us to reflect in ways we haven’t. Listen to music, read poems, find pieces of art that inspire. Art is also a beautiful tool of expression – write, sing, dance, paint... create!

Affirm. Speak kindly and compassionately to yourself. Affirm who you are. If you struggle with negative self-talk, ask yourself, how would I speak to a friend? What would kindness and compassion and acceptance say?

Practice gratitude. Identify something you can be thankful for each day. This doesn’t take away from the fact that things need to continue to change and improve, but practicing gratitude can guard against hopelessness. Maybe you are thankful for your body that allowed you to practice yoga, or perhaps you are thankful for a friend that you shared a life-giving conversation with, or perhaps you are thankful for a policy that was changed.

Therapy. Speaking with someone who is not in your family/friend circle and who is a mental health professional can be extremely beneficial. A therapeutic space can provide a safe place where you can process emotions, grow in self-awareness, and learn effective coping strategies. Email wellness@guttman.cuny.edu if you’d like to schedule a counseling appointment or would like more information about mental health resources.

Reach out. We need each other. Reach out when you need support. None of us can go through life alone or make societal changes by ourselves. We are better when we are together.