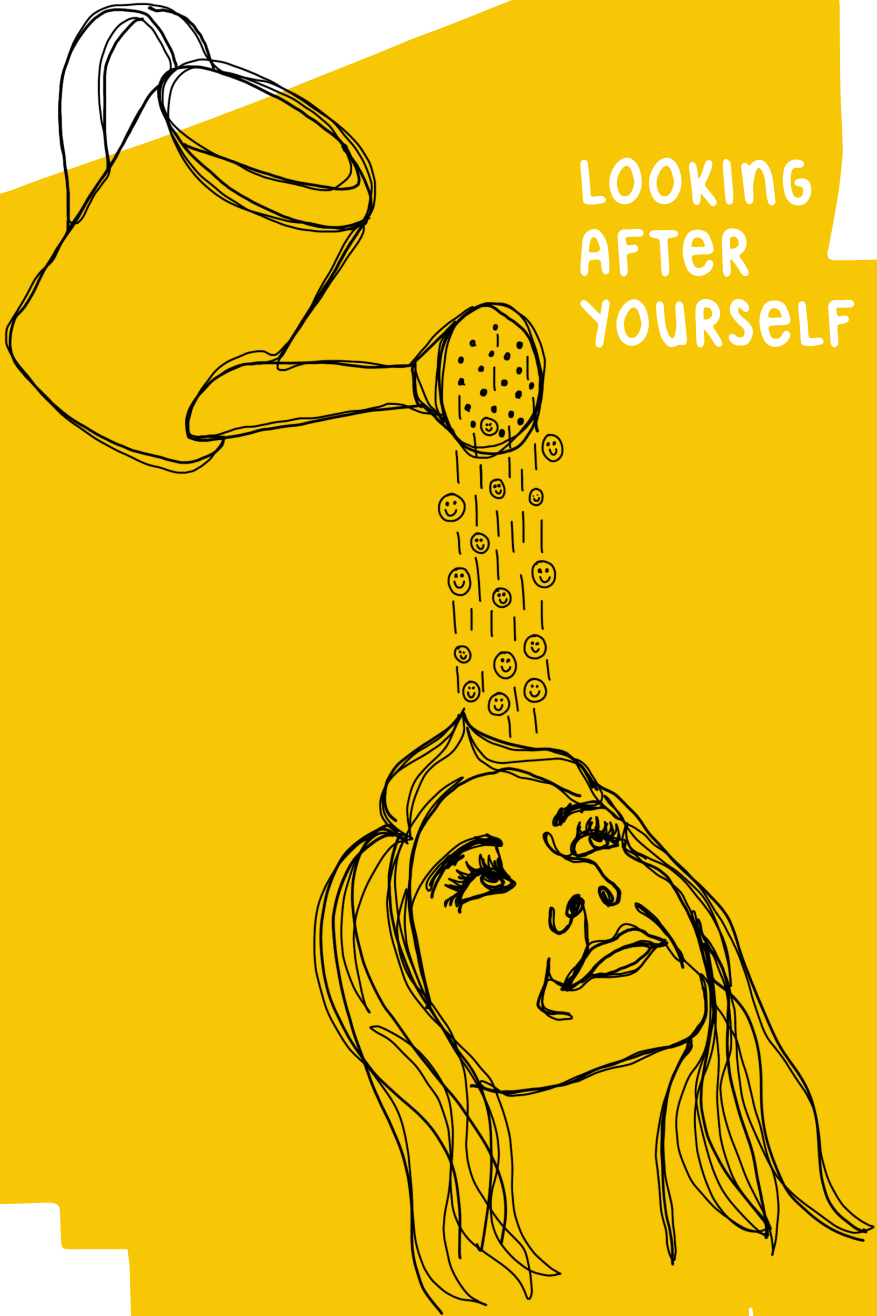


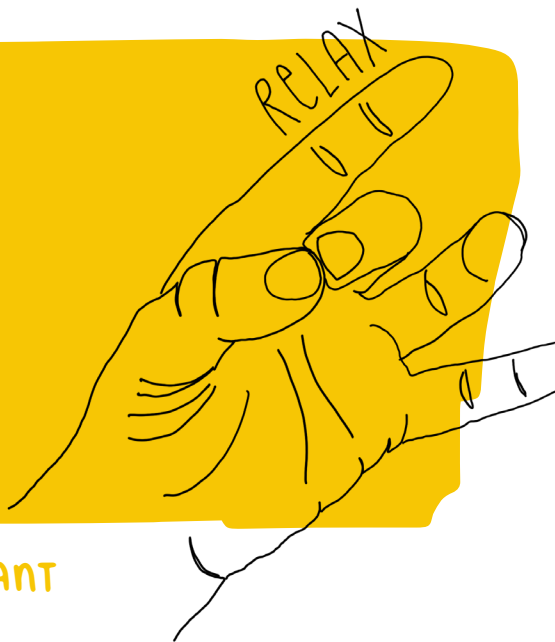


Conservation
Council SA

LOOKING
AFTER
YOURSELF



SELF-CARE IS ANY
VOLUNTARY ACTIVITY
THAT YOU DO TO
IMPROVE YOUR
PHYSICAL, MENTAL OR
EMOTIONAL HEALTH.



WHY SELF-CARE IS IMPORTANT

Self-care is any voluntary activity that you do to improve your physical, mental or emotional health. Practising self-care will significantly improve your wellbeing over time, enabling you to be a more effective change agent.

It's important to look after yourself in the short term so you're able to contribute to the environmental movement over the long term. It's a bit like the safety procedures on a plane: you need to put on your own oxygen mask first before you help others. **You will be able to do more for the environment if you make taking care of yourself a priority.**

Many environment workers, in both paid and voluntary roles, are exposed to prolonged periods of high stress, which can lead to burnout or compassion fatigue. After a period of giving so much, you may simply feel like you've got nothing left to give.

Self-care has become a buzzword in recent times and it may feel like the term is increasingly being co-opted by commercial interests trying to encourage you to consume more

However, it is actually an essential practice that enables environment workers to continue the important work they do. Many environment workers have left the movement because they have burned out or haven't been able to maintain a healthy balance in their lives.

Self-care isn't a self-indulgent privilege, it is practical and important.

It plays an integral role in our ability to continue championing our causes in the long term.

BURNOUT

IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR

Burnout is a state of mental or physical exhaustion caused by chronic or prolonged periods of stress.

- * Exhaustion—you may feel so exhausted you have nothing left to give and start distancing yourself from the work.
- * Cynicism—you feel negative towards others and lose a sense of hope.
- * Inefficacy—you might start to be less productive and experience feelings of incompetence.

Burnout is very real in the environmental sector. Most people who are drawn to environmental work are motivated by altruism, by the drive to protect or improve our environment.

Environmental work can be mentally taxing largely because it feels like there is so much at stake and the cause is so much bigger than ourselves. As a result, we may find it hard to turn down the work or feel that we're the only ones who can do the task.

Often our passion overtakes our sense of what we can reasonably handle.

All of this can make us incredibly vulnerable to stress and burnout. Environmentalists need a great deal of strength to carry out such emotionally charged work. This means we need intentional regular self-care practices to recharge our batteries.

**'IN ORDER TO TAKE CARE
OF THE ENVIRONMENT, YOU
HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THE
ENVIRONMENTALIST. ACTIVISTS
WHO WANT TO PROTECT THE
EARTH HAVE TO LEARN TO
PROTECT THEMSELVES.'**

THICH NHAT HANH

SIGNS

OF BURNOUT

It can be difficult to recognise when you're slipping from a state of chronic stress into burnout. Perhaps you feel like giving up, or you simply can't motivate yourself to put in the effort you used to. It's important to recognise the signs of burnout so you can put preventative strategies in place.

Everyone has different levels of stress tolerance. Some people thrive on lots of stress, late nights and anxiety to get them going, while others hate any stress and prefer to be well organised and always in control. Only you know your own limits. It's important to cultivate self-awareness so you can stop yourself from burning out. This means recognising your early warning signs and acting on them on immediately.

SOME COMMON SIGNS OF BURNOUT ARE:

- ✱ Tiredness or depleted physical energy
- ✱ Emotional exhaustion
- ✱ Lower immunity to illness
- ✱ A pessimistic outlook
- ✱ Feeling unmotivated
- ✱ Feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment

BURNOUT SELF-ASSESSMENT

It can be difficult to recognise when you're slipping from a state of chronic stress into burnout. Perhaps you feel like giving up, or you simply can't motivate yourself to put in the effort you used to. It's important to recognise the signs of burnout so you can put preventative strategies in place. Do the self-assessment on the next page to see how you are tracking.

SCORING

0 – 15 YOU ARE DOING WELL.

16 – 25 SOME ATTENTION IS NEEDED—YOU ARE A CANDIDATE FOR BURNOUT.

26 – 35 YOU ARE HEADING TOWARDS BURNOUT. MAKE CHANGES NOW.

36 – 50 YOU NEED TO TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION—YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING COULD BE AT RISK.

DO YOU FEEL FATIGUED IN A WAY THAT REST OR SLEEP DOES NOT RELIEVE? ☐

DO YOU FEEL MORE CYNICAL, PESSIMISTIC OR DULL/BORED ABOUT THINGS YOU USED TO FEEL POSITIVE ABOUT? ☐

DO YOU FEEL A SENSE OF SADNESS OR EMPTINESS MOST? ☐

DO YOU HAVE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS, E.G. HEADACHES, HEADACHES, UPSET STOMACH? ☐

IS YOUR MEMORY UNRELIABLE? ☐

ARE YOU IRRITABLE OR EMOTIONAL WITH A SHORT FUS? ☐

HAVE YOU BEEN MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO ILLNESS, E.G. COUG, FLU, FOOD ALLERGIES, WET FEVER? ☐

DO YOU FEEL LIKE ISOLATING YOURSELF FROM COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS OR FAMILY? ☐

IS IT HARD TO ENJOY YOURSELF, HAVE FUN, RELAX AND EXPERIENCE JOY IN YOUR LIFE? ☐

DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE ACCOMPLISHING LESS IN YOUR WORK? ☐

MY SCORE: _____

DATE: _____

BURNOUT

SELF ASSESSMENT

SCORING GUIDE

0 = never











1 = VERY RARELY

2 = RARELY

3 = Sometimes

4 = OFTEN

5 = VERY OFTEN

1. DO YOU FEEL FATIGUED IN A WAY THAT REST OR SLEEP DOES NOT RELIEVE? 
2. DO YOU FEEL MORE CYNICAL, PESSIMISTIC OR DISILLUSIONED ABOUT THINGS YOU USE TO FEEL POSITIVE ABOUT? 
3. DO YOU FEEL A SENSE OF SADNESS OR EMPTINESS INSIDE? 
4. DO YOU HAVE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS, E.G. INSOMNIA, HEADACHES, UPSET STOMACH? 
5. IS YOUR MEMORY UNRELIABLE? 
6. ARE YOU IRRITABLE OR EMOTIONAL WITH A SHORT FUSE? 
7. HAVE YOU BEEN MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO ILLNESS, E.G. COLDS, FLU, FOOD ALLERGIES, HAY FEVER? 
8. DO YOU FEEL LIKE ISOLATING YOURSELF FROM COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS OR FAMILY? 
9. IS IT HARD TO ENJOY YOURSELF, HAVE FUN, RELAX, AND EXPERIENCE JOY IN YOUR LIFE? 
10. DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU ARE ACCOMPLISHING LESS IN YOUR WORK? 

my score: _____

date: _____

Prevention

IS BETTER THAN CURE

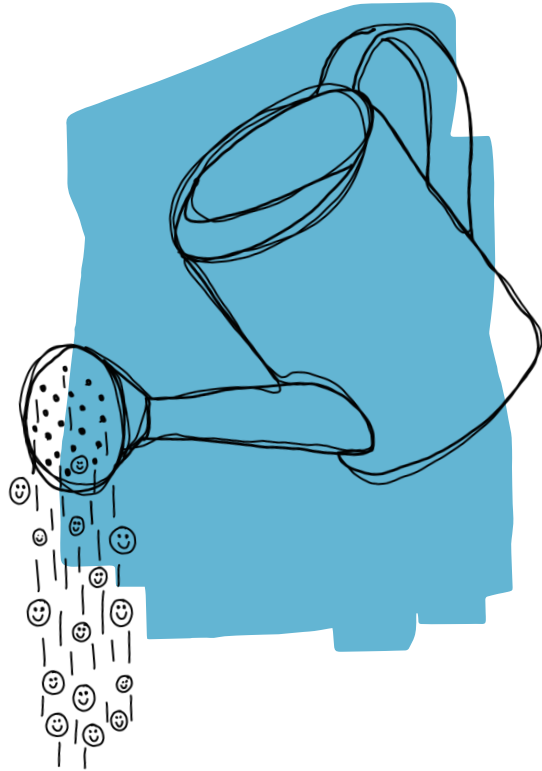
It's easier and better for your overall wellbeing if you practice self-care regularly and proactively, rather than reaching crisis point before implementing self-care strategies

Unless you are in a life-threatening situation or a serious crisis, it's always beneficial to dedicate time to cultivating resources which support your health, connectedness and positive feelings. Often the more stressed you are, the more beneficial self-care is going to be.

Once you reach burnout, you usually need to take time out and devote a significant amount of energy to building yourself up again.

This takes a toll on you and also means you're unable to contribute to the environmental movement for a period of time. Make an ongoing commitment to yourself to prevent this from happening by proactively looking after yourself.

If you approach your environmental work like this, you'll be able to contribute to environmental causes for longer and follow through on your plans. This means you will end up making a bigger difference!



WHAT DOES SELF-CARE LOOK LIKE?

Self-care means engaging in activities and practices that give you energy, reduce your stress and contribute to your wellbeing.

Self-care activities will be different for everyone but generally involve taking steps to look after your physical and mental well-being, maintaining healthy stress levels, fostering healthy relationships and a reasonable work-life balance.

Self-care also involves making a commitment to your wellbeing in the present and for the long term.

A CULTURE OF SELF-CARE

Many groups or organisations have a culture of 'work until you drop.' In this setting, you might feel direct or indirect pressure to keep working harder or longer. You might even feel self-indulgent or shameful if you take time for yourself. Our broader society often encourages this feeling too. It's almost as if we measure our self-worth by how busy we are.

We need to work on letting go of the guilt or worry about being perceived as uncommitted or selfish if we practice self-care. It's also important to cultivate a culture of collective self-care by constantly considering the needs and wellbeing of those around us, our group or organisation, and the wider movement.

Self-care is not just a one-off activity—it needs to be integrated into our thinking and practised in our everyday decisions and habits. This involves setting realistic self-expectations and managing others expectations of you. To do this, you need to know your strengths and limitations and set appropriate boundaries.

If your organisation has a culture of 'work until you drop', then it's important to be aware of this and make an extra effort to set healthy boundaries. If your boundaries aren't being respected then try reasserting them, or consider moving to a group or organisation that respects your limits.

**'LOVE YOURSELF ENOUGH TO SET
BOUNDARIES. YOUR TIME AND ENERGY
ARE PRECIOUS. YOU GET TO CHOOSE
HOW YOU USE IT. YOU TEACH PEOPLE
HOW TO TREAT YOU BY DECIDING WHAT
YOU WILL AND WON'T ACCEPT.'**

-ANNA TAYLOR

EMERGENCY SELF-CARE

It's not always possible to stop yourself from reaching burnout. If you're reading this and realising that you're already in the burnout zone, here are some things to try:

- * Take time out from work or volunteering to rest
- * Reevaluate your priorities
- * Ask others for help
- * Confide in someone you trust
- * Seek professional help

If you know you're prone to burnout, you could try writing yourself an emergency self-care plan. This could be a list of healthy coping strategies that work for you when you're feeling overwhelmed. Start by asking yourself:

- * What helps me relax and let go?
- * Who can I speak to that will be sympathetic and help me put things in perspective?
- * Which behaviours or people should I avoid while I'm feeling down?
- * What positive things can I say to myself to help get me through this rough patch?

If stress, anxiety, and depression are really impacting your life over a longer period of time, you might need to seek professional help.

Start by speaking to a GP who can provide an initial assessment and refer you to an appropriate professional. If you're employed, it's a good idea to see what resources your employer has available. See if they have an Employee Assistance Program that gives you access to free counselling services.

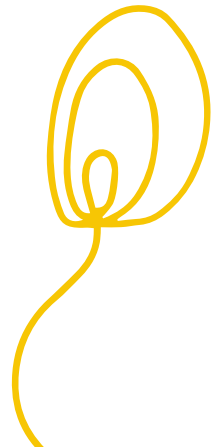
There are plenty of other options for low-cost treatment, so don't be discouraged if your employer does not have such a program in place.

For more information about seeking professional help visit the Beyond Blue website: beyondblue.org.au

9 STEPS

TO BUILDING RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING

1. NOURISH YOUR BODY, MIND, AND HEART EACH DAY
2. CELEBRATE YOUR STRENGTHS AND ACHIEVEMENTS
3. MAINTAIN CLEAR BOUNDARIES
4. PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION
5. FOCUS YOUR ENERGY ON THE HERE AND NOW
6. BE ASSERTIVE: HONOUR AND EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS
7. LOOK OUT FOR OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE STRUGGLING
8. TAKE TIME OUT TO JUST 'BE'
9. BE PLAYFUL AND HAVE FUN



TAKING CARE OF YOUR BODY

It's important to take care of the basics. To function well and feel mentally well, we need to look after our physical bodies. This includes eating a well-balanced diet, getting enough exercise and sleep, limiting exposure to environmental pollutants, and restricting intake of harmful substances including alcohol, drugs, excessive sugar and excessive caffeine.



Physical self-care also means taking time to rest and nurture yourself if you do become unwell. If you're repeatedly getting sick, this may be your immune system's way of telling you that you're burning out. Listen to your body and try to make the time to fully recover.

TIPS

FOR PHYSICAL SELFCARE:

- * Get enough sleep
- * Drink plenty of water
- * Don't skip meals
- * Eat healthy nourishing food
- * Avoid junk food
- * Watch your alcohol and caffeine intake
- * Exercise regularly and aim for at least 30 minutes a day
- * Reduce the time you spend sitting down

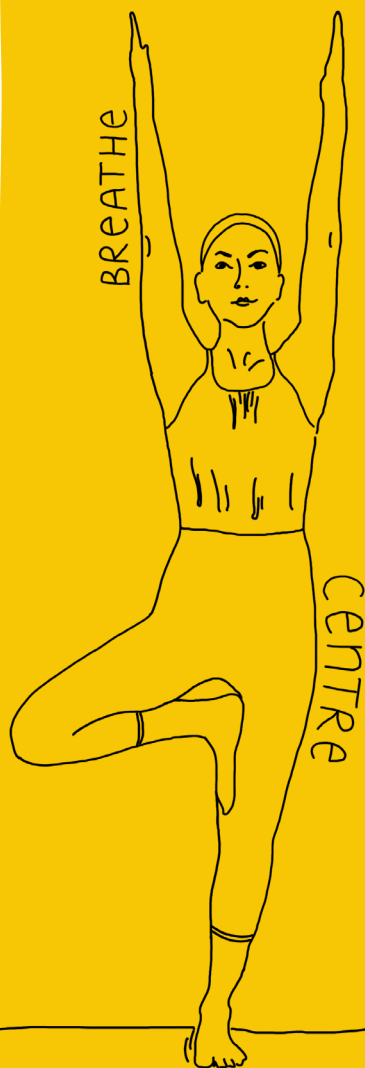
MANAGING STRESS AND FINDING BALANCE

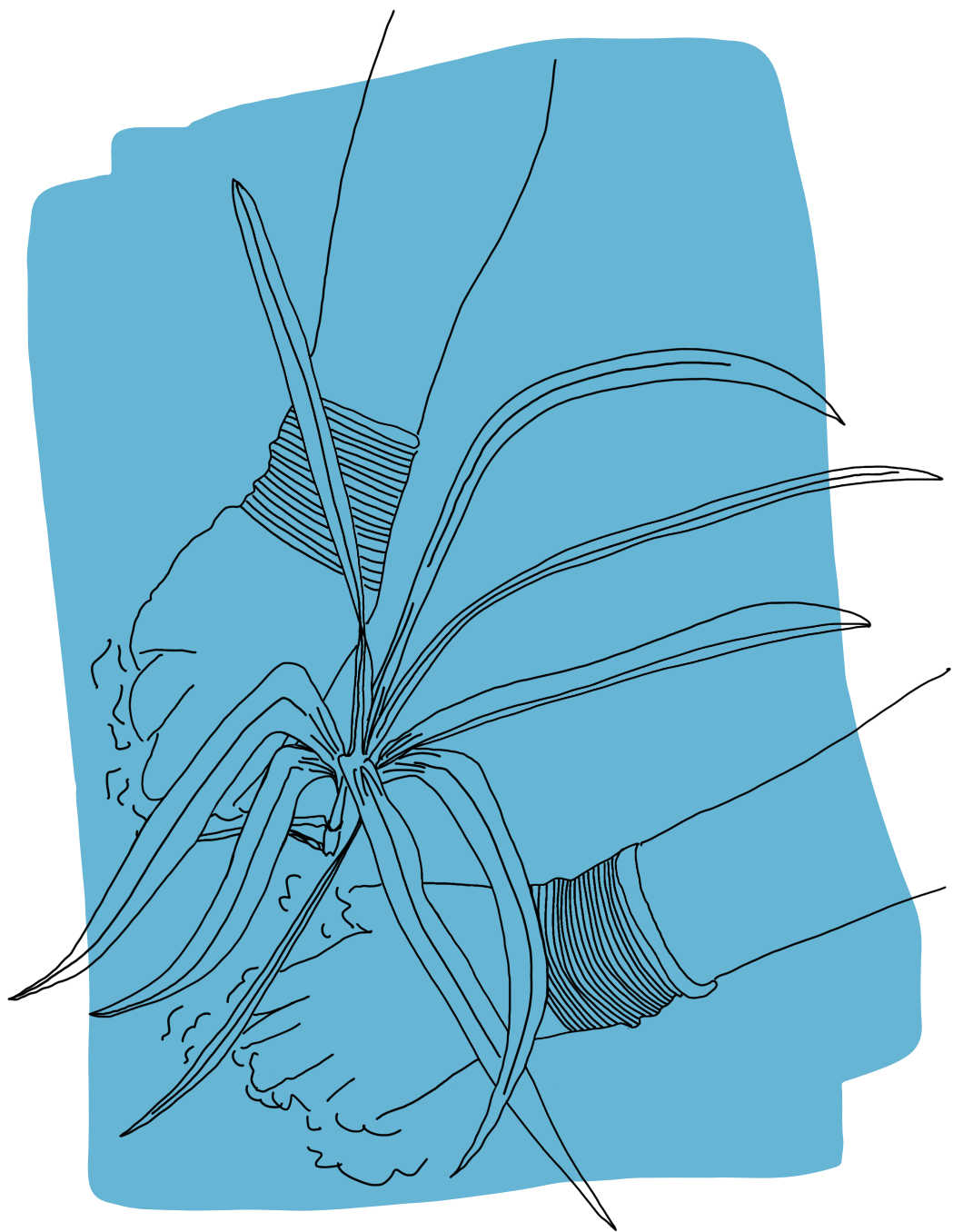
Managing stress is about making a plan that enables you to successfully cope with life's daily pressures. The aim is to strike a balance between life, work, relationships, relaxation, and fun.

As anyone who has ridden a bike knows, balance is an ongoing process. Once you are in balance, you must keep it that way. Just like riding a bike, practising self-care helps you stay in the balance until the process of balancing work and life becomes almost automatic.

HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES FOR FINDING WORK -LIFE BALANCE:

- ✱ Regularly do things you enjoy that don't feel like work
- ✱ Take whole days off instead of half days
- ✱ Make time for your family and friends
- ✱ Prioritise personal goals as well as work goals
- ✱ Cultivate self-compassion
- ✱ Manage your time wisely by scheduling, prioritising and setting goals



















CHECKLIST

OF BASIC needs

AT WORK



-  DO I TAKE A LUNCH BREAK EVERY DAY AND DO SOMETHING UNRELATED TO WORK?
-  DO I WORK REASONABLE HOURS?
-  DO I SCHEDULE 'BREATHING ROOM' EVERY DAY SO I CAN STEP BACK, AND REEVALUATE MY PRIORITIES?
-  IS MY WORK SPACE FREE OF CLUTTER?
-  DO I HAVE ADEQUATE LIGHTING AND CLEAN AIR?
-  DO I ASK FOR HELP OR DELEGATE WORK TO FREE MY TIME AND EMPOWER OTHERS?
-  DO I HAVE BLOCKS OF TIME WITHOUT DISTRACTIONS AND INTERRUPTIONS?
-  HAVE I SCHEDULED SPECIFIC TIMES FOR RETURNING PHONE CALLS AND CHECKING e-MAIL?
-  HAVE I STOPPED TAKING ON MORE THAN I CAN HANDLE?
-  DO I DRINK ENOUGH WATER WHEN I AM AT WORK?
-  DO I SCHEDULE TIME OFF FROM WORK TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF?
-  DO I HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK WITH ABOUT MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE?
-  DO I HAVE CREATURE COMFORTS THAT MAKE MY OFFICE OR WORK SPACE PLEASANT? (MUSIC, AROMA, PHOTOS, ARTWORK)
-  DO I SAY YES TO COMMITMENTS THAT I LATER REGRET?

enjoyment

AND RELAXATION

It's important to take time on a regular basis to relax and do something you enjoy that doesn't feel like work.

This could take many forms, including physical relaxation or finding fun activities that help you unwind. Spend some time thinking about the positive things that work for you.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS:

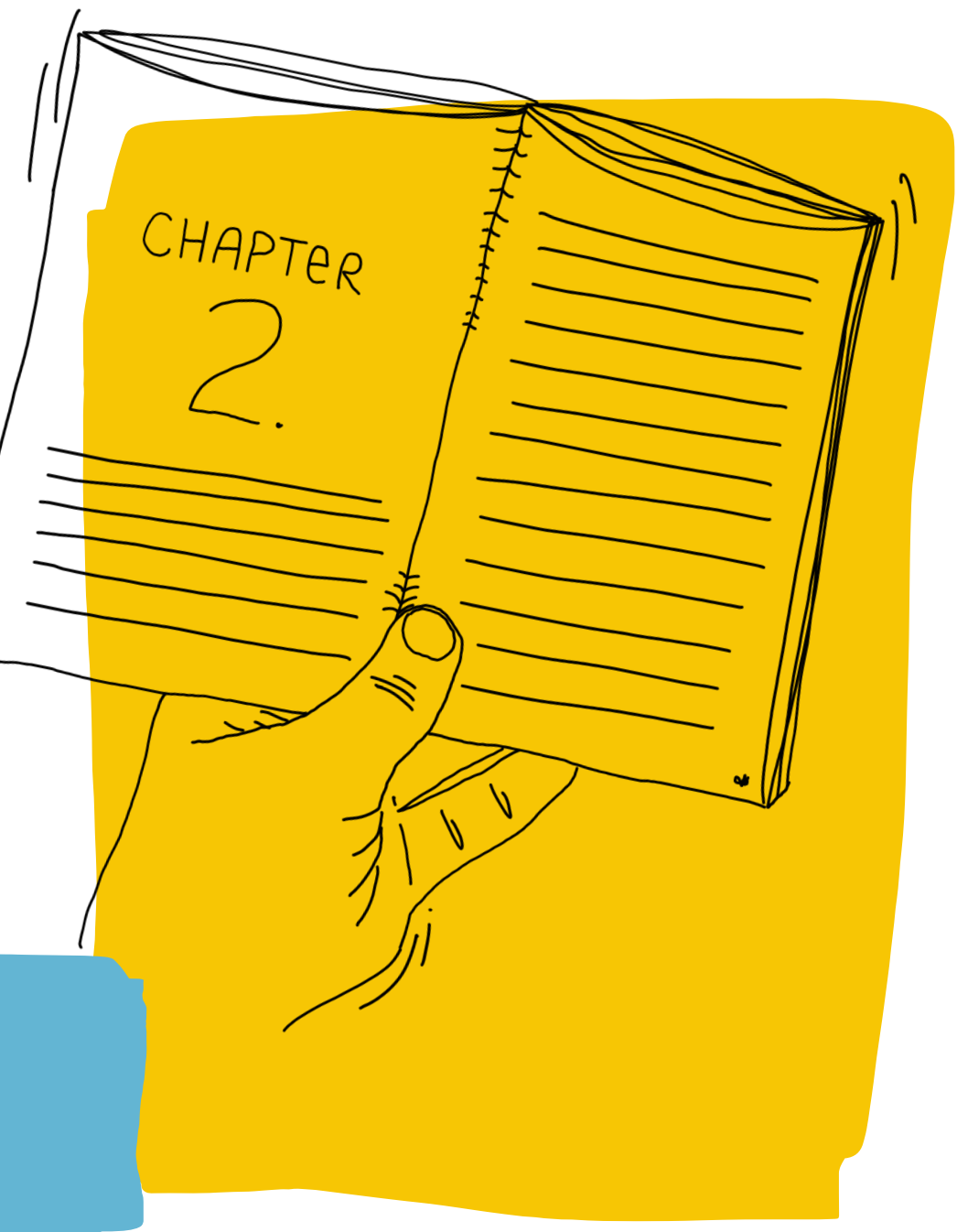
- * Spend time with friends and family
- * Go for a walk or swim
- * Try yoga or meditation
- * Read a book
- * Play with your pets
- * Take a long bath
- * Go to the movies
- * Get creative

The tension in your body caused by a stress response increases the stress you feel on an emotional level. You can reduce this by using physical relaxation techniques.

Physically relaxing your body provides stress relief by stopping your body from signalling a stress response. Try physical relaxation techniques like breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, visual imagery or exercising.

It's not always easy to relax on cue. If you've been living a fast-paced life and haven't been giving yourself the chance to relax regularly it might be difficult at first. You may need to schedule in time to relax so you can give yourself permission to do it.

**'CARVE OUT AND CLAIM
THE TIME TO CARE FOR
YOURSELF AND KINDLE
YOUR OWN FIRE.'
-AMY IPPO.**



CONNECT

WITH NATURE TO REVIVE YOU

There is plenty of evidence about the positive effects of nature on wellbeing. Simply spending time in natural settings can greatly improve the way you feel physically and mentally. And you don't have to go into the wilderness to experience these benefits—a local park or a leafy backyard will do.

Experiences in nature have been shown to have a restorative effect as well as being protective of your mental health. Connecting with nature is an important way to maintain general wellbeing and help revive you during hard times. It's also a great practice to manage stress, improve concentration and generally help you feel happier.

Positive interactions with nature can help remind you why you decided to do this work in the first place. Staying connected to the natural environments you work to protect can help renew your passion to be a catalyst for change.

EASY WAYS

TO CONNECT WITH NATURE

- * Take a walk in nature
- * Observe the birds
- * Lie under a tree and look up at the branches
- * Prepare seasonal food
- * Spend some time gardening—even if you just grow herbs or indoor plants
- * Walk barefoot on the grass or at the beach
- * Watch the stars or the moon
- * Find a special 'sit spot' in nature
- * Make something inspired by nature
- * Visit a body of water: the ocean, a river, creek or lake
- * Exercise outside

'I GO INTO NATURE TO BE
SOOTHED AND HEALED
AND HAVE MY SENSES
PUT IN ORDER.'

-JOHN BURROUGHS,
NATURALIST AND
CONSERVATIONIST



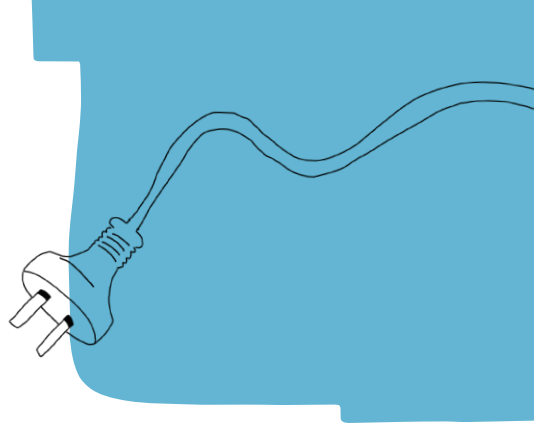
THE IMPORTANCE OF UNPLUGGING

Research shows that more time spent on social media leads to increased anxiety, disconnection, and distress. The frequent exposure to graphic images and reactionary language keeps us in our reptilian ('fight or flight') brain.

Be conscious about the time spent on social media or engaging with the news. Although social media is a powerful tool for building the environmental movement, many people find that taking regular breaks from social media is essential for their mental wellbeing.

You could try taking a full day a week away from social media as a healthy minimum, but decide what is right for you.

Despite the need to take social media breaks, it's important not to completely bury our head in the sand. When it comes to social media, we need to find a balance that enables us to continue to be engaged and contribute to the movement while also looking after our own wellbeing.

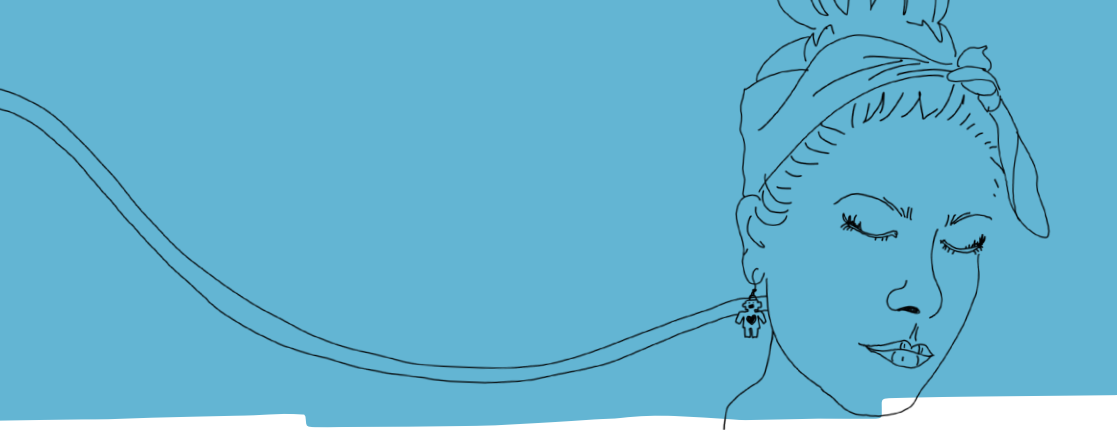


MAINTAINING PERSPECTIVE

Keeping things in perspective means you stay optimistic and focus on solutions when things go wrong. It means reframing setbacks and minimise the impact of any negativity around you.

HERE ARE SOME STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHY THINKING:

- * Apply problem-solving techniques—notice when there is a problem, clarify what it is and map out options for dealing with it
- * Try to worry less about things you can't control, and make plans for dealing with the things you can
- * Set small, manageable and achievable goals
- * Think positively about yourself and don't diminish your achievements
- * Aim for your own personal best and don't compare yourself to those around you
- * Avoid perfectionism—allow yourself to let things go and make mistakes
- * Cultivate and use your sense of humour



SELF-CARE FOR VOLUNTEERS

Juggling paid and unpaid work can be challenging, so it's important to choose your volunteer activities wisely. We all need a basic level of financial security otherwise we spend a lot of energy worrying about money.

Although many people in the environmental movement come from a place of privilege, we still need to ensure we can look after our material needs.

Give yourself permission to spend time deciding how you'll volunteer. Make it a conscious decision about how you want to spend your time. Think about where you can best contribute, what will have the greatest impact and what you enjoy doing.

Remember that it is okay to hang back for a while when you're new to a group or organisation. Don't feel pressured to sign up for a big role or significant responsibility straight away.

COLLECTIVE SELF-CARE

You can help build a culture of self-care in the environmental movement through the way you interact with others. Find ways to share the load within your group. Have regular group check-ins and encourage each other to practice self-care.

Only invite people to volunteer for your group or campaign if you truly want their involvement and are able to invest time and energy into building their capacity and giving them a meaningful role. Make them feel welcome.

When new people join your group, think about giving them a small job immediately and gradually building up their level of responsibility one step at a time.

Invest time in helping others understand what you're trying to achieve, then take a step back so you can allow them to take on some responsibility.

Take the time to find out why they are there, what interests them, what skills they can offer and what role they want to do.

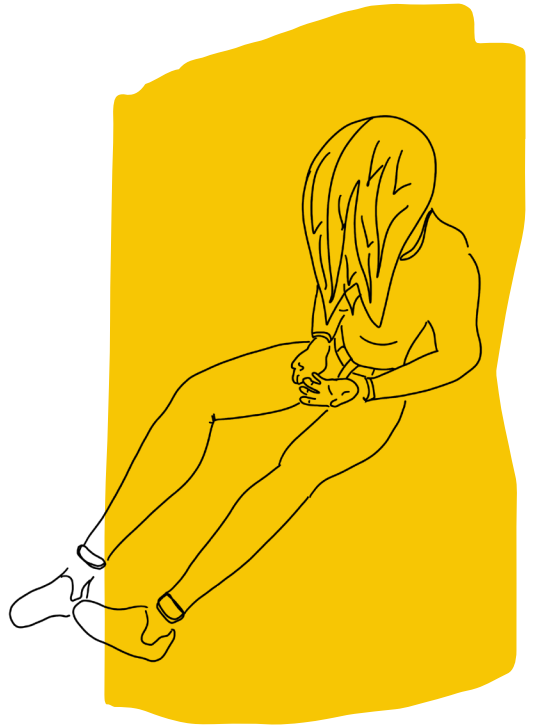
DEALING WITH ECOLOGICAL GRIEF

When we think of grief we usually think of the sense of loss a person feels after losing a loved one. Yet grief can extend to many types of loss, including environmental loss. A new term is emerging to explain this: ecological grief.

Ecological grief is grief relating to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including loss of species, ecosystems or landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change.

This type of grief is experienced most strongly by people that have a direct connection with the land or those that are working to protect it.

Ecologist, Richard Hobbs, has highlighted that many people working in the field of conservation are constantly facing loss. This may be a personal or local loss such as the loss of a piece of valued bushland, or the loss of a beloved species. It could also be on a much larger scale, such as the loss of forests worldwide, or the loss of the Arctic ice sheet due to climate change.



Hobbs argues that these experiences mean people working for the environment live in a world characterised by loss, and as a result, they are often in a constant state of grief. This can take a huge emotional toll and lead to psychological numbing that makes it difficult to be our full selves.

The field of psychology has explored the experience of grief and loss. A well-known way of characterising grief is the Kübler-Ross model which outlines five stages of grief.

5 STAGES

OF GRIEF

1. **DENIAL** IN THIS STAGE A PERSON REFUSES TO ACCEPT THAT THE LOSS HAS OCCURRED
2. **ANGER** WHEN THEY REALISE THE LOSS HAS HAPPENED, THE PERSON MAY GET ANGRY AT THEMSELVES OR OTHERS AND TRY TO PLACE THE BLAME
3. **BARGAINING** IN THIS STAGE THE PERSON MAY TRY TO DELAY OR PREVENT THEIR LOSS
4. **DEPRESSION** IN THE DEPRESSION STAGE THE PERSON HAS RECOGNISED THAT THE LOSS HAS HAPPENED OR WILL HAPPEN, AND THEY WILL FEEL A DEEP SENSE OF SADNESS
5. **ACCEPTANCE** IN THE FINAL STAGE THE PERSON WILL COME TO ACCEPT THEIR LOSS – THEY UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION LOGICALLY AND HAVE COME TO TERMS WITH THE SITUATION

These stages of grief are not necessarily linear and people experiencing grief may cycle through them many times.

Many of us working in the environment field express grief through anger. This could be anger at political systems and decision-makers that have contributed to the ecological loss, at corporate greed or individual irresponsibility—and sometimes at each other.

You might find it useful to reflect on whether you could be experiencing grief as a result of environmental work that you do.

How might this be affecting you on an emotional level? Which stage of the grief cycle are you currently in? How might this affect the way you relate to others who are experiencing different stages of environmental grief?



BUILD AND MAINTAIN A SUPPORT NETWORK

Having a supportive network of friends or family around you will enable you to be more effective and resilient.

Value your relationships within and outside the environmental movement and nurture them.

They might be people who share your passion for the environment, or family or friends without as much interest in the environment but who love and support you whatever you do.

Find one or two people to debrief with when you've encountered difficulties or if you're feeling low. Stay connected to your community, whoever they are. This could be a group of friends, people in your neighbourhood or your cultural group.

It takes time and effort to build up your professional and personal support networks, so don't be discouraged if it doesn't happen straight away.

Maintaining a strong support network is one of the most effective self-care practices, so make sure you give it the attention it deserves.

LINKS

TO RESOURCES

thechangeagency.org/tag/sustainable-activism

plantothrive.net.au

findingsteadyground.com

mycompass.org.au

headsup.org.au

beyondblue.org.au

1millionwomen.com.au/blog/self-care-guide-helping-planet

mindbodygreen.com/0-10948/what-sustainable-living-taught-me-about-selfcare.html

theselfcareproject.org

volunteeringsa-nt.org.au/volunteers

grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/

idealistcareers.org/6-strategies-gaining-perspective/

activehope.info

Hobbs Presentation – Grief for the Past and Hope for the Future

youtube.com/watch?v=TOIEbp3MoWA

sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/healthy+living/be+active



Conservation Council SA

C/- The Joinery
111 Franklin Street
Adelaide SA 5000

conservationsa.org.au

THIS PROJECT WAS MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO FUNDING FROM



THE MYER
FOUNDATION