

## **How To Emotionally Prepare and Process This Election**

This Presidential Election has been the most chaotic and yet one of the most important of American history. Due to the extreme nature of this election and what is at stake on these ballots, we as a nation have spent months being actively politically engaged. We must also leave time for emotional self care and energy conservation. Stress can manifest negatively and affect a person's mental and physical health. Follow these guidelines to avoid excessive stress.

### **Leading Up to the Election**

1. Create a routine that will give you structure and control of your day.

There are not many aspects of Election day that you can control except the things you do yourself. Be mindful with the actions you take; gain control where you can so that you do not fall into a stagnant mindset. Make a social media and news outlet schedule that you can abide by to avoid over consumption and exhaustion. Choose two or three outlets that are reliable so you can put an end to mindlessly scrolling through platforms (but still remember to fact check!). Set a timer for 5-10 mins to check the polls daily and then turn it off. Consuming yourself with numbers and over indulging in information is not beneficial for anyone.

2. Keep your social media in check.

In addition to setting a schedule for yourself to limit the amount of exposure you have to the soul sucking election content that will be present at least for the next 60 days, you should also remember that social media is not a valid source of information. There will be a lot of opinion pieces that can lead to political fatigue and screen burnout so if it gets too overwhelming, consider taking away the source of the pain all together and deleting an app for the time being. Your platform will remain intact, you will just have one less stressor. Social media can be an influential way to spread useful information, but that does not mean that it is *necessary*. Aim to get necessary information from news outlets and save your platforms for spreading information important to you.

3. Have a self-care practice in your back pocket.

No matter what your beliefs about the upcoming election, I guarantee you will have to engage in a conversation with someone who has a differing opinion than yours. Whether that is family members, friends, co-workers, teachers or next door neighbors, these conversations are difficult but necessary in order to achieve change. Understand what instant self-care works for you and keep it readily available, then also have long term self-care that you set aside time everyday to take part in. Some options of instant self-care could be taking a walk, using a meditation or breathing app, listening to music, laying on top of your dog or taking a shower. A couple longer method self-care options could be baking banana bread, doing a yoga flow, going on a run or a walk through the woods. Also, understand the difference between healthy dialogue and combative conversation, and know that it is okay to step away from discussion that feels disrespectful.

## **On Election Day**

1. Start the day with a restorative practice or self-care.

Before approaching the day, before picking up your phone to check your notifications, and before the reality of the outcome of this day, take a moment for yourself. Breathe in and fill your lungs completely with air, hold it for a second and then release. Practice this 5 times and then begin your self-care practice. It is okay if all you have the time and energy for is those 5 breaths, but if you can bring yourself to wake up 15 minutes earlier than usual, take that time to give your body, spirit and soul peace.

2. Set boundaries between family and friends.

There is no avoiding encountering stress all together on this day, but you can set boundaries to make you the most comfortable you can be and to make sure there is a mutual respect that is kept between you and the people you love. If there are topics you would not like to discuss, let it be known. If something that is addressed makes you uncomfortable, it is okay to politely excuse yourself from the conversation. Stress does not mean you have to be forced to be entirely uncomfortable.

3. Allow yourself to feel authentically.

There will be a range of emotions that will flood your mind. Let yourself feel them to the fullest extent so you can understand them. However, try not to get obsessed with one thought. Instead, think of your thoughts as passengers on a train with you as a conductor. You take the ticket of each thought, acknowledge it, understand it, and move on to the next one. Feel authentically but do not dwell.

## **After the Election**

1. Be kind to yourself and take as much space as you need to process.

People process grief and stress in many varying ways. The first step is to identify what you are feeling and why. Not simply the surface level why, but the deep rooted underlying issues so that they can be addressed. If your candidate loses, understand why that means so much to you, what you lost on the ballot and what you now have to fight for harder.

2. Continue your self-care routine and social media schedule.

Now more than ever it is imperative that we avoid burn-out. Never be afraid to put down the screen, block a profile on your platform or take a moment of social silence if that is going to benefit you. Avoid being overwhelmed so that you can think with a clear head.

3. Avoid giving in to negative talk.

Engaging in these times with negative emotions will cause you to intensify and prolong them. Instead, turn your attention to positive topics and things you have the control to change. Rather than bad mouthing a person for their choice in candidacy, turn your perspective to how to help your activism no matter the political outcome.

4. Live in the moment.

Do not get caught in “what if” statements or daydreams of the worst outcomes. Letting aspects out of your control dominate your mental stability will send you into turmoil. Live in the now, in what is happening at that moment, especially *outside* of the campaign. You are still a human outside of being a US citizen, continue on your daily life tasks and keep a normal routine.

5. Practice value based living.

The closer your everyday actions are to your values and beliefs, the more fulfilled you will be. Aim to “walk the walk” in order to bring a sense of achievement to yourself and your beliefs. Make them small practices and celebrate the little victories. Process the election information and then move on to your daily activities.

6. Understand the limits of your own control.

Control the controllable, fix the fixable, change the changeable. Look inward to see the conditions you have influence over before looking outwards at the society that is out of your control. Realize that you can not govern the way people think or their actions, you can only manage your own reaction to them, so make it a positive one.

7. Find a support system that you can rely on.

Anxiety can become concerning once it starts to impact your daily life. Find a support system that works for you. Battling these emotions and this stress on your own is possible, but difficult. Find a support system that is dependable, such as family, friends or even your therapist. Sharing your emotions can help alleviate some of the pressure and can even help you to interpret it better. There is no shame in asking for or seeking out help.

8. Reflect and retell a redemption narrative to yourself.

Instead of focusing on the values you believe you could lose, consider the adversity you have overcome. A study at Northwestern University showed that people with strong mental health had the ability to shift their perspective to see their personal obstacles as adversities they had faced and overcome. Practice this skill when reflecting on the outcome of this election.

9. Get back to working hard towards your cause!

After this election, whatever the outcome may be, life will go on. Figure out long-term goals to help your cause whether it is activism related or not. Life will continue, how will you continue yours?

## **Election Student Resources**

[Teaching Tolerance](#) | Classroom Resources

[The Be Kind Academy](#) | Student Social and Emotional Education

[PBS Election Central](#) | Resource Guide

[Scholastic Election Page](#) | Teacher Lesson Plans and Student Resources

[Campus Vote Project](#) | Student and Teacher Resources

[Student Voice](#) | Student Resources

## Guide to Self-Care

Changing the world is a marathon, not a sprint. If we want to bring about real change, we have to avoid burn-out. This is accomplished through continuous active self-care.

*“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” -Audre Lorde, Writer and Civil Rights Activist*

### **Defining Self-Care Culture and Burn-out Response**

**Self-care:** Anything we do deliberately to take care of our individual and collective mental or physical health. In the terms of activism, self-care becomes a political act; in the world of women, it becomes a feminist act. Self-care is activism.

**Burn-out:** Physical or mental exhaustive collapse caused by overwork or stress.

Challenge the idea that activism is selflessness, an effective activist tends to their own needs so that they can continue to dedicate their energy to their cause.

### **Steps to Sustainable Self-Care**

1. Watch and know the warning signs.

Though we all experience stress in differing ways, we do have several of the same warning signs which is your body's way of telling you that it is time for some self love. The first of these signs is increased irritability, where things that may have not annoyed you before are now a problem. Next is having trouble either falling asleep or staying asleep. You may also experience a constant overwhelming feeling that you can not seem to get rid of. Lastly, your body will physically start to break down, creating a strain in your eyes, giving you body aches or headaches. Listen to your body.

2. Take care of your body.

The difference a good night's rest and properly fueling your body will make in your attitude and productivity is needed to continue this fight so vigorously. Sleep the recommended 7-8 hours a night, nourish your body with food full of vitamins and nutrients, and drink plenty of water. Also enjoying daily active activities will help relieve stress, increase brain function, improve mood and appetite and help you sleep better. This activity can be anything that brings movement to your body, whether that is yoga, running, doing cartwheels in a field, hula hooping, having a private dance party or playing double dutch. Find what brings you joy during and after you do it, and make it a part of your routine. When your body is taken care of properly, your mind then follows.

3. Set clear boundaries for yourself and the people in your life.

This can be as simple as turning your phone on silent or airplane mode after a certain time at night to guarantee that you have a better night's rest or to give yourself some much needed "me time". These limits can also be applied to events you participate in or times in the year that are triggering for you. We all have a past, and some of our pasts include trauma that we have not yet dealt with. This is nothing to be ashamed of, in fact it is something for you to learn from. If there is a topic, a day or an event that brings up past trauma, excuse yourself and let yourself heal instead of pushing further. Physical and emotional boundaries are necessary to avoid burn-out.

4. Take a step back from social media.

In the world of activism today, social media has become a huge tool for our generation. While it can be a source of information, it can also be a trigger for many people. Give yourself permission to disconnect, to take a break and breathe. It can be overwhelming to log onto our socials everyday and see disheartening news, see messages from internet trolls, or to become increasingly angry by what shows up on our feed. When you notice the frustration starting, turn it off and tune out for as long as necessary. Cater your social to you, follow accounts that align with your beliefs to avoid as much trauma as possible. I also challenge all of you to do one thing: Do not make the first action you take in the morning be on your phone. We have a tendency to roll over after our alarm goes off and immediately start scrolling through emails, instagram, twitter, and any other form of distraction you can think of. I challenge you to practice mindfulness in the morning instead. Take a couple moments to breathe, stretch in your bed and wake your whole body up, stand and greet the day and maybe after do a couple warrior yoga poses to incite strength in your day. Taking part in this practice will subconsciously help your mind in disconnecting from the constant need of social media.

5. Have interests outside of your activism realm and practice them daily or as often as possible.

While activism is a lifestyle, it does not have to be your entire life. Letting your activism consume every piece of your life will lead to you feeling overwhelmed. A large portion of activism work is stressful and serious, make sure to be silly and invite joy into your life! Leave moments to spend with friends, family and your pets, walk through nature, stroll on a beach, watch a funny netflix special, ride your bike through town, any hobby you have that will make you smile.

6. Slow your mind and find relaxation.

There are many ways to have peace in your body, and each is unique to the person who is taking part in them. From yoga, meditation, journaling, breathwork, reading, drawing or painting, find what works for you. Try and practice this everyday, but if that is not possible with the immensely busy lives we lead, identify what works for you and have that action ready for you whenever you need to use it.

7. Understand, notice and adhere to your emotions.

Acknowledging your feelings is the first step to healing. Being an activist can enhance feelings of isolation, stress, anger, betrayal, frustration, sadness and defeat. Recognize when you are

feeling this way and address it to let yourself heal. If you ignore or suppress these feelings, they will only fester and become more of a nuisance later in your fight. Take the emotion you feel and try and express it in an artistic manner through drawing, painting, photography, poetry, journaling, collage work, sculpture, dance or music. You do not have to be considered good at art or artistic to take part in artistic expression.

8. Celebrate every success, and realize there will be failure. Use it and learn from it. What we think of as small victories can result in a large action change over time. That is why it is important to take the time to appreciate every action you take towards supporting your cause. To look back at your progression, you may want to keep a victory journal. This can include any meetings you have, protests you attend or plan, clippings of news articles or publication of your work, anything you can compile to reminisce on when you feel down, unmotivated or like you have hit a wall. Showing yourself the progress you've made can save you from that feeling of doubt we all experience as humans.

9. Connect with a support system and share your emotional labor. A support system can be friends and family you already knew, people you have networked with that share your same interest for your cause, or people you seek out that bring you some form of comfort. Whatever your support system looks like, it should be a space that makes you feel appreciated, heard, supported, safe and valued. It is so important that you have a relationship that you trust and can show your true authentic self in. If you are having trouble trusting people or finding a community that you feel safe in, consider speaking to a therapist or using counseling services to help decrease the emotional load you are carrying around. With the activism work we do, it is imperative you give yourself outlets to feel empowered.

10. Include self-care of the collective in the conversation. While taking care of your individual self is imperative for sustainability, as is self-care of the collective. The people who you collaborate with and who become your inner circle should be reminded that whatever your cause is, we fight for it together and take care of each other. Try to take part in unified and mutual self-care, which can be anything from taking a collective breath together every time you meet to give each member a moment of peace, or performing a yoga class as a whole to enhance the energy between you all, and even stopping for a random 5 minute dance party to just let loose. Make sure your tribe can vibe.

11. Think long term to focus on prevention. Activism is not a short term gig or hobby to take part in, it is a constant lifestyle which is why it is so increasingly difficult for us to take a step back and give ourselves permission to care for ourselves. The actions you take can set you up either for success or failure, and though failure is not always a bad thing we do want to aim for success. To do this, set up long-term goals for yourself that you know are achievable. They should be tailored to you, to help form a foundation that your further success can be built off of. These do not have to be physical, attainable goals, but rather personal, emotional, spiritual guidance goals that will continue to fuel your fire for this work.

## ABC's of Self-Care for Activists

**Awareness to get Active** | Become aware of the warning signs of burn-out and take the first step towards being active.

- Warning signs: mental and physical fatigue, trouble sleeping, irritability, feeling detached or unlike yourself.
- Take a moment and breathe.
- Commit yourself to taking a step back.
- Listen to your body and your mind.
- Do yoga, work out, ride a bike, rollerskate, skateboard, go on a run, play a sport, walk your dog, have a dance party, get your body active in some way that brings you joy.

**Boldly Believe in Balance** | Recognize that burn-out is caused by imbalance and remedy it, whether it is work, family, friends, school or your activism work that you need to take a step back from.

- Identify the stressor and take a moment away from it.
- Find your own balance between work and play, family and friends, school and sports, physical and spiritual, being alone and being surrounded by people, ect.
- Do not be afraid to say "no".

**Create with Courage and Compassion** | Take part in creating something that will bring you confidence and peace.

- Use creative expression through writing, photography, drawing, painting, sculpture, music, acting, dance or anything in between.
- Bring compassion to everything you create, and if you feel called to share that joy with others.
- Make courage your best friend. Do not fear the unknown, embrace it.
- Use your creative expression to bring a sense of community to those around you in times of feeling lonely or sad.

**Disconnect then Detach to Discover** | Let go of any burden holding you back or telling you that you can not do something. You will accomplish what you set your mind to.

- Disconnect from people, groups or events that bring up trauma.
- Set a time at night on your phone that you will not indulge in social media and stick to it. Take a step back all together if you feel the need to. Social media can be used as a tool if used correctly, but it can also turn into an anchor.
- Detach from feelings of disappointment, frustration and neglect.
- Discover yourself through showing love and kindness to your physical and mental being.

**Expand to Empower and Enlighten** | Branch out of your comfort zone to empower yourself first, so that you can enlighten others.

- Take part in an adventure that may scare you and try to push yourself, which can be anything from skydiving to trying a new food you thought you would never eat.
- Embody empowerment through approaching your self-care with an open heart.

- ❑ Find new hobbies or take part in old ones outside of your activism work.

**Forgiveness to Find Freedom** | Release the feeling of guilt for taking time to build yourself up and any lingering anger, frustration or hatred you hold in your heart.

- ❑ Take an inventory of your spirit: Do you have left over feelings or emotions from your activism work? Are you holding onto anything that is holding you back from your fullest potential? Are you at peace with yourself?
- ❑ Start a note in your phone and keep track of all the things you have actively had to let go. Look back at this to see your progress and the recurring aspects in your life that you can focus your energy on identifying early and then actively respond to it. (example: you feel angry often about racial injustice often, so when you notice yourself constantly holding onto anger you can learn to let it go and grow)
- ❑ Forgive yourself for mistakes you think you've made. Mistakes are just learning experiences that help us grow.

**Grounded Gratitude creating Growth** | Have gratitude in your life for the small things and people who have been introduced to you through your work, they can help keep you grounded.

- ❑ End each day before you head to sleep with at least one thing you are thankful for, small or big. It can be the fact that you got out of bed that morning, that both your legs kept you standing all day, or that you had an awesome ice cream sundae for dessert.
- ❑ Stay grounded through reminding yourself that your self-care is about you, your activism work is not.
- ❑ Continue to invite growth into your life and recognize the growth that has already taken place.

**Heal to Help Harmony** | Healing is the last step to self-care and it makes us better at approaching whatever cause has called us. We need to help individually and as a larger community.

- ❑ Encourage those around you to heal and bring your peace to the communities that surround you. There is a lot of healing that needs to be done in this world, and it only gets accomplished if we take part in it together.
- ❑ Seek out a mentor who can connect with your cause, struggle, lifestyle or healing process and create a mutually beneficial personal and professional relationship.
- ❑ Ensure your work is fulfilling to your mind and your spirit.
- ❑ After forgiveness comes healing. Forgive yourself and others and then take the time to recognize your own healing process. There is no right or wrong way to heal.



## Your ABC's of Activism

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My Current Practice

New Ideas

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**Awareness**

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**Balance**

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**Create**

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**Disconnect**

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**Expand**

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**Forgive**

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**Growth**

Heal

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### Resources for Activism Self-Care

[Frontline Defenders](#) | International Organization

The mission of Front Line Defenders is to protect and support human rights defenders who are at risk as a result of their human rights work.

[Retreat Finder](#) | Website to Find Meditation Retreats

**Calm** | Meditation Phone App

**My Affirmations** | Personalized Daily Affirmations Phone App

**Happify** | Stress Reducing Phone App

[Active Minds](#) | Non-Profit for Mental Health Awareness

[The Sanctuary](#) | Free Meditation and Healing Resources

[The Self-Care Starter Kit](#) | University at Buffalo

*In The Tiger's Mouth: An Empowerment Guide for Social Action* by Katrina Shields

[You Feel Like Sh\\*t](#) | An Interactive Self-Care Guide

[45 Simple Self-Care Practices for a Healthy Mind, Body and Soul](#) | Little Buddha Website

[Just Healing](#) | Resource Site for BIPOC People

[American Psychological Association](#) | Resource Center

[Ms Mindfully](#) | Wellbeing Resource for Teachers and Students

[Shrinking It Down](#) | Podcast on Mental Health and Resilience