



Sustaining Self-Care

Overview: This activity helps activists explore and deepen their understanding of self-care, inviting them to reflect about their sustainability and resilience given the many challenges and risks of activism.

Purpose: We need to reclaim self-care from those who see it as a self-indulgent and privileged activity. Self-care, from a feminist perspective, is a practice to help us reclaim our lives, bodies, hearts, minds from the systems of oppression that devalue, dehumanize, deplete and destroy us. It is an individual and collective commitment to our liberation, well-being and endurance as activists. It is the foundation of resilience we need to lead resistance and transformation in our communities.

This activity helps activists explore and deepen their understanding of self-care, inviting them to reflect about their sustainability and resilience given the many challenges and risks of activism. It uses participants' experience to uncover new insights and appreciate old ones. It's also a powerful tool for perceiving patterns about the relationship between depletion of energy and increase of energy. More specifically, the activity aims to encourage self-care throughout the collective and supportive process; help participants reflect on techniques they already use; to use the workshop as a laboratory to practice those techniques for long-term sustainability; to increase participant's awareness of what balances them (and what depletes their energy); and to identify and share self-care strategies.

Time: 2-3 hours

Credit: Adapted from JASS Southern Africa

Materials:

- Flip chart
- Markers
- Masking Tape
- Coloured paper (4 pieces per participant)





Process:

In plenary:

- Introduce the purpose of the exercise by letting participants know this is a chance to do some reflection about the meaning of self-care in an activist context and to look at ways we can foster our own resilience and well-being.
- Ask participants to think about: What are first words that come to mind when you think of self-care?
- If you think about the idea of self-care in the context of our lives as activists, what are key elements to build your own definition of self-care?
- How does that change or add to your definition of self-care? How is it connected to our safety and survival?
- Develop a quick definition that puts self-care in the context of activism and its risks and challenges, drawing on inputs shared by participants.

In buzz groups:

- Ask participants to discuss:
 - What emotions do these ideas about self-care generate (pro or con)?
 - When you look at our new definition of self-care, how does it relate to our well-being in different aspects of our lives: hearts, minds, bodies, wholeness, etc.?

In plenary:

- Ask groups to present their discussion. Follow presentations with a group discussion. Ask participants to address how self-care relates to our politics and vision. Summarize, adding any other key points.

Storytelling in groups of 3:

- Have participants get into groups of three (preferably with people they have worked with less). Have them briefly introduce themselves if they do not know each other. Then, have them settle into a moment of silence to reflect on three questions:
 - How do I come to this activist work?
 - What helps me sustain my work (supports my resilience)?
 - What gets in the way of sustaining my work (depletes, harms)?



- Invite people to recall a particular moment or story for each of the questions, and then share them within the group. Give about 15-20 minutes for this section (about 5-7 minutes each).
- Ask people in the group to listen actively to each other, offering back reflections and questions, not advice.

In plenary:

- Bring the group back together and report - looking for common themes: What do we learn about what sustains and what gets in the way or depletes us?
- Make two lists: What Sustains You / What Depletes You.
- Notice any patterns (for example, physical action often shows up on the sustain list). Be light and help the group be honest as they disclose. Also help the group notice forms of sustenance people already do that they can carry with them into the field (people may not have yet thought about which actions they can or cannot continue to do while in the field). Make sure to draw how self-care is both individual and collective, that we need to support one another in taking the value of our lives seriously.

Reflection in groups of 3:

- Explain that much of self-care is about cultivating our resilience and balance. There may be some wisdom in looking at the two lists together and how they relate to supporting one's resilience and balance.
- Send people back into their original groups of three with the question: "For you, what are the connections between what sustains you and what depletes you?" and "What does it take to foster self-care for ourselves and each other?"

In plenary:

- Have groups present their discussions and then open a group reflection. Summarize key points.

Option 1: Closure

- Close activity with a circle in which each person completes the sentences:
 - Self-care makes me stronger by...
 - Self-care makes our movements stronger by...



Option 2: Stepping Stones activity

- If you would like group to deepen its reflection on strategies for self-care, you can use the “Stepping Stones” tool presented below.

Individually:

- Ask each participant to sit for a few minutes with six pieces of paper on which they write the strategies that they employ to keep themselves well (in one or a few words). Each piece of paper will represent ‘stones’. Once a participant has finished writing out their strategies, they should set them out in the shape of an imaginary flowing river. Wait until all participants have placed their strategies along the length of the river.

Note to the facilitator: This exercise should be facilitated in a peaceful place, preferably in nature, if possible. It is a very focused and calming exercise, so facilitators need to set the tone for this. Note that in some contexts, participants would prefer not to step on the ‘stone’, for example, if spirituality or prayer has been listed as a strategy. It is fine for them to stand near the ‘stone’ instead.

- Ask each participant to walk down the river by stepping on the ‘stones’ (strategies) that they feel are important (it does not matter in which direction they walk along the river). Some may choose to step on their own stones, whereas others may just select the stones that resonate with them (not their own). When a participant stops on a stone, they are asked to explain why that stone (strategy) is important to them. The group simply listens to each participant, without making comments.
- Lead a brief discussion on the different and varied strategies that can be used to enhance wellbeing and self-care practices: Lack of self-care is a form of violence. There are big and small things we can do to ensure our self-care, there are things we can do that cost no money but that ensure a sense of wellbeing.

Note to the facilitator: It is possible also to post strategies up on the wall afterwards so that people are surrounded by them, and refer to them again later - to remind everyone of the many strategies available to them.