

Self Care: 14 Ways to Love Yourself

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As first responders, we are trained to provide care to others. In this month of Valentine's Day, in the spirit of love, while caring for those you love, why not make a plan to give extra love to yourself as well?

It's a given that law enforcement is often a demanding job that can place extra stress not only on officers, but on their families as well. When schedules are busy, days are shorter, and weather outside is frightful, it can be easy to get in a rhythm of working, plopping at home on the couch, going to bed and doing it all over again. Doing something new or different can end up taking a backseat. Self-care might take a bit of intentional planning to start. But beginning a new habit is always possible, and when it comes to taking care of and loving yourself, consider it as necessary as taking care of others.

Get started today with one of these ideas. Tomorrow try another. Then make it a weekly plan!

1. **Enjoy a great meal.** Think about taking in a delicious but nutritious choice. Or have a special meal to indulge in that one sinful dish you love to eat. If you enjoy cooking, prepare a special meal for someone you love!
2. **Get a good night's (or day's) sleep.** With hectic schedules and overtime, it can be hard to get adequate rest. However, even one solid 8-hour session of uninterrupted sleep in a week can help your body regenerate and can provide you with a clearer head. Set yourself up for good rest by ensuring it is quiet (use earplugs if you need!) a comfortable temperature, and dark (sleep masks are golden!) in the room where you slumber.
3. **Go for a walk.** Wintry weather outside? If you aren't a fan of the gym or the treadmill, think of a place indoors that has room for you to walk and things for you to see or do. Indoor shopping malls are a popular place for walks when the weather is bad. Physical movement of any kind gets the blood pumping, makes the heart stronger, and has been proven to improve mood.
4. **Phone a friend.** With non-traditional work schedules and rotating shifts, it is often difficult to keep in touch with friends. Make a plan to call a friend you haven't talked to as much as you would like. Write it down to help you remember or set a reminder in your watch or phone.
5. **Take a deep breath.** Fill your lungs and hold it for a count of three, and then completely exhale all of your breath out. Then do it again. When we are stressed or anxious, taking a few deep breaths can have a tremendous impact on our state of mind and sense of calm.
6. **Plan a "me" day.** Ever feel like you spend all your time working and doing for others and that you never get a chance to just do what you want? Sometimes it's difficult to get things done without a plan. So first, plan which day you will take time for yourself. Then let family and others know. It may feel like you are being selfish, but everyone deserves time to do what they enjoy. Then plan what you will do on "your" day. Finally, make it happen and enjoy!

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7. **Practice positive self-talk.** This tip conjures up images of Stuart Smalley and his characteristic affirmations. However, using positive phrases to encourage yourself really does work. Humans seek to validate what they believe. If you tell yourself you can't do something, it is likely that you won't. Reminding yourself (out loud if you have to!) of your strengths and good qualities can improve your mood and make you more confident and productive.
8. **Thank yourself and those around you.** Spend a few minutes thinking about people in your life for whom you are grateful and consider exactly what they do to make your life better. Then let them know how you feel. If it's hard for you to express out loud, write a message. Also think about something you have done lately that turned out exactly the way you hoped. Maybe it's something as simple as having organized a closet. Thank yourself for getting that project completed!
9. **Play!** Even if you think it might be silly, do that thing that excites you or makes you laugh. For some it may be video games. Maybe dancing? Crank up those tunes and sing along at the top of your lungs. Whether it's playing fetch with your dog or basketball with your buddies, playing dress up with your kids or cards with your honey, have some fun!
10. **Buy yourself a little something.** Choose that something you have been eyeing for awhile or find a little something on impulse that makes you smile. It's always fun to get something new that we love or enjoy.
11. **Connect with your favorite hobby.** Hobby time often gets buried in the demands of work and the to-dos of busy weeks. But working on something you can get completely absorbed in is therapeutic. It helps us to get into a state of flow in which we are challenging our minds, abilities, or creativity, yet we are enjoying the process.
12. **Learn something new.** It could be something as simple as YouTubing a small home repair or learning a new dance. If you are more ambitious, take an online class or take up learning a new language. Learning new things keeps the mind young and healthy!
13. **Let go of negativity.** Been harboring hurt feelings or resentment over something that happened in the past? Unfortunately, holding on to hurt feelings can be like holding onto broken glass. It only hurts the person holding it. Identify something about which you are angry or hurt, then be intentional about letting it go. There is no need to tell anyone unless you want to. Just put it down, let it go, and find peace in not allowing negative thoughts to hurt or anger you any longer.
14. **Reflect on your spiritual side.** It can be very meaningful to look outside of ourselves and consider how we are a part of something bigger. Whether you practice a religion as a faithful churchgoer or you take quiet time to meditate in nature, taking time each week to nourish this part of yourself can be the most important act of love for your soul.

Hopefully these tips for self-care are not news but instead reminders. If you learned something new, get out there and try it out. Sharing self-care with others you treasure can be the greatest act of love you show for them as well!

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