What does it all mean?

Sometimes we see self-care used in mental health settings to discuss someone’s ability to actually take care of themselves. For example: personal hygiene, nutrition and managing a household. These actions are important to the assessment of mental health but it is not what therapists are talking about when they are telling you to engage in self-care. Self-care is the actions that you take to engage in relaxation and emotional wellbeing – outside of daily responsibilities and tasks. This may include getting a massage, a haircut, or setting time aside each day to read a chapter in your favorite book.

How do I even do this?

There are infinite ways one can engage in proper self-care. It can be in the form of tasks we add to our day that are pleasant or help us fill our emotional cup. On the next page is an assessment tool to help identify areas you may need more focus on. This assessment tool is designed to guide you through a simple list of categories and items that can be tailored to your personal values.

Self-care can also be in the form of NOT doing things. For some of us – saying no to someone – is very difficult. Check out the table below for ways to say NO. This is a great time to revisit the quote by Paulo Coelho, “When you say ‘Yes’ to others, make sure you are not saying ‘No’ to yourself.”
ART ACTIVITY: Self-Soothe Box

In dialectical behavioral therapy, the “self-soothe” skill is all about using our five senses to regulate our emotions and feel good. To create a self-soothing kit, get a small box or bag and fill it with items to your liking. Try to choose items that will engage all five senses. Here are some examples for each sense:

- **Sight:** Positive affirmation cards, small prints of art, art supplies, glitter jar, photos of your favorite people or places
- **Touch:** Modeling clay, puff balls, lotion, fidget toys, beads, marbles, feathers or a soft brush
- **Sound:** Bells, chimes, make a playlist with your favorite songs or calming tones, sound machine
- **Taste:** Mints, gum, chocolate, hard candy, a crunchy snack
- **Smell:** Scented lotions, candle, aromatherapy oils, incense sticks, a small jar of spices

Consider making several self-soothe kits and keep them in your car, at work, or home so you will always be ready to self-soothe. [Click here for more examples.](#)

Building Mastery

Whenever we learn a new skill, it takes time to master it. Engaging in self-care skills feels new and awkward at first – that’s ok! Every time you practice you are building mastery. While part of self-care focuses on relaxation, remember that completing difficult tasks can also feel good. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your ‘to do’ list, try picking ONE thing that will make you feel accomplished for the day. Instead of focusing on everything that is still on your list, be mindful of the task you accomplished and give yourself credit.