

Deep Sigh, Heavy Exhale: Micro Self-Care Practices When Your World Is in Chaos

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Introduction

When your world feels like it's coming apart, whether from global headlines, local conflict, workplace pressures, or personal stress, it can feel impossible to breathe. A deep sigh. A heavy exhale. Sometimes that is all you have to give, and sometimes that is exactly what you need.

For those in nonprofit, humanitarian, or service-centered roles, chaos is not abstract. It shows up in your inbox, meetings, social media, and even relationships. It follows you home. The very work that once gave you purpose can sometimes become a source of exhaustion, especially when your capacity is stretched thin, and the world's needs continue to grow.

Self-care may sound like a luxury, but in the midst of disruption, it becomes essential. You do not need a complete reset. You need moments of relief. Micro self-care practices are small, intentional steps that can make a meaningful difference when everything else feels overwhelming.

1. Name What You're Feeling (Even If It's Uncomfortable)

When the world feels chaotic, naming your emotions can bring clarity. Avoiding them only allows them to grow in the background.

Micro Practice: Pause for 10 seconds and say out loud or write down how you feel.

- I feel tense
- I feel exhausted
- I feel like I'm not doing enough

Why it works: Naming your emotion reduces its intensity and gives your brain a place to begin processing.

2. Ground Yourself With the 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

This simple grounding exercise reconnects you with your body and environment, which is especially useful when stress or anxiety feels overwhelming.

Micro Practice: Notice and name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Why it works: This exercise activates your senses and brings your attention to the present moment, helping you feel more centered.

3. Reset With One Simple Task

When your mind is flooded, your energy scattered, and the world feels too loud, choose one small thing to complete.

Micro Practice: Focus on a single task for five minutes.

- Make tea
- Clean off one surface
- Reply to one email with intention

Why it works: Mono-tasking supports mental clarity and reduces overwhelm by eliminating distractions.

4. Move Your Body to Release Stress

Stress settles into the body. When you move intentionally, you help release that tension.

Micro Practice: Stand up and shake out your hands, roll your shoulders, or stretch for 30 seconds.

If you're in a private space, shake your limbs or dance freely to music.

Why it works: Physical movement resets your nervous system and helps discharge stress that builds up during difficult days.

5. Limit News to Protect Your Nervous System

Being informed is important. Being overwhelmed is harmful. Boundaries with news help protect your mental space.

Micro Practice: Give yourself two minutes to check updates. After that, close the app or tab.

Why it works: Constant exposure to distressing content leads to emotional fatigue and increased anxiety. Setting time limits reduces this impact.

6. Give Yourself a "Good Enough" Goal

In times of uncertainty, perfection is an impossible standard. Focus on being gentle with yourself and choosing what matters most.

Micro Practice: At the start of your day, choose one simple goal.

- Today I will do my best
- Today I will drink enough water
- Today I will say no when I need to

Why it works: Setting a realistic goal helps preserve your energy and cultivates self-compassion.

7. Connect in Small Ways

When the world feels unstable, connection is one of the most stabilizing tools we have. You do not need a deep conversation. Small gestures make a difference.

Micro Practice:

- Text someone a kind word
- Share something that made you laugh
- Acknowledge a colleague's effort

Why it works: Even a brief connection helps release oxytocin, which soothes the nervous system and builds emotional safety.

8. Create a Ritual to End the Day

When stress blurs the lines between work and rest, your body and mind need a clear signal that the day is done.

Micro Practice: Develop a short end-of-day ritual.

- Light a candle
- Change into different clothes
- Turn off notifications
- Step outside for a moment of air

Why it works: Rituals anchor us and support mental closure, which is essential for rest and recovery.

Closing Thought: Steadying Yourself in the Storm

When the world is in chaos, your nervous system feels it too. These micro self-care practices are not meant to solve everything. They are here to create breathing room, moments of regulation, and reminders that you still have agency, even when so much is out of your hands.

You do not have to fix the world to deserve rest. You do not have to be okay to care for yourself. You only need to start with one small thing. One deep breath. One heavy exhale.

You are worth that moment.