Spring is officially here! The daylight is getting noticeably longer and colorful blooms are making an appearance here in the Pacific NW. Spring is a time of welcoming the light, inviting a sense of renewal, and planting of seeds you want to see grow over this next year. Spring invites inspiration and energy to renew or recreate our self-care practices, so we can continue to grow and evolve towards happiness and a sense of well-being. Get creative with your self-care!

Here are some simple ideas to help you get started:

• Play in the dirt! Plant a flower or vegetable in a pot. Watch it grow!
• Add color to your environment—add colorful throw pillows, paint a picture and hang it up, wear a colorful scarf, or add some spring flowers to your space. Open your curtains and allow in the natural light.
• Enjoy a cup of tea while watching the sunrise or sunset.
• Start that gratitude practice!
• Diffuse some essential oils that evoke inspiration or sense of peace.
• Stretch your body outside.
• Dance to your favorite song or sing in the shower.
• Sit against a tree and feel supported and grounded.

Whatever you do, I encourage you to do it with a sense of lightness and joy as we move into the season of light and renewal!
Have you ever found yourself doing pretty well, handling life challenges, feeling proud of yourself, noting your accomplishments, and then all of a sudden “one more thing happens”, and you recognize the tipping point just occurred? The next thing you know, you are stuck! Stuck feeling tired, or overwhelmed, maybe even a little bit cranky? Wondering, “will this ever change?”

You may feel like it has been months since you had any time for yourself. You may not remember the last time you felt relaxed, or laughed. Don’t worry, this happens to all of us, sometimes.

Feeling “stuck” is not a one-time experience. It is part of life’s natural experiences, similar to the moon waxing and waning. We experience loss and change, feel afraid, or exhausted. Sometimes we even feel trapped by the pressures of our lives. It is okay, this happens.

We may feel it is hard to change away from this place. But truthfully, it is manageable to change if we are willing to look within. And, start with some small shifts in our way of living. Small shifts and first steps can add up to something much bigger, and can be surprisingly easy.

Truth be told, not changing is harder! Think about it, what is the price you pay, to not stretch your mind, take an adventure, or express yourself? How does staying in a rut, effect your body, your heart, your mind? Go ahead, let yourself dream, imagine what your life might be like if you had more personal balance. This is an inside job.

The first step is to notice when we feel stuck. Are we unhappy, longing for a more balanced life? If so, we need to show up for ourselves, be curious. Challenge yourself to have some fun, or talk to someone new. Pay attention to yourself. Notice when you are tired, or tense, hungry or in need of comfort. Ask yourself, “Does this feel right for me?” “What do I need or want right now?” What is my body telling me?”

Live in reality, sort out the past from what is happening now in this present moment. “Can I feel clear and calm like a grown up, or am I afraid and uneasy, or reacting?” What is really true here?” Now connect with someone: a friend, a family member, or a support person. Genuine connections with others ease stress. Talking with someone may help you celebrate your joys.. They may cheer for you or they may even catch you if you feel like you are falling.

Once you feel like you have some support, take action. Taking action becomes a process of how we live on a daily basis. We learn to better care for our bodies, and speak up when we are hurting. Taking action means getting rid of excess stuff that clutters our life. It is about becoming more of who we truly are.

Lastly, we “let go”. We stop trying to be the one to make everyone happy and everything smooth. Instead of being the “doer”, we practice, learning new ways of being, enjoying the flow of our lives, becoming an expression of our lives. When we are willing to explore what gives us joy, we begin to experience it. Joy cannot help but fill us up and spill over, even into the lives of others!
Join us for:

WELLNESS CAFÉ

APRIL

Spring Guided Meditation
You will experience a guided meditation to help you harness the Spring time energy of “planting seeds” for growth that promote your well-being and happiness.

Vancouver
Thursday, April 5th 10-11 am
1601 E 4th Plain Blvd
Columbia Room building 11 Room 305

Salem
Wednesday, April 25th 1-2
1750 McGilchrist St. SE Suite 130
Room 1C 101-B

MAY

Healing Touch as Self-Care
We will explore how consciously working with our own energy can be a form of self-care.

Vancouver
Thursday, May 3rd 10-11
1601 E 4th Plain Blvd
Columbia Room building 11 Room 305

Salem
Wednesday, May 23rd 1-2 pm
1750 McGilchrist St. SE Suite 130
Room 1C 101-B

PsychArmor’s Military Caregiver Recognition Award Program

PsychArmor is a nonprofit organization that is offering free education and support for Americans to engage effectively with the military community.

And PsychArmor is offering FREE online courses for family caregivers:

And if you, as a family caregiver, register at: http://www.hiddenheroes.org and complete five PsychArmor courses for caregivers, you will earn a Certificate of Achievement!

This special certificate will be signed by Senator Elizabeth Dole and PsychArmor's founder, Marjorie Morrison, in recognition of your dedication in caring for a wounded, ill or injured Veteran.

The courses include:
Good Grief
Invisible Wounds of War
The ABCs of Respite: Caregiver Support
Understanding the VA for Caregivers
Coaching a Loved One Into Care

You can find additional courses for caregivers here: https://psycharm.org/caregivers/

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I recently had the privilege of attending a conference with Tara Brach, a psychologist, author and meditation and mindfulness teacher. She has been practicing self-compassion and meditation for 40 years. Her presence was powerful and tender. She taught the following practice of 'The RAIN of Self-Compassion' for dealing with feelings of unworthiness and insecurity, but it can be used for any feelings we find challenging.

Tara Brach shares the following quote by Victor Frankel, “Between the stimulus and the response there is a space, and in this space lies our power and our freedom.” The practice of ‘RAIN’ was developed to assist people in skillfully navigating the space between feeling and action.

Tara Brach says, “In order to flow-er, self-compassion depends on honest, direct contact with our own vulnerability. Compassion fully blossoms when we actively offer care to ourselves.” The RAIN of Self-Compassion is an easy-to-remember tool for practicing mindful self-compassion. It has four steps:

1. Recognize what is going on; Allow the experience to be there, just as it is;
2. Investigate with kindness;
3. Nurture or Nourish with self-compassion.

Tara says you can take your time and explore RAIN as a stand-alone meditation or move through the steps in a more abbreviated way whenever challenging feelings arise.

**R—Recognize What’s Going On**
(Roots of Understanding)

Recognizing means really paying attention at any given moment to our thoughts, feelings and behaviors that are affecting us. Tara says, “Like awakening from a dream, the first step out of the trance of unworthiness is simply to recognize that we are stuck, subject to painfully constricting beliefs, emotions, and physical sensations. Common signs of the trance include a critical inner voice, feelings of shame or fear, the squeeze of anxiety or the weight of depression in the body.”

Tara adds, “Some of us are at war with ourselves for decades, never realizing how our self-judgment and self-aversion keep us from finding genuine intimacy with others or enjoying our lives. Rather than listening to and trusting our inner life, most of us try to live according to the expectations of others, which we internalize. When we inevitably fall short of the mark, we condemn ourselves.”

**A—Allowing: Taking a Life-Giving Pause**
(Grounds of Love)

Allowing can be simply pausing with the intention to relax and allow experience to be just as it is. This doesn’t mean we agree with our conviction that we’re unworthy, Instead was honestly acknowledge presence of our judgment, as well as the painful feelings underneath. It can help to silently offer yourself an encouraging word or phrase when you notice the grip of fear in order to acknowledge and accept the reality of your experience in this moment.

Tara shares “allowing creates a space that enables us to see more deeply into our own being, which, in turn, awakens our caring and helps us make wiser choices in life”.

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“If your compassion does not include yourself it is incomplete”
-Jack Kornfield
I—Investigating with Kindness (Deepens Understanding)

Tara defines investigation as “calling on our natural curiosity—the desire to know truth—and directing a more focused attention to our present experience. Investigation adds a more active and pointed kind of inquiry.” Some questions you might ask yourself can be: What most wants attention? How am I experiencing this in my body? Or What am I believing? What does this feeling want from me? Until we bring our underlying feelings into awareness, our unconscious beliefs and emotions take the driver’s seat and perpetuate your identification with a limited, deficient self.

Poet Dorothy Hunt says that we need a “…heartspace where everything that is, is welcome.” Developing an attitude of unconditional care for ourselves allows us to develop enough internal safety and openness for real investigation to take place. Tara says, “The more we investigate the source of our suffering, the more we cultivate a compassionate heart toward ourselves and others”. Mindful contact with our suffering can help us to respond with care.

Tara suggests practicing RAIN with gestures can help people find healing by gently placing a hand on the heart or cheek; others, in a whispered message of care, or by envisioning being bathed in warm, radiant light. Most importantly is that once you have investigated and connected with your suffering, respond by offering care to your own heart.

N–Nurture or Nourish with Self-Compassion (Awakens Love)

In this step we offer ourselves the nurturing and nourishment we need to honor and support ourselves. Tara shares “self-compassion can come into fullness as we intentionally nourish our inner life with self-care”. This requires some intentional gesture or action to support ourselves. Some examples may be: offering ourselves reassurance, forgiveness, companionship, or love.

It might be a mental whisper such as I am here with you, I am sorry, I love you, You are good enough, I am listening, Trust in your goodness. It may also entail an outward action such as setting a healthy boundary for yourself or engaging in a healthy activity, such as physical exercise. Tara teaches “when the intention to awaken self-compassion is sincere, the smallest gesture of turning towards love, of offering love—even if initially it feels awkward—will nourish your heart”.

After RAIN

After practicing RAIN take the time to notice your own presence and rest in the wakeful tender space of awareness you have created and allow it to sink deep into your heart and body. This will help you to develop a deeper familiarity with your ability to pay attention and tend to yourself with self-compassion as you move forward in your life. The more we practice RAIN the more it becomes our habitual way of relating to ourselves and our experience. Enjoy!

https://www.tarabrach.com/selfcompassion1/

https://www.mindful.org/tara-brach-rain-mindfulness-practice/
Caregiver Health Matters!

Family Caregivers (including friends and other loved ones) play a critical role in the health and long term care of Veterans. Multiple studies confirm how much our society has come to rely on Family Caregivers across all populations.

While caregiving can be rewarding and positive, many Family Caregivers experience substantial physical, psychological and financial stressors. These stressors can lead to increased risk of physical ailments and disease, as well as depression and other emotional challenges.

Impact of Caregiving on Caregiver Mental and Emotional Health

Higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health effects are common among family members who care for a relative or friend.

Caregivers commonly experience higher levels of stress and frustration

It is common for Caregivers to feel a range of emotions in response to providing care including feeling: frustrated, angry, drained, guilty, worried or helpless.

Caregivers often feel a loss of self-identity and lower levels of self-esteem.

Caregivers report less self-acceptance and feel less effective and less in control.

Caregivers may feel exhausted when they go to bed at night, and many feel they cannot effectively manage all of their caregiving responsibilities.

Caregivers show higher levels of anxiety and depression

Caregivers are at a greater risk of becoming depressed. Studies estimate that 40 to 70% of Caregivers report symptoms of depression. The risk of depression increases as the Veteran’s ability to function declines.

Caregivers are more likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

Caregivers are also at increased risk for developing a substance abuse problem.

Impact of Caregiving on Caregiver Physical Health

High rates of depressive symptoms and mental health problems among Caregivers, in addition to the physical strain of caregiving, can put many Caregivers at serious risk for poor physical health outcomes.

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Caregivers experience more physical health challenges

Caregivers report feeling less well and have reduced overall physical health than non-caregivers.

Caregivers providing care to an ill/disabled spouse are more likely to report a personal history of high blood pressure, obesity, physical pain, diabetes and higher levels of cholesterol.

Caregivers also reported chronic conditions (including heart attack/heart disease, cancer, diabetes and arthritis) at nearly twice the rate of non-caregivers.

Caregivers experience more challenges with self-care

Due to the high demands of caregiving, Caregivers often find it difficult to engage in activities that promote their own health and well-being.

Caregivers are less likely to engage in preventive health behaviors.

Nearly three quarters of Caregivers reported that did not go to the doctor as often as they should, and more than half had missed doctors’ appointments. Caregivers in rural areas are at a greater disadvantage for having their own medical needs met due to difficulty getting to the hospital and doctor.

Female Caregivers are twice as likely not to fill a prescription because of the cost.

Caregivers’ self-care suffers because they lack the time and energy to prepare proper meals or to exercise. About six in ten Caregivers in a national survey reported that their eating and exercising habits are worse than before.

Improved recognition and treatment of physical and psychological symptoms among Caregivers who are dedicating their lives to the care of others, is a growing health concern and should be considered a priority.

Increasing Positive Health Outcomes for Caregivers: Increasing appropriate mental health services and medical care for family Caregivers are important steps toward addressing Caregiver health. Although Caregiving can have a negative impact on Caregivers’ health and well-being, research demonstrates its effects can be alleviated at least partially by: an assessment of family Caregiver needs that leads to a care plan with support services, Caregiver education and support programs, respite to reduce Caregiver burden, and primary care interventions that address Caregiver needs.

The Caregiver Support Program is here to help! Please contact the Caregiver Support Program at (503) 273.5210 to learn more about our services.
Join Oregon Care Partners in April

This exceptional conference is FREE of charge to attend. If you’re a family or professional caregiver living or working the state of Oregon, join us for an opportunity to learn from expert presenters, network with other caregivers, and learn best practices to use in your care setting.

**Program Sessions**

**Elder Abuse Prevention, Investigation, and Reporting**

Presented by Devrey Hackenberg, APS and AFH Licensing Manager at NorthWest Senior & Disability Services and Denise Lundeon, Adult Protective Services Lead for Jackson and Josephine Counties

**Person-Centered Approaches to Reducing the Risk of Falls**

Presented by Josh Allen, RN, C-AL, Vice President of Quality at Senior Resource Group

**Understanding Behaviors as Communication**

Presented by Josh Allen, RN, C-AL, Vice President of Quality at Senior Resource Group

**Music For a Healthy Mind, Body and Spirit**

Presented by Jodi Winnwalker, LCGSW, MT-BC and Licensed Board Certified Music Therapist, CEO of Earthones Music Therapy Services, LLC

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