

Discipline #5 - Barriers to Self Care

Injunction [What to do]:

- Make a list of all of the activities that you do everyday to take care of yourself that benefit you directly and others only indirectly.
- Make a second list of strategies that you have done routinely to take care of yourself but which you aren't able to get yourself to do consistently even though you believe that you are benefited when you do.
- Make a third list of actions that you believe would be good for you to do but which you have not been able to get yourself to do at all.
- Now take list #1 and turn it into a schedule that is specific enough that you will notice when you depart from it. For example, one of the strategies that you do everyday to take care of yourself is to sleep. Decide when you are going to go to bed and when you are going to get up.
- You are not going to always do as you have planned. Simply notice when you depart from your plan. If you stay up later than you planned, notice how you talked yourself into straying from your routine. See if you can find the part of you that persuaded you to depart from what you already decided was in your own best interest.
- As you find yourself doing what you decided to do, you can add items from list #2 and then #3, but only when you are mostly doing what is already on the schedule. Don't overwhelm yourself.

Why do it [Rationale]:

The barrier that tends to keep us stuck around not taking care of ourselves is that we “*should* on ourselves.” We have one part that tells us what we should be doing and another that resists. This becomes a struggle for control and we repeatedly thwart ourselves. Each takes a turn at dominance and submission. Instead, if we build a relationship between those two parts, they are able to bring both of their sets of skills and perspectives to the task of self-care.

For example, most of us have a part that tells us that we should do certain actions to care for ourselves. This part may not do anything more than gripe at us for not caring for ourselves or it may actually have been able to get us to do strategies that are good for us for fairly long periods around specific activities.

We also have a part that is more spontaneous and impulsive that says that we don't need to do the self-care now (or perhaps at all). It just wants to play, or it may be a part that is busy taking care of others, so we don't have time for ourselves.

Rather than allowing these parts to fight it out, we can be more satisfied if we can establish a relationship with each of them and then allow them to relate to each other in such a way as to meet both of their needs. For some folks there are more than two parts here. There can be a whole complex of parts and issues that compete for our attention.

What it will get you [Promises]:

There are actually several results that will happen for you as you consistently apply yourself to this discipline.

The simple act of writing down what it is that you do for yourself will remind you that you do act on your own behalf and that you are someone who is worth taking care of. Your self-esteem will rise.

You will become more conscious of what it is that you want to do to care for yourself. Most of our failures to adequately care for ourselves come from our failure to plan to care for ourselves. Simply having the plan increases greatly the chances that you will act on your own behalf.

Having the plan and then noticing when you don't follow it highlights the tension between the parts of you that are trying to care for you responsibly and the parts that are caring for yourself impulsively. This tension, this conflict between the parts, is a crucial starting place for our inquiry into our own interior life.

By attending to the issues of the more impulsive parts of ourselves we become less impulsive and also to discover important ways that we are not doing the best job of caring for ourselves.

Suggestions: The key to this discipline is that the goal is not to make yourself take care of yourself but to notice how you stop yourself from taking care of yourself. This is about getting to know the part that sabotages the plan and to appreciate what it is that that part is trying to do for you. This is a difficult point to get so I am going to say it again. The point of this discipline is not to shame ourselves into doing a better job of caring for ourselves. We have plenty of shame already. The point of this discipline is to discover what may be in the way of acting on our own behalf and to remove those barriers. At the same time, we are likely to discover that there are needs that we have of which we are unaware. By becoming aware of those needs we can begin to act in ways that address them.