

CHECKLIST: SELF-CARE CHECK

When you're living in survival mode, self-care feels like a luxury you can't afford. But taking care of your basic needs isn't selfish—it's essential. This shit is hard. This checklist will help you figure out whether your fundamental needs are being met and what you can do when you need help.

Time Needed

10-15 minutes

(can be done with low energy)



When to Do This

- You're feeling run-down or burnt out
- You're getting sick frequently
- You're functioning, but barely
- You need to check in with yourself
- Weekly as part of your reset routine

Physical Needs

Sleep

☐ Am I getting enough sleep?

- ☐ 7-9 hours most nights
- ☐ I fall asleep reasonably easily
- ☐ I wake up somewhat feeling rested

If NO:

- ☐ Go to bed around the same time each night (even if it's late, make it consistent)
- ☐ Create a minimal bedtime routine, even if it's just brushing your teeth and getting in bed
- ☐ Limit your screen time 30 minutes before bed (this is hard, but it helps)
- ☐ Use a sleep meditation or white noise if racing thoughts keep you up. Use a free app like InsightTimer or Calm to choose from a ton of different types.
- ☐ Address safety concerns if they're preventing you from getting good sleep
- ☐ Talk to your school counselor, therapist, or doctor if any of the red flags below are present



RED FLAGS:

- Less than 5-6 hours regularly
- Insomnia
- Nightmares disrupting sleep

Food

☐ Am I eating enough?

- ☐ I'm eating at least 2 meals a day
- ☐ I'm getting some variety and protein, not just junk food
- ☐ I'm not going long periods without eating

If NO:

- ☐ Keep easy, non-perishable food in your room in sealed containers (granola bars, crackers, peanut butter)
- ☐ Eat breakfast at school if it's available (free/reduced lunch programs)
- ☐ Ask your school counselor about food assistance resources
- ☐ Set phone reminders for yourself to eat if you forget
- ☐ Keep it simple—eating something imperfect is better than nothing
- ☐ Talk to your school nurse or counselor if any of the red flags below are happening



RED FLAGS:

- Losing weight unintentionally
- Frequent dizziness/weakness
- Going full days without food

Hydration

☐ Am I drinking enough water?

- ☐ Clear or light yellow urine
- ☐ I'm not constantly thirsty
- ☐ I'm drinking throughout the day

If NO:

- ☐ Get a water bottle and keep it with you all day
- ☐ Drink water first thing in morning
- ☐ Set hourly reminders on your phone or watch to drink
- ☐ Add flavor if plain water is hard, like lemon, drink mix, or flavor drops
- ☐ Aim for 6-8 glasses every day

Hygiene

☐ Am I maintaining basic hygiene?

- ☐ I'm showering/washing at least 2-3x per week
- ☐ I'm brushing my teeth daily
- ☐ I'm wearing clean clothes
- ☐ I'm changing my underwear daily

If NO:

- ☐ Use baby wipes if showering is hard to access
- ☐ Use dry shampoo for hair between washes
- ☐ Keep hygiene supplies in your room if access to your bathroom is limited
- ☐ Set minimum standards: underwear and toothbrushing should non-negotiable
- ☐ Hand-wash your essentials, like underwear and socks, if laundry isn't accessible
- ☐ See [My Daily Basics](#) and [Laundry Day Basics](#) checklists
- ☐ Talk to your school nurse about resources if either of the red flags below are happening



RED FLAGS:

- Hygiene affecting health (skin issues, tooth pain) or social life (comments from others)
- Avoiding people

Medical/Dental

☐ Am I addressing any health issues?

- ☐ I'm taking prescribed medications regularly
- ☐ I'm seeing a doctor or dentist when needed
- ☐ I'm addressing pain or symptoms

If NO:

- ☐ Set medication reminders on your phone; let your phone take that mental burden
- ☐ Use your school nurse for basic health concerns
- ☐ Tell a trusted adult if you need medical care; don't let potential issues get bigger
- ☐ Research free or sliding-scale clinics in your area
- ☐ Don't ignore persistent pain or symptoms; take care of these early
- ☐ Talk to your school counselor for help if any of the red flags below are happening



RED FLAGS:

- Chronic pain
- Untreated conditions
- Missing medications regularly

Emotional Needs

Social Connection

☐ **Am I connecting with others?**

- ☐ I'm talking to friends regularly
- ☐ There's at least one person who knows how I'm really doing
- ☐ I'm not completely isolated

If NO:

- ☐ Text one friend today
- ☐ Sit with people at lunch, even if you don't talk much
- ☐ See if there's someone you can help. Helping others often helps you feel a lot better.
- ☐ Join one activity or club at school
- ☐ Talk to school counselor (they count as connection)
- ☐ Online communities if in-person is too hard (but be safe)
- ☐ **Call a crisis line: call 988 or text HOME to 741741 if any of the red flags below are present**



RED FLAGS:

- Complete isolation
- Feeling like no one cares
- Thoughts that you'd be better off gone

Emotional Processing

☐ **Am I dealing with my feelings or stuffing them down?**

- ☐ I'm acknowledging honestly how I feel
- ☐ I'm expressing my emotions somehow (journaling, doing art, talking, crying)
- ☐ I'm not just numbing out constantly

If NO:

- ☐ Journal for 5 minutes (even just "I feel like crap today...")
- ☐ Use the RAIN technique from the [Mindfulness in Everyday Life Exercise](#) when emotions are big
- ☐ Talk to someone safe
- ☐ Cry if you need to (it's not weakness)
- ☐ Use one of the [toolkit exercises](#) to reset (Affirmations for Strength & Hope, Mindfulness in Everyday Life, Meditation for Reducing Stress)

- ☐ Talk to a counselor or call a crisis line if you are having any of the red flags below



RED FLAGS:

- Completely numb
- Self-harm urges
- Only feeling rage or nothing

Mental Health

☐ **How is my mental health overall?**

- ☐ I can function at school or work most days
- ☐ I'm not thinking about suicide
- ☐ My anxiety/depression is manageable
- ☐ I'm not using substances to cope

If NO:

- ☐ Talk to your school counselor immediately
- ☐ Call a crisis line if having suicidal thoughts: **988**
- ☐ Tell a trusted adult what's happening as soon as you can
- ☐ Ask about therapy or counseling resources
- ☐ Use toolkit exercises for day-to-day coping
- ☐ If any of the red flags below are happening, **this is a crisis—get help now**



RED FLAGS:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Self-harm
- Substance abuse
- Can't function

Stress Management

☐ **Am I managing stress or just powering through it?**

- ☐ I'm using coping tools (meditation, mindfulness, physical activity)
- ☐ I'm taking breaks when possible
- ☐ I'm not in constant crisis mode

If NO:

- ☐ Practice one toolkit exercise daily (even 2 minutes)
- ☐ Take 5-minute breaks to breathe
- ☐ Say no to non-essential obligations WITHOUT guilt
- ☐ Lower your expectations where you can
- ☐ Ask for extensions or accommodations at school if needed

Safety & Environment

Physical Safety

- ☐ **Am I physically safe at home?**
 - ☐ I'm not in immediate danger
 - ☐ I'm not experiencing abuse
 - ☐ My basic needs are being met

If NO:

- ☐ Have an exit plan and emergency contacts ready in case you need to bolt
- ☐ Know where you'd safely go in an emergency
- ☐ Tell a trusted adult what's happening
- ☐ Call Childhelp if you're experiencing abuse: 1-800-422-4453
- ☐ Use one of the resources in your state on the More Than Messy [Resources](#) page (or visit one of the state pages on [Resources by State](#) if in the U.S.)
- ☐ **Your safety is the priority**

Emotional Safety

- ☐ **Do I feel emotionally safe at home?**
 - ☐ I'm not constantly walking on eggshells
 - ☐ I'm not being verbally abused regularly
 - ☐ I have some emotional space

If NO:

- ☐ Practice boundaries (see the [Practicing Boundaries exercise](#))
- ☐ Spend time outside the home when possible
- ☐ Build relationships with safe and trusted adults elsewhere
- ☐ Use the exercises in the [toolkit](#) for emotional regulation
- ☐ Remember: **this is temporary**

Personal Development

Learning/Growth

☐ **Am I maintaining school and learning?**

- ☐ I'm attending school regularly
- ☐ I'm turning in assignments (even if it's not perfect)
- ☐ I'm learning something

If NO:

- ☐ Talk to your school counselor about barriers
- ☐ Ask for accommodations if your home life is getting in the way
- ☐ Focus on just showing up (that's enough some days)
- ☐ Connect with at least one teacher who gets it
- ☐ Remember: school is your ticket out—protect it

Future Planning

☐ **Am I working toward independence?**

- ☐ I'm thinking about next steps (graduation, getting a job, moving out)
- ☐ I'm building skills I'll need to live on my own or with a roommate
- ☐ I'm saving money when I can

If NO:

- ☐ Use the [Vision Board](#) and [Future Me Letter](#) exercises
- ☐ Learn one life skill per month (cooking, budgeting, etc.)
- ☐ Research resources for when you turn 18
- ☐ Connect with your guidance counselor about your post-graduation plans
- ☐ Save even \$5 a month—it adds up

Hope

☐ **Do I still have hope things can be different?**

- ☐ I can imagine a future that's better
- ☐ I believe I can get out eventually
- ☐ I'm still trying to get through each day

If NO:

- ☐ Read your Future Me Letter
- ☐ Look at your Vision Board
- ☐ Talk to someone who's gotten out of a hard situation
- ☐ Remember: Your current situation is NOT forever
- ☐ Reach out to counselor—hopelessness is serious

Joy & Pleasure

Things I Enjoy

☐ **Am I doing anything just for enjoyment?**

- ☐ I'm engaged in hobbies, interests, fun activities
- ☐ I'm laughing sometimes
- ☐ I have moments of genuine happiness

If NO:

- ☐ Do ONE thing you enjoy this week (even 5-10 minutes)
- ☐ Watch/read/listen to something that makes you happy
- ☐ Spend time with someone who makes you laugh
- ☐ Let yourself have fun without guilt
- ☐ Joy is not a luxury—it's necessary for survival

Taking Action on Your Self-Care Check

After completing this checklist:

☐ **Identify your top 3 gaps**

What are the three biggest areas where your needs aren't being met?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

☐ **Pick ONE to address this week**

Don't try to fix everything at once. What's the one thing that would make the biggest difference?

This week I will: _____

☐ **Identify one small action**

What's the tiniest step you can take toward that?

My small action: _____

☐ **Get support if needed**

Do you need help with any of this? Who could you ask?

I could reach out to: _____

Red Flags That Need Immediate Attention

If you checked NO on multiple items in these categories, get help NOW:

- ☐ **Physical health:** Not eating regularly, losing weight, ignoring physical pain
- ☐ **Mental health:** Suicidal thoughts, self-harm, substance use, can't function
- ☐ **Safety:** Experiencing abuse, in danger, no safe place

Who to contact:

- School counselor (first stop for most things)
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988
- Childhelp: 1-800-422-4453
- School nurse (for physical health)
- Trusted teacher, coach, friend's parent

Don't wait. Reach out today.

Troubleshooting

"I checked NO on almost everything."

- You're in crisis/survival mode
- Pick THE most critical issue (usually safety, food, or mental health)
- Get help from your school counselor or a crisis line
- Focus on the absolute basics: eat something, sleep, stay safe
- Everything else can wait

"I feel guilty taking care of myself when everything is a mess."

- Self-care isn't selfish—it's survival
- You can't help anyone (including yourself) if you're depleted
- Taking care of yourself doesn't make the house worse
- You deserve care even in hard circumstances

"I don't have resources/money for some of these needs."

- School counselors know about resources
- Many services are free for minors (food programs, health clinics)
- Don't let a lack of money stop you from asking
- There are more resources available than you think

"I'm too tired/depressed to do any of this."

- That's a sign that you're severely depleted
- Start with THE smallest thing: take ONE sip of water, take ONE bite of something
- Tell someone how bad it is—don't try to handle this alone
- Being this depleted is serious—get support

Accessibility Considerations

Self-care looks different for everyone. If you have chronic illness or disability, your baseline needs are different—compare yourself to YOUR normal, not others'. If depression makes basic tasks feel impossible, pick just one thing and do that (even brushing teeth counts). If executive function makes tracking this overwhelming, just check in with yourself mentally—no need to write everything down. If you don't have access to resources (food, hygiene items), talk to school counselor about what's available. Self-care isn't about doing everything perfectly—it's about meeting your needs at whatever level you can manage right now.

Important Reminders

- **Self-care is not optional.** Your body and mind need basic maintenance to function.
- **You can't pour from an empty cup.** Taking care of yourself isn't selfish.
- **Small actions matter.** Drinking water, eating a snack, brushing teeth—all count.
- **It's okay to ask for help.** You're not supposed to meet all your needs alone.
- **Your needs matter even when life is chaotic.** You don't have to earn the right to basic care.

Real Talk

Self-care when you're living in survival mode feels impossible and pointless.

How are you supposed to think about "meeting your needs" when you're just trying to get through the day? When there's no food in the house, when the shower is unusable, when you're too exhausted to care?

Here's the truth: Self-care in your situation IS survival.

You're not doing face masks and bubble baths. You're making sure you eat. You're forcing yourself to drink water. You're brushing your teeth even when you don't want to get out of bed.

That's self-care. That's what it looks like in hard circumstances.

And here's what happens when you don't: You get sick. You stop functioning. You can't make it to school. You lose the ability to work toward getting out.

Taking care of yourself isn't about thriving right now. It's about surviving long enough to eventually thrive.

One glass of water. One meal. One night of sleep. One conversation with a friend.

That's how you make it through.

Check in with yourself. Notice what you need. Do one small thing about it.

You matter. Your needs matter. Your survival matters.

Take care of yourself. Even—especially—when it's hard.