

# The Art of Being Well

Work/Life Balance Workbook for the  
Frontline Worker



**Ascension EAP**

[www.ascensionWIEAP.org](http://www.ascensionWIEAP.org)

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## Introduction

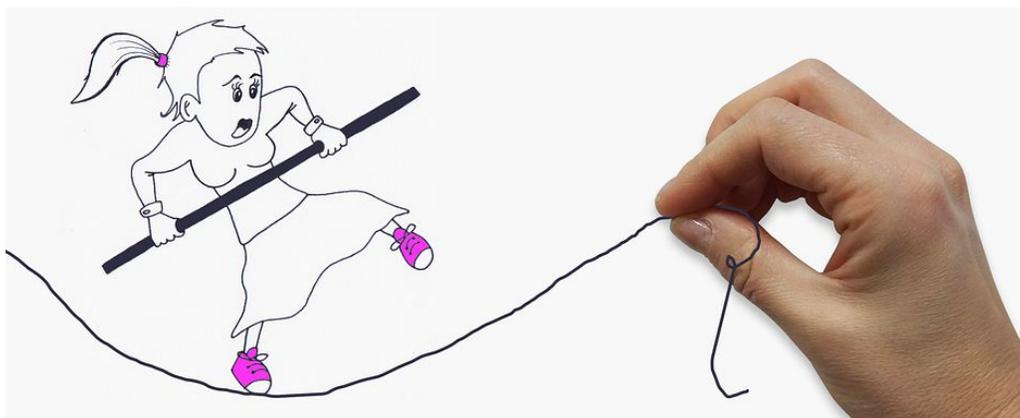
You haven't gotten into this line of work for the heck of it. Rather, you chose a career that fulfilled the values instilled in you. You care about people. Problem solving, responding to crisis, stepping up to the plate when others shrink away, and literally saving lives--those are probably the reasons why you entered this line of work. How does a person maintain balance when these traits are so enmeshed into their personal character and value system? Work life balance is a goal that most people strive for, but let's be honest--it may look a little different for you than for someone in a regular 9-5 job.

Below are some exercises to help you evaluate your current work/life balance as well as activities to help you improve that balance. Some activities may work very well for you, while others may not. Give them all a try! See what works for you. Even if you only get one or two new strategies to improve your work/life balance, that's a great place to start!

## Evaluate Your Goals

First, take a moment to reflect on what work/life balance means to you. Maybe it conjures up an image of a teeter totter with work on one end, and everything else on the other as it squeakily tries to keep both in the air.

Many people believe that true work/life balance is a state where there is absolutely no tension or conflict between the two--just the right amount of time for work and home life, with neither bleeding through to the other. Ha! Maybe that is why work/life balance can seem so unachievable, especially in times of stress or high demand.



## Work/Life Balance Quiz

Answer the following questions to evaluate your current work/life balance:

- True or False** My life and work demands often interfere with each other.
- True or False** I have worked through days off or cancelled vacation days to work.
- True or False** I'm distracted by personal calls or emails at work.
- True or False** I can't relax until my work projects are completed.
- True or False** I don't have time for activities that give me joy.
- True or False** I don't have time for exercise.
- True or False** I lose sleep thinking about work.
- True or False** I make mistakes at work thinking about things happening at home.
- True or False** I believe "once things settle down" I'll take better care of myself.
- True or False** I use alcohol or other substances to relax when I am home.
- True or False** I use caffeine or other substances to stay focused at work.
- True or False** I frequently check my phone for work messages when I am no longer working for the day.
- True or False** I have difficulty concentrating.
- True or False** I believe that self-sacrifice is required to make my job successful.
- True or False** I find myself worrying a lot about how I'll get everything done.
- True or False** I work more than the hours I'm scheduled for.
- True or False** I'm quick to lose my temper.
- True or False** I don't have the luxury of "down time."
- True or False** I believe that as long as people are suffering, I should put my self-care aside.
- True or False** I am available to my work outside of work hours.
- True or False** I am available to my family and friends throughout my work day.
- True or False** I am exhausted.
- True or False** I believe that if I don't get it done, it won't get done.
- True or False** My family or friends have remarked about how much time I spend working.

## Scoring

If you answered...

**Mostly true:** It's time to take action to improve your work/life balance. Consider contacting your EAP to talk with a counselor about ways to improve your self-care before you reach burnout, which can negatively affect your job, your home life, and your health!

**Down the middle:** You may be making it work now, but you're probably feeling some serious stress. It's time to review strategies and learn skills to improve your work/life balance.

**Mostly false:** You're doing a good job maintaining balance between work and home. Keep it up!

Now that you've taken a moment to reflect on your current state, write down your thoughts about your current state, and what you hope to achieve by working through this workbook.

**My current work/life balance condition is:**

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**What I would like to gain from this workbook is:**

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## What's in Your Heart?

This exercise can help you creatively explore where your energy is going, and where you would like it to go. This is sometimes called heart mapping.

**What you need:** Colored pencils, markers, or crayons.

**Step 1:** Using the heart below, in the center write or draw what is most important to you. This could be an important person (or people), place, activity, pet or value. You can do this by writing it out, drawing it, or using one word or symbol that represents what is most important to you.

**Step 2:** Continue working outwards to depict other things that are important to your heart and soul. Use various shapes, sizes and colors to represent each thing. Be specific, and consider all areas of wellness, such as physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, social and vocational. The things that are important to you may be things you already have or do, or they may be things you dream of.

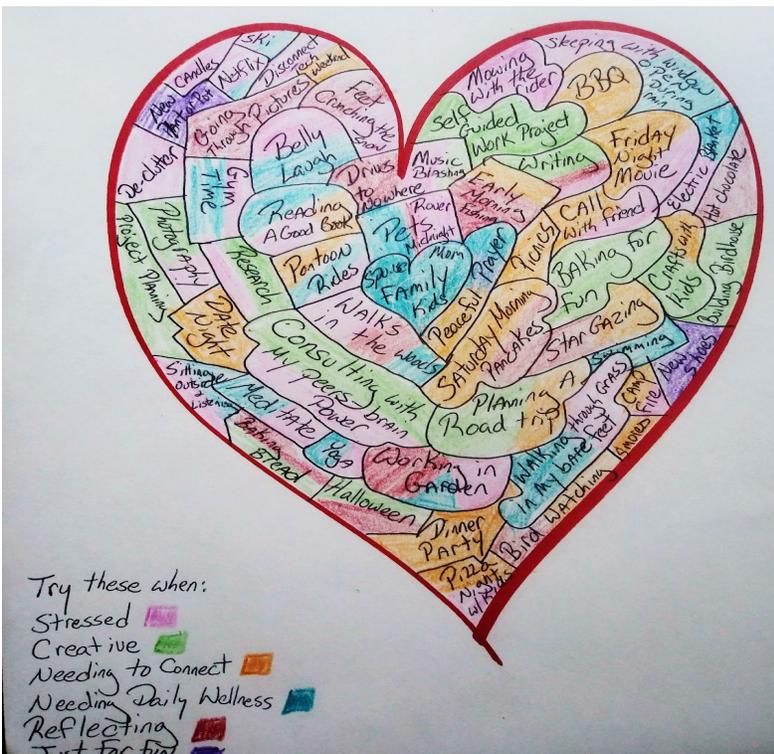
**Step 3:** You may want to use different colors to represent feelings or help you see patterns. For example, you could use one color to shade in all the areas of your heart that you feel you are attentive to, another color for items in your heart that you visit occasionally, and another color for areas you haven't used in a while and miss.

**Step 4:** Take some time to explore your heart. Acknowledge any patterns that have emerged. Are you spending a lot of time in the outer layers of your heart? Do you need to spend more time in the center areas? Or maybe it's the other way around--maybe you spend all your time in the center and never give yourself permission to go to other fulfilling spaces. Do you have blockages preventing you from using all the different facets of your heart? What are those blockages? Are they moveable?

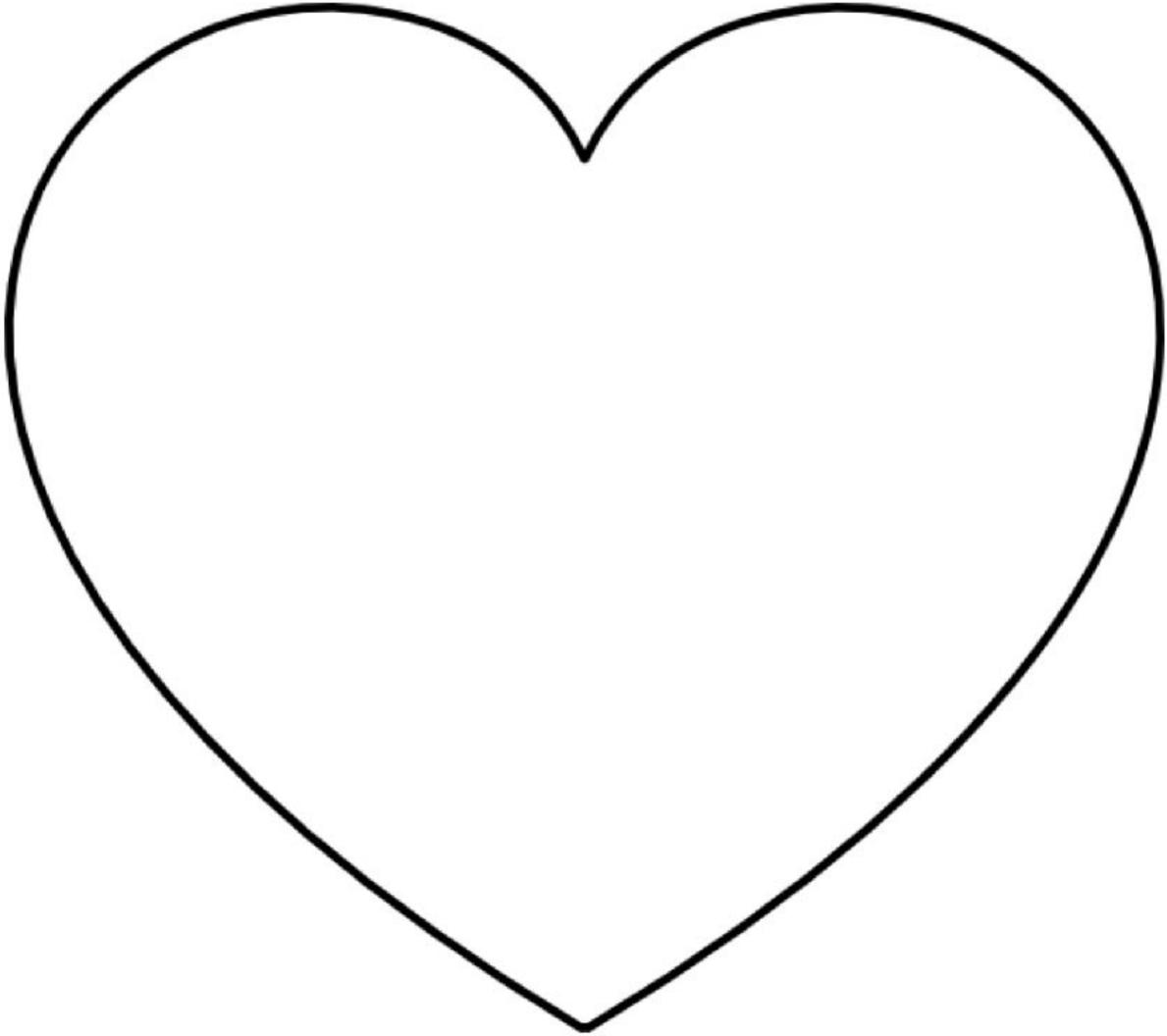
Consider how you can use your heart as inspiration for better self-care. How can you create a work/life balance that will bring more enjoyment and fulfillment to your life?

## Heart Map Reflection

- What memories have you stored in your heart? (These don't have to be epic memories. For example, the smell of a grill reminds me of summer BBQ's with my family).
- What people have been important to you and why?
- What are some experiences or events that you will never forget?
- What is something you have always wanted to do?
- What things or objects are important to you -- for example, a tree in your backyard, a favorite chair, a blanket, your front steps, a patio, driving in your car, etc.
- What's at the center of your heart? You might want to place the most important people, memories, and experiences there.
- Maybe you want to keep important things inside your heart and less important things on the outside of your heart.
- Do you want to draw more than one heart – good and bad; happy and sad; secret and open – and include different things inside each heart?
- Do different colors represent different emotions, events, and relationships?



Inspired by: *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School* by Georgia Heard (Heinemann)



## Integrating Values

Review the list below, and circle all the values that are important to you:

### Values List

Acceptance	Forgiveness	Perseverance
Accomplishment	Friendship	Personal fulfillment
Achievement	Fun	Power
Adventure	Future Generations	Pride
Altruism	Generosity	Recognition
Ambition	Gentleness	Reliability
Authenticity	Giving Back	Respect
Balance	Grace	Resourcefulness
Beauty	Gratitude	Risk taking
Belonging	Growth	Safety
Calm	Harmony	Security
Caring	Health	Self-Discipline
Collaboration	Home	Self-Expression
Commitment	Honesty	Self-respect
Community	Hope	Sensuality
Compassion	Humor	Serenity
Competence	Inclusion	Service
Confidence	Independence	Simplicity
Connection	Integrity	Spirituality
Contentment	Initiative	Sportsmanship
Contribution	Intuition	Stewardship
Courage	Job security	Strength
Creativity	Joy	Success
Dignity	Justice	Time
Direct	Kindness	Teamwork
Diversity	Knowledge	Thrift
Education	Leadership	Tradition
Elegance	Legacy	Travel
Environment	Love	Trust
Efficiency	Loyalty	Truth
Equality	Making a difference	Usefulness
Ethics	Optimism	Vision
Excellence	Nature	Vulnerability
Fairness	Parenting	Wealth
Faith	Patriotism	Wellbeing
Family	Patience	Wholeheartedness
Financial Stability	Peace	Wisdom

Now that you've identified all of your important values, narrow your list down to your top three values for work and personal life.

## Highest Values

### Top three values for work:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Top three values for personal life:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you have identified your top values, consider what these values mean to your life and work.

## Values Reflection Questions:

- Do your values differ from work to home? What is different and why?
- How do these values serve you at work? At home?
- Do any of these values cause issues for you at work or at home?
- How were your top 3 values utilized in your work this week?
- How were your top 3 values utilized in your personal time this week?
- How can you enhance values-based living at work?
- How can you enhance values-based living at home?

## Boundaries

The values that serve you well at work may not translate well at home, and vice versa. For example, the value of “caring” may serve you very well in your work role as you serve patients, clients, customers and even teammates. However, when you find yourself caretaking for everyone you know outside of work as well, the value of caring can become an unmanageable burden.

Boundaries protect us from being used up. They put limits around our most important assets, such as time, energy, emotions and resources so that we have them to utilize where and when we need them, without burning out!

Healthy boundaries are often vaguely understood, but an essential part of staying well and maintaining work/life balance. We know we need them, but we don’t always know how boundaries look or how they sound in real life. Let’s start with the assets you already have that need strong boundaries. Here are some areas for you to consider:

**Time.** There never seems to be enough. You may need to create boundaries around your time if you feel overextended and exhausted.

*Examples: When friends stop over unexpectedly (and you had other plans); Others ask you to volunteer or help them out; Your spouse makes plans for your only day off.*

**Emotions** can be taxed if we over-invest in things that are outside of our control, or do not set clear expectations for how we want others to treat us.

*Examples: A parent plays the guilt-trip when you say no to a request; Your partner calls you names; You keep thinking about that terrible situation from work--and it’s eating you up inside.*

**Energy** can be zapped if we do not take the time we need to reenergize the way we need to. This not only results in fatigue and exhaustion, but also irritability, anxiety, depression, and increased conflict with others.

*Examples: You are just about to relax after a long day when your spouse asks you to mow the lawn; You’ve been working so many hours, you can’t remember the last time you [fill in the blank with something you enjoy]; Your kids have been begging you to take them to the park, but you’ve just been too tired...*

**Values** are the things that are most important to us, whether tangible treasures (like family), deeply held beliefs, or defining character traits. We need to protect and embody our values to help us feel purposeful and fulfilled.

*Examples: If your value is honesty but you are asked to “make the numbers work”; if your value is faith but you have not prayed or gone to church in over a month; if your value is family, but the kids are sleeping by the time you get home each night.*

**Health & Safety** is essential to our very existence. Many people go to great lengths to protect their health and safety, while others have looser expectations and concerns. When others don't share our same values around health and safety, we might become anxious or resentful.

*Examples: People who choose to socially distance and wear masks vs. those who don't; A parent who smokes around small children; A supervisor asks you to do a procedure without proper personal protective equipment (PPE).*

What are some of your personal assets (either listed above or others) that you need to protect with boundaries?



## Boundary Activity

### Example:

**Asset I need to protect:** Time

**How this is being violated:** My friend frequently calls me when upset, so my only time off is consumed with trying to help them feel better about their day. I have hard days too!

**Feelings associated with this:** Resentful, disappointed, sad, angry

### Your turn!

1. **Asset I need to protect:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How this is being violated:**

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**Feelings associated with this:** \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Asset I need to protect:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How this is being violated:**

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**Feelings associated with this:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. **Asset I need to protect:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How this is being violated:**

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**Feelings associated with this:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Personal Boundary Tips

- Close your laptop and shut off email notifications at a certain time each day. Keep them off.
- Limit how much news or social media you watch or read.
- Shut off or leave your phone somewhere else at certain times such as meals, when sleeping, date night, or when playing with your children.
- Turn off notifications from work when you are not working. The more time you can do this the better!
- Have work free conversations with partners, friends and family.
- When at work, limit checking your phone or computer for personal updates. Many people find work to be a welcome distraction from outside stress--be intentional about your focus.
- Routinely have someone watch the kids for a little while on your day off so you can get at least a little time to yourself.
- Block time on your work schedule to tackle your tasks.
- Learn how to say no.



## Assertiveness

Assertiveness is key in establishing boundaries. Some people get assertiveness confused with aggression, but it is not the same thing. When a person is acting aggressively they are either using intimidation or interrogation tactics to exude power and control over the other person. Examples might be yelling, name calling, pointing fingers, disregarding what others say, or any other behaviors that cause them to “win” the interaction. This is very different from assertiveness. When a person is behaving assertively, they believe that the best outcome is one that is fair and favorable to everybody.

Assertiveness is also different from passive conflict strategies. Some people are naturally conflict-avoidant. That’s actually pretty normal, but to use passive conflict strategies to avoid conflict actually creates more conflict! Some people use the “poor me” strategy which causes other people to feel guilty (the classic guilt-trip) and give in to their requests. For example, “I always try to cover other people’s shift when they ask, but no one ever covers for me. Oh well. I didn’t really want to go to my son’s birthday party anyway...” If that doesn’t work, they must just shut down altogether, becoming silent, withdrawn, pouty, or even snarky. When you ask them what’s wrong they say, “NOTHING!” This is called aloof. It’s obvious they are upset about something, but you will never know why.

While aggressive behaviors cause people to back down or give up in fear, passive conflict strategies suck people in. People take pity on them, beg them to share what’s wrong, or give in to their guilt-laden demands. These passive conflict strategies contribute to covert manipulation, triangulation, and ultimately--more conflict! We’ve all seen it (and maybe done it a time or two). These are passive conflict strategies at work.

Assertiveness is not aggressive--it does not intimidate others to shut up or give in. It’s also not passive--laying guilt trips or emotionally manipulating people to do what you want, or just giving in to anything and everything because you don’t want to create any waves. Assertiveness is calm, fair, rational negotiation that is neither aggressive nor passive. You look the other person in the eye, calmly explain the problem, then brainstorm solutions. You stick up for yourself--needs, ideas and expectations, but you also consider the other person’s perspective. Sounds easy right? Here’s a guide to get you started.

## Assertiveness Tips

**Step 1: Define your boundary:** Be clear with yourself about what you want. This step is essential before you can establish boundaries with anyone else.

*Example: I want to only talk to my sibling once a week over the phone. They can text me but I might not respond right away.*

**Step 2: Establish your boundary:** Be clear and to the point. Try to avoid feelings and stick to facts as much as possible.

*Example: "Sibling, my work is draining, and I need more time for rest. From now on I will call you on Saturday mornings for one hour. If you really need something in the meantime you can text me, but I might not be able to respond right away."*

**Step 3: Stick to your guns (and be prepared for buts):**

*Example:*

**The initial BUT:** "But what happens when I really need to talk to you?"

**Assertive Response:** "We can talk on Saturday!"

**The worst case BUT:** "But what if it's an emergency?"

**Assertive Response:** "If it's really an emergency you should call 911. Otherwise you can text me, or we'll talk Saturday."

**The guilt-trip BUT:** "You're just like Mom! You don't even care about me!"

**Assertive response:** "I do care, and I'm not like Mom, but my work is draining, and I need more time to myself."

**The intimidation BUT:** "You're being really selfish, you know that?"

**Assertive response:** "That may be true. Self-care, by nature, is selfish, but I need to do it so I can be in good shape to take care of the people who depend on me."

## Assertiveness Scenarios

Consider situations in your life where you may need to be more assertive to set boundaries. Write your answers to the questions below:

### 1. Boundary being crossed:

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### What you could say to establish your boundary:

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### How you could respond to the “buts”:

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### 2. Boundary being crossed:

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### What you could say to establish your boundary:

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### How you could respond to the “buts”:

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## Rituals

Here are some positive ritual suggestions:

**Coffee Break.** Make a daily routine of having coffee (or any drink) that you enjoy. Brew it, smell it and feel the warmth of the cup in your hand. Sit in a comfortable spot as you enjoy your drink. This is the perfect time to do a devotion, reflect on a mantra, or create positive intentions for your day.

**Driveway Moment.** Keep a notebook in your car. When you arrive home at the end of your workday, take a few moments to sit and reflect while in your car. If your mind is still on work-matters, jot them down in the notebook. Write down thoughts, feelings, events, to-dos, or anything else you need to clear out of your head.

**Create a Mantra.** A mantra is a statement of intention, encouragement, or inspiration that you can repeat over and over. You might create a mantra to help you complete a task, (“I can do this. I’ve done it before.”) remain focused, stay calm, or embody a certain character trait or value. (“I live with integrity. I will do the right thing, even if it’s hard.”) Mantras can be very powerful. The right words can help you achieve your loftiest goals—even self-care or work/life balance! Consider the example below, then create your own mantras.

Thoughts or behaviors that are not helpful:	A positive counter-statement, or mantra:
I eat junk food in the car on my way home from work.	“Healthy food makes me feel good.” “I feel proud when I make healthy food choices.”
I think about all the things I need to do when I get home.	“I will focus on one thing at a time.” “Quality time with family matters more to me than [fill in the blank].”
I worry about all the things I didn’t get done at work.	“I did my best today--that’s all that I can do.” “There’s always tomorrow.”

## Write Your Mantra

Write a few mantras for yourself. Try to keep them simple so that they can easily be memorized. Practice repeating one for a few days. Pay attention to whether your mantra helps you stay focused on your goals and improve your work/life balance. As you begin to feel confident in this skill, consider adding other mantras into your day.

Thoughts or behaviors that are not helpful:	A positive counter-statement, or mantra:

Write your mantra on a note card or post-it and put it where you will see it (strategic places might be your bathroom mirror, computer, dashboard, refrigerator, phone, pocket or wallet). When you see your mantra, say it in your mind or out loud with a slow, deep breath.

These transition rituals and mantras can be helpful in letting go of one thing before entering another. They will keep your mind from wandering back and forth between work and home, helping you to stay fully present and focused on the moment you are in.

## Disruptions

Even the best laid plans can be thwarted by the unexpected. As the saying goes, “Change is inevitable; growth is optional.” There will be bumps in the road, but how we handle those bumps determines our character and builds our resilience. Still, though, it’s easy to get bogged down by the burdens of life, so here are a few tips to help you navigate through difficult times:

**Acknowledge** how circumstances have impacted you. Some high-achieving, self-reliant, front line workers believe that no matter what happens, they should just be able to handle it. Sometimes they repress deep emotions so that they can continue to do their job, putting others before themselves. While this is admirable, it is not sustainable. At some point their internal “jar” is going to get full, and they won’t be able to keep everything in anymore. It is not a crime to be sad, hurt, angry, or even scared sometimes. You will not break if you allow yourself to feel emotions. Life can be tough--more than it should be sometimes. People may see you as a hero, but allow yourself to be human, too.

**Seek support** from people who love and care about you. Research overwhelmingly shows that social connections aid in every type of recovery--from substance abuse, trauma, physical injury--EVERY type of recovery. And it doesn’t matter so much how many relationships you have, but rather the quality of your relationships. In other words, it’s better to have two really good people in your life than 542 Facebook friends. Human beings are social creatures; you are not meant to walk alone.

**Take good care** of yourself no matter what. When major disruptions, tragedies, or traumas happen sometimes we try to put everything else on hold until things get back to “normal.” Maybe you’re called to work extra hours, or your job has been suspended for a while; maybe a close loved one has passed away, or you saw something at work a human being should never see. No matter what the difficulty is that you’re facing, now is not the time to stop taking care.

Selfcare is not something we can only do when the cosmos is aligned just right. In fact, during difficult times we SHOULD’N’T wait to take care of ourselves. When we are stressed, tired, overwhelmed and weary, that is especially the time we need to take good care. During times of chaos and change self-care may look a little different, but by practicing the strategies in this workbook, both at work and at home, it is possible.

**Ask for help.** I know I know--you are the one that everyone comes to when THEY need help; you're not the one to usually ask for help, right? Take off the cape, Superman! We’re all human, and we all need it sometimes. The good news is that you can get free and confidential help from your Employee Assistance Program, and no one will ever know (unless you tell them). Good counselors will empathize; they won’t judge. They know how to help when it hurts, and they won’t share your secrets with anyone. What are you waiting for, call today!

**Thank you** for taking the time to read this workbook.

Remember that EAP is here to help.

**Thank you** for the work that you do.

**Thank you!**



Our last page is a list of personal rights. When self-care is tricky, or work/life balance seems like a luxury, repeat these to yourself, and remind yourself that you have the right to be well, too!

## Personal Rights for Frontline Workers

I have the right to care for my body through relaxation and nourishment.

I have the right to take breaks.

I have the right to take time off.

I have the right to rest.

I have the right to seek accurate information and ask for mentoring in decision making.

I have the right to be [*sad, angry, or scared*] sometimes.

I have the right to express my feelings both positive and negative.

I have the right to not be ok sometimes.

I have the right to be hopeful.

I have the right to be compassionate.

I have the right to be happy.

I have the right to focus my energy only on what is within my control.

I have the right to accept what is not in my control.

I have the right to accept that I am doing the best I can, and that is enough.

I have the right to say no.

I have the right to accept that I am not the only person who can help.

I have the right to set and maintain boundaries.

I have the right to change my mind.

I have a right to be treated with dignity and respect in all areas of my life.

I have the right to make mistakes.

I have the right to be human.

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