

BOOKLET

How to use cards for
self - care

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Instruction on how to use the cards

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élan interculturel

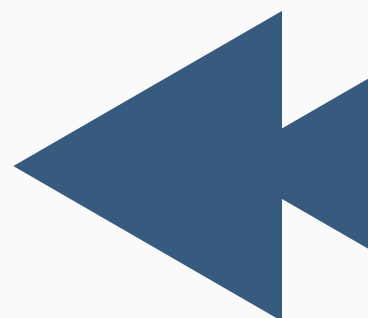
These cards are the result of 12-hour workshops held in the countries involved in the project—Italy, France, the Netherlands and Greece—bringing together the contributions of all those who participated.

While each card contains its own guidance, we felt it was important to provide additional information for some of them, offering further context and supporting deeper reflection.

Created with the aim of providing tools for self-care, the cards work as follows: on one side there are explanatory or evocative images, and on the other side there are instructions. We recommend taking the time to look at them, familiarise yourself with them and experiment with them.

You are free to print them and use them with others, or access them in PDF format.

Thanks to everyone who took part!



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**Agenzia Italiana
per la Gioventù**



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Learning to Say No

Practice saying no to something that feels too heavy or draining today. Protecting your limits is not selfishness — it is care for your boundaries.

About self - care

Care as a daily political practice

These cards invite you to reflect on care as something that is not neutral, private, or purely individual, but deeply political. Rooted in feminist practices, they start from the idea that taking care of oneself is a way to resist systems that normalize exhaustion, self-sacrifice, and silence.

Through small, everyday gestures—setting boundaries, saying no, reorganizing your space, slowing down—you are invited to recognize how care can interrupt harmful dynamics and open space for more just, livable ways of being with yourself and others.

Each card combines an evocative image with simple guiding instructions. There is no right or wrong way to use them. You can choose one card a day, return to the same card multiple times, or explore them together with others. What matters is paying attention: to your body, your limits, your desires, and the conditions that shape them.

Care is not a luxury. It is a collective practice, made of small acts of disobedience and construction, practiced over time.

These cards are the result of two days spent together in nature, with the aim of talking about self-care as a political act, rooted in feminist movements.






Own (or edit) your personal myths

Think of how you usually tell the story of your life (you can even write it down in max two pages).

How do you usually talk about key turning points? Do you have recurrent narrative features that always come back? Do you have a baseline story that comes back often?



Be your own author and editor!

explorations of our narratives and personal myths

“Who we are is a story of our self—a constructed narrative that our brain creates.

Some of that simulation is experienced as conscious awareness that corresponds to the self illusion that the average person in the street reports. At present, we do not know how a physical system like the brain could ever produce those nonphysical experiences, like the conscious self. In fact, it is turning out to be a very hard problem to solve. We may never find an answer, and some philosophers believe the question is misguided in the first place. Dan Dennett also thinks the self is constructed out of narratives: ‘Our tales are spun, but for the most part, we don’t spin them; they spin us.’ There is no self at the core. Rather, it emerges as the ‘center of a narrative gravity.’ In the same way that we can see a square at the center of the arrangement (the flip-side), it is an illusion created by the surrounding elements. Take the context away, and the square disappears. In the same way, the self is an illusion created by our brain.”

(Bruce Hood, The Self Illusion)

That our self may be spun by narratives may be a surprise to us, may even contradict our everyday experience. But it is certainly no reason to despair. And most of all, no reason to believe that it is any less important than if it was a nice immutable stable core like a pearl. In fact, we could rejoice that we have a very nice window on who we are, precisely in the form of our personal myth, the story we are telling ourselves about who we are. Shall we explore? Here is how: First, record your narrative, your personal myth. You can record your voice or you can write.

Take whichever option is easier for you. If you're more into editing podcasts then opt for voice recording, if you're used to texts then write.

What is your personal myth? It's the story of who you are, from your birth, until the present, and maybe even until the future that you imagine. Make it rather short though, as if you had to tell the story of your life in 3 minutes.

Listen or read your narrative and explore it with tender, generous curiosity as if you were a particularly kind and friendly editor. The emphasis is really on curiosity as opposed to a critique.

Here are a couple of aspects you could check:

- What is it that you like in this way of telling your story?
- Is there something that you don't like?
- How coherent does it seem to you?
- Are there any baseline stories that you recognise, that are recurrent in the way you think of your life?

And here is a bit of good news: this story is not carved in stone. It is not immutable. Now that you discovered that it exists, you are not its prisoner, but its author. Feel free to change it, without losing its coherence or authenticity.

Credits: Photo by Lucas Alves:

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/woman-holding-her-necklace-3289620/>

Handwriting photo by pixabay

Bruce Hood (2013) *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity*, Oxford University Press.

Map of personal projects

“The terrible and fascinating truth about the human condition is that none of us really know the answer to the dramatic question as it pertains to ourselves. We don’t know why we do what we do, or feel what we feel. We confabulate when theorising as to why we’re depressed, we confabulate when justifying our moral convictions and we confabulate when explaining where our love of music comes us. Our sense of self is organised by an unreliable narrator. We’re led to believe we’re in complete control of ourselves, but we’re not. We’re led to believe we really know who we are, but we don’t.”
(Will Storr, *The Science of Storytelling*)

If we can’t trust the stories we tell ourselves, then how to proceed to get to know ourselves? Professor Brian Little proposes that we pay attention to what we do, what is important for us, and do so he proposes we pay attention to our “personal projects”. He believes each of us cultivates a good dozen of different projects, some trivial pursuits and some “magnificent obsessions”.

Interested in having a look at your personal projects? Here is how to proceed:

1. Create a visual representation a “map” of your personal projects
 - Choose a medium that works for you, that you are most likely to revisit during several months: a huge paper with watercolor paint and markers, notebook with pencil, your notebook, computer...
 - Find symbols that can represent your current 6–10 personal projects. These can be small scale humble projects, but also important long term “core projects”

2. Reflect on your map and the projects

In absolute terms there is not good or bad project, out of context. But subjectively, you can use any of these aspects to have a look at each of them. You can take notes, mark your conclusions on your map: How important are they?

Are they connected to internal or external motivations? What helps you to pursue them, what hinders you? Are you actually cultivating them or just contemplating the idea?

3. Revisit your project map regularly

- Check which projects you are actively cultivating and which ones may be forgotten
- You can make any transformation you like, what is important is that your “map” is an authentic representation of what you really want.
- Another strategy may be not to revisit the map you already made but make a new one from time to time and explore how different they are.

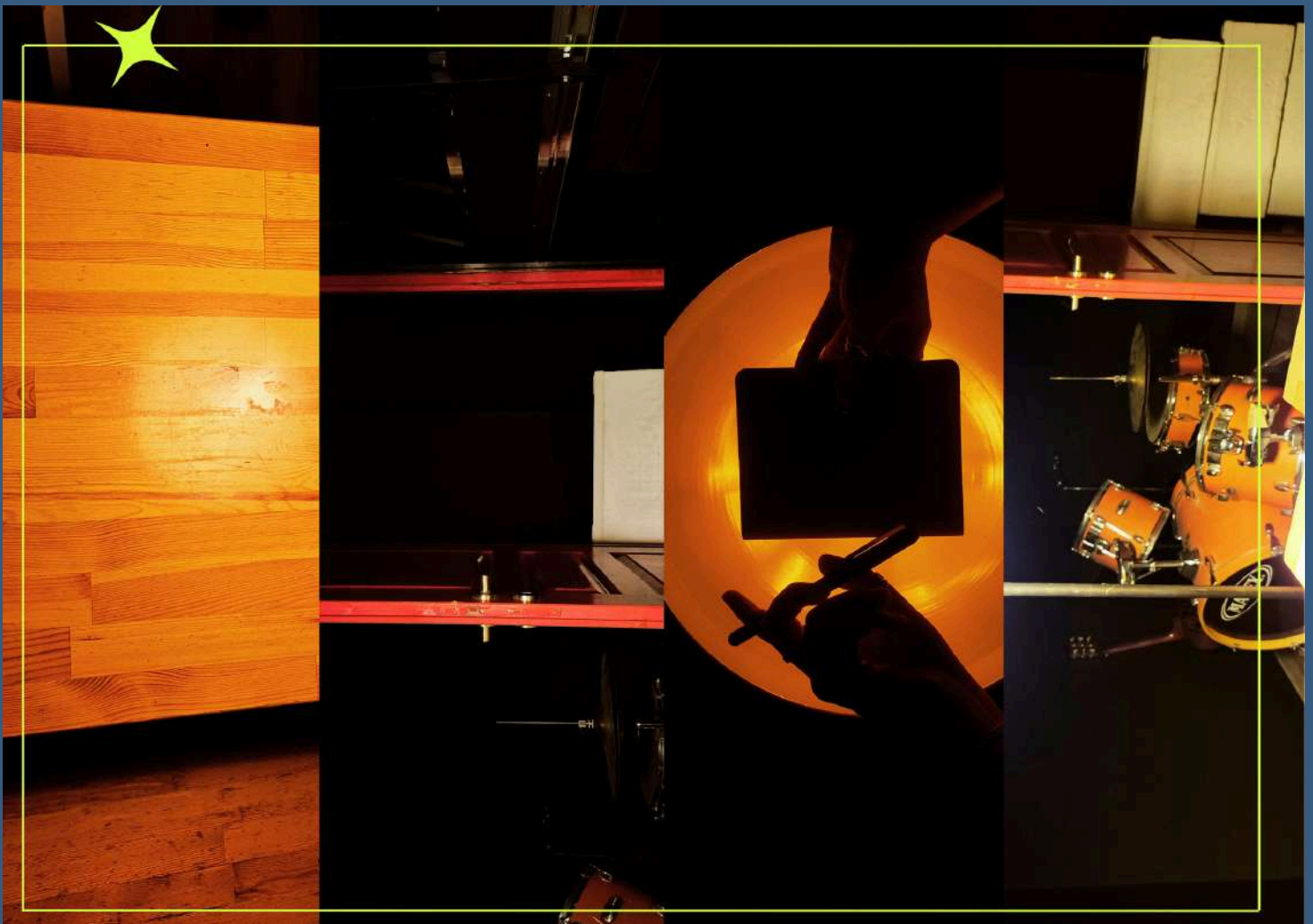
Credits:

Credits for forest photo in background: Francesco Ungaro

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/trees-on-a-dark-forest-1671325/>

Brian Little (ed.) 2007 Personal Project Pursuit, Psychology Press

Will Storr (2020) The Science of Storytelling, Abrams Press



Automatic Writing

Take a quiet moment for yourself.

Sit with a pen and paper, and start writing down your thoughts just as they come – without judging, editing, or overthinking.

Let the words flow, no matter how random they may seem.

Keep writing for at least ten minutes, or longer if you wish.

When you're done, look back at what you've written and notice the words that speak of **care**, comfort, or kindness to you.

These are your **self-care** words.

Return to this practice whenever you feel stressed, overwhelmed, or in need of gentle care.

Writing & Self-Expression

Automatic Writing

This exercise is grounded in the Surrealist technique of automatic writing, as articulated by André Breton, in which spontaneous, uncensored writing allows the unconscious to express itself without the interference of logic or self-editing. Similar to the game “Exquisite Corpse”, the process encourages a release from pre-planned thinking and invites trust in the creative flow, revealing unexpected connections and personal truths. Through this non-directed production of language, you can uncover words and patterns that reflect needs for care and inner calm, making the exercise a tool for self-awareness and self-nurturing.

A Recipe for Self-Care

The exercise draws on the power of autobiographical memory and sensory recall to transform a positive experience into a symbolic “recipe book” of personal care. Through the process of turning memory into a recipe, you can develop a creative way of processing emotions, strengthening their awareness of the sources of comfort and psychological nourishment your life. This practice functions as a mindful self-care tool, offering a personally meaningful ritual that can be used whenever there is a need for comfort or emotional replenishment.



If you could be an animal.. what that would be?

Visualizing yourself as an animal allows you to tap into different, sometimes hidden aspects of your personality. Through the qualities of your chosen animal, you can gain insights into your own strengths, fears, and desires, helping you reconnect with your true self.

Embodied Imagination

If you could be an animal... What animal would you choose to be?

Imagine if you could become any animal - what would it be? Visualizing yourself as an animal allows you to tap into a different aspect of your personality, one that might be hidden or unexplored in daily life. This kind of imagination can serve as a form of self-care, offering a moment of play and reflection in a busy world. By considering the qualities of your chosen animal, you can gain insights into your own strengths, fears, and desires, helping you reconnect with your true self and nurture a sense of balance and confidence.

Thinking about your animal identity also encourages a deeper understanding of your inner world. For example, an animal might symbolize resilience, independence, kindness, or wildness - traits that can be empowering to acknowledge and embrace. When you imagine yourself as that animal, you create a safe space to explore emotional vulnerabilities or explore aspects of self-acceptance that might otherwise be difficult to face. Ultimately, it serves as a gentle reminder that caring for ourselves involves honoring all parts of who we are - including those instinctive, primal, or even misunderstood parts - through playful imagination and mindful reflection.

Photo Credit: Agnes Poe/fear of Happiness

How do you take care of your animal? /
How does your animal take care of you?

Caring for your animal means tending to its needs and nurturing its qualities, just as you would with any important part of yourself.

It involves giving attention to what your animal symbolizes - whether that's bathing it in kindness, allowing it space to express its wildness, or protecting it during vulnerable moments. Engaging in activities that reinforce its traits, such as spending time in nature, practicing mindfulness, or simply listening to your instincts, helps keep your animal strong and true to itself. By caring for this part of you, you ensure that your inner world remains balanced, resilient, and authentic.

We invite you to reflect on your animal's needs and nurture it.

Conversely, your animal also takes care of you by offering comfort, strength, and honest reflection. When you tune into your animal's presence, it can remind you to be gentle with yourself, to trust your instincts, or to embrace your boldness when needed. It lends you resilience and strength during tough times and inspires courage to face challenges. In this mutual relationship, caring for your animal allows it to support you emotionally and spiritually, creating a nurturing cycle where both you and your inner animal grow stronger together - each providing vital support for the other in your journey of self-care.

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