

Start a Self-Care Revolution

By Heath and Nicole Reed

Lately it seems like there's a never-ending cascade of threats: a land war in Europe (in the 21st century!?), ongoing and exacerbating climate change, a national or potential global recession, mass shooting after mass shooting, and ever-enduring examples of marginalization. We are living through tumultuous, traumatic times of transition. And if it feels like a lot, it is—and you are not alone. Caregivers are seen developing symptoms resulting from this assault of uncertainty with newly minted terms like “compassion fatigue” and “vicarious trauma.” Rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide are statistically skyrocketing, leaving a trail of grief, pain, and suffering in their wake.

As empaths and helpers, we are in touch with not only the field of global suffering and our own personal challenges but also the waves of feelings felt from loved ones and every client we place our hands on.

Have you appreciated yourself for all that you have given lately?

Please take a moment to breathe deeply and smile to yourself for all that you have given.

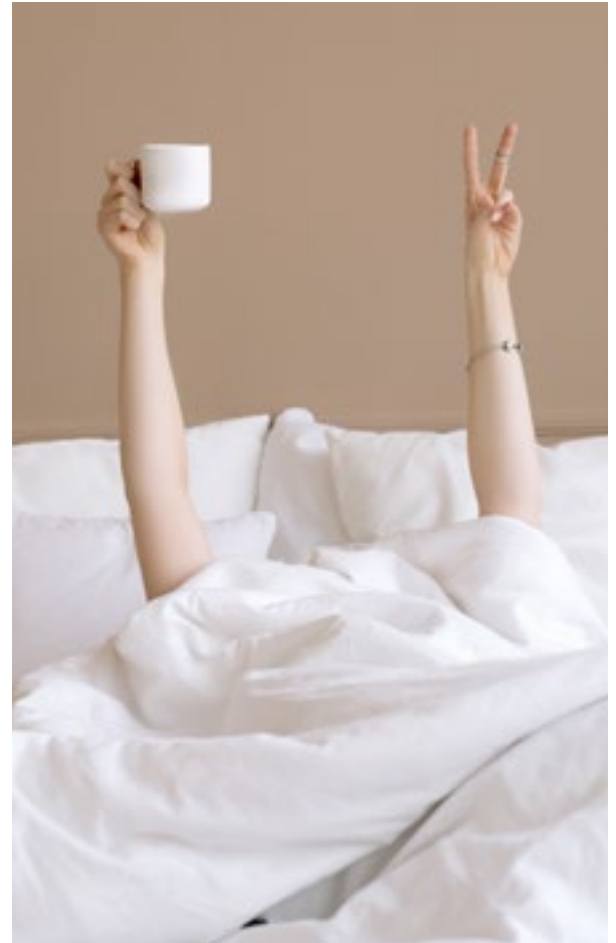
Our drive to give, share, and help is one of the many ways we participate with ongoing suffering. But what if your greatest contribution to relieving community and global suffering is accomplished by taking better care—we would even say “fierce care”—of yourself?

CARE-FORCE REVOLUTION

It is a revolutionary and evolutionary act to care for yourself in a world of suffering. Each of us has the subtle and potent power to generate an increased “care force” in our

own personal nook of the world. It's time to practice being the change you wish to see in the world. You are being called to act. That feeling of overwhelm, brain fog, and fatigue is simply information from your body intelligence telling you it's time to connect with others, move your body, and fiercely recommit to generating greater care for yourself. Investing in ongoing acts of self-care has a butterfly effect, rippling out into your community and the collective. You can be a lighthouse of care that, with practice, is simultaneously kind and strong, nurturing and empowering, tender and fierce.

We understand that helping yourself now may seem like a contradiction—unfathomable, ridiculous, or even crazy. That may be influenced by the fact that combining the words *self* and *care* into a singular concept is a relatively new evolution in humanity. Self-care only entered the American psyche in the 1950s and did not become mainstream until the past couple decades. Since its circuitous route and ubiquitous status threading through mental health, civil rights movements, self-help, and a multitude of marketing campaigns, self-care has been packaged and sold in ways that sometimes discounts the real-world impact of practicing self-care as a means of facilitating systemic transformation. We advocate that modeling and practicing self-care is one of



the greatest positive contributions you can gift to your family, friends, community—and yourself! Especially if you know how to modulate your self-care possibilities along the spectrum from tender to fierce and back again.

MAMA BEAR OR “FIERCE” SELF-CARE

Many of us have only been practicing one side of the self-care coin: yin qualities like tenderness, gentleness, and stillness. Full-spectrum self-care also requires embracing yang qualities: activating, strengthening, and empowering. Inspired by the book *Fierce Self-Compassion* by Kristen Neff, PhD, we discovered how ferocity is at the core of initiating significant change, standing up for ourselves and others, recommitting to our core values, and refusing to suffer.

The metaphor of a mama bear reveals the intersecting balance between tender and fierce care. Mama bear nurtures her cubs with tender (yin) care as she cuddles, feeds, and grooms her little ones. Mama bear also reliably turns on her fierce (yang) care, as seen when she activates her innate power to protect her cubs and not put up with any threats to their well-being. This level and commitment to fierce self-care may (and ought to) be harnessed for oneself.

Choosing to avoid people, places, and things that don't align with your core values is an example of fierce care: "I refuse to allow others to take advantage of me," "I refuse to be in the company of those who criticize me," "I refuse to hurt myself while I give to others," and "I refuse to speak negatively about myself" are all fierce commitments to activating your mama bear care force.

EMBODYING FIERCE AND TENDER CARE

Fierce self-care is a powerful way to take action and create change with kindness. It motivates us to provide safe places for ourselves and others to be, to feel, to heal, and to grow.

Try on and embody fierce care by placing your fist over your heart as a gesture of power, strength, and courage. Breathe into your heart, breathe into your fist, and notice. How do you feel? Notice what feelings, body sensations, and impressions arise from making this contact and holding this shape.

Try on and embody tender care by placing an open palm over your heart as a gesture of loving, connected presence. Breathe into your heart, breathe into your open palm, and notice. How do you feel? Notice what feelings, body sensations, and impressions arise from making this contact and holding this shape.

Does one embodiment practice feel more familiar? Which one felt more empowering? Which one felt most nourishing to you today? In this moment, is your essence yearning for more tenderness or fierceness?

Whenever you feel overwhelmed, fatigued, or uncertain, you can use this embodiment practice to help you identify the kind of care you most need in any given moment. Become savvy and learn to listen appreciatively to your own needs so you can help create a template for yourself (and others) to respond and even thrive in a world of tumultuous transition. This is how we begin to practice creating the world we want our children and our children's children to live in.

SELF-CARE REVOLUTION

Waves of violence, enduring hatred and anxiety, and the constant threats to our safety seem to be the normative context humans are living in nowadays. We, and many around us, find ourselves wondering and bemoaning, "What can I do? I feel like I can't do enough to help." Don't allow suffering and hopelessness to be the norm in your life. Use your tender fierceness to activate a completely revolutionary way to take care. Our personal belief is that a lifestyle rooted in full-spectrum self-care provides an unparalleled positive impact to the entire human race.

Isn't it cool that the introduction of self-care into the American lexicon was actually popularized by the civil and women's rights movements? However, rooting self-care as a means of fortifying one's well-being while generating systemic change is often subverted by the drive to sell more and buy more. It's time to take limiting self-care definitions out of the pockets of slick marketing campaigns and into our own hands.



TAKEAWAY: Full-spectrum self-care requires embracing not only the yin qualities (tenderness, gentleness, and stillness) but also the yang qualities (activating, strengthening, and empowering) to initiate change, stand up for ourselves and others, recommit to our core values, and refuse to suffer.

What is self-care to you?

How do you demonstrate care for yourself in ways that inspire others?

Activate positive systemic change by investing in ongoing acts of self-care in service of you—and all those who love you, watch you, and are cared for by you. Individually and collectively, we can begin to generate a new world of possibilities—a new world with ever-growing pockets of communities of care reweaving a new invitation for our collective evolution and a brighter future for all the generations after us. We are—you are—the change we've been waiting for. Stop waiting. Create a new world by starting with yourself. Now is the time to inspire, model, and carve out the infinite pathways of tender and fierce care to reimagine and live in a more loving and caring world. **m&b**

G Heath and Nicole Reed are co-founders of Living Metta (living "loving kindness"), a continuing education company now offering touch therapy tools and self-care practices in their online community. They also lead workshops and retreats across the country and overseas and have been team-teaching touch and movement therapy for over 20 years. In addition to offering live classes, Heath and Nicole are life coaches offering home study, bodywork, self-care videos, and online courses that nourish you. Try their community free for 30 days at livingmetta.com/trial.