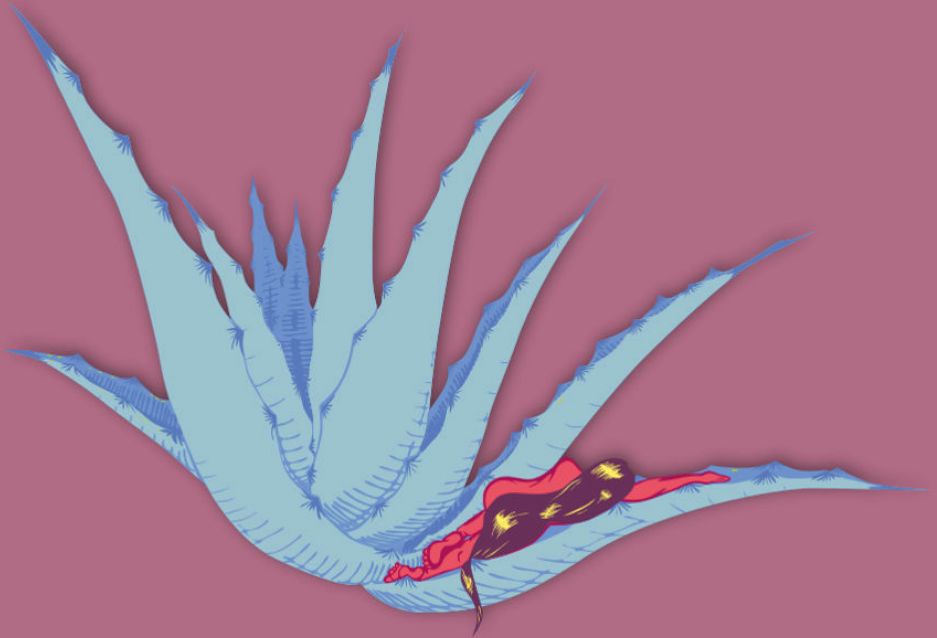




CYBERWOMEN



Self-care

**INSTITUTE FOR
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Building feminist self-care

- **Objective(s):** To give participants an opportunity to reflect on the importance of self-care in their daily lives, allowing them to build a definition of self-care in a judgement-free environment.
- **Length:** 30 minutes
- **Format:** Exercise
- **Skill level:** Basic
- **Required knowledge:**
 - None required
- **Related sessions/exercises:**
 - Personal perceptions of security¹
 - Who do you trust?²
- **Needed materials:**
 - A rubber ball (or any small, throwable object)
- **Recommendations:** Self-care is an essential part of a holistic digital security practice, and is important to consistently reinforce and encourage – it is highly recommended that you distribute exercises from this module throughout your training. for this and all sessions in your train-

¹<https://cyber-women.com/en/rethinking-our-relationship-with-technology/personal-perceptions-of-security/>

²<https://cyber-women.com/en/trust-building-exercises/who-do-you-trust/>

ing, always be conscious of and sensitive to women's different physical abilities and limitations. this exercise is best done near the start of the training, or at the beginning of an individual training day; as it is a very reflective and introspective exercise, make sure it is well spaced from other self-care related exercises.

This exercise was adapted from content in Mujeres Al Borde's Manual "Self-Care and Feminist Healing for Unmanageable"

Leading the exercise

1. Begin the exercise by introducing the idea of self-care – ask participants if they are familiar with the concept, or know what it is. Define the concept of self-care for the group, and explain that this exercise will be focus on self-care as a feminist practice in the context of WHRDs.
2. Now, explain how this (very simple) exercise works:
 - Have participants get up and out of their seats, giving them all a few moments to stretch and move around – then, have everyone stand in a circle.
 - You will begin by gently throwing a small ball (or other throwable object) to one of the participants.
 - When they catch it, you will ask them a question eliciting their thoughts on aspects of self-care as it relates to them personally (you can use the examples included below).
 - Once they have answered, the participant will throw the ball back to you; then, you will throw it to another participant, and repeat the process above. You can keep going until everyone has had the chance to answer a question.

Here are some example questions you can use for this exercise (feel free to also ask any other similar questions focused on self-care that you can think of):

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- What is self-care for you? What is collective care? How are they different?
 - Is self-care an issue addressed in your organizations, groups or collectives?
 - Do you practice self-care? What are your self-care practices?
 - Do you find it difficult to think of yourself as a person who deserves care?
 - Do you find difficult to think in yourself as a person whom deserves care?
 - As WHRDs, do you think our tendency is to focus more on taking care others at the expense of ourselves?
 - Do you feel that you're aware of what your body and soul needs?
3. Once everybody has had the chance to answer a question, or otherwise express their thoughts or practices related to self-care, close the discussion by giving a quick summary of what was shared by the group – is this a group of women who are new to self-care as an intentional practice, and perhaps doesn't practice it very often (or at all)? Perhaps these are women who are already quite familiar with self-care, and practice it regularly? Or maybe it's a mix of women, some of whom are very familiar and others not so much, who can learn from each other? Highlight any insights or practices shared by the group – and make sure to positively emphasize anything they are already doing well!
 4. Ask the group – are the responsibilities that we have as women human rights defenders different from those of our male counterparts? Discuss the social burdens they are expected to carry, especially the caretaker role - to take care of home and family, and sometimes even work and colleagues – that society often imposes on women.
 5. Analyze how these additional responsibilities can impact their work as WHRDs, and how this compares to the challenges faced by men. Here, you could also raise the issue of the guilt often experienced by WHRDs – they must frequently decide between their activism and their personal lives and families, and feel that regardless of their choice, their choosing of one signifies a profound neglect of the other.

6. After these discussions, close the exercise by asking participants if they would like to propose any self-care practices for the training process; for example, this could mean beginning the training a bit later each day, taking more frequent and shorter breaks, taking certain meals together, etc.

The loving touch

- **Objective(s):** Conectarse las unas con las otras a través del tacto y contacto corporal para reflexionar sobre cómo damos y recibimos amor, cariño y afecto.
- **Length:** 20-30 minutes
- **Format:** Exercise
- **Skill level:** Basic
- **Required knowledge:**
 - None required
- **Related sessions/exercises:**
 - The rules of the game¹
 - Building feminist self-care²
- **Needed materials:**
 - Mattresses or blankets
 - Cushions or pillows
 - Quiet, relaxing music
- **Recommendations:** Self-care is an essential part of a holistic digital security practice, and is important to consistently reinforce and encour-

¹<https://cyber-women.com/en/trust-building-exercises/the-rules-of-the-game/>

²<https://cyber-women.com/en/self-care/building-feminist-self-care/>

age – it is highly recommended that you distribute exercises from this module throughout your training. for this and all sessions in your training, always be conscious of and sensitive to women's different physical abilities and limitations. both you and other participants must remain aware of and sensitive to those women who may not be comfortable with being touched by others (this is especially true of certain cultures over others) – for this reason, this exercise is best for groups of women who already know and trust one another. if some women prefer not to participate in the activity, let them know that this is completely acceptable. reassure them that they will not be made to feel uncomfortable, and that they can still participate by lying down and taking a few minutes to relax with slow, deep breaths.

This exercise was adapted from content in the IM Defenders Self-Care Manual

Leading the exercise

1. Arrange the blankets, cushions and pillows in a circle on the floor - ask half of the group to lie down on their backs in the circle, with their heads towards the center as if forming the petals of a flower. Invite them to close their eyes and relax. Make sure there is at least one-person-width of space between each participant.
2. Ask the other half of participants get comfortable in the spaces between the other participants, each in a seated position next to the knees of those who are lying down.
3. You will lead this session using your voice. Explain to the seated group that they will give a "loving touch" to the women lying down next to them, touching and caressing them in a respectful way as you will soon describe. Those who are not comfortable touching others can place their hand on the head or shoulder of their partner, or simply close their eyes and listen to your voice.

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4. In a calm, soothing tone of voice, you will give the seated women several instructions for their loving touches, with 2-3 minutes of spacing between each. Remind everybody that breath is very important for this exercise – they should all breathe slowly, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth:
 - **First Instruction:** Caress the head of your partner.
 - **Second Instruction:** Caress the forehead of your partner.
 - **Third Instruction:** Caress the arms of your partner.
 - **Fourth Instruction:** Caress the hands and fingers of your partner.
 5. As the group progresses through the activity, talk about:
 - As women activists and human rights defenders, we typically have very little time for ourselves. Those who are caressing their partners are allowing them a rare opportunity to relax and feel taken care of.
 - The social burdens and responsibilities carried by women – as human rights defenders, mothers, sisters, we are always expected to take care of others, but do we take care of ourselves? Our lives often have very little space for self-care or collective care.
 6. Once the women who are seated are done caressing the hands and fingers of their partner, give the women who are lying down a few moments to open their eyes and change positions with her partner. Repeat the process above, so that everyone who has given also has the chance to receive.

Look

- **Objective(s):** Women will push back on any feelings of monotony, disenchantment, sadness and disconnection by activating their desire to dream and rejoice with life.
- **Length:** 20 minutes (depends on group size)
- **Format:** Exercise
- **Skill level:** Basic
- **Required knowledge:**
 - None required
- **Related sessions/exercises:**
 - The loving touch¹
 - Building feminist self-care²
- **Needed materials:**
 - An open and relaxed mind
- **Recommendations:** Self-care is an essential part of a holistic digital security practice, and is important to consistently reinforce and encourage – it is highly recommended that you distribute exercises from this module throughout your training. for this and all sessions in your train-

¹<https://cyber-women.com/en/self-care/the-loving-touch/>

²<https://cyber-women.com/en/self-care/building-feminist-self-care/>

ing, always be conscious of and sensitive to women's different physical abilities and limitations.

This exercise was adapted from content in *Mujeres Al Borde's Manual "Self-Care and Feminist Healing for Unmanageable"*

Leading the exercise

1. Begin by explaining how, in the daily life of a woman activist or human rights defender, it can be easy to become overwhelmed by feelings of monotony, disenchantment, sadness and disconnection to overcome.
2. Continue by explaining that, during this exercise, participants will address those feelings they experience when they are struggling, or feel lost and without a sense of direction – they will do this by activating an energy point which, in traditional Eastern medicine, activates the desire to dream and to feel enchanted by life again.
3. Invite the participants to sit in a circle, either in their seats or on the floor.
4. Lead the group through the following steps (have them repeat this three times):
 - Locate your energy point – it sits right between your eyes, just below your eyebrows and just above the bridge of your nose.
 - Inhale with a deep, cleansing breath and hold it.
 - With your thumb, press down on your energy point – as you exhale, think of something that inspires you and makes you feel alive.
5. Finalize the session by inviting participants to use this technique whenever they feel the need to center themselves and push back on feelings of despair or melancholy. Talk about how it is okay to feel afraid, tired or disenchanting at times, and how everybody has felt this was at one time or another.

Our reflection

- **Objective(s):** To give participants an opportunity to think about their own self-care practices – specifically, which ones they already do well, which ones they could improve, and which ones they might want to adopt.
- **Length:** 20-30 minutes
- **Format:** Exercise
- **Skill level:** Basic
- **Required knowledge:**
 - None required
- **Related sessions/exercises:**
 - I decide¹
 - The loving touch²
 - Building feminist self-care³
 - Look⁴
- **Needed materials:**
 - Mirrors for each participant

¹<https://cyber-women.com/en/determining-the-best-solution/i-decide/>

²<https://cyber-women.com/en/self-care/the-loving-touch/>

³<https://cyber-women.com/en/self-care/building-feminist-self-care/>

⁴<https://cyber-women.com/en/self-care/look/>

- Dot stickers
- Optional: Participants can use a photo of themselves instead of mirror (ask them to bring these ahead of time)
- **Recommendations:** Self-care is an essential part of a holistic digital security practice, and is important to consistently reinforce and encourage – it is highly recommended that you distribute exercises from this module throughout your training. to create an environment that encourages relaxation and introspection, you may light some candles, burn some incense, or play some soft, soothing music during this exercise.

Leading the Exercise

1. Give each participant a small mirror, or if not using mirrors, ask them to take out their photos of themselves. Hand out the dot stickers.
2. Explain that you will read a series of statements, which participants should answer either “Yes” or “No” for themselves. For each time they answer “No” to a statement, they should place a dot sticker on the mirror or on their photo.
3. Below is a list of example statements that you can during this exercise; however, based on what you know about the group (and how comfortable the individual participants are with one another) you can add additional statements, or avoid certain ones:
 - Every night, I get at least 8 hours of sleep and wake up feeling rested and ready to start the day;
 - During the last six months / one year, I have had the option of taking a vacation available to me and have taken one;
 - I have a healthy diet and make the effort to exercise regularly, to keep my body and mind in balance;
 - I always find a little time for myself to read, to sleep, or to spend time with my friends and family;

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- Whenever I get sick, I take days off to recover and concentrate on getting better, not on my work;
 - Whenever I am overloaded, I always say no to offers of additional work;
 - I get my semiannual gynecological exams as recommended;
 - I take time to clarify and resolve misunderstandings with loved ones or work colleagues when any conflicts arise;
 - I keep an 8-hour per day work schedule, which both myself and my organization respect;
4. When you finish with the questions, ask participants - What do they see in the mirror (or on their photos)? Bring the group together in a circle to discuss the effects that can excessive work burdens, poor social practices at work, or insufficient care for body and mind can have on individuals, blurring out their essence and obscuring who they really are at heart.
 5. Go around the circle and ask whoever feels comfortable doing so to set an intention – that intention should be to begin taking better care of themselves by doing one of the self-care activities mentioned earlier more regularly.

Our reflection

The act of NO

- **Objective(s):** Reflection opportunity for women to think about on the burdens placed on them - as women, human rights defenders, or activists – and how they can better justify for themselves the need for self-care.
- **Length:** 10-15 minutes
- **Format:** Exercise
- **Skill level:** Basic
- **Required knowledge:**
 - None required
- **Related sessions/exercises:**
 - None
- **Needed materials:**
 - Honesty and Sensitivity
- **Recommendations:** Self-care is an essential part of a holistic digital security practice, and is important to consistently reinforce and encourage – it is highly recommended that you distribute exercises from this module throughout your training. some women may not feel comfortable telling their stories (see below), in which case they can instead tell the story of a friend, sister, or co-worker.

Leading the exercise

1. Introduce the exercise by talking with the group about the pressures that society often places on women – societal and cultural norms dictate that women must work two or three times as hard as men to prove their self-worth, for example.
2. Talk about how women human rights defenders face even more burdens – work overloads, self-guilt for failing to meet deadlines or accomplish goals, and being expected to take care of others' needs before their own are just a few examples.
3. Now, explain that with this exercise, participants will have an opportunity to reflect on the burdens they carry with them. Start by organizing the group into pairs.
4. Ask each pair to tell each other a story about a time they wanted to say NO, but didn't or couldn't – this could be a time they wanted to say no to extra work, or to a request for a favor, to spend time with a loved one or to fulfill another commitment. You can start by telling a story of your own, from a time when you wanted to say NO – for example:
 - I had planned a dinner with several friends, but while I was at work I was asked to stay late to resolve a problem that had arisen with an important project. I couldn't say NO, but I really, really wanted to.
5. Once each pair finishes, tell them that they will now re-tell their stories to each other; however, this time, they will change their stories as if they had actually said NO.
6. Tell participants that, if they wish, when they tell these alternative versions of their stories they can include how they would have explained (to their boss, colleague, or whoever was making the request of them) the reason why they are saying NO. This is not required, but it can be healthy reflection on the importance of making time for themselves.

Love letter to myself

- **Objective(s):** To provide space and time for women human right defenders to think about themselves, their concerns, and the actions they can take to relieve the pressures they face.
- **Length:** 20 minutes
- **Format:** Exercise
- **Skill level:** Basic
- **Required knowledge:**
 - None required
- **Related sessions/exercises:**
 - None
- **Needed materials:**
 - Paper and Pens
 - Projector and laptop/computer (to show the sentences below)
 - Optional: if you would prefer not to have a projector for this session, you can write out the sentences below on a large piece of flipchart or poster board.
- **Recommendations:** Self-care is an essential part of a holistic digital security practice, and is important to consistently reinforce and encourage – it is highly recommended that you distribute exercises from this module throughout your training. depending on the group you are

working with (and the amount of time you have for this exercise) consider closing this with a reflection on self-care and why it is important. ask participants - when was the last time they asked themselves how they felt? is their activism having an impact in their health? how are they taking care of the most important resources they have for their activism work (themselves)?

Leading the exercise

1. On a prepared slide or sheet of flipchart paper, show participants the following:

Dear,

I have been watching you lately, I know you are having a difficult time with...

I also know you are concerned about

I just wanted to make sure you knew

Remember you are great at

I really think that you should

And maybe try doing in the coming weeks.

Love, Yourself

2. Give one sheet of paper to each participant - ask them to fill in the blank space "Dear" with their name, and to complete the remaining sentences that were provided.
3. Remind participants that they will not have to share their letter with the rest of the group - this is a deeply personal activity.