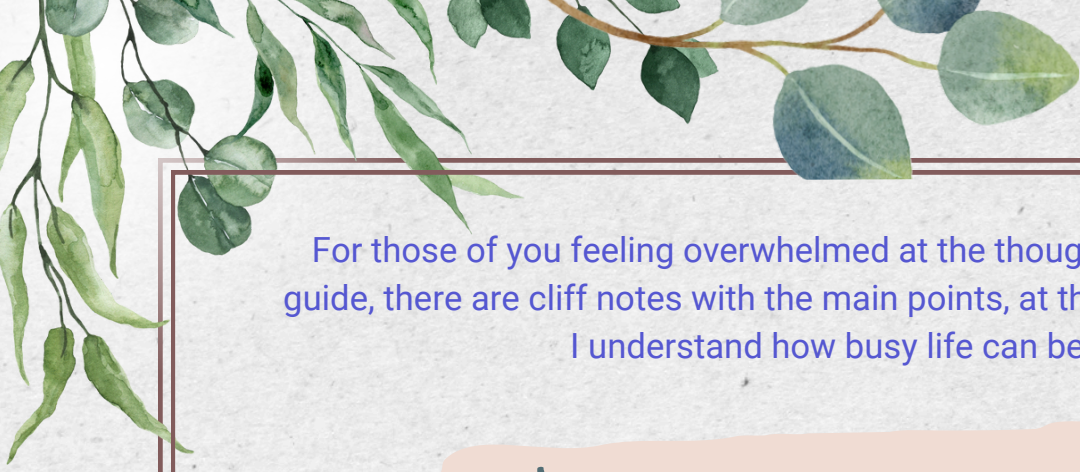




# When Self-Care Feels Selfish

How to overcome this  
roadblock to self-care  
and put your needs back in  
the picture!



For those of you feeling overwhelmed at the thought of reading this guide, there are cliff notes with the main points, at the end of the guide. I understand how busy life can be!


## INTRODUCTION

Most women know that self-care is important—finding the time for it is usually the issue.

We live busy lives, and **self-care most often ends up at the bottom of our lists**—a list that keeps growing, and as it does self-care moves further and further down the list.

In talking to women over the years, **one of the major reasons self-care gets bumped down on the list** is that, for many women, **putting their own needs ahead of others feels selfish.**

Because self-care is so important and this is such a common belief, I put together this guide to help you **explore whether this is a belief you want to hold on to.**



Before getting started it is **important for you to know that this information is provided for informational and educational purposes only. It is not meant to be a prescription for what you should do or to replace the advice of any of your health care providers. Downloading this guide does not mean we have a professional client/therapist relationship.**

# YOU GET TO DECIDE

Those of you familiar with my work know that **my passion is supporting women in being themselves and in trusting their own wisdom.**

So, I didn't create this guide to tell you that believing self-care is selfish is wrong or needs changing.

**Only you get to decide what you believe.**

My hope for this guide is to get you thinking about

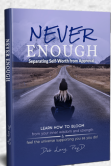
- **why you believe taking care of yourself is selfish**
- **and whether it is working for you.**

Let's start with the "why."

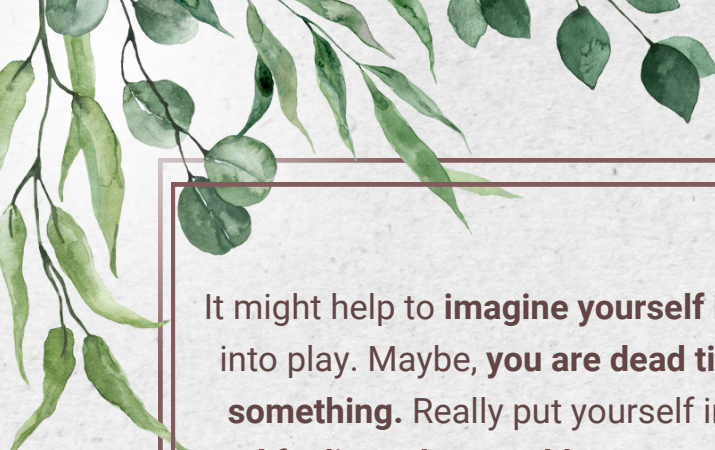
## WHERE DID THE BELIEF COME FROM?

I have some theories about why this belief is so common in women, and if you would like to learn more about those ideas, check out my book. \*

**Where do you believe the belief that self-care is selfish came from?**  
Take some time to reflect on how you came to believe that taking care of yourself is selfish.



\*[Never Enough—Separating Self-Worth from Approval](#)



It might help to **imagine yourself in a situation** where this belief would come into play. Maybe, **you are dead tired, and a friend or family member needs something.** Really put yourself in that situation and **imagine the thoughts and feelings that would come up. What are the beliefs that would drive you to help them even though you are exhausted?**

Use the space below to record what you notice.



Once you've identified the beliefs, **try to identify the source of those beliefs or where you learned them. Think about why you believe it.**


Jot down what you discover in the space below.





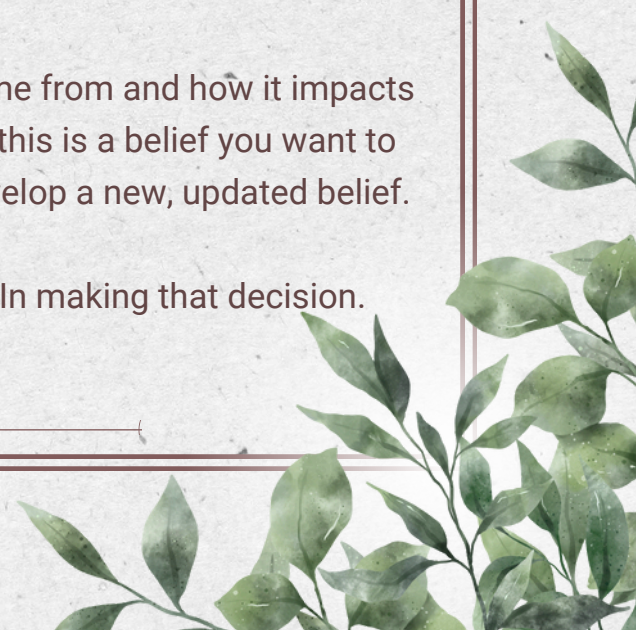
## THE IMPACT IN YOUR LIFE

Now take some time to **brainstorm about the advantages and disadvantages of believing that self-care is selfish.** How does this belief serve you and what is the cost? In other words what do you get out of avoiding self-care because you believe it is selfish, and what is the cost in your life?



Now that you are clear on where this belief came from and how it impacts your life, the next step is to consider whether this is a belief you want to hold onto or whether it would be worth it to develop a new, updated belief.

Here are some ideas that might help you in In making that decision.





## THINGS TO CONSIDER

As I shared in the beginning, my goal is to empower you. I could tell you to stop believing self-care is selfish, and I doubt it would do any good until you want to change this belief.


In this section, I will share some of the realizations women have had that motivated them to change their views about self-care.

The first one was really understanding the true meaning of selfishness.

## WHAT IS SELFISHNESS?

Let's look at the definition.

Merriam Webster defines it as: ***concerned excessively or exclusively with oneself: seeking or concentrating on one's own advantage, pleasure, or well-being without regard for others. 2.: arising from concern with one's own welfare or advantage in disregard of others. a selfish act.***



Does this **sound like you?** Most of the women who have come to me struggling with this belief, **were over-concerned with the welfare of others.** For many, if not most, **at a deep level there was a connection between feeling okay and lovable, and approval.** If this is you, it will most likely take some additional work to change this belief.



## ADDING SELF-CARE DOESN'T MEAN DISREGARDING OTHERS

**One reason women often equate self-care with selfishness, is that when they finally do take time for themselves, they do so when they have reached a limit**—when they are so over taking care of everyone else that they **no longer care what others think or need.**

This usually **feels good in the moment and later results in a great deal of guilt.**

If we go back to the **definition of selfishness, one of the components was disregarding others.** So, **each time women wait until they are past their limits** to take care of themselves and disregard the needs of others in the process, **they reinforce the belief that self-care is selfish.** Make sense?

Take a moment to **think of a time when this has happened in your life.** **Most of us can think of a time when we have disregarded the needs of others because we have gone past our limits. I sure can.**



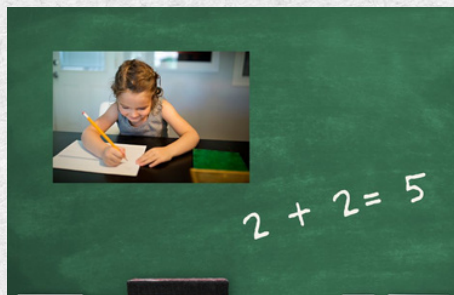
**Acting in this way represents changes in our nervous system during stress,** so there is no need to get down on yourself as you recall a time when this has happened.

Guilt can also surface because disregarding the needs of others can light up core beliefs about what it means to be a “good” person —beliefs that were developed early in life.

## BELIEFS ARE OFTEN FORMED IN CHILDHOOD

Most of **our beliefs about ourselves, relationships, and the world are formed when we are young—a time when our brains are immature.** We lack the cognitive abilities that develop throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.

As a result, the **beliefs we form in childhood often don’t add up, or as a friend of mine used to say, “We have a lot of  $2 + 2 = 5$  beliefs.”**



A good example of this is a child feeling responsible for their parents’ divorce.

**Our conclusions are usually very concrete and lacking in context or perspective.**

For instance, **your mom might say, “Don’t be selfish,” as you reach for the last cookie.** As adults, we can see that she is referring to the cookies. **To a child, this can become the foundation of a worry about being selfish.**

**Another origin of this struggle around self-care is religion.**



## RELIGIOUS TRAINING

Many women **believe that self-care is selfish because of their spiritual or religious beliefs.**

Trisha experienced a great deal of fear and shame when she even thought about putting her need for self-care higher on her list. **She was convinced that to be a good Christian, she needed to put the needs of others before her own.**

She really struggled with this until she realized that **many passages in the Bible reference the importance of self-care** and that Jesus took breaks between preaching and healing. **Investigating her religious beliefs freed her to think about self-care in a new way.**

I'd encourage you to **think about where and when you formed any religious beliefs about self-care.** Were you a child and made generalized conclusions from words that you heard? **Consult religious leaders you trust, or as Trisha did, search for answers in the teachings of your faith.**

## IT'S DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN

From a practical standpoint, believing self-care is selfish just doesn't work very well. It is not sustainable. I'm imagining you know this, or you wouldn't be reading this guide.

We just can't keep giving and not take care of ourselves. Well, we can, and there will be consequences.

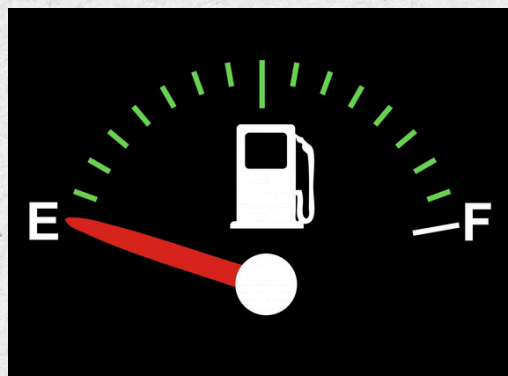
Theresa's experience is an example of the consequences of not making sure our needs are in the picture. Theresa was overwhelmed. She had a full-time job, a family, and a mother who was ill. She spent all of her time focusing on the needs of the people in her life. She was struggling to continue to care for those she loved, and she just couldn't put her needs into the picture. As a result, she felt overwhelmed, anxious, and depressed, and her health was suffering.


## PUT YOUR MASK ON FIRST

Just like they say on planes before takeoff, we need to put our masks on before helping others. Theresa's intentions were good, and her poor health was preventing her from offering the care that felt so important to her, and this was adding to her stress.

My clients have come up with ingenious ways of reminding themselves to "put their mask on first." For instance, equating their ability to give with the amount of gas in a car or money in a checking account.

You can't drive a car without gas or write checks with a zero balance. Similarly, we can't keep giving when we have nothing to give.





**Madeline, who struggled with saying no when her employees asked for help, started taking the time to ask herself, “How full is my tank?” before replying to their requests.**

**Checking on how much you have to give, adds your needs to the equation.**

This will keep you from

- **swinging from giving too much to no longer caring about the needs of others and reinforcing the idea that taking care of yourself is selfish.**
- **giving when you really have nothing left to give.**

**Because how can you really help with nothing left to give?**


## **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

**Would it be worth reconsidering any connections you have made between self-care and selfishness?**

**If so, what will you need in order to start work on changing these beliefs?**

**Will you need to**

- **think about what you might say to a good friend in need of a break?  
Would you tell her it is selfish to take a break when others need her?**
  - **gather more information from your spiritual texts or leaders?**
  - **remind yourself of the definition of selfishness?**
  - **ask yourself how full your tank is or how much is in your account before agreeing to help?**
-



## KEEPING YOUR FINGER ON THE PULSE OF YOUR INNER LIFE

**To change this belief, you are going to need to become aware of when it fires up.** Most of the time we are unaware of how our beliefs are guiding our behavior.

**You will need to come up with a plan for how you will notice this belief.**

You might **start gradually by reflecting on your day** and thinking about when during the day you were solely focusing on the needs of others and forgetting about your own needs.

After doing that for some time, **see if you can notice when you are only focusing on the needs of others while it is happening.**

**Awareness is the first step in change.**

Take a moment to write down your plan to increase your awareness.



Before I end, I want to share with you an analogy that many of my clients have found helpful.

# THE TWO-WHEELED CART

**Imagine a relationship as being a cart with two wheels. One wheel represents you and your needs, and the other wheel represents the other person or persons in the relationship and their needs.**



**In order for the cart, or relationship, to move forward, both wheels have to be rolling and on opposite sides of the cart.** If you ignore your needs, your wheel will no longer turn, and the cart or relationship will be stuck.

Likewise, if you are always on the other side of the cart trying to help the other wheel move, the cart will be stuck.

**A healthy relationship, just like a two-wheeled cart, needs to have both partners taking care of their wheel and not being over on the other side, abandoning their needs while only focusing on the needs of others.**



## WHAT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER?

Take a moment and write down the main points from this guide that you would like to remember.



I HOPE THIS GUIDE HAS BEEN  
HELPFUL

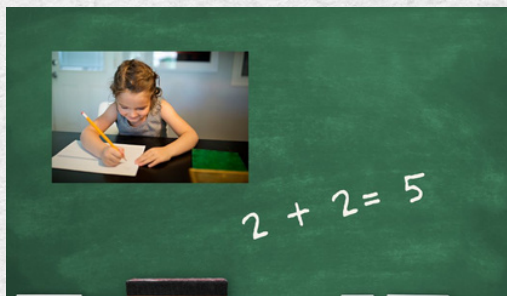
**Be patient and kind as you work on changing these patterns. If you have questions or comments, I'd love to hear them. My email is [info@creatingchoicesdeblang.com](mailto:info@creatingchoicesdeblang.com)**

[creatingchoicesdeblang.com](http://creatingchoicesdeblang.com)



# CLIFF NOTES

- only you get to decide what you believe
- try to identify where you learned that self-care is selfish. Was it from childhood or do your beliefs have religious origins? Beliefs formed in childhood are often concrete and lack perspective. They are often not factual, even if they feel true.



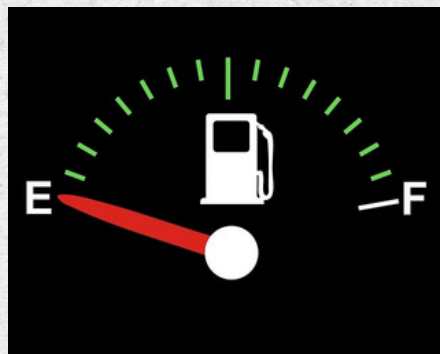
- are your beliefs sustainable without impacting your emotional or physical well-being? Take a moment to jot down your thoughts.



# CLIFF NOTES—CONTINUED

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

- remember what we are told before the plane departs, “Put your mask on before helping others.” We can’t keep giving when we have nothing to give.
- Consider what you would say to a good friend who needed a break, would you tell her it was selfish to take care of herself?
- clients have used thinking about gas levels in a car or how much money is in a bank account to help them consider their needs. You cannot write a check with no money in your account or drive a car without gas. Likewise, you can’t keep giving when you have nothing to give.



- Try asking, “How full is my tank?” before agreeing to a request for help.

## CLIFF NOTES—CONTINUED

- If you fear taking time for yourself for religious reasons, spend time studying the religious teachings of your faith or talking to religious leaders you trust.
- finally use the image of a two-wheeled cart to help you remember that taking care of your own need is essential in a relationship. For more on this go to page 12.
- be kind and gentle with yourself as you work on these beliefs!



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