

I MATTER  
SELF-CARE  
JOURNAL  
FOR GBV STAFF



**NORWEGIAN CHURCH AID**  
actalliance

“I have always wondered  
how women who carry war  
inside their bones  
still grow flowers between their teeth.”

Ijeoma Umehinyuo - Poet



*"How do you survive war," I ask?*

*"I talk to the water," she says.*

*"When we tell the water something bad,  
water takes it from us.*

*When I was a kid and I would have a nightmare,  
I would run to my grandmother,  
and she would tell me:*

*'Go to the water and tell that to the water. Let  
the water take it from you and carry it away.*

*Water carries everything bad away.'*

*And that is why even though I am already a  
grown up, all my life I do this and it works for  
me."*

Alona Stoyanova, GBV Advisor



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Name

*We need different things at different times.*

Sometimes we are upset and want to be alone, or quiet,  
or paint, or sing.

Other times, we want to talk or write.

All of that is what you are going to do in this journal.

*Self-care should not feel like a formula.*

## *How to use this journal?*



This “I Matter journal” is about self-care, managing stress and avoiding burnout. It invites you to express yourself in different ways.

As you read, page by page, **try different things.** Feel free. Write a poem exploring how a topic affects you or take a walk while humming to yourself or discuss the topic with a friend.

In response to any page in this journal you can:

1. Write (poems, stories, reflections)
2. Share & discuss with a friend
3. Move (dance, walk, stretch)
4. Draw or paint
5. Sing, hum or whistle a song to yourself

This journal is divided into 4 major themes that you can write, discuss, walk, draw or sing through.

The themes are:

1.The ways my work changed me, Pg. 10-26



2.The ways my work causes me stress & other strong emotions, Pg. 27-51



3.Finding Balance, Pg. 52-69



4. Joy & Meaning , Pg. 70-80

The theme of joy is at the end of each section, because we ALWAYS need more joy.



Move around to any page you choose.

You can go page by page. You can skip pages.

You can use the same page as many times as you want.

Or, you can just close your eyes and open ANY page.

**How you use this journal is up to you.**

Make this journal MESSY!!!!!!



Really really WFESSU!!!

All of you is welcome here!

The ways my work  
changed me  
Theme 1



Remember you can move around to any page you choose.

# Let's start this journey into yourself



Close your eyes.

Feel your feet on the ground and let the ground support you.

Let the chair support your bottom and your back.

Pull a breath all the way down into your belly.

Hold it for a second.

Fully exhale.

It's like a balloon in your belly that fills slowly, then holds,  
then releases.

In, hold, and out.

*Now, think back to the time when you chose to become  
a GBV aid worker.*

*Who were you at that time?*

*What were your original hopes?*

*What was the dream?*

*Think about now.*

*Think about what it is like for you now doing this work.*

*How have you felt seeing suffering, hearing horrible stories, and knowing so many people who suffer?*

*How does it feel being a person who gives to other people?  
As you think about the helper you are, how does your body feel?  
How does your heart feel?*

Take a few more breaths, pull the air down into the balloon in your belly, hold, and release.

Good. Notice your feet touching the ground and feel your bottom and back in the chair.

Wiggle your fingers and toes a bit.  
Now, when you are ready open your eyes.

Remain silent.  
Notice the thoughts, feelings  
and memories that come into your mind.

Write or draw on the following page for several minutes.

Adapted from the Headington Institute





Draw or write.  
This page is only for you.

Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw



*Burnout looks different for everyone.  
It changes how we act and feel.*

“I knew nothing about self-care and burnout. Instead, I wondered why I was so **irritable** and **tired** all the time, and dreaded hearing one more tragic story.”

Maria - Aid Worker



“Aid workers often suffer from the  
*I-don't-have-needs-syndrome.*

Let's define it.

No matter how unwell you feel,  
or what you are going through in your personal life,  
you will show up at work.

The mission is to make sure that no one will ever  
suspect that you have personal needs beyond  
serving those in need.”

Alessandra Pigni - Aid Worker, Psychologist

*In what ways do you relate to this?*



Everything we experience is  
inside us.

The ugly moments.  
The magical moments.  
We carry it all everyday.  
It's our invisible baggage.







*What are you carrying around?*

Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw

“So many of us are used to living from one crisis to the another. We have become so accustomed to crises and deadlines that we feel almost lost if we are not putting out some kind of fire.”

Anne Wilson Schaeff - Psychologist

*How do you feel when you are not involved in a crisis?*



*In what ways has GBV work had positive influences on the way  
you see the world,  
see yourself  
or what matters to you?*



When I feel I need to cry,  
I find a quiet place.  
I remind myself that it's okay to cry.  
And I let myself cry.



*What do you do?*



I am...



“The thing about aid work is that they don’t tell you, you can’t un-see or un-experience what you’ve seen, good or bad. And the truth is, I don’t want to - all of those experiences have made me who I am.”

Becca - Aid Worker

*Who has this work made you into?  
Who have you become?*



Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw



*What wounds **AND** gifts has GBV work given you today?*

Who are you when no one is watching?

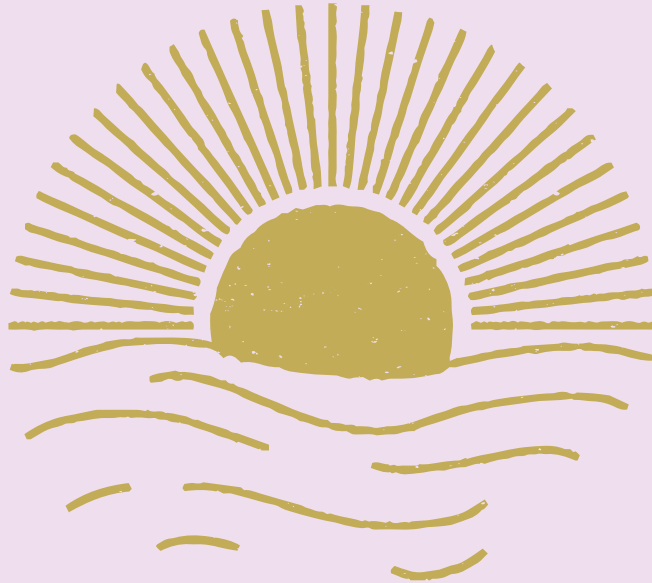




Reach as far as you can to the sky.  
Reach down to your toes.  
As you stretch, think about:

*Why do you do this work?*





Choose a favorite song or sound.

Close your eyes & open your ears.

**Separate each sound** one by one.

Listen to each instrument or voice separately.

**Feel** the music instead of **thinking** about the music.

The ways my work causes me stress  
& other strong emotions


Theme 2



Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw

Sometimes our hearts hurt from the stories we hear.





It's okay to feel whatever you are feeling.  
There is no 'normal' or 'right' way to feel.

We are all affected differently by working with  
trauma survivors.



“Resilience is the ability to ‘fall  
7 times and stand up on  
the 8th fall’  
as a Japanese proverb says.



Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw



Sometimes you don't have the words. You just feel it.  
Draw the feeling.



Take a walk.

As you are walking, pick an emotion you felt today and gently ask yourself “why?” five times, diving deeper into the root cause of this emotion. Remember emotions are messengers.

Ask yourself:

*“What does this feeling I have want me to know?”*



Many GBV staff learn to freeze their feelings.

They believe they need to:

*'push through,' 'hang in there,' and 'be tough.'*

*When was a time when you 'pushed through' strong feelings  
when doing GBV work?*

*How would it have been different if you did not push through?*



Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw

Right now I need .....



“It is not possible to suppress some feelings and not others.  
When we push anger down, joy can go with it.  
Trying to hide our feelings is like trying to tie down the wind.”

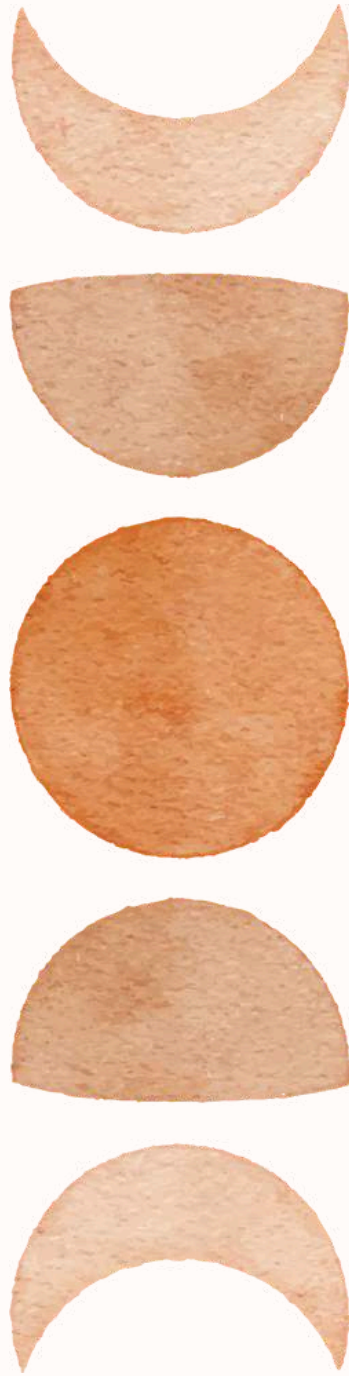
Anne Wilson Schaef - Psychologist





The conversation I've been carrying around in my head today that I haven't been able to have with others is...





Take a Breath

What does stress feel like for you?



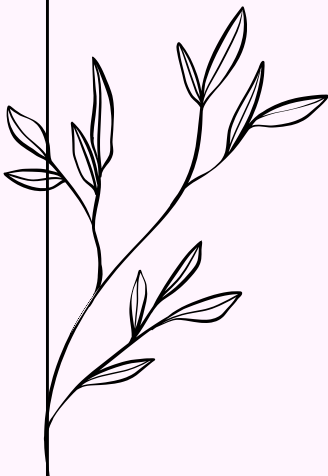
Draw the story of your day  
Today.





Share one recent moment  
when you felt lost in your work  
and did not know what to do?

*How did you find your way?*







“It is normal for us to feel anger.  
Anger is only harmful if it’s held in and ‘starved.’  
When we hold it in, it builds and we find ourselves  
exploding on innocent people.  
We need to find safe places to let our anger out.  
It is our friend.  
It lets us know when something is wrong.  
  
Anger is not the problem. What I do with it is.”

Anne Wilson Schaef - Psychologist

Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw

*How do we let life in, when life is **really really** dark?*



The feeling I've been carrying around in my heart that I have not been able to share with myself and others is....



*What are your feelings right now?*



Imagine you can stretch any feelings-  
anger, love, sadness, or joy - out of your body.

Now try it.

Stretch in response to your feelings.

Move them through your body.

As the feelings move,  
*imagine what these feelings are saying to you?*



*What does it mean to emotionally prepare myself  
for doing GBV work?*

*How do I 'prepare' my eyes, my ears & my heart for  
painful stories?*



You go to very dark places when you work with survivors of war. It's easy to get lost in that darkness.

*How do you find your way through this darkness?*





Sometimes for  
no understandable reason,  
do you just feel like screaming?

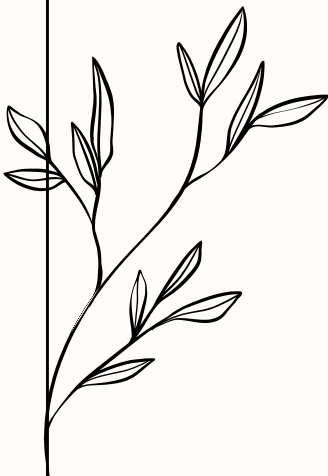
You are not alone.



"You must not be frightened if a sadness rises in front of you larger than any you have ever seen."

Rainer Maria Rilke - Poet

*What are warning signs that you are overwhelmed and need to reach out for support?*





## Guided Imagery

Sit in a quiet place for 5 minutes.

Place your arms above your head.

Take 3 deep breaths.

Close your eyes or focus on a stable object.

Keep breathing deeply.

Let your shoulders and jaw relax.

Imagine sitting somewhere where you feel good.

This could be a real or imagined place.

What does it look like and feel like in this place.

Choose whether you would like to be alone

Or with loved ones.

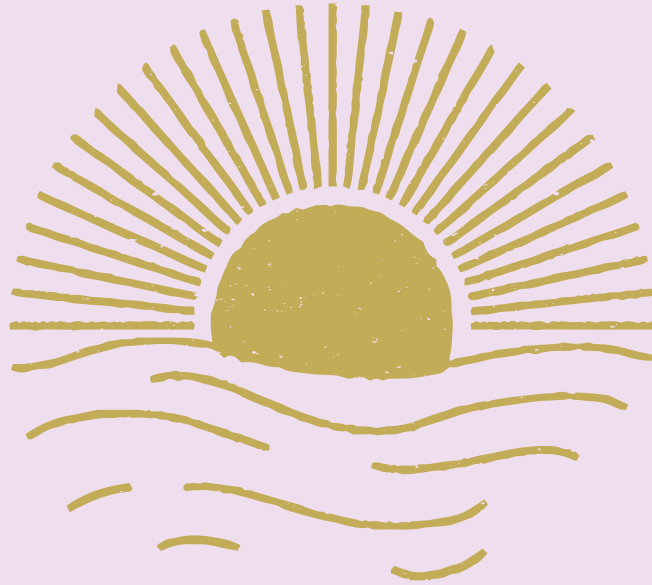
Breathe deeply for a couple of minutes, and build up  
a good picture of what this relaxing place looks like.



Draw a picture of what you imagined, and keep this as a reminder of your own private place where you feel comfortable.

At times when you feel frightened, look at the picture, breathe slowly and remember what it is like to feel good.





Dance.

Dance in the mornings or whenever.  
Imagine while dancing, that your body is being filled  
with enough joy so that you can handle  
the painful stories of the day.

# Finding Balance

## Theme 3



All throughout this journal we are looking for ways  
to take care of ourselves & to **avoid burnout**.  
because let's get 5 things clear:

1. Burnout is not simply too much work.
2. Burnout is not the same as stress.
3. Burnout doesn't go away with a holiday.
4. If you are just tired you are not burned-out.
5. Burnout is an existential issue, not simply a stress problem.

Alessandra Pigni - Psychologist, Aid Worker

You do not want burn out.



"Avoiding burnout isn't about getting three square meals or eight hours of sleep. It's not even necessarily about getting time at home...

Tell people find your rhythm. Your rhythm is what matters to you so much."

Marissa Mayer - Author



What rhythm do you need to successfully balance:  
work, personal life and playtime?





1. You must let the pain visit.
2. You must allow it to teach you.
3. You must not allow it to overstay.

Ijeoma Umehinyuo - Poet



How did you create balance in  
your day today?



"Smile, Breathe and go  
slowly."

Thich Nhat Hanh - Monk





When we feel down, it can be the little things that bring us back to ourselves like smiling with a friend, watching a child play, sitting in the sun, staying quiet, a cup of tea, a good book, listening to a special song, a walk, a sunset, or laughter.

*What brings you back?  
What makes you feel better?*





When you take care of yourself,  
it feels easier to take care of everything else.



Sometimes in GBV work, we put ourselves last,  
at the bottom of the barrel.  
*We say, "I'll eat, if there is time.  
I'll sleep if I finish this report.  
I'll go out with my friends, if I finish this meeting."*  
Sound familiar?



Have a conversation with a close friend  
about a hard moment at work.

Do an activity with this friend that makes  
you smile.



The key to keeping your balance is knowing  
when you have lost it.





Create a buffer between work and home.

Have a ritual that marks the end of the work day -  
such as changing your clothes, drinking a specific type of tea,  
walking home, playing a certain song  
- find something that marks the difference.

*What is a buffer you can create for yourself?*





The little things?  
The little moments?  
They aren't that little.

Jon Kabat-Zinn -Author

*What "little thing" matters to you?*



Sometimes we dont have the words to describe our day.  
That's fine. Draw it. Sing it.





If you only give, you will feel drained.  
If you only receive, you won't enjoy what you have.

*What have you given today?  
What have you received today?*



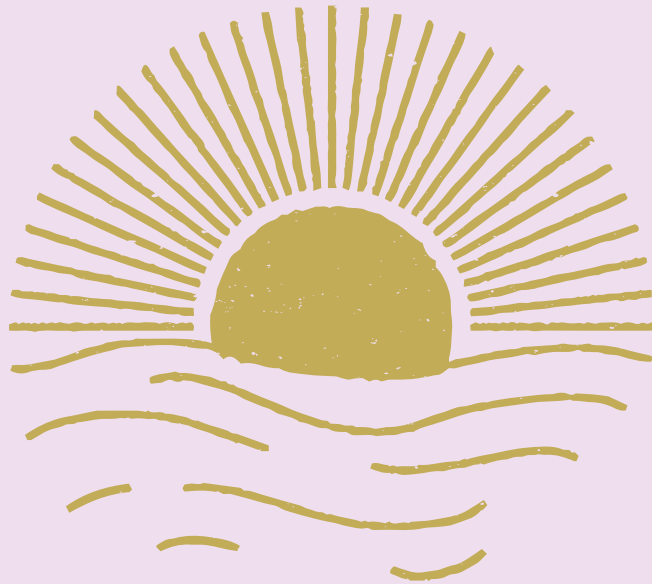
"When your world moves too fast and you lose  
yourself in the chaos,  
introduce yourself to each color of the sunset.  
Re-acquaint yourself with the earth beneath  
your feet.

Thank the air that surrounds you with every  
breath you take.

Find yourself in the appreciation of life."

Christy Ann Martine - Poet





Think of your favorite childhood song.

Sing it.

Get lost in the song.

# Joy & Meaning

## Theme 4



Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw

What made you smile  
Today?



Draw whatever is in your heart right now.





*What was one small, but meaningful  
moment that happened to you this week?  
Why was this meaningful?*



Breathe





Put joy in the center of all that you do.



What was the best sound you heard  
today?

Move  
Write  
Sing  
Talk  
Draw



Stand in front of a mirror, look into your eyes,  
and list five things out loud you love about yourself.  
They can be **ANYTHING!**



“It’s the taste of the broth that makes the tongue stick out.”  
(Good food leads to good conversation)

Haitian Proverb

Just a little reminder that eating a really good meal is also self-care

.

Working in trauma filled environments makes it hard to feel joy.  
We might even feel guilty to be happy.

Write or draw one thing that brings you happiness.  
You can color, sketch, scribble, whatever works for you.





Sometimes GBV work can make us feel like we are on a never ending treadmill.

We forget to celebrate things.  
We are so focused on what we have not done.

Think of one thing you can celebrate today.  
Now, **GO CELEBRATE IT!**







“I don’t have a simple recipe for healing,  
and I believe any short, standard set of  
steps to avoid burnout is nonsense... There is  
no standard recipe.

Yet recipes can give us a sort of ‘roadmap.’”

Alessandra Pigni - Aid Worker, Psychologist



Draw your roadmap

Draw a self-care map.

What self-care practices do you need in your  
life?



What will you take with you from  
this experience?

Reflect on what this journal has taught you

Have you shared any of the information you learned in this journal with anyone else?

What have you shared?


*"Dance in the mornings," she told me,  
"Dance around your room. Play your music.  
Fill your body with enough joy so that you can handle the painful  
stories of the day."*

It was good advice.  
I still dance in the mornings.  
It helps me to stay joyful.

We all need things we can do to find our way back to ourselves  
when we get lost.

I hope this journal helps you to explore ways to take care of  
yourself.

*Serena Thomas*



A big thank you to Serena Thomas for writing this journal;  
Lara Fakhoury and Daniela Arocha Ramirez for their technical review;  
and NCA's GBV teams around the world for their wisdom & creativity.

This resource would not have been possible without the generous support of the  
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

*You are incredible.  
The work you do matters.*



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