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# WHAT NO ONE TELLS YOU ABOUT SELF- CARE

Sometimes looking after yourself feels wrong  
before it feels right.

A guide to understanding guilt, change,  
and your nervous system.

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A Guide from Lynsey Berwick Counselling





## MEET SARAH

Sarah is a 45-year-old teacher and mother of two. Last Tuesday, she booked a yoga class — something she had been putting off for months. The moment she pressed confirm, a familiar feeling crept in: a tight, uneasy sense that she was doing something wrong.

"I should be home," she thought. "The kids need me. There's still so much to do."

She went anyway and spent most of the class thinking about everyone else and not relaxing — the very thing she had booked the class to help with.

Sound familiar?

*(Case study based off many clients sharing similar experiences Sarah is fictitious and not a real client)*



# WHAT MANY PEOPLE NOTICE

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When people begin to look after themselves more intentionally,  
something often shows up internally.

It might sound like:

- "This feels selfish"
- "I should be doing something else"
- "I feel guilty for even thinking about it"
- "I'll do it once everything else is sorted"

Even when there is clear awareness that rest, boundaries, or space  
would help, it can still feel difficult to choose them in the moment.

Many people find themselves asking:

"Why does it feel so difficult to choose myself, even when I know I need  
to?"

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# WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR BRAIN

Your brain learns through repetition what is familiar and what feels safe. Over time, many people develop strong default patterns such as:

- prioritising others first
- responding quickly to requests
- avoiding conflict or disappointment
- staying emotionally available
- earning rest through productivity

These patterns become the brain's most efficient pathways – the route of least resistance.

The more often a behaviour is repeated, the more automatic it becomes. When you begin to act differently, your brain doesn't automatically recognise this as growth or self-care.

Instead, it notices:

"This is not the usual route."

And unfamiliarity often gets experienced as discomfort.



# WHY SELF-CARE CAN FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE



There are many reasons why looking after yourself may feel difficult.

For some people, their sense of worth has become closely tied to being useful, reliable, or needed by others. For others, rest has come to feel like something that must be earned through productivity.

Some people grew up in environments where their emotional needs were overlooked, criticised, or deprioritised. As adults, receiving care – even from themselves – can feel unfamiliar.

Whatever the reason, the common thread is often the same:

Your brain learned that looking after others was the safer, more familiar path.

So when you begin to choose yourself, your nervous system may interpret that change as risky, even when it isn't.



# WHY IT CAN FEEL LIKE GUILT

Sometimes what we experience as guilt is actually the nervous system responding to unfamiliarity.

It can show up as:

- discomfort
- urgency
- self-doubt
- second-guessing
- "I shouldn't be doing this"

These feelings are often signals of change, not signals of wrongdoing.

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If choosing yourself feels difficult,  
it doesn't mean you're selfish.  
It often means you've spent a long  
time learning how to take care of  
everyone else.

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# A HELPFUL REFRAME

Guilt is not always evidence that you've done something wrong.  
Sometimes it is evidence that you are doing something differently.

New can feel wrong before it feels normal.

Imagine your car's fuel warning light comes on.

You wouldn't see it as a sign of failure.

You would recognise it as information.

A reminder that something needs attention.

Looking after yourself works in much the same way.

Rest, boundaries, connection, movement, nourishment, and downtime are not rewards  
for getting everything done.

They are part of the maintenance that allows you to keep going.

You cannot pour from an empty cup, but equally, you cannot drive a car without fuel.

*You are learning a new way of being with yourself.*

# A SMALL PRACTICE

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Check the rule

The next time guilt appears, pause and ask:

"What rule am I breaking?"

You might notice something like:

Others come first

I should always be available

Rest must be earned

Saying no is selfish

Then ask:

"Is this rule helping me thrive, or helping me stay familiar?"

*Even very small pauses begin to create new pathways.*





# REFLECTION

*Think about a recent moment where you felt guilt  
for choosing yourself.*

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What was I about to do?

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What did the guilt feel like it was telling me?

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What might my brain have been trying to protect me from?

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What would a small act of choosing myself look like here?

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# Try a Tiny Experiment

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Choose one small act of self-care this week:

- Sit down with a cup of tea for five uninterrupted minutes
- Delay responding to a non-urgent message
- Take a short walk without using the time to be productive
- Ask yourself what you need before asking someone else
- Leave one task unfinished

Notice what thoughts and feelings show up.

Remember: the goal isn't perfection.

The goal is information.



## What to Expect

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Changing an old pattern rarely feels comfortable straight away.

You may still feel guilty the first few times you choose rest.

You may still feel uncomfortable setting boundaries.

You may still find yourself questioning your decisions.

This doesn't mean the change isn't working.

Often, it means you are practising a new pathway that hasn't yet become familiar.

The goal isn't to stop feeling uncomfortable overnight.

The goal is to become less controlled by the discomfort.

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*You are allowed to learn this  
slowly.*

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Sometimes change doesn't feel confident at first — it feels unfamiliar.

And unfamiliar is where new patterns begin.

This guide is for educational purposes and is not a substitute for personalised therapeutic support.

If this guide resonated with you, it may be because you've recognised a pattern that has been running quietly in the background for a long time.

Change doesn't happen through awareness alone. It happens through practice, support, and creating new experiences that help your nervous system learn something different.

If you'd like support exploring these patterns more deeply, you can find out more about counselling sessions, walk-and-talk therapy, and additional resources at:

[www.lynseyberwickcounselling.com](http://www.lynseyberwickcounselling.com)