

# Doria Feminist Fund Psychosocial Support Manual





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# Chapter 1: Introduction

To the Doria Feminist Fund Community,

Over the last few years Doria has been working to define and document holistic feminist responses to emergency contexts, to understand how we can strengthen support to our grantee partner community in moments of crisis. Our duty of care to the feminist movement ecosystem is to create opportunities for connection, knowledge sharing and exchange, and solidarity, while strengthening the work of Doria grantee partners with access to flexible funding and accompaniment.

In the heart of feminist organizing across the MENA region, our work pulses with both purpose and challenge. This psychosocial support manual emerges from a deep understanding of the complex realities we navigate daily - the delicate balance between our passion for social change and the weight of sustained activism in challenging contexts.

As feminist activists, we often find ourselves standing at the intersection of multiple struggles. Our days might begin with supporting a survivor of violence, continue through strategic planning for a campaign, and end with navigating family expectations or community pressures. This constant engagement, while meaningful, carries profound implications for our wellbeing - both individual and collective.

Doria's approach to crisis preparedness and emergency response is to listen carefully and respond intentionally. This manual emerges from Doria's documentation of the lived experiences of feminist activists across the region, shaped by their stories, challenges, and wisdom. It serves as both a mirror to help us recognize our experiences and a compass to guide us toward sustainable practices of care and resistance.

We invite you to hold this manual as a framework for your own care, for community care, and as an open reflection space so that we may always prioritize healing and care in the face of injustice.

In Solidarity,

The Doria Feminist Fund team

## Who Is This Manual For?

These pages speak to everyone engaged in feminist organizing across the MENA region whether you're a seasoned activist feeling the weight of years of engagement, a community organizer supporting others through crisis, or someone newly exploring the landscape of feminist movement-building. We recognize that each person's journey through activism carries its own unique challenges and needs.

The manual particularly resonates with members of Doria partner organizations, while remaining relevant to the broader feminist movement in the region. It acknowledges that our experiences, while unique to our context, share common threads that weave through our collective struggle.

## Understanding Our Context

Our activism unfolds within a landscape marked by multiple layers of complexity. In many areas, we work against the backdrop of ongoing conflicts or political instability. Some of us navigate direct security threats, while others face subtle but persistent forms of oppression. The economic pressures that many in our region face add another layer of complexity to our work.

We often find ourselves holding multiple roles - as activists, family members, community leaders, and caregivers. Each role brings its own set of demands and expectations, creating a complex web of responsibilities that we must navigate daily. This multiplicity of roles, while enriching, can also contribute to our experience of fatigue and distress.

## How to Use This Manual

Consider this resource a companion in your journey of activism and healing. While the chapters follow a logical progression - from understanding our experiences to implementing practical care strategies - you're invited to engage with the content in ways that best serve your needs. Some might choose to read it sequentially, while others might turn directly to specific sections that speak to their immediate circumstances.

In the chapters that follow, we'll explore key concepts that help us understand our experiences as feminist activists. We'll examine the distinct yet interconnected nature of trauma, fatigue, and distress, before moving into practical strategies for maintaining wellbeing at both individual and collective levels.



## Chapter 2: Understanding Fatigue, Distress, and Trauma in Our Movements

The landscape of feminist organizing in the Arab world spans diverse realities. Our experiences unfold across a spectrum - from areas of relative stability to zones of active conflict, from spaces of chronic crisis to regions under occupation. Within these varied contexts, understanding how fatigue, distress, and trauma manifest becomes essential for our collective wellbeing and the sustainability of our movements.

### Understanding Fatigue: The Body's Wisdom

Fatigue emerges as more than mere tiredness - it represents a profound state of depletion that affects our entire being. In our region, fatigue rarely exists in isolation, instead manifesting as layers of experience that interweave in complex patterns affecting both individuals and communities.

Our bodies speak first through fatigue's physical language. Sleep becomes disrupted, leaving us unrested even after apparent rest. Our immune systems weaken, making us more susceptible to illness that lingers longer than usual. Physical tension settles into our bodies - in our shoulders, backs, or jaws - becoming a constant companion. Many notice shifts in appetite or digestion, while others experience persistent headaches or dizziness that seem resistant to regular remedies.

The mental landscape of fatigue reveals itself through subtle yet profound changes. Tasks requiring sustained attention become increasingly challenging. We might find ourselves reading the same document repeatedly without retaining its content, or struggling to follow complex conversations that once felt natural. Decision-making, even for routine matters, requires additional effort and energy. Our usually sharp strategic thinking becomes dulled, making it harder to navigate the complexities of our work.

The emotional dimension of fatigue often emerges so gradually we might not notice its progression until we're significantly affected. Joy in our work might feel more distant, replaced by a sense of going through motions. We might find ourselves becoming more emotionally reactive or, conversely, experiencing a kind of emotional numbness. Connections with colleagues and community members - usually a source of strength - might feel more challenging to maintain.

### Collective Dimensions of Fatigue in Our Movements

Within our movements and organizations, fatigue manifests in distinct collective patterns. Decision-making processes that once flowed smoothly might become labored and slow. Organizations might find themselves struggling to maintain their usual rhythms of work and response. The vibrant exchange of ideas and strategies that typically characterizes our movements might dim, replaced by a kind of collective heaviness.

## Understanding Distress: When Our World Shifts

Distress manifests as an acute response to overwhelming circumstances, affecting us both individually and collectively. Unlike fatigue's gradual progression, distress often emerges more suddenly, though it can also become chronic when circumstances persist.

In our bodies, distress speaks through immediate physical responses. Our muscles might hold persistent tension, creating pain that doesn't ease with rest. Digestive systems often react strongly, leading to appetite changes or persistent discomfort. Sleep becomes disrupted in different ways than with fatigue - we might struggle to fall asleep, experience nightmares, or wake frequently with anxiety. Our breathing patterns might shift, becoming shallow or rapid, especially in moments of acute stress.

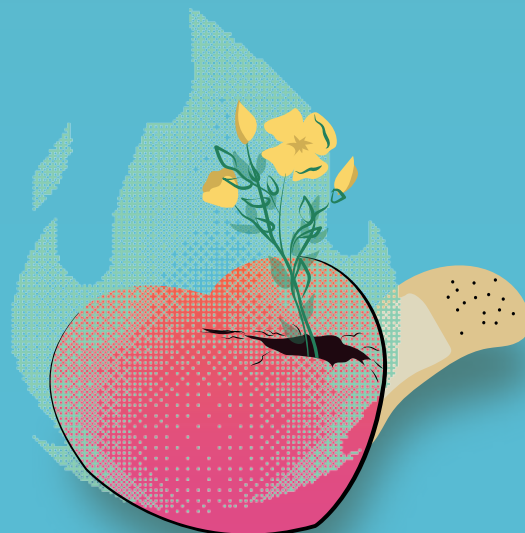
The emotional landscape of distress is often intense and variable. We might experience sudden shifts between feeling overwhelmed and emotionally numb. Anger or irritability might arise more easily, even in situations we typically navigate with ease. Some find themselves crying more frequently or feeling emotions with unusual intensity. Others might notice a growing sense of helplessness or disconnection from their usual emotional responses.

Mentally, distress affects our capacity to process information and respond to challenges. Concentration becomes difficult as our minds constantly scan for threats or solutions. Planning for the future might feel impossible when the present feels overwhelming. Some experience racing thoughts or difficulty focusing on immediate tasks.

In our social connections, distress often reveals itself through changed patterns of interaction. We might withdraw from relationships or find ourselves struggling to maintain appropriate boundaries. Trust - both in giving and receiving support - might become more challenging. Some might seek constant connection while others retreat into isolation.

## Collective Distress in Our Movements

When communities experience distress together, it manifests in shared patterns. Decision-making might become more reactive than strategic. Conflict within groups might increase as collective anxiety rises. Communities might struggle to maintain their usual practices of mutual support or find their traditional coping mechanisms insufficient for current challenges.



## Understanding Trauma: Individual, Collective, and Historical Dimensions

Trauma occurs when an event or series of events overwhelms our natural capacity to cope and integrate our experience, creating lasting impacts on our mind, body, and spirit. These experiences exceed our ability to respond effectively, often leaving us feeling helpless, vulnerable, or out of control. In psychological terms, trauma represents a rupture in our sense of continuity, safety, and meaning-making.

### What Makes an Event Traumatic

A traumatic event fundamentally challenges our sense of safety, predictability, or control in the world. In the context of our work, this might involve experiencing or witnessing violence, facing severe threats to survival, or enduring prolonged exposure to dehumanizing conditions. Forced displacement, systematic oppression, witnessing violence against community members, or sudden loss of home and community can all constitute traumatic experiences. The violation of human dignity and rights, particularly when perpetrated by those in power, often carries deep traumatic impact.

### The Path from Event to Impact

Critically, not everyone who experiences a potentially traumatic event will develop trauma responses. Our reaction to overwhelming events depends on a complex interplay of factors. Previous life experiences, existing support systems, cultural resources, and immediate safety conditions all influence how we process and integrate difficult experiences. Some might emerge from potentially traumatic events with their sense of self and safety relatively intact, while others might develop significant trauma responses. Both reactions represent natural variations in human response to overwhelming circumstances.

### Individual Manifestations of Trauma

When trauma does develop, it manifests through various channels in our individual experience. Our nervous systems might remain on high alert, making it difficult to distinguish between actual and perceived threats. Memory processes often change - some experiences might feel intensely present while others become difficult to access. Many notice changes in how they relate to their bodies, either feeling disconnected or experiencing unexplained physical symptoms.

Relationships often shift as trust becomes more complex. Some might find themselves withdrawing from connections, while others might develop patterns of anxious attachment. Sleep disturbances, changes in eating patterns, and difficulties with emotional regulation commonly emerge as the body and mind attempt to process the traumatic experience.



## Collective Dimensions of Trauma

When communities experience trauma together, its impact extends beyond individual experiences to shape collective patterns of being. Community trauma manifests in how groups organize themselves, make decisions, and maintain their cultural practices. Traditional celebrations might take on new meanings or feel impossible to continue. Communities might develop new protective behaviors that, while adaptive in crisis, limit their ability to thrive in times of relative peace.

Collective trauma influences how communities tell their stories, maintain their relationships, and envision their futures. It can affect everything from parenting practices to political engagement, from artistic expression to economic decisions. The way a community understands and responds to new challenges often bears the imprint of previous collective trauma.

## Transgenerational Echoes

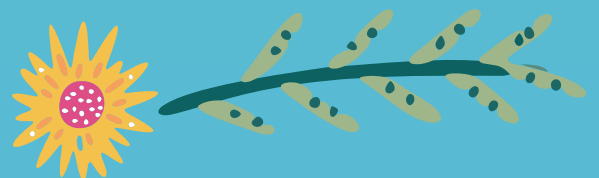
Trauma's impact doesn't end with those who directly experience it. Instead, it often passes between generations through both spoken and unspoken channels. Children might inherit not only their parents' stories but also their adaptive responses to trauma. Family systems might organize themselves around historical wounds, even when the original circumstances no longer exist. Cultural practices might shift to protect against past threats, influencing how future generations understand their identity and possibilities.

This transmission occurs through multiple pathways - through stories told and untold, through patterns of relationship and attachment, through bodily responses passed from parent to child, and through collective practices of remembering and forgetting. Understanding these transgenerational dimensions helps us recognize how past traumas continue to shape present realities and future possibilities

## The Complex Interplay

These experiences - fatigue, distress, and trauma - create intricate patterns of interaction in our movements and communities. Their manifestations rarely exist in isolation, instead weaving together in ways that reflect the complexity of our contexts and work. In conflict zones, the immediate impact of trauma might compound with chronic fatigue and ongoing distress. Those in supporting roles might experience secondary trauma alongside organizational fatigue and the distress of witnessing suffering without clear solutions.

Understanding these intersections becomes crucial for several reasons. First, it helps us recognize that our experiences, while deeply personal, often reflect broader patterns within our movements and communities. Second, it allows us to develop more nuanced and effective approaches to care and support. Finally, it reminds us that healing - whether individual or collective - requires attention to multiple layers of experience and impact.



## Looking Forward

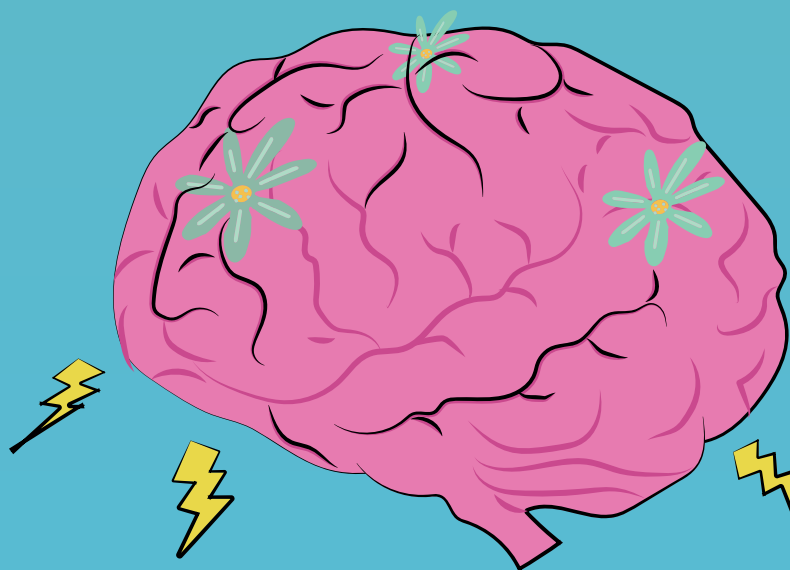
Understanding these layered experiences helps us recognize the complexity of our needs - both individual and collective. This recognition forms the foundation for developing effective care strategies that honor both our immediate circumstances and our longer-term healing. As we move forward, several key principles guide our approach:

First, we must acknowledge that our responses to these experiences represent natural adaptations to extraordinary circumstances. Whether experiencing fatigue, distress, or trauma - or some combination thereof - our reactions reflect our bodies' and communities' attempts to navigate challenging realities.

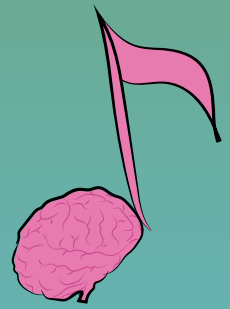
Second, we need to recognize that healing and support require attention to multiple dimensions of experience. Individual care practices must exist alongside collective care strategies. Immediate coping mechanisms need to complement longer-term healing approaches.

Finally, we must remember that our capacity for resilience - both personal and collective - remains present even in the face of profound challenges. While these experiences impact us deeply, they also carry the potential for transformation and renewed commitment to our work and communities.

The next chapters will explore specific strategies for addressing these experiences, always keeping in mind the complex interplay between individual and collective needs, between immediate circumstances and historical contexts, and between healing and continued engagement in our crucial work.



# Chapter 3: Individual Care Practices: Understanding and Responding to Fatigue, Distress, and Trauma



When fatigue and distress weave themselves into our daily experience as feminist activists, our bodies and minds signal the need for intentional care. This chapter explores how we might tend to ourselves with gentleness and purpose, recognizing that caring for ourselves is integral to sustaining our commitment to feminist organizing.

## Learning to Listen to Our Rhythms

Each of us carries unique patterns of energy and depletion, like an internal tide that ebbs and flows throughout our days. Some of us find clarity and focus in the early morning light, while others come alive as evening approaches. These patterns aren't arbitrary - they reflect our body's special rhythm that lets us know when and how we can best engage with our work.

Take time to notice your natural movements through the day. When does your mind feel sharpest? In which moments do you naturally seek rest? Understanding these patterns helps us work with our natural rhythms rather than against them, creating sustainability in our activism.

## Nurturing Our Physical Being



Our bodies carry not only the physical weight of our work but also the emotional intensity of our engagement with justice. They need regular, gentle attention to maintain their capacity for this important work.

Consider creating morning rituals that ease you into your day - perhaps a few moments of gentle stretching, or time to feel the morning sun on your face before engaging with the demands of your work. Throughout the day, notice when your body asks for movement or rest. Maybe it's a walk around your workspace after an intense meeting, or a moment to close your eyes and breathe deeply between tasks.

Feeding ourselves well becomes particularly important during intense periods of work. Regular meals, even simple ones, help maintain our energy and ground us in our physical needs. Notice what foods help you feel sustained and what eating patterns support your wellbeing.

## Creating Space for Mental Rest

Our minds need regular opportunities to process and reset, especially when we're holding complex information and challenging realities. This might look like taking brief pauses between different activities, allowing our thoughts to settle before moving to the next task. It could mean creating clear boundaries between work time and rest time, giving our minds permission to fully disengage from our activism at regular intervals.





## Tending to Our Emotional Landscape

The emotional dimension of our work requires particular care. Create regular times to check in with your emotional state - perhaps at the beginning or end of each day. Notice what feelings are present and what they might be telling you about your needs.

Maintain connections with trusted friends or colleagues who understand the nature of your work. These relationships provide essential spaces for processing difficult experiences and remembering we're not alone in this work.

## Digital Boundaries as Sacred Space

In our deeply connected world, the constant flow of information about violence, political upheaval, and systemic injustice can become overwhelming. Our devices, while essential tools for organizing, can also become channels through which trauma and distress flow uninterrupted into our daily lives.

Creating intentional boundaries around our digital engagement isn't just about "unplugging" - it's about cultivating spaces where our nervous systems can find rest from the constant awareness of urgent needs and ongoing struggles.

This might look like:

### Gentle Morning Practices

Before engaging with news or social media, give yourself time to ground in your own experience. Perhaps sit with a morning beverage, feel the sunlight on your skin, or simply breathe deeply for a few moments. This creates a container of calm that can help sustain you through more challenging moments.

### Structured Engagement

Rather than remaining continuously available to distressing information, consider creating specific times for engaging with news and social media. This might mean checking updates at set times during the day, allowing yourself to be fully present in other moments.

### Digital Sunset Rituals

As evening approaches, gradually decrease your exposure to potentially activating content. Create evening routines that support your transition toward rest, perhaps engaging in gentle movement, connecting with loved ones, or enjoying creative activities that don't involve screens.



## When Fatigue Deepens



When we notice fatigue settling into our bones, our body and mind asking for more substantial rest, we need to respond with particular attention. This might mean adjusting our workload where possible, communicating our needs to colleagues, or finding ways to create additional space for recovery.

Consider developing practices that help you recognize early signs of deepening fatigue - perhaps changes in your sleep patterns, difficulty concentrating, or shifts in your emotional responses. The sooner we notice these signs, the more effectively we can respond.

## Addressing Distress

When distress emerges - whether from witnessing injustice, engaging with traumatic material, or holding the weight of systemic violence - we need approaches that help us process these experiences while maintaining our stability.

Our bodies often carry distress before our minds fully register it. Working with distress therefore begins with developing a compassionate relationship with our physical experience. This might mean learning to recognize how distress manifests in our unique bodies - perhaps as tension, restlessness, or changes in our energy patterns. By acknowledging these physical manifestations, we create space to respond with care before distress becomes overwhelming.

## Creating Containers for Processing

Just as we create containers for our activist work - specific times, spaces, and structures - we need to create containers for processing distress. This means developing practices and rituals that help us acknowledge and move through difficult experiences without becoming overwhelmed by them. These containers might be temporal (specific times set aside for processing), physical (designated spaces for reflection), or relational (trusted relationships where we can share openly).

## The Role of Boundaries in Managing Distress

Boundaries serve not as walls but as membranes - allowing us to remain engaged while protecting our capacity to sustain that engagement. This includes:

### Understanding Our Thresholds

Learning to recognize our personal thresholds helps us engage more sustainably with challenging work. These thresholds aren't fixed - they shift with circumstances and require regular reassessment.

### Creating Rhythms of Engagement

Developing patterns of engagement and retreat helps us maintain presence with difficult realities while ensuring adequate time for integration and renewal.

### **Honoring Our Limits**

Recognizing and respecting our limits isn't weakness - it's wisdom that allows us to sustain our commitment to justice work over the long term.

### **Transformative Approaches to Distress**

Rather than simply managing distress, we can approach it as an opportunity for deeper understanding and transformation. This might involve:

#### **Learning from Our Responses**

Our patterns of distress often carry important information about our values, boundaries, and needs for change - both personal and systemic.

#### **Finding Meaning in Difficulty**

Understanding how our distress connects to our broader commitment to justice can help us engage with it more purposefully.

#### **Building Resilience Through Understanding**

As we develop a more nuanced relationship with distress, we often find greater capacity to stay present with challenging realities while maintaining our wellbeing.

## **Working with Trauma: The Importance of Professional Support**

When trauma enters our experience as activists and community workers, it requires a distinct and specialized approach to healing. Unlike fatigue or distress, which can often be managed through self-care practices and peer support, trauma requires professional intervention due to its profound impact on our nervous system, emotional landscape, and cognitive processes.

### **Understanding Professional Support for Trauma**

Trauma affects us at multiple levels - physical, emotional, psychological, and social. Professional mental health providers trained in trauma work bring specialized knowledge and skills essential for healing. They understand the complex ways trauma impacts our nervous system, how it shapes our responses to the world, and how it influences our capacity for engagement in both personal and movement work.

These professionals can provide evidence-based treatments specifically designed for trauma healing, create safe containers for processing traumatic experiences, and offer expert guidance in developing sustainable strategies for recovery. Their training allows them to recognize the subtle manifestations of trauma and adapt interventions to each person's unique needs and circumstances.

Different mental health professionals offer distinct types of support based on their expertise and your specific needs. Counselors provide supportive guidance and practical coping tools, focusing on present challenges while helping you navigate daily life situations through active listening and solution-oriented approaches. Therapists, including psychologists and clinical social workers, offer deeper psychological work through various therapeutic approaches, helping you understand patterns, process experiences, and develop long-term coping strategies.

Psychiatrists, being medical doctors, can diagnose mental health conditions and prescribe medication when necessary, making them particularly valuable for cases requiring medical intervention.

## When to Seek Professional Support

While everyone's experience of trauma is unique, certain experiences signal the need for professional support. This becomes particularly important when you notice persistent changes in your capacity to engage with daily life, work, or relationships. Professional help is especially crucial if you experience ongoing challenges with sleep, persistent emotional flooding or numbness, intrusive memories, or significant changes in your ability to feel safe in your body or environment.

It's important to note that seeking professional mental health support isn't exclusively for those experiencing trauma or severe mental health challenges. Anyone who feels they need support in managing life's challenges, understanding themselves better, or maintaining their mental wellbeing should feel empowered to seek help. Just as we regularly visit doctors for physical check-ups, mental health care can be part of our routine wellness practice. Whether you're dealing with work stress, relationship issues, life transitions, or simply want to improve your emotional well-being, professional support can provide valuable tools and insights for personal growth and maintenance of mental health.

## Finding Appropriate Support

When seeking professional help for trauma, it's important to find providers who understand both trauma and the context of activist work.

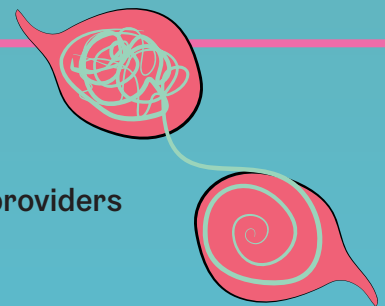
Look for professionals who:

- Have specific training in trauma-informed approaches
- Understand the political and social dimensions of trauma
- Can provide culturally appropriate care
- Recognize the unique challenges faced by activists and movement workers

## Supporting Your Healing Journey

While working with a mental health professional, you can support your healing process by:

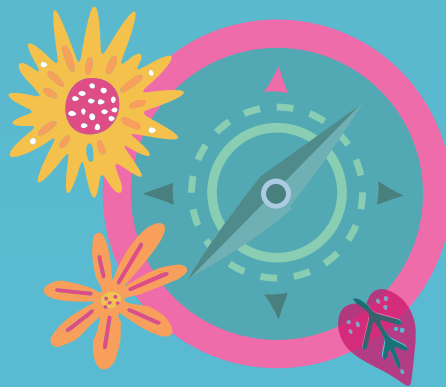
- Maintaining basic self-care practices that help you feel grounded
- Staying connected with trusted support systems
- Being patient with the healing process
- Communicating openly with your provider about what helps and what doesn't
- Recognizing that healing isn't linear and requires time



## Looking Forward

As we've explored the various dimensions of individual care - from managing fatigue and addressing distress to recognizing when professional support is needed for trauma - we see how these elements interweave in our activist experience. Understanding and responding to our needs isn't just about personal wellbeing; it's about sustaining our capacity to engage in social justice work effectively and meaningfully.

The next chapter will examine how these individual practices connect with broader community care approaches. We'll explore how our movements can create environments that support both personal and collective healing, recognizing that sustainable activism requires a balance between individual and communal care practices. By weaving together personal and collective approaches, we strengthen not only ourselves but also our capacity for long-term engagement in the vital work of social transformation.



# Chapter 4: Weaving Collective Care: Community-Based Approaches to Wellbeing

In contexts of ongoing crisis and social transformation, we increasingly recognize that individual survival and healing are inseparable from collective wellbeing. This understanding, deeply rooted in feminist approaches to care, acknowledges that our personal experiences of fatigue, distress, and trauma are intimately connected to our collective experiences as communities facing systematic challenges.

## The Power of Community in Times of Crisis

Communities have historically served as crucial support systems during times of crisis. Traditional support networks have provided essential emotional and practical care that sustains both individuals and movements. These networks, often led by women, demonstrate how collective care practices emerge naturally from shared experiences and needs.

When we create spaces for collective care, we challenge individualistic approaches to healing and acknowledge our fundamental interconnectedness. This becomes particularly vital in contexts where resources are limited and external support systems may be compromised.

## Collective Responses to Fatigue

Communities naturally develop ways of sharing the burden of work and rest. Through collective practices, groups create sustainable rhythms that help prevent exhaustion. Communal spaces provide opportunities for rest and recovery together, while shared resource systems ensure basic needs are met collectively. The simple act of gathering allows members to share resources and support each other through difficult times.

Organizations can support these natural community responses through thoughtful institutional practices. Creating flexible work arrangements respects both individual and collective needs, while clear policies about rest and recovery help normalize the importance of sustainable practices. Supporting resource-sharing initiatives strengthens community bonds while ensuring more equitable distribution of care work.

## Processing Collective Distress

When communities face ongoing crises, collective distress emerges as a shared experience requiring communal responses. Traditional practices of gathering and storytelling provide valuable frameworks for processing this distress together. Communities create safe spaces where members can share experiences and emotions, develop collective rituals that acknowledge shared pain while celebrating resilience, and establish systems for identifying and responding to collective distress.

Regular gatherings provide opportunities for emotional expression and mutual support, helping members recognize that their experiences, while deeply personal, are also part of a shared reality. This understanding can help reduce isolation and build collective

## **Working with Multiple Layers of Trauma**

Understanding trauma through a feminist lens helps us recognize how personal experiences connect to broader social and political contexts. Communities often carry multiple layers of historical and ongoing experiences that require careful attention and processing.

For immediate experiences, communities create environments where individual trauma responses are understood and supported. Safe spaces allow members to process their experiences while maintaining connection to collective support systems. This might involve creating quiet areas for reflection, establishing regular check-in practices, or developing shared language for discussing difficult experiences.

Collective trauma requires particular attention to how shared experiences shape community responses and relationships. Through collective memory work and shared healing practices, communities build resilience while processing difficult experiences. This might include commemorative practices, artistic expression, or other cultural forms of processing collective pain.

Intergenerational experiences shape present-day realities in profound ways. Through intergenerational dialogue and cultural practices, groups maintain connection to historical wisdom while developing new approaches to healing. This involves recognizing how past experiences influence current responses while creating space for new forms of understanding and resilience.

## **Institutional Practices for Sustainable Movements**

Organizations play a crucial role in supporting both individual and collective wellbeing through their policies and practices. When institutions prioritize care at a structural level, they create environments where sustainable activism becomes possible.

### **Rest and Recovery**

Regular breaks and time off become essential components of sustainable work. Organizations can implement clear policies that normalize and encourage regular periods of rest. This might include scheduled breaks during the workday, regular days off, and longer periods of leave after particularly intense work periods.

The practice of rotation in demanding roles helps prevent burnout while building collective capacity. By creating systems where responsibilities are shared, organizations ensure that no individual bears too heavy a burden for too long.

### **Mental Health Support**

Access to mental health support should be considered a fundamental resource rather than an optional extra. Organizations can provide this through various channels, namely professional support through counseling or therapy services helps individuals process challenging experiences. Meanwhile, group sessions create spaces for collective processing while building understanding of shared experiences. Regular check-ins with team members help identify early signs of distress and ensure appropriate support is available.

## Creating Sustainable Work Environments

Physical spaces within organizations can be designed to support both individual and collective wellbeing. Quiet areas for rest or reflection provide necessary spaces for recovery during the workday. Communal spaces support connection and collective care practices.

Work schedules should reflect an understanding of natural energy rhythms and the need for recovery time. Flexible scheduling allows individuals to work when they're most effective while maintaining collective coordination.

## Resource Allocation

Organizations demonstrate their commitment to care through how they allocate resources. Budgeting for collective care activities, professional support services, and material needs for care practices shows that wellbeing is a priority rather than an afterthought.

## Training and Skill Development

Regular training in stress management, trauma awareness, and collective care practices helps build organizational capacity for sustainable work. These skills become part of the organization's collective wisdom, strengthening its ability to support member wellbeing over time.

## Looking Forward

Throughout this chapter, we've explored how community care forms the foundation of sustainable movements. From addressing collective fatigue to processing complex layers of trauma, we've seen how communal approaches create more resilient pathways to healing. When supported by thoughtful institutional practices - from creating spaces for rest to providing mental health resources - these community-based approaches enable truly sustainable activism.

The next chapter offers practical exercises for both individuals and communities to support wellbeing, providing concrete tools for implementing the approaches we've discussed here.



# Chapter 5: Practices for Individual and Collective Wellbeing

In contexts of ongoing crisis and social transformation, practical tools for maintaining wellbeing become essential. This chapter presents concrete practices that support both individual and collective care, designed to be accessible and adaptable to various contexts.

## Understanding Energy Flow and Depletion

Before engaging with these practices, it's vital to recognize how stress and trauma manifest in our bodies and communities. Physical signs often include persistent exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and muscle tension, while emotional indicators may include feelings of hopelessness, increased irritability, and decreased motivation. Recognizing these patterns helps us respond with appropriate care practices.

## Individual Care Practices

### Deep Breathing Practice

Our breath is our most accessible tool for regulation, yet in times of stress, we often disconnect from this natural resource. Deep breathing helps restore balance to our nervous system and creates a pause in moments of intensity.

#### Purpose:

- Calms the nervous system
- Reduces anxiety and stress
- Creates mental clarity
- Helps manage overwhelming emotions

#### Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Find a comfortable seated or lying position where you won't be disturbed
2. Place one hand on your chest, the other on your belly
3. Close your eyes or maintain a soft gaze
4. Take a slow breath in through your nose for 4 counts
  - o Feel your belly expand like a balloon
  - o Keep your chest relatively still
5. Hold the breath gently for 2 counts
6. Release the breath through your mouth for 6 counts
  - o Feel your belly fall
7. Rest for 2 counts
8. Repeat 10-5 times
9. Notice how you feel afterward

#### When to Practice:

- First thing in the morning
- Before difficult conversations
- During moments of stress
- Before sleep

## 1-2-3-4-5 Grounding Practice

When we experience anxiety, overwhelm, or disconnection, this practice helps us return to the present moment through engaging our senses. It's particularly effective during moments of crisis or when feeling dissociated from our surroundings and ourselves.

### Purpose:

- Interrupts anxiety and panic cycles
- Creates immediate present-moment awareness
- Helps manage overwhelming emotions
- Restores connection to our environment
- Supports nervous system regulation

### Step-by-Step Guide:

#### 1. Find a comfortable position where you are:

- You can sit, stand, or walk slowly
- Keep your eyes open to engage with your surroundings

#### 2. Begin with your SIGHT (5 things):

- Look around slowly and deliberately
- Name 5 distinct things you can see
- Say them either aloud or silently
- Notice details about each item

#### 3. Move to TOUCH (4 things):

- Notice 4 things you can physically feel
- This might include your feet on the ground
- The texture of your clothing
- The temperature of the air on your skin
- The surface you're sitting or standing on

#### 4. Focus on SOUND (3 things):

- Listen carefully to your environment
- Name 3 different sounds you can hear
- Include distant and close sounds
- Notice the qualities of each sound

#### 5. Attend to SMELL (2 things):

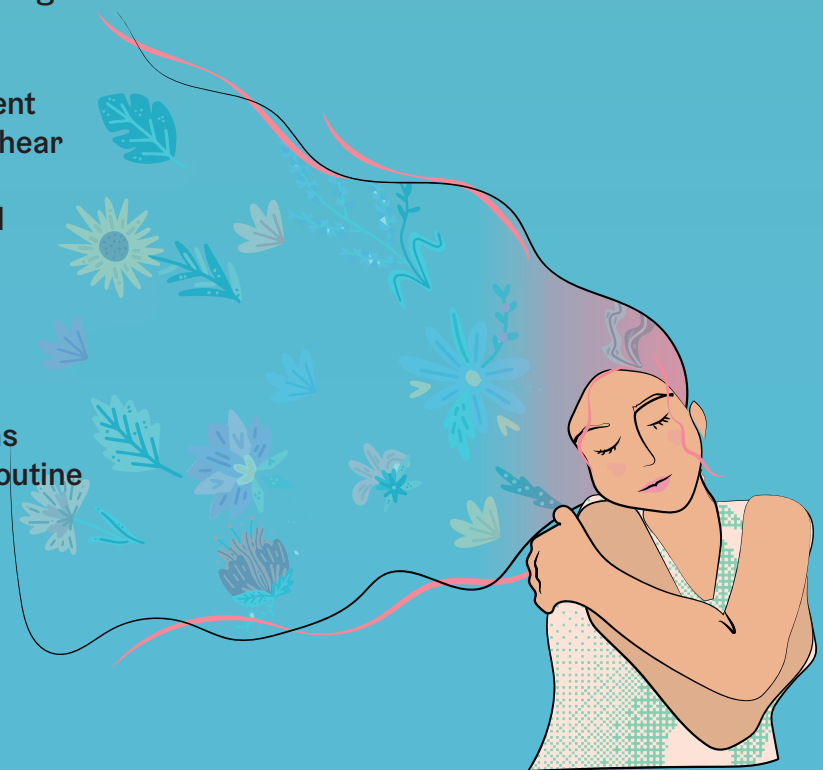
- Notice 2 scents in your environment
- If you can't smell anything, recall 2 familiar smells
- Take a few deep breaths through your nose

#### 6. Finally, TASTE (1 thing):

- Notice one taste in your mouth
- Or recall a favorite taste
- Take a moment to fully experience this sensation
- Complete the practice:
- Take three deep breaths
- Notice how your body feels now
- Observe any changes in your state

### When to Practice:

- During moments of anxiety
- When feeling overwhelmed
- Before challenging situations
- As part of daily grounding routine



## Collective Care Practices

### Community Check-in Circle Practice: A Facilitator's Guide

The Community Check-in Circle is a structured group practice designed to create safe spaces for authentic sharing and collective support within feminist movements. This practice serves as a vital tool for building trust, maintaining connection, and fostering collective resilience, particularly during challenging times. Through this practice, participants can share experiences, process emotions, and strengthen community bonds in a contained and supportive environment.

#### Role of the Facilitator

As a facilitator of the Community Check-in Circle, your primary role is to create and maintain a safe, supportive container for authentic sharing and collective healing. You are responsible for establishing the tone, maintaining boundaries, and ensuring the practice remains grounded in feminist principles of care and mutual support. Your presence should be steady and nurturing, while remaining aware of group dynamics and individual needs.

Your role requires maintaining several key standards:

#### 1. Safety and Confidentiality

- Ensure physical and emotional safety of the space
- Clearly establish and maintain confidentiality agreements
- Be prepared to respond to emotional distress or triggers
- Have resources available for additional support if needed

#### 2. Inclusivity and Respect

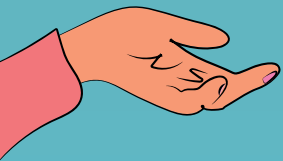
- Create conditions where all voices are valued equally
- Be mindful of power dynamics within the group
- Ensure accessibility in both physical space and participation methods
- Honor different ways of expressing and processing

#### 3. Time and Space Management

- Start and end on time to maintain container integrity
- Balance between structure and flexibility
- Maintain appropriate pacing for the group's needs
- Create space for silence and reflection

#### 4. Emotional Awareness

- Stay attuned to individual and collective emotional states
- Notice non-verbal cues and group energy shifts
- Be prepared to offer grounding exercises if needed
- Maintain your own emotional regulation



## 5. Cultural Sensitivity

- Honor cultural differences in expression and processing
- Acknowledge collective trauma and historical context
- Respect different cultural approaches to healing
- Use culturally appropriate language and practices

### Practical Guidelines for Facilitation:

#### Pre-Session Preparation (30 minutes before):

- Arrange the physical space in a circle, ensuring all seats are equal and visible
- Prepare necessary materials (tissues, water, optional candle)
- Review participant list and any known sensitivities
- Consider potential triggers and prepare appropriate responses
- Have a timekeeper designated

#### Opening the Space (15-10 minutes):

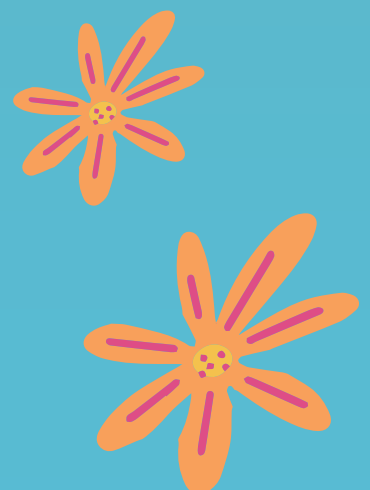
1. Welcome participants warmly and personally
2. Clearly state the purpose and duration of the circle
3. Establish group agreements:
  - o Explain confidentiality principles
  - o Emphasize respect for different experiences
  - o Clarify the voluntary nature of sharing
4. Lead three collective breaths to center the group
5. Explain the process and timing

#### Facilitating the Check-in Round:

- Begin with a clear, open-ended prompt
- Model vulnerability through your own brief share
- Use gentle time management without rushing
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues
- Be prepared to support emotional moments
- Honor silence between shares
- Acknowledge each contribution non-verbally

#### Managing Group Dynamics:

- Maintain equal speaking time
- Gently redirect advice-giving to personal sharing
- Support those who become emotional
- Handle interruptions diplomatically
- Be prepared to pause for group regulation if needed



## **Closing the Circle:**

- Acknowledge themes without analysis
- Lead a brief collective grounding
- Remind of confidentiality
- Share information about support resources
- End with collective breaths or chosen ritual

**Remember: Your role is to create and maintain a safe container while allowing the natural wisdom of the group to emerge. The success of the circle depends not on controlling the process but on holding space with presence, care, and attention to both individual and collective needs.**



**As we conclude this manual, we recognize that sustainable wellbeing emerges from a delicate interplay of personal and collective practices. The approaches shared here remind us that caring for ourselves and our communities is fundamental to human flourishing.**

**Each person's journey with mental health and wellbeing is uniquely their own - shaped by personal experiences, cultural context, and current circumstances. While we may share common experiences and challenges, how these manifest and what practices serve us best will differ for each individual. The key is to listen deeply to our bodies and minds, allowing them to guide us in adapting and personalizing these practices to our specific needs.**

**The combination of individual and collective care creates a robust foundation for wholeness - when we tend to ourselves, we naturally strengthen our communities, and when we create supportive environments, we enhance individual resilience.**

**Whether you're experiencing occasional stress or navigating more complex challenges, remember that seeking support is a natural part of the human experience. The practices explored here - from personal grounding techniques to collective healing spaces - are offered as flexible tools to be adapted to your unique journey, always remembering that your body and mind hold wisdom about what serves you best.**

**Together, we can create environments where both personal wellbeing and meaningful engagement flourish side by side, supporting each other in maintaining balance while contributing to the world we wish to create.**