

OPTIMIZING SELF-CARE

THE BALLOON METAPHOR



Part of mastering self-care is knowing when you need a boost and just how much of a boost you need. One way of considering how to optimize self-care is the balloon metaphor.

IMAGINE A HOT AIR BALLOON LYING FLAT ON THE GROUND IN A FIELD THAT SEEMS TO GO ON FOREVER.

Imagine the balloon slowly filling up with hot air, puff after puff. As time passes, the balloon begins to take form. The pace picks up as the air continues to flow until the balloon is ready to fly. Now notice the basket underneath the balloon. Envision the pilot climbing in and getting settled. And then in the blink of an eye... the balloon is airborne. Hot air balloons don't have a steering wheel. The pilot has to work with the wind and whatever other weather conditions, instead of against them. The goal is four-fold: Navigate the environment safely, take a minute to look around while you're up there, land softly, and learn lessons for next time.

IMAGINE THE STRESS, HARDSHIP, PRESSURE, AND ANXIETY IN OUR LIVES AS FILLING UP THE HOT AIR BALLOON.

As the stress rises, we see that the balloon, its basket, and the pilot up in the air are at the mercy of the wind. In theory, the pilot has been trained in the principles of flying a hot air balloon and she's practiced for this flight. She isn't surprised when the time has come for lift off, even if she feels like she's not quite ready. She knows she can land safely, because in this basket are the self-care principles and practices she uses to make sure she doesn't crash and burn out. She is confident that her chase crew is waiting for her when she arrives back on the ground, giving her a soft place to land.

At different points in our life, we're all going to be "up in the air" with stress, and we will have to be our own pilot. Most of the time we are stunned when our basket is suddenly lifted off the ground and we're flying through the air. We react by scrambling to adjust or maybe we freeze up, frantic about where this stressful situation is taking us. Few of us have training for navigating what is ahead of us. You will learn when to expect the balloon (stress) to rise and you will be prepared with the principles and self-care practices in your basket that are required to land safely.

AS YOUR STRESS LEVEL INCREASES, YOU HAVE TO PROPORTIONALLY INCREASE YOUR SELF-CARE PRACTICES.

Think of the hot air balloon and basket both going up proportionally to one another, tying them together. There is no way to safely land the balloon without what is in the basket to help you.

If you can recognize when you're lifting off the ground and employ appropriate self-care practices to help you land safely, you will be prepared for all future adventures in flight.