

Radical Self-Care

AS A KEY COMPONENT OF
RESISTANCE



THE BODY POLITIC

Introduction

Radical self-care goes beyond bubble baths and chocolate treats. **It is the act of preserving yourself in a capitalist world that demands never ending productivity and constant consumption.** It is the act of prioritising your well being in a capitalist system of oppression that values self-sacrifice and burnout. Audre Lorde referred to the bodily cost of surviving injustice as 'oppression sickness' – it is systemic, not a personal failing.

The Body Politic version of activist self-care is rooted in the feminism of Audre Lorde and Angela Davis and in the experiences of our community of activists, who have sought to change the world for the better. **Acts of radical self-care should always be part of social justice movements.** They are about surviving the day and surviving the world. They are also acts of revolution in and of themselves, as by their very nature they challenge the systems of patriarchy and capitalism that profit from our exhaustion.



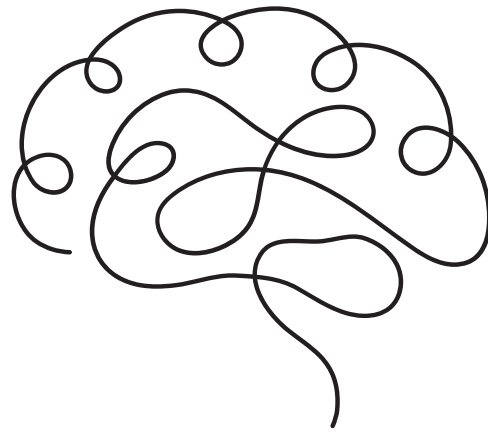
What to expect...

Our Body Politic notebook is organised into three main sections:

1 Recognising Activist Burnout

2 Radical Restoration

3 Tending the Flame



Explore our radical self care notebook and find ways to prioritise your own needs in a society that glorifies relentless output and normalises perpetual exhaustion. Make rest, boundaries and self preservation intentional acts of resistance against capitalism and patriarchy.



“

Caring for myself is not self-indulgence.
It is **self-preservation**, and that is an act of
political warfare.

-AUDRE LORDE

”



Activism and Radical Self-Care

It's political not consumerist!

Audre Lorde called self care and preservation 'an act of political warfare' for activists and marginalised people trying to survive oppressive systems. Capitalism is built on exploitation and thrives on endless consumption, reducing human worth to what we buy rather than who we are. Consumerism teaches us to crave possessions rather than the things that truly sustain us as human beings. Reclaiming rest and community is a radical act. Joy is not a fast purchase or a commercial high. It is rooted in our emotions and the entire spectrum of human feeling. Radical self care takes the very personal to the very political and what's more – it is necessary.

Prioritises needs over guilt!

You can say no and should say no. You can rest without apology. Your worth does not equal your productivity. You haven't failed at activism. You are burned out in a system that rewards self abandonment. Capitalism is a narcissist that will gaslight your sense of self. Choose what sustains you, not what shames you. Honour your body and your needs, not your guilt.

1 ► RECOGNISING ACTIVIST BURNOUT

Sustainability!

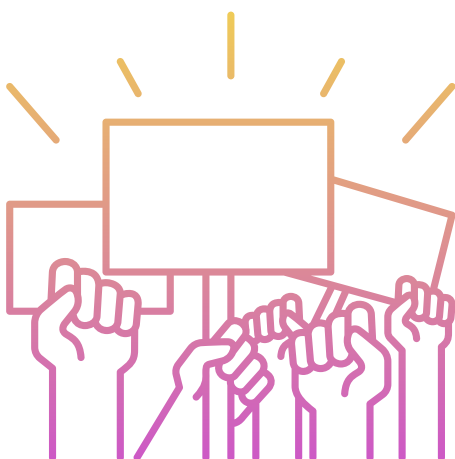
Your mind, body and spirit needs to sustain itself in order to sustain activism. Listen to your body because it is constantly communicating. your body is your first home. It is more than just matter. It is a map, a story, a library and an archive of your thoughts, your feelings, your mind, your sensory knowledge , your actions and your life. When you stop listening to it and nurturing it, you disconnect from it. When you disconnect from it, you are abandoning the first place you were ever meant to be.

Rejects hustle culture!

Embrace slowing the pace when you need to – it might be difficult but it's worth it and so are you. Hustle culture exists because it is profitable. It is a form of toxic positivity and a way of glorifying over commitment. It has a way of dismissing the things you might be struggling with and frames exhaustion as somehow 'fun'. It never includes ' hustling ' to do the things that you actually need to sustain like saying 'no' and protecting your own time. It isn't even about 'culture' – actual culture requires collectivism – hustle culture is based on individualism and competitive environment.

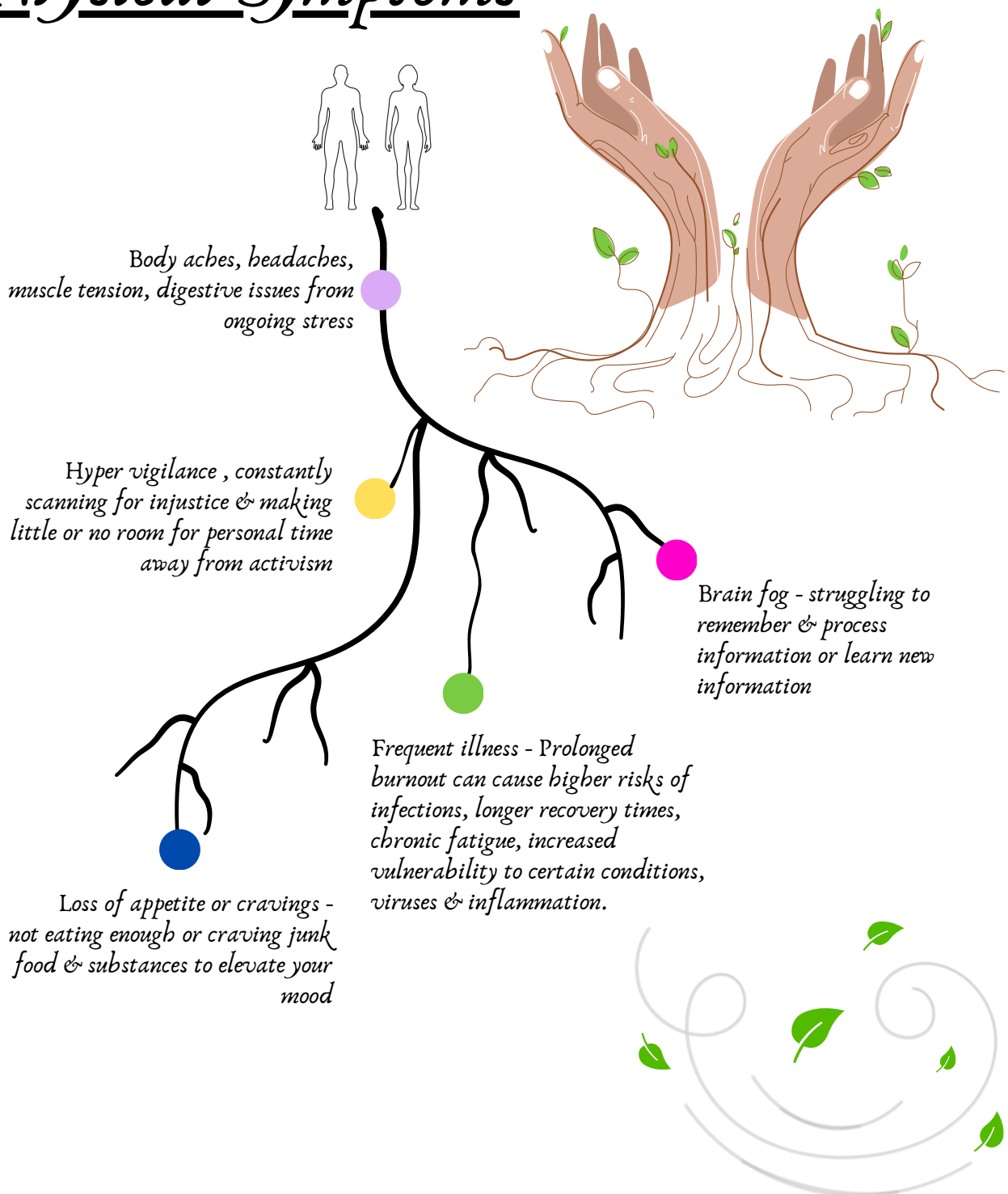
Community is everything!

Individualism is the core tenet of capitalism and the patriarchy. Reject it. Healing is not a solo act. Collective care, mutual aid, solidarity and joy are vital. As human beings we thrive on connection, belonging, support and solidarity. Healing as part of a community fosters mutual aid, motivation, shared wisdom and practice, healthy boundaries, purpose and belonging. It is about nurturing relationships that will in turn replenish you. It allows you to be vulnerable with trusted people and ensure quality connections rather than quantity of short term connections than say, social media provides. A genuine community acts as both a safety net and a mirror, reflecting your worth back when you are struggling to remember it.



Activist Burnout is a state of **physical, emotional/mental exhaustion and behavioural shifts**, caused by the urgency of crises & oppression. It's deep depletion & erodes your activism. Sit with the feelings of discomfort to acknowledge them and recognise the signs.

Physical Symptoms



Emotional & Mental signs

Cynicism or hopelessness - "Nothing I do matters. Everything is bad. Nothing ever changes. We never win."

Guilt or feelings of failing for stepping back from the movement.

Heightened anxiety, low mood, intrusive thought patterns & depression, behavioural patterns

Irritability or numbness, outbursts, emotional detachment, tearful, feeling of emptiness or being overwhelmed

Engaging less in the things you enjoy

Neglecting your basic needs & abandoning routines

Catastrophising - if this doesn't get done, everything will fail



Over reliance on short term coping mechanisms

Isolating from your activist community, family & friends, refusing or avoiding interactions & events

Detachment - dispassionate about causes you care deeply about & feeling demotivated

The good news is that your activist burnout **doesn't mean an end to your activism**, nor do you have to continue as is on burnout repeat. The patriarchy would love it if you did! There are many political and practical ways to take a break and recharge, but like most things, it starts with acknowledgement. **Acknowledge the burnout, make the space and commit unapologetically to rest and restoration.** Radical restoration needs to be hardwired into your life and not just your activism.

Radical self-care goes beyond capitalism and consumption.

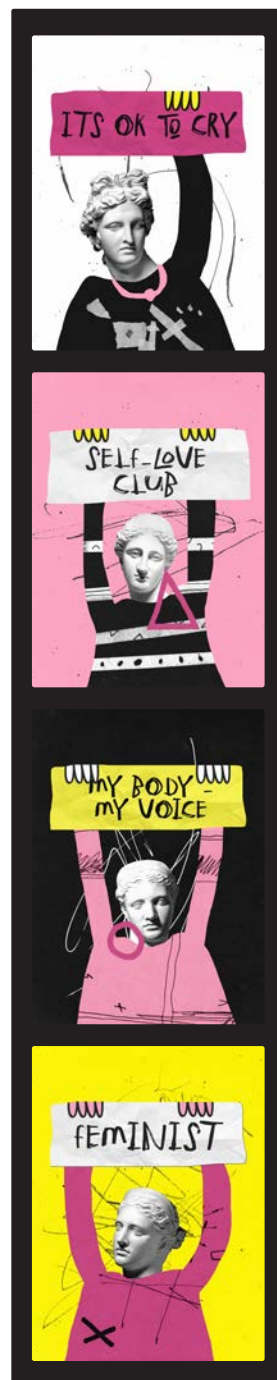
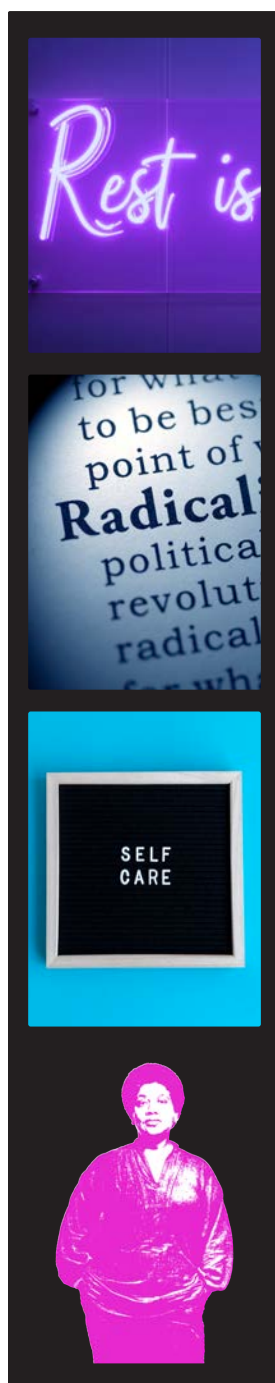
Bubble baths & facemasks aren't the problem – but they aren't the answer and you don't need to purchase your way out of burnout.

Sleep and switch off. Remember it is ok to do nothing at times.

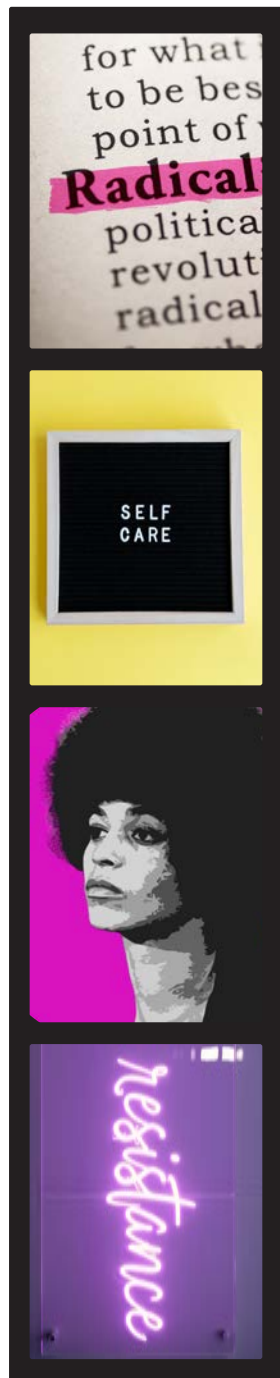
Put 'nothing time' in your weekly diary. The system is designed to grind you down. Rest is it a reward – it is a requirement. Schedule rest like you would a meeting and make it part of your resistance.

Sustainable Activism – Not everything all at once.

Define your limits – it might be 2 meetings a month and not 4. It might be organising particular parts of the rally and not all of it. Capitalism may have you believing you are a machine – but you are human. Real change takes long term engagement. It's a marathon, not a sprint.



Share your burnout with your fellow activists and share responsibility too – rotate roles, do less if you need to and remember that activism isn't individual – it is shared responsibility. And mutual aid, not just when it comes to activism, but when it comes to caring for each other and checking in. Check in with your community and when you are up to it, you can be that check in for someone else too. You are part of an ecosystem of care and you don't have to hold it alone.



Collective Care - you are part of a community of activism.

You are part of an ecosystem of care and you don't have to hold it alone. Form a radical care pod to a group that supports each other emotionally and logistically. No one is immune from burnout and remember that experienced activists deal with it too. They may be able to offer mentorship and peer support about sustainable practices.

Don't Catastrophise.

If something isn't done, it just might not get done this time – it isn't the end of the world. Remember you are an activist in life and it doesn't rise and fall on one event or one thing that didn't get done. Embrace imperfect activism. There is no such thing as perfection anyways.

Disconnect when you need to.

From social media and online spaces and from meetings or activities. Silence notifications even if it is for a period of time. Social Media demands urgency and immediacy, short termism and continual input and output. You are not that bot. You are a person complete with human emotions. Emojis do not complete you.

Connect with Nature

Walk, hike, bathe, garden or simply spend time outdoors. Nature is grounding and sensory and when we are burned out, it can rob us of our sensory joy. Taking pleasure and enjoying nature is pretty uncomplicated. It can be just about being present and the antithesis to constantly having to 'do' or to 'produce'. Nature is about sights, sounds, smells and touch. It can reconnect us with our sense and provide uncomplicated joy. What's more – it is free. It doesn't have to cost you a single penny.

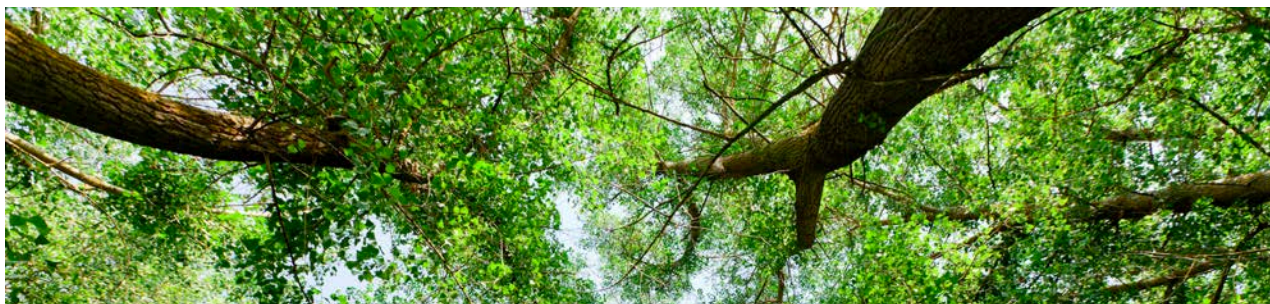
Grieving and Celebrating

Make space for both. Grieve the losses and remember you are part of a community. The losses aren't on you. It is important to mark them but also move on and keep building. Celebrate the amazing things you have achieved as an activist community. Celebrate your contribution to it. Joy is an act of resistance. Make space for both rage and gratitude.

Creative Expression

Journal, paint, make, craft, cook, sing, read fiction or scream. Creativity can be the valve and the salve. It can be a way to let off steam and it can also be a way to soothe and nurture your mind and body. Connect with joy outside the movement and remember what you are struggling for. In the words of Emma Goldman 'If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution'.

Boundaries are sacred – take some time to define what yours are. You can say 'no' in order to preserve your 'yes'. Don't compromise your 'no' with feeling guilty about it. **Designate, delegate and don't over commit.** If you don't know where to start, make one time boundary and one emotional boundary, but set boundaries as if your activism depends on it, because it does.



When we look back at progress, we see that we are standing on the shoulders of many women and people over centuries. We are part of that. That is what makes us – not one thing – but all of these things. That can sustain our activism and maintain our optimism – how future generations will benefit from what we do now, in the same way, we benefit from our feminist ancestors from centuries gone by.



Remember what the Angela Davis school of feminist activism preaches:



Activism and progress is measured over decades, over histories and by our collectivism, not by one week, one event or one individual.”



TENDING THE FLAME

Capitalism's pervasive impact has us believing that we have to be productive all the time, even when it comes to our activism. We don't. Once we burnout and recover from it, it is a significant step, but requires intentional strategies to maintain. We'll call it 'sustainable activism', but whatever you call it, **try these steps to ensure long term balance and healthy activism.**

Not everything all the time and immediately

yes activism might require urgency, but it doesn't always mean everything all at once. Shifting from reactive activism to strategic, sustainable efforts that align most closely with your values, will build resistance and resilience in the longer term.

Work life balance – No paper boundaries

You have defined them – now you need to stick with them. Define when you are on and when you're not as an activist. You don't need to fall into a pattern of taking on every cause, protest or activity. Prioritise with your needs as a whole person.

Social Media & News Consumption

Stick to those specific boundaries for engagement and exposure – whether it is times of the day or amount of hours. You can easily spend the time in nature or doing something else that isn't on a screen.

Celebrate wins (even the small ones)

Acknowledge progress to stay motivated without exhaustion. As Audre Lorde explains, activist joy gives us 'the energy for change'. In the face of paralysis, joy is an act of sustainable activism, resilience and resistance.

Remember joy always – it is the antithesis of oppression

Anamaria Artemisa Sayre said 'Joy is radical' and she is 100%. The patriarchy is made of fragile stuff – egocentric sad sacks in the main, who would rob us of our collective joy and drag us down into their never ending cycle of misery. Joy stealers tend to resent anyone who doesn't share their gloom and doom, whether they are ranting about 'sin' the perils of feminism' or the 'great replacement', so be the joy that resists their world view.

3 TENDING THE FLAME

Check in with yourself and adjust your commitments if you need to

Assess your energy levels and emotional state. Now that you have acknowledged and addressed your burnout, you will recognise it, if it starts creeping back. Scale back temporarily to make room for adjustments.

You can't do it all

Collectivism is our superpower and individualism our kryptonite. The world's problems won't be solved by one person. Activism isn't a private enterprise system – that's capitalism. Remember you have switched to activism that requires less 'burnout' more 'contribution', so focus on your contribution and do it without the guilt.

Focus on long term impact – especially when it seems like a loss

Activism is a marathon not a sprint and small consistent actions often create real progress and lasting change.

BALANCE



Rest is resistance and community is everything – Burnout culture is part of oppressive systems – prioritising rest is radical and it nourishes your community. Activism is struggle – but not always and certainly not solitary struggle. It thrives on collective power, cooperation, shared purpose and mutual support. A strong community is necessary for sustaining movements, preventing burnout and making real change happen. **You are part of that.**

TENDING THE FLAME

It might be once a month or once a week if you can manage it, but starting with a few of these things will get you started on the radical self care road map.

Sort some stuff out

Declutter physically mentally, emotionally or digitally – this might seem boring, but it is also just about you and it is the kind of thing that is straightforward, doable and prevents things from spiralling. Make a list of the five ‘unsorted’ things that you keep thinking about on repeat and just do one. It might be clearing a cupboard, the fridge or your wardrobe. It might be clearing your emails or decluttering your desktop. It might be rearranging your bedroom furniture or sorting out some old paperwork. It isn’t exciting, but if you do it, it is all for your benefit, it will be satisfying and is an easy win.

Technology Free Day

For a period of one day or even a half day every month; put your phone on silent. Turn off your notifications. Stay away from social media and don’t post anything. Don’t watch the news or television. Make the online you unavailable. Instead go for a walk, a hike, a swim, read a fiction book (a paper one), go for a coffee with a person you haven’t seen in a while but really want to reconnect with. When you have one that for even one day, ask yourself if anything fell apart in your absence and ask yourself how you felt after doing something connected to the world or more people?

Boundary revolution

Create ways to say no and set some new boundaries – start with a simple ‘polite no’ script. Maybe it is a text, maybe it is something you say in person, maybe it is an email – it can be as simple as ‘I appreciate you asking, but I can’t take this on right now’. Don’t apologise for your boundaries – that is a gateway to guilt. It might be hard to say no to start with, but keep reminding yourself that this is self respect and not selfishness. Set small boundaries to start with, like not answering emails after 5pm or scheduling some time to yourself each week where you don’t have a single thing planned. You can build and adjust boundaries to be flexible with your self care growth and they get easier with practice.



Radical Rest

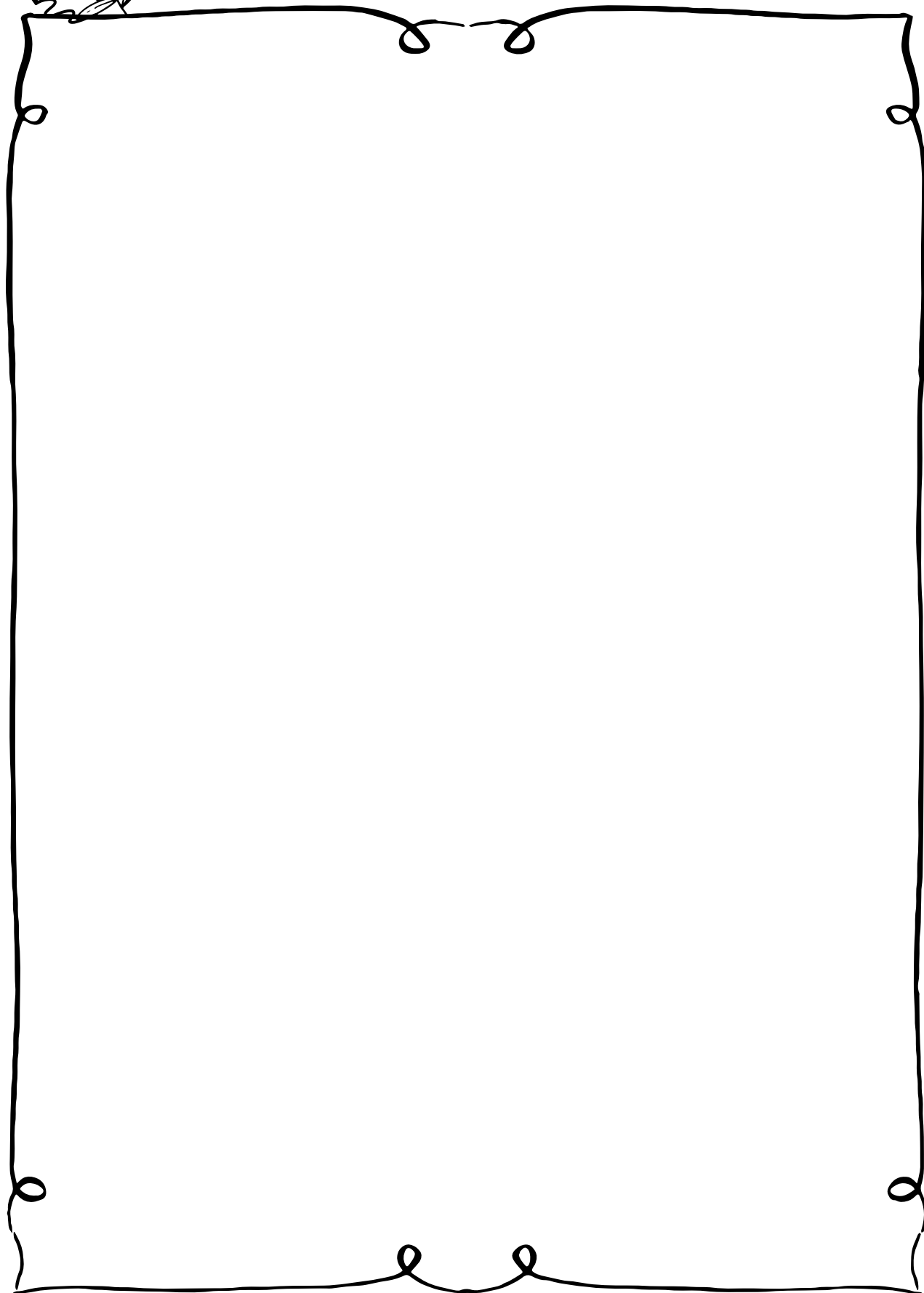
Examine your rest patterns. Are they enough? You could spend as little as a few minutes each week scanning your body to find out where you are holding tension, where you feel the stress and what kind of tiredness or fatigue you are experiencing. You could do some breath work for 5 mins a day or sit and stare at the sky for 10 mins. You could schedule 1 rest day a month. You can check your sleeping patterns and readjust them to make sure you are getting a minimum 7 hours quality sleep each day. Reject the hustle culture that preaches ‘I’ll sleep when I am dead’. Good sleep is vital to maintain your physical and emotional health. Wellness is founded on real rest, not a multi billion pound industry.

Practice Joy as a Life-Long Discipline

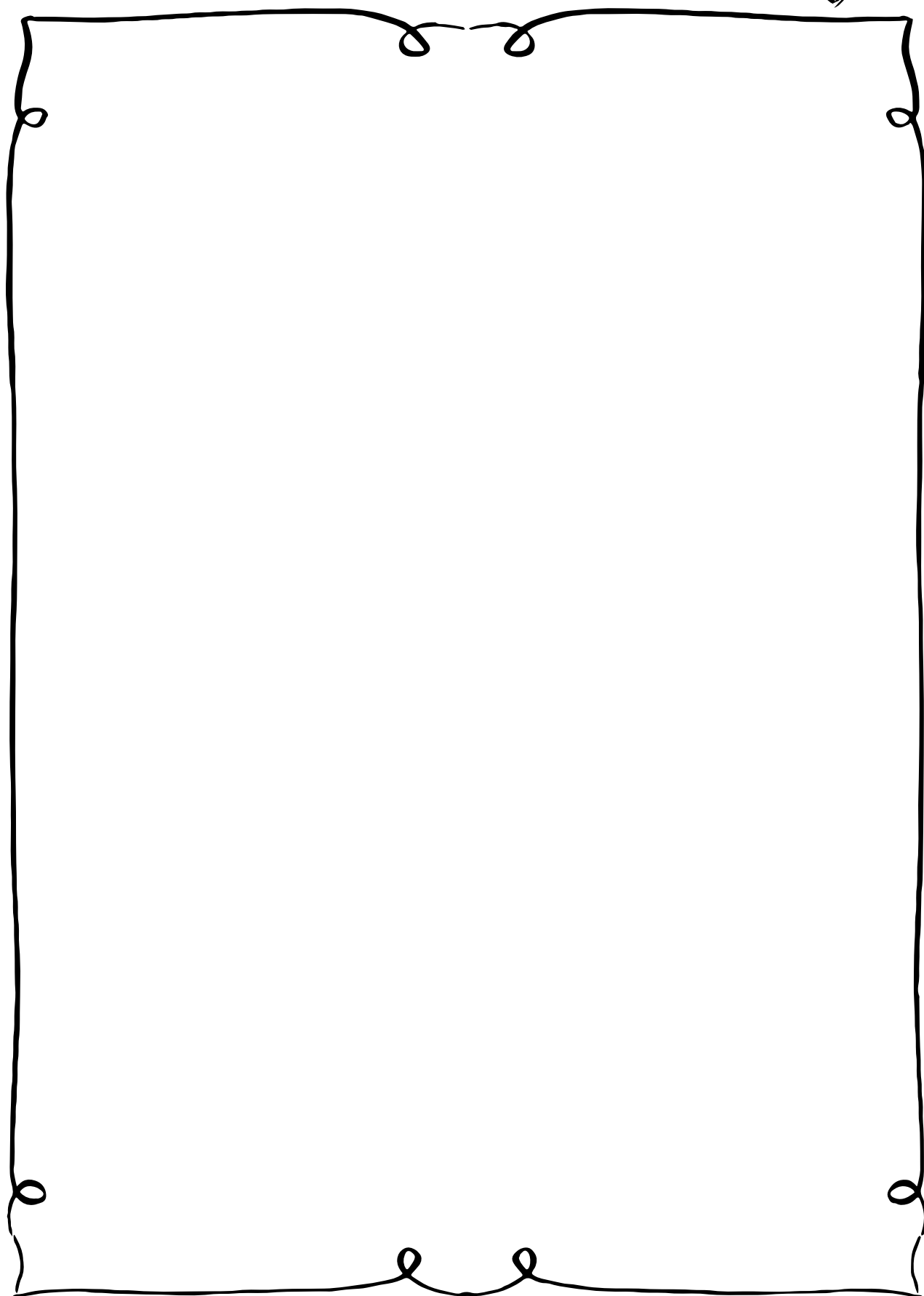
Joy is not frivolous and it should be accessible on a daily basis. It is not the same as happiness – that is situational. It is probably about the small things, but it should be embedded in the structure of your everyday existence. It is about reclaiming moments of delight and weaving these into your day and your routine. It might be listening to a song or doing a really small piece of craft. It might be doodling or taking a walk through the mud. It might be listening to a rain sounds app. It might be celebrating something very small like finishing a task or journaling about something you found weird or funny that day. Whether it is leaving work early, making a shelf with rock treasures or doing some crappy craft – remember what Audre said ‘Joy is not a luxury; it is a strategy for survival’. Choosing joy is an act of rebellion in a system that equates suffering with worth.



TO JOURNAL,



NOTE OR DOODLE...



Radical Self-Care

This booklet was created by Alliance for Choice for educational purposes on behalf of The Body Politic.

The Body Politic is a free online community resource. In the 'hedge school' pluralist tradition of taking education into our own hands and learning from each other and our collective activism, we have created a digital learning hub comprising a collection of interactive multimedia resources which anyone can use or even help co-create.

The Body Politic is a learning engine and an intersectional feminist space. The NI abortion campaign took place in (post) conflict conditions in a region experiencing profound inequality. It gave rise to unique perspectives on abortion, linking it to other social justice issues such as worker's rights, LGBTQ plus rights, immigration rights, race, colonialism, and faith. We believe that whilst the systems of oppression are intertwined, our liberation can also be sought out at the intersections through community, collectivism, and solidarity.

Collectivism is our superpower and The Body Politic would love to hear from you. This is a genuine community space and to exist and grow, we need contributors. Maybe you have written an article or a journal. Maybe you have conducted some research on reproductive justice. Maybe you have put together an activity that promotes understanding around intersectionality. Maybe you can suggest a podcast, interview or short film that could be hosted on The Body Politic.

If you would like to get in touch, drop an email & brief explainer on your contribution to Alliance for Choice: alliancechoice4@gmail.com.