

**CLEAN
BREAK**



Self-Care Guide

**More Than We Can Bear:
The women's centre play**

By Eno Mfon

What is More Than We Can Bear?

More Than We Can Bear is a play by Eno Mfon about a women's sector worker who is dealing with the pressures of her job during lockdown and the death of her mother.

The play was developed through interviews with women's sector workers during the pandemic, as part of the Almeida Theatre's Key Workers Cycle – a cycle of nine plays about keyworkers during the pandemic.

Why Self-Care?




More Than We Can Bear might be challenging to engage with, especially if you are affected by the content. This guide will help you look after yourself before, during or after watching the play.

This guide includes:

- Content Warnings
- Helplines and Support
- Self-Care Suggestions
- A Synopsis
- Further reading and resources about self-care

Content Warnings

In the synopsis below we have used symbols to show when the topics in this content warning list come up, so you can see them at a glance.

Topic	Symbol
Bereavement	
Mother / daughter relationships	
Imprisonment / criminal justice experience	

Panic attacks	
Suicidality	
Gender based violence	
Sobriety	

Helplines and Support

Advance – a charity providing support to women who have experience of the criminal justice system and / or domestic abuse.

advancecharity.org.uk | London North: 020 3981 8486 | West: 020 8563 2225 | East: 020 3096 6488

Cruse – a charity supporting people through bereavement and grief.

cruse.org.uk | 0808 808 1677

Pecan - a community development charity based in Peckham. Working to help people find a way through seemingly impossible barriers to a better future.

pecan.org.uk | 0207 732 0007

Samaritans - provides emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide.

samaritans.org | 08457 90 90 90

Unlock - provides a voice and support for people who are facing stigma and obstacles because of their criminal record.

unlock.org.uk

Women in Prison - supports women affected by the criminal justice system and campaigns to end the harm caused to women, their families and our communities by imprisonment.

womeninprison.org.uk | 020 7359 6674

Self-Care Suggestions

Watch with someone

Bring a friend or someone you trust to watch the play with you.

Talk to someone

If you find the content in *More Than We Can Bear* distressing try talking to someone you trust or contacting one of the organisations we listed above.

Read the Summary

If you think the content warnings suggest that you might find the play difficult to watch, read the full synopsis. This will help you prepare for any difficult bits or decide if the play is right for you.

Breathe

Breathing is a great way to help you feel calm. Try breathing in for four seconds, holding your breath for four seconds, exhaling for four seconds and holding again. Repeat this for as long as you need.

Try a Grounding Exercise

Grounding exercises are things you can do to bring yourself into contact with the present moment to relieve distress. There are many ways you can do this:

1. Notice five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.
2. Sit with your feet on the floor and back against your chair and either gently tap each leg or cross your arms and tap your shoulders.
3. Wash your hands, have a shower or drink some water.

Find some nature

Look out of the window or go for a walk if you can, experiencing nature can be beneficial to our wellbeing and help us feel grounded.

Know if you need to step away

There is nothing wrong with deciding this isn't for you or it's too much. Walk away or turn it off, do what feels right for you.

Synopsis

The themes listed in the content warnings come up throughout the play, we have used symbols to indicate where the themes are spoken about or are very prominent.

The names of the characters in the play are Sandra, Dianne, Ellie, Carol, Zeinab, Chelsea, Mercedes, Alice, ‘Supervisor’ and ‘Teacher’

● ◆ The play starts with a funeral / memorial service for Sandra’s mum. Sandra speaks about her mother being a good woman, but Dianne questions this from the audience. She jokingly suggests that Sandra hated her mother, and indicates that her mother died from Covid. It then becomes clear that Dianne is Sandra’s mother.

Other women, Ellie, Chelsea and Zeinab are interrupting the conversation throughout, trying to get Sandra’s attention.

● ◆ Dianne speaks more about death with Sandra, saying it is a natural part of life, and that hopefully she will end up in heaven for all the good she has done. She gives Sandra feedback about her speech, and they speak about how they don't get along together.

■ Dianne says it's because Sandra is always late, Sandra explains that's because of the needs of the women she works with meaning she can't finish work on time. She says one of the girls had a panic attack. Sandra says she misses her mum.


They speak about going to church and it not being the same now it's online. Ellie, Chelsea and Zeinab are still interrupting with a new woman Alice joining, it is getting increasingly distracting. Dianne can hear them too and thinks it's neighbours and tells Sandra if she had a higher paying job, she could afford a place with thicker walls.


◆ Sandra's daughter Kayla is brought up, but Sandra doesn't want to talk about her. Dianne asks if they are still arguing "Only this generation can talk back to their parents and not get a Jamaican beating."


A teacher starts interrupting and saying they need to speak about Kayla, she's missing classes.

Dianne is asking Sandra about being single, and that it's not good for a woman to be alone.

Another woman called Carol starts interrupting as well.


 Alice and Sandra start a conversation about what outfit to wear to court. Alice is scared about going to prison while experiencing menopause.



 It switches to Mercedes and Sandra talking. Mercedes has ordered food but doesn't want Sandra to watch her eat. They speak about lockdown, Mercedes says she already spent eight years in lockdown, in prison.

 It switches to Carol speaking to Sandra about the women's centre being closed and switching to online services. But Carol doesn't have a

computer and doesn't trust technology. Carol speaks about being five years sober.

Carol and Sandra start singing Carol's karaoke song, *You've Got the Love*.

 Zeinab interrupts, they are starting a video call. They speak about it being hard for Zeinab to find work because of her conviction. "I've seen many bad things go unpunished. But I get caught stealing nappies and nobody forgets."

  Ellie appears, she has a bruise on her face. She isn't with her mum and sister like she told Sandra, she says "I wanted to call you yesterday. But he didn't let me." She is on a pier and it is implied that she is having suicidal feelings.

Sandra's supervisor joins, asking if Sandra is handling the workload ok and if she needs time off. Dianne tells her to say she is fine, otherwise she could lose her job.

◆ The teacher starts asking about Kayla missing classes, and tells Sandra that she needs to give Kayla more support.

The supervisor asks Sandra about Ellie, she still hasn't heard anything.

Sandra speaks about struggling to switch off from her caseload, to look after herself and keep boundaries with the women she works with, Ellie in particular.

The women are all talking, repeating conversations they have had with Sandra during the play.

▣ Sandra becomes increasingly overwhelmed and eventually has a panic attack.

● The final scene is a funeral for Dianne. All the women sing *You've Got the Love*, until eventually Sandra's phone rings.

The play ends.

What does ‘Self-Care’ mean?

The concept of self-care comes from the Black Feminist movement. Self-care is important because it's about recognising that we experience discrimination and oppression because of how others react to who we are, or what we've experienced. Self-care is a choice to listen to our needs and look after ourselves, so we are able to keep going and live our best lives, despite the difficulties we experience in life and how they make us feel.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.” - Audre Lorde, a Black Feminist and pioneer of self-care.

Further reading and resources about self-care

This guide takes inspiration from [20 Stories High](#) and [The Survivor's Trust](#).

[London Survivors Gateway self care guide](#) - this guide has been written for people who have experienced sexual violence, but it includes lots of helpful self-care tips which could be useful for anyone.

[Anna Freud Self Help Hub](#) - this resource hub has been created for young people, but it contains lots of self-help tips and suggestions which anyone could find useful.



Supported using public funding by

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