

With the information provided in mind, develop an essay educating youth how to take care of themselves first, in order to be available to take care of others. Be sure to include specific examples from your own health science education and training. (Formatting is not judged in online submissions)

It started simple enough - a warmth creeping from my chest to my shoulders and a odd tingling sensation in my feet. Within a few moments I could no longer feel my hands. My ears began thundering and my heart rate began increasing like a crescendo from one of Beethoven's symphonies. I've fainted plenty of times in my life, but this was nothing like that - it was like being suspended in between the conscious and subconscious, a purgatory of emotion. Am I going to die? That was what it felt like when I experienced my very first panic attack. Little did I know, that it would soon become a common occurrence in my life, and it would be something that I would go on to struggle with for the next several years. A few months ago I was formally diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety and Panic Disorder for the first time. I had been having these "fever dream episodes" (as I dubbed them at the time) for about 4 years before I built up the courage to finally tell someone something was wrong. In high school, I had been incredibly stressed with balancing school, extracurriculars, and helping taking care and worrying about my parents. My mom had 3 surgeries, 2 of which had almost 8 month recovery times each. But the tipping point for me had been when my dad had a severe heart attack and almost died. I'll never forget dialing 911 and watching the paramedics come rushing in as my dad screamed in agony, writhing in a pool of his cold sweat like a fish out of water. I didn't know at the time that this could be considered a traumatic event or a trigger. I was already active in the health science programs at my school and went on to become a Certified Nursing Assistant and had the opportunity about 3 times a week, to leave school halfway through the day and go work at the hospital instead for credit. I loved what I did and threw myself into taking care of my patients, and then coming home to help my parents. I loved what I was doing so much that I never stopped to consider how I was actually feeling, or worry about myself. I figured, "After all if I want to be a doctor, isn't taking care of other people my whole life how it's supposed to be?" So I continued to ignore my needs until finally after starting college it finally all boiled to the top. I could no longer get through each hour, much less through the day without having complete meltdowns - my body lightly trembling at all times. It was fall semester of 2021 that I finally got the help I needed by telling my doctor, finding a therapist, and reaching out to my friends and family to find a community. What I went through, though often untold and undiscussed, is incredibly common in the medical industry. Health care professionals, and aspiring ones alike, often invest so much time into helping others that they overlook themselves, which is utterly detrimental in the long run. It is imperative that they are taught the importance of how to take care of themselves and their mental health first, before they go out to help others. The first thing about learning how to take care of yourself first is forcing yourself to slow down and identify your needs. This was the hardest part for me. You need to be able to sit, ask yourself some questions and pick apart what's wrong. Do I feel bad because I'm tired and haven't rested today? Not enough sleep? Not enough food? Healthcare professionals spend so much of their time and energy looking into other people's needs that they sometimes forget their own. No person can be a 24/7 machine, and taking the time to identify what you need is like routine maintenance. Teaching yourself how to ask these questions and find the answers will make it easier for you to determine exactly what you need to do to take care of yourself. The next thing you need to do after addressing immediate concerns like that is learning how to set boundaries. Youth need to be taught how to actually balance work, life AND personal care, rather than just being told in hollow platitudes that they should. You should schedule time for yourself, to do things you enjoy and recharge you, and plan out a schedule that accommodates an adequate amount of time for sleep. For me, that was making sure I had some time set apart every day to practice karate and workout, and some time set apart to write poetry. These activities were able to allow my mind some time to refresh from the stress of the every day world and let me vent out my frustration and other complex emotions. Getting exercise has been proven in the scientific community to help release endorphins in your brain, and long term that's not just good for physical strength, and bodily health; it's also great for the mind. Furthermore, poetry and other creativity driven activities challenge other parts of your brain that often get lost during the fight and flight mode your body may be in when it's trying to get through the day. Studies

have shown that art, and art therapy are wonderful tools to help people heal and recover. One of the key things about life and mental health is that you shouldn't always need to be recovering. Scheduling time for yourself and time to take care of your mind will help you get the much needed rest that allows life to feel more bearable. Hustle culture often tells us that we need to be working 24/7, always fighting for a seat at the table, always trying to climb the next rung on the ladder. But that's not possible and will lead to burnout. When it comes students on the healthcare path, this is especially prevalent. Between taking difficult and demanding classes, wrestling for research positions, internships, hospital rotations, extracurriculars, studying for the MCAT (or other exams) and making yourself seem like a worthy candidate, you will without a doubt feel exhausted. If you're already always exhausted, you'll be unable to help others too. Like the ageless saying goes, you can't pour from an empty pitcher. Scheduling time for yourself will make you stronger in the long run and make your life feel more fulfilled. Paying attention to your own needs, better equips you to not only take on life, but to also help others. If you feel well rested and not-burnt out, you'd be better equipped to handle a difficult patient. The more patience you have with yourself, the more patience you'll be able to give to your patient. I distinctly remember that in high school when I worked at the nursing home, I would come home in tears almost every day. I wanted so bad to be able to help so many people but it just wasn't possible for me to help every single one of them. I felt helpless, and I remember at the time that it worsened my mental health even more so. But a piece of advice I was given by my instructor stuck with me. "You're carrying a load" she said, while pantomiming a Santa Claus-esque bag, "leave the bag when you leave your shift" and learn to take care of your shoulders. And when you come back the next day, it will be easier to pick up and give from. You don't need to help everyone, every life you help has an impact. Though difficult, I took those words to heart, and started taking care of myself, and she was right. I began enjoying my work again and my productivity increased. On my last day at the nursing homes, tearfully a resident told me "You were like an angel" because I took the time to try and understand them (they had a speech and breathing condition that made it difficult for them to talk and communicate). The other nurses cared, but they were simply too exhausted to do anything extra and give more time. The only reason I was able to give her my 100%, the only reason I was able to give all my love and my best care, was because I learned how to find rest for myself. It's also important to find a community. Life is hard, there's no sugar coating for that. But having friends, family, coworkers, and more that you can count on, can make it feel a little less daunting. Learn how to equally share burdens with each other: lift them up when you can, but more importantly, let yourself be lifted up when you need it. Let yourself be cared for by others and let people love you. Find people you can talk to, and if you feel the need to, reach out to to a therapist. It's time to break away the stigma of getting therapy because ultimately all therapy is, is just going to get help for another part of you, which is just as valid and just as important as any other part. Learn to value your body not just as a machine, but as a beautiful, encaptivating, strong, and precious vessel for your soul and who you are. Having a community to help take care of you is just as important as giving your own heart out to help care for others. Growing up I had always wanted to be a pediatrician, because I wanted to be able to help other little kids out there. But after all my experiences I've changed my path into studying to be a Clinical Psychologist. I truly see the value now in taking care of mental health, and I realized that this is my true passion. I want to be able to help people see themselves as important and learn how to care for themselves. Taking care of yourself requires finding and identifying your needs, tending to them, setting boundaries, finding enjoyment, and finding your community. I know it seems tedious at times, but I assure you, taking care of yourself first will make you happier, and in the long run will help you give better care and touch even more lives.