

Holding Space Without Losing Yourself

The Grounded Practitioner Series

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The Wholesome Woman

Welcome

This workbook has been created to support you as a practitioner who listens, responds, and shows up with care.

It offers space to pause and reflect on how your work actually feels from the inside. Not how it looks, not how it's meant to feel, but how it lands in your body, your thoughts, and your energy.

You can move through these pages slowly, return to sections over time, or stay with a single page if that's what feels most supportive right now.

There is no expectation to complete everything.

This is a place to notice, reflect, and reconnect with yourself within the work you do.

Session Intention

Many practitioners are deeply empathetic and responsive. We listen closely, sense what sits beneath the words, and stay present with complex emotional experiences.

This sensitivity supports meaningful work.

It allows trust, depth, and genuine connection.

Over time, though, that same sensitivity can lead to emotional load building in subtle ways. Not because anything is being done incorrectly, but because the work involves ongoing emotional contact.

This session focuses on:

- emotional load in practitioner work
- the difference between empathy and compassion
- staying connected to yourself while supporting others

The intention here is not to change how you care, but to deepen your awareness of how you experience caring. When that awareness grows, sustainability often follows naturally.

Arriving Here

Before continuing, pause for a moment.

Notice your body where you are seated.

Notice any points of contact, weight, or tension.

Notice your breath as it moves naturally, without trying to change it.

Allow yourself to arrive fully into this moment, rather than rushing into the next section.

You may want to write, or simply sit with the question:

How am I arriving into this workbook today?

There is no right answer. What matters is honesty.

Empathy and Emotional Load

Many practitioners experience the world through deep feeling.

You may notice emotional shifts quickly, sense unspoken experiences, or feel the tone of what someone is sharing before it's clearly named. This often happens without conscious effort.

This capacity supports presence and understanding.

It's also where emotional load can begin to accumulate.

Emotional load doesn't usually arrive in dramatic moments. More often, it shows up gradually:

- thoughts that linger after sessions
- a heaviness that stays into the evening
- physical sensations that don't fully resolve

These experiences are common in practitioner work, especially for those who care deeply and listen closely.

Understanding how empathy functions within this process is an important part of caring for yourself over time.

Reflection:

Where do I notice emotional load building for me?

This might be during certain types of work, with particular situations, or at specific points in my week.

Empathy and Compassion

Empathy is often one of the reasons people are drawn to practitioner work in the first place.

Empathy allows you to sense what another person is experiencing. You may feel their emotions in your own body, pick up on subtle shifts, or find yourself emotionally resonating with what they are sharing. For many practitioners, this happens naturally, without effort or intention.

Empathy supports attunement. It helps people feel seen, understood, and met.

At the same time, empathy can blur boundaries if it becomes the primary way of relating. When empathy pulls you fully into another person's emotional experience, it can be difficult to remain connected to yourself at the same time.

Compassion also involves care, presence, and responsiveness, but it lands differently.

Compassion allows you to stay present with another person's experience while remaining anchored in your own body, perspective, and internal state. There is awareness of what the other person is feeling, without needing to feel it in the same way.

With compassion, you are alongside rather than inside.

This difference matters because it changes how the work feels over time.

When empathy shifts into over-identification, emotional load tends to increase. You may find yourself carrying emotions after sessions, thinking about people long after contact, or feeling responsible for how things unfold.

When compassion is present, care remains available without the same emotional weight. You can respond thoughtfully, remain engaged, and still leave the interaction feeling like yourself.

Neither empathy nor compassion is right or wrong. Empathy is not something to get rid of. Compassion is not something to force.

The work here is noticing:

- when empathy is drawing you too far into another person's experience
- when compassion allows you to stay connected without losing yourself

Reflection:

How do I recognise when empathy is pulling me into over-identification?

This might show up emotionally, physically, or mentally.

What does compassion feel like in my body when I am supporting someone?

Notice sensations, posture, breath, or energy.

What helps me shift from empathy into compassion when I notice I am carrying too much?

How Boundaries Actually Work

Boundaries are often talked about as something we set or apply, but in lived experience, they are something we maintain through connection to ourselves.

Boundaries are not created by pushing others away or by hardening. They form when you remain present with your own body, breath, and internal responses while listening to someone else.

When you are connected to yourself, there is a natural sense of where you end and where another person begins.

In practice, boundaries tend to weaken when attention shifts entirely outward. This can happen easily in caring work. You may notice yourself becoming absorbed in another person's emotions, story, or distress, while losing awareness of your own internal state.

Emotional load often builds when listening becomes all-consuming.

This can show up when:

- your attention stays fully on the other person without checking in with yourself
- you feel emotional responses but don't notice them as they arise
- your body becomes tense, shallow in breath, or disconnected

Boundaries strengthen when self-awareness stays present alongside listening.

This does not mean splitting attention or doing something complicated. It can be as simple as:

- noticing your breath while someone speaks
- feeling your body in the chair or on the floor
- staying aware of your own emotional responses as they arise

When compassion is present, you can stay engaged with another person while remaining anchored in yourself. You are able to listen, respond, and care without stepping fully into their emotional experience.

Boundaries, in this sense, are not something you enforce.

They are something you return to, again and again, through self-connection.

Reflection:

What tells me that I am still connected to myself while listening?

This might be a physical sensation, a sense of clarity, or a feeling of steadiness.

What tends to pull me away from myself when I am supporting others?

When Boundaries Are Lost

When boundaries soften or fade, it's rarely sudden or dramatic. More often, it happens gradually, as self-connection stretches thinner over time.

This doesn't mean you've failed or missed something. It means the work has required a lot of you.

When empathy shifts into over-identification, the effects often show up in familiar ways. You may notice:

- feeling drained or flat after sessions, even when the work felt meaningful
- carrying other people's emotions with you long after contact has ended
- feeling a sense of responsibility for how someone is doing or what happens next
- losing awareness of your own needs, limits, or capacity

These experiences are not personal shortcomings. They are information.

They point to moments where attention has been pulled outward for too long, and connection to self needs to be restored.

Often, the first sign is subtle. You might feel slightly foggy, heavy, or disconnected rather than clearly overwhelmed. Over time, if these signs are ignored, exhaustion and resentment can begin to build.

Noticing these signals early creates space for recalibration. It allows you to return to yourself before depletion sets in.

Reflection:

Which of these signs do I recognise most often in myself?

Notice without judgement.

What usually happens just before I feel this way?

This might relate to certain types of work, emotional themes, or patterns of listening.

How do I typically respond when I notice these signs?

Do I push through, withdraw, seek relief, or ignore them?

Reconnecting with boundaries does not require withdrawing from your work or caring less. It begins with restoring awareness of yourself within it.

When You Stay Tethered to Your Centre

When you remain connected to yourself, the experience of supporting others changes in subtle but important ways.

You are still present.

You still care.

You still listen deeply.

What shifts is where you are anchored.

Rather than being pulled into another person's emotional experience, you stay connected to your own body, breath, and internal state while remaining available to them. This creates a sense of steadiness that supports both you and the person you are with.

When compassion is present, you may notice:

- a sense of clarity while listening
- emotional responsiveness without being overwhelmed
- the ability to stay engaged without losing your footing
- a clearer sense of what belongs to you and what does not

This doesn't mean you feel less. It means your feelings move through rather than staying lodged.

Over time, working from this place can change how the work feels in your body. You may find that you recover more easily after sessions, feel less emotionally tangled, and have more energy available outside of your work.

Staying tethered to your centre allows care to remain sustainable. It creates space for presence without depletion.

Reflection:

How does my body feel when I am connected to myself while supporting someone?

Notice sensations such as breath, posture, energy, or tension.

What do I notice is different about my thoughts or emotions when compassion is present?

What helps me return to this place when I notice I've drifted away from myself?

This state is not something to maintain perfectly.
It is something you return to, again and again.

Practice: The Clearing Breath

This practice is designed to support you in moments where emotional residue or mental load has begun to build.

It isn't meant to change how you feel or remove emotion.

It's a way of returning to yourself when your attention has been pulled outward for too long.

The breath offers a simple point of reconnection. It brings awareness back into your body and helps distinguish between what belongs to you and what does not.

You can use this practice:

- after a session
- between conversations
- at the end of the day
- or anytime you notice heaviness, fogginess, or emotional carryover

To begin, bring your attention to your breath as it is right now.

As you inhale, allow the breath to draw your awareness back into your body. Notice where the breath lands. Notice any sensation of presence returning.

As you exhale, allow the breath to create space.

There is no need to force release. Simply let the exhale soften whatever is ready to move.

You might reflect with each breath:

- Inhaling: returning to myself
- Exhaling: releasing what is not mine

If your mind wanders, that's okay. Gently return attention to the breath and the sensation of being here.

This practice doesn't require long pauses or perfect focus. Even one or two conscious breaths can support clarity and steadiness.

Over time, returning to the Clearing Breath helps reinforce compassion rather than over-identification. It supports care that remains connected to self.

Reflection:

When I use this practice, what do I notice shift first?

This might be in my body, my thoughts, or my emotional state.

Where in my day could this practice support me most consistently?

This practice is not about doing more.
It is about remembering to come back to yourself.

Creative Reflection: My Energetic Container

This reflection invites you to explore how you hold yourself while holding others.

It is not about creating protection or distance.
It is about understanding your own emotional space and how you stay present within it.

Every practitioner has an internal sense of where their experience begins and ends. When this sense is clear, it becomes easier to stay connected to yourself while remaining available to others.

This reflection offers a way to explore that sense visually or symbolically, rather than through words alone.

You may choose to draw, sketch, write, or simply visualise. There is no expectation of artistic skill or a particular outcome.

Begin by noticing how you experience your emotional space right now.

You might imagine it as:

- a shape or form
- a sense of width or closeness
- a colour, pattern, or texture
- something solid, fluid, open, or contained

Let the image or impression arise without trying to decide what it should be.

As you reflect or create, consider the following questions:

What helps me feel steady when I am supporting others?

Notice what contributes to stability, clarity, or ease.

What strengthens my sense of self in those moments?

This might include physical awareness, internal cues, values, or ways of listening.

What allows me to remain open without becoming overwhelmed?

Notice where openness feels supportive rather than draining.

There is no right or wrong container.

This reflection is about awareness, not correction.

You may find that your container changes over time or in different situations. Simply noticing how it feels right now is enough.

Space to reflect or create:

Integration

Integration is the process of allowing what you've noticed to find its place.

It doesn't require decisions, plans, or immediate change. Often, integration happens quietly in the background as awareness continues to unfold over time.

As you pause here, take a moment to notice what feels different now compared to when you began this workbook. This might be subtle rather than dramatic.

You may notice:

- a clearer understanding of how empathy and compassion show up for you
- a greater awareness of when you are connected to yourself and when you drift
- a sense of relief in naming experiences you've had but not articulated before

None of this needs to be acted on straight away.

Integration begins with recognition.

You might reflect on the following:

What feels clearer for me now than it did before I started?

This might be an insight, a pattern, or a feeling you can now name.

What do I want to stay aware of moving forward?

This could be a bodily cue, an emotional signal, or a moment where I pause and check in with myself.

Is there one small thing I want to honour or protect in myself as I continue my work?

This might relate to energy, time, attention, or internal space.

Integration doesn't mean everything settles at once. It means you leave this session with a little more clarity than you had before.

That clarity becomes something you can return to, especially in moments where emotional load begins to build again.

Closing Reflection

This work asks for presence, attention, and care.

Supporting others involves ongoing emotional contact, responsibility, and responsiveness. Over time, that has an impact, whether it's acknowledged or not.

Taking time to notice how this work lives in you matters.

Before closing this workbook, pause for a moment and acknowledge the effort it takes to reflect honestly on your experience. There is value in that alone.

You might notice:

- a sense of relief in naming things clearly
- a greater awareness of your own limits and capacity
- a deeper respect for what this work requires of you

There is no need to resolve everything you've touched on here. What matters is that you've taken time to be present with it.

As you close, you may want to sit with the following statements. You can write them, read them, or simply notice how they land.

- I can stay connected without losing myself.
- I know what is mine to carry.
- I return to myself with ease.

Take a breath.

Allow yourself to carry forward whatever feels useful from this session, and to leave the rest behind.

This work continues to unfold over time, and you are allowed to meet it one moment at a time.