

A photograph of a woman sitting on a couch, looking thoughtful with her hand to her face. A therapist is sitting next to her, holding a clipboard and pen, appearing to be in a session. The background shows a modern living room with a plant and a white wall.

# Holding Space in Hard Times: Self-Care and Sustainability for Financial Service Providers

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## Who am I?

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- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
- Accredited Financial Counselor
- First Certified Financial Therapist™
- Board Member of FTA's Board of Director
- Editor of the practitioner corner for Journal of Financial Therapy
- I teach financial therapy certificate courses at K-State



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# What is financial therapy?



“A financial therapist helps clients think, feel, and behave differently with money to improve overall well-being through evidence-based practices and interventions that aim to resolve underlying issues limiting self-growth, happiness, and financial wellness...”

- Financial Therapy Association

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Financial stress impacts well-being

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- Mental health diagnoses/symptomology
  - Physical health issues
  - Relational issues



But your overall health is also relation to your financial health

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- Physical health issues
  - Relational issues
  - Mental health diagnoses/symptomology

This is directly relevant to your work as Financial Wellness Providers, as you regularly engage at this intersection and support clients through difficult and stressful periods.

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# Life Changing Events



- Life-changing events can be a catalyst for seeking the financial help.
- Sometimes life-changing events are positive, such as getting married or the birth of a child.
- Other times, life-changing events are more closely related to loss, such as receiving a difficult medical diagnosis, going through a divorce, or losing a loved one.
- They could even be considered financial traumas.

# Financial Trauma

## **Big T Financial Traumas**

- Poverty
- Hunger
- Vulnerability to crime
- Great Recession
- Bankruptcy
- Divorce
- Foreclosure
- Homelessness
- Theft/Robbery
- Unemployment

## **Little T Financial Traumas**

- Parents' fighting about money
- Parents' stressed about money
- Realizing you have more/less than others
- Losing/wasting money
- Jealousy of other's belongings
- Not being able to afford items
- Shame about purchases
- Financial infidelity
- Watching a family member control others with money.

As practitioners,  
often we have  
experienced  
similar financial  
traumas.





## Many of these experiences can evoke grief

- Grief can best be viewed as a coping process, typically after someone has experienced a physical or emotional loss.
- Other examples of events that can cause grief: the dissolution of a marriage, a failed friendship, a colleague leaving for a different position, a change in one's health, a market downturn, job loss, moving, retiring, buying or selling a home, or even a child graduating from high school.



# Grieving Process

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- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance





## Recognize the power of anger

- Anger is normal.
- It also can actually make people feel better momentarily as it makes one feel strong while out of control.
- Don't internalize clients' anger but also hold them accountable.

# How to Deal with that Anger

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- Normalize the emotion without endorsing the behavior
- Slow the interaction down intentionally
- Name what you observe, not what you assume
- Set clear, respectful boundaries early
- Shift from problem-solving to stabilization
- Separate the person from the stressor
- Offer structured choices
- Avoid power struggles
- Know when to pause or reschedule
- Assess for scope and referral needs

# Anticipatory Grief (aka Ambiguous Loss)

- Ambiguous loss has been defined as the pain and discomfort experienced from a loss without closure.
- Examples - taking care of a partner with a chronic debilitating illness, the demise of a relationship, or even nearing retirement and losing sense of self.



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## Empathy versus Sympathy

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- Sympathy means feeling bad for someone.
- Empathy means understanding the feelings they are experiencing.
- It is not necessary to have experienced the same loss as the other person in order to empathize with the underlying.
- Don't say I'm sorry as this sympathetic statement often leads to the reply It's okay when it is not necessarily okay.
- Alternatives - Nothing will ever be the same or My heart hurts for you.



A photograph showing a man and a child in an airplane cabin. The man is wearing a dark blue polo shirt and a white oxygen mask with a yellow filter. He has a white oxygen tube connected to the mask. He is holding a yellow, textured object, possibly a piece of fruit or a toy, in his hands. The child, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is sitting in a dark blue airplane seat and looking towards the man. The background shows the interior of an airplane with windows and overhead storage bins.

You need to put your oxygen mask on first before you care for others.

# Why Self-Care is Essential...

- If you are promoting the health and wellness of their clients, then you must also be actively pursuing health and wellness within your own life.
- Need to avoid compassion fatigue and burnout.
- To be more deeply connected, effective, and present with their clients.



# Create a closing ritual

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Helping work does not end when the session ends. Without intentional closure, clients can remain active in your nervous system long after you leave the office. These structured rituals support containment, reduce rumination, and preserve professional longevity.

# Create a closing ritual (1)

- Cognitive Closure: Move clients from your nervous system to your notes.
  - Name something you did effectively to increase confidence and interrupt self-criticism/guilt.
    - I maintained boundaries during the crisis.
    - I reflected accurately and slowed escalation.
    - I asked the hard question.
    - I tolerated discomfort without rescuing.
- One Sentence of Responsibility Clarification: To separate care from over-ownership.
  - Their housing instability is not mine to fix.
  - Their ambivalence is part of their process.
  - Their growth belongs to them.
  - I can guide, but I cannot choose for them.
  - Take your responsibility to create a brief Tomorrow List of unresolved items and let the rest go so you don't ruminate overnight

# Create a closing ritual (2)

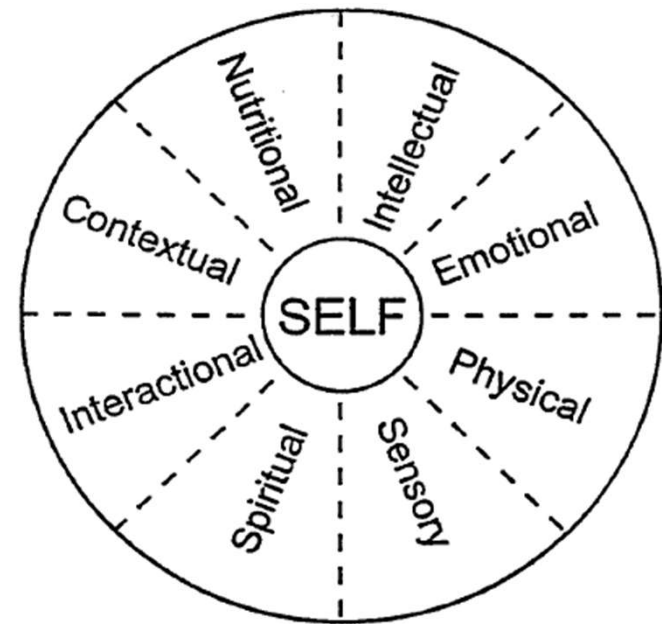
- Somatic Transition: Signal safety and completion to your body.
  - Take a five-minute walk before getting in your car
  - Change shoes or clothing immediately
  - Wash hands slowly and intentionally
  - Practice 4–6 breathing (inhale 4, exhale 6) for two minutes
  - Roll shoulders, release jaw, unclench hands
  - Consistency matters more than intensity. The repetition teaches your nervous system what finished feels like.

# Create a closing ritual (3)

- Symbolic Boundary Ritual: Create a psychological closing ceremony.
  - Select a simple, repeatable action:
    - Power down work devices
    - Shut your office door with intention
    - Clear your desk surface
    - Turn off lights deliberately
    - Then say (out loud or internally): I have done my part for today. The rest belongs to tomorrow.
- When a Client Still Follows You Home
  - Is this empathy or anxiety?
  - Am I trying to solve something outside my role?
  - What boundary would support this client's growth?
  - Remind yourself, I can care without carrying.

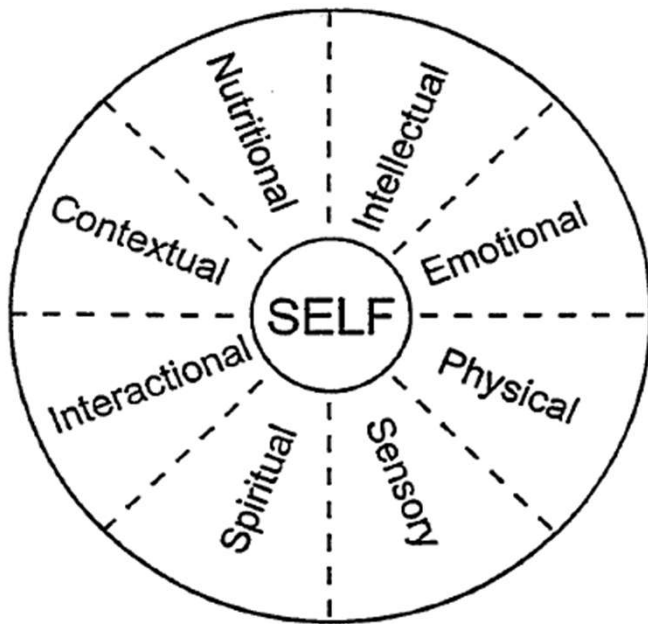
# Engaging in Self Care using the Self Mandala

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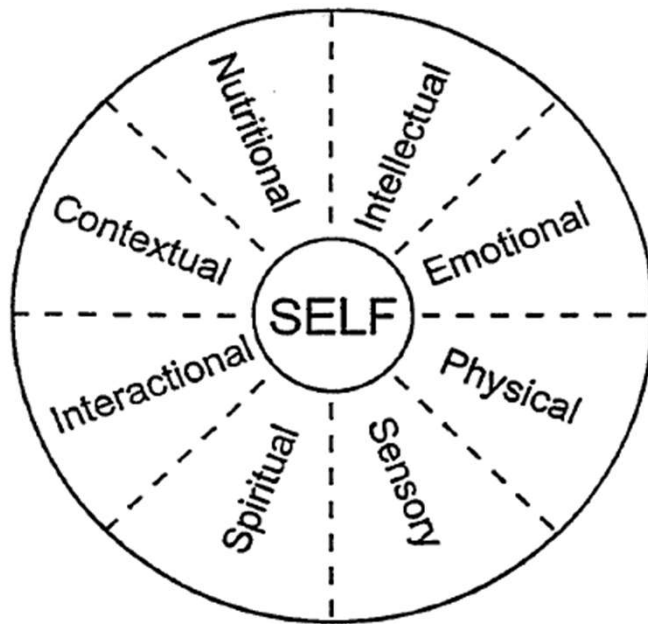
# Self Mandala - Intellectual

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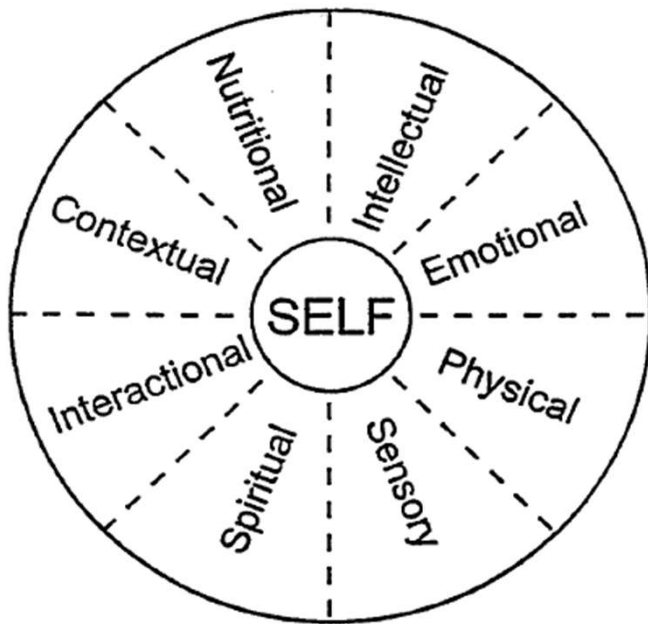
# Self Mandala - Emotional

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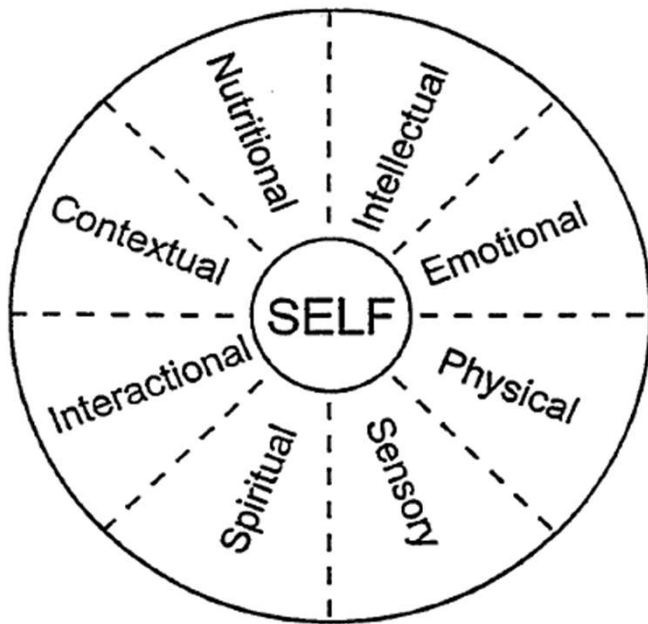
# Self Mandala - Physical

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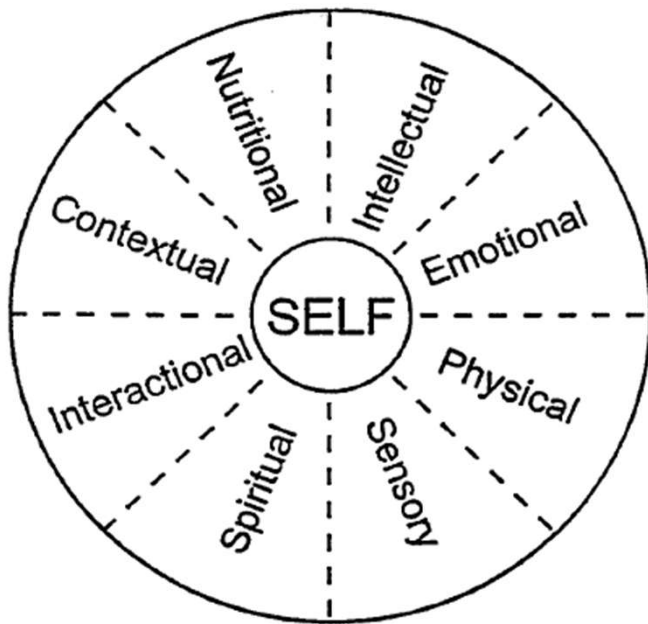
# Self Mandala - Sensory

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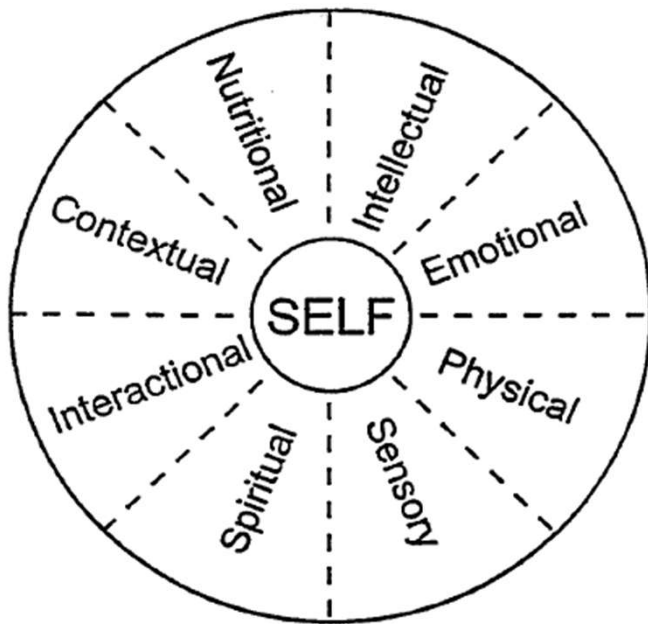
# Self Mandala - Spiritual

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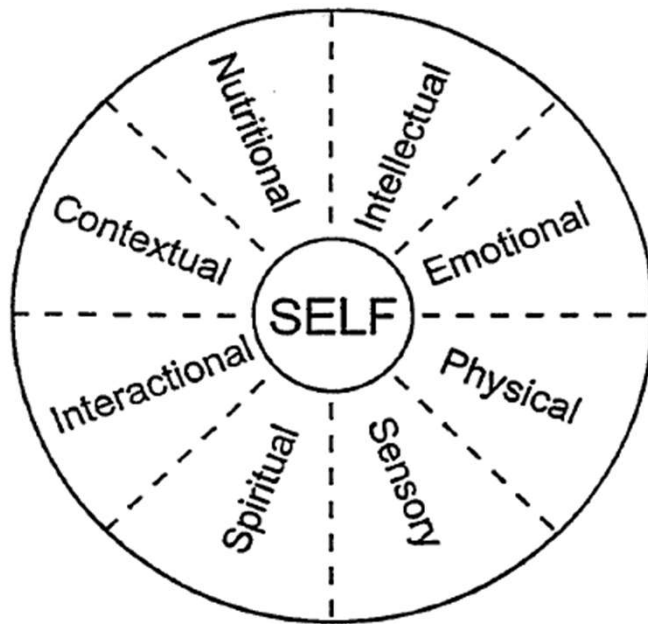
# Self Mandala - Interactional

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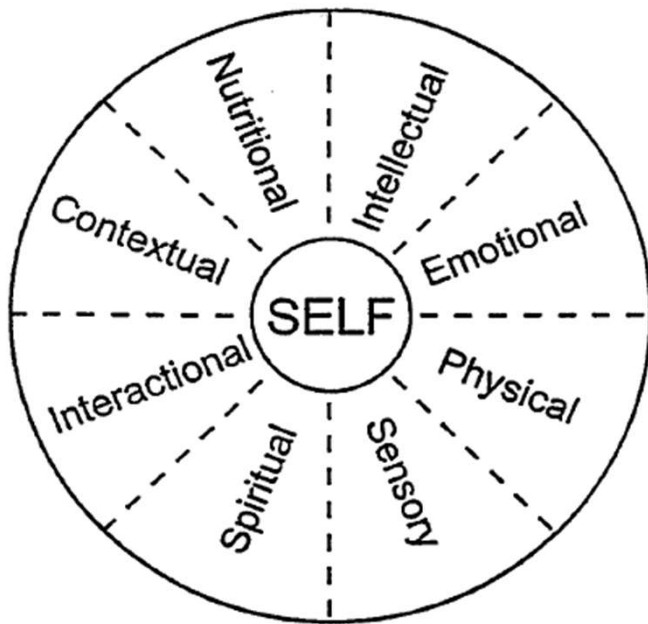
# Self Mandala - Contextual

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# Self Mandala - Nutritional

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## Create a Team of Helpers

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- Recognize your scope of practice through:
  - Self Check
  - Client Check
  - Problem Check



# Differentiating Mental Health Professionals

- **Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists** work with individuals, couples, and families but tend to focus on the relational dynamics of well-being.
- **Clinical Social Workers** work with individuals, couples, and families but generally focus on a communities' impact on well-being.
- **Licensed Professional Counselors** usually focus more on an individual's well-being rather than the family's well-being.
- **Psychologists** tend to concentrate on testing and assessments as a means of providing help.
- **Psychiatrists** are medical professionals who tend to apply the use of medication to the management of mental health.
- **Financial therapists** can be mental health professionals or financial professionals.



# Psychologytoday.com

- Psychologytoday.com is a helpful tool when searching for mental health professionals specializing in grief work.
  - There are helpful filters on the site that enables searches based on location, insurance, and specialties (e.g., grief, addiction, couple's counseling).
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Thank you!

