

Creating Work-Life Balance in Graduate School

A practical guide for students balancing academics, employment, and personal responsibilities.

Deborah Nevarez

CUNY SPH Student Wellness Intern



Overview

- Balance isn't something you "Achieve Once"
- About Me
- Strategies

What Is Work-Life Balance?

Work/life balance isn't about splitting time evenly. It's about managing your responsibilities in a way that protects your mental, emotional, and physical health.

- Balance looks different for everyone
- What feels manageable changes over time
- Balance is personal, flexible, and evolving





Why Balance Matters

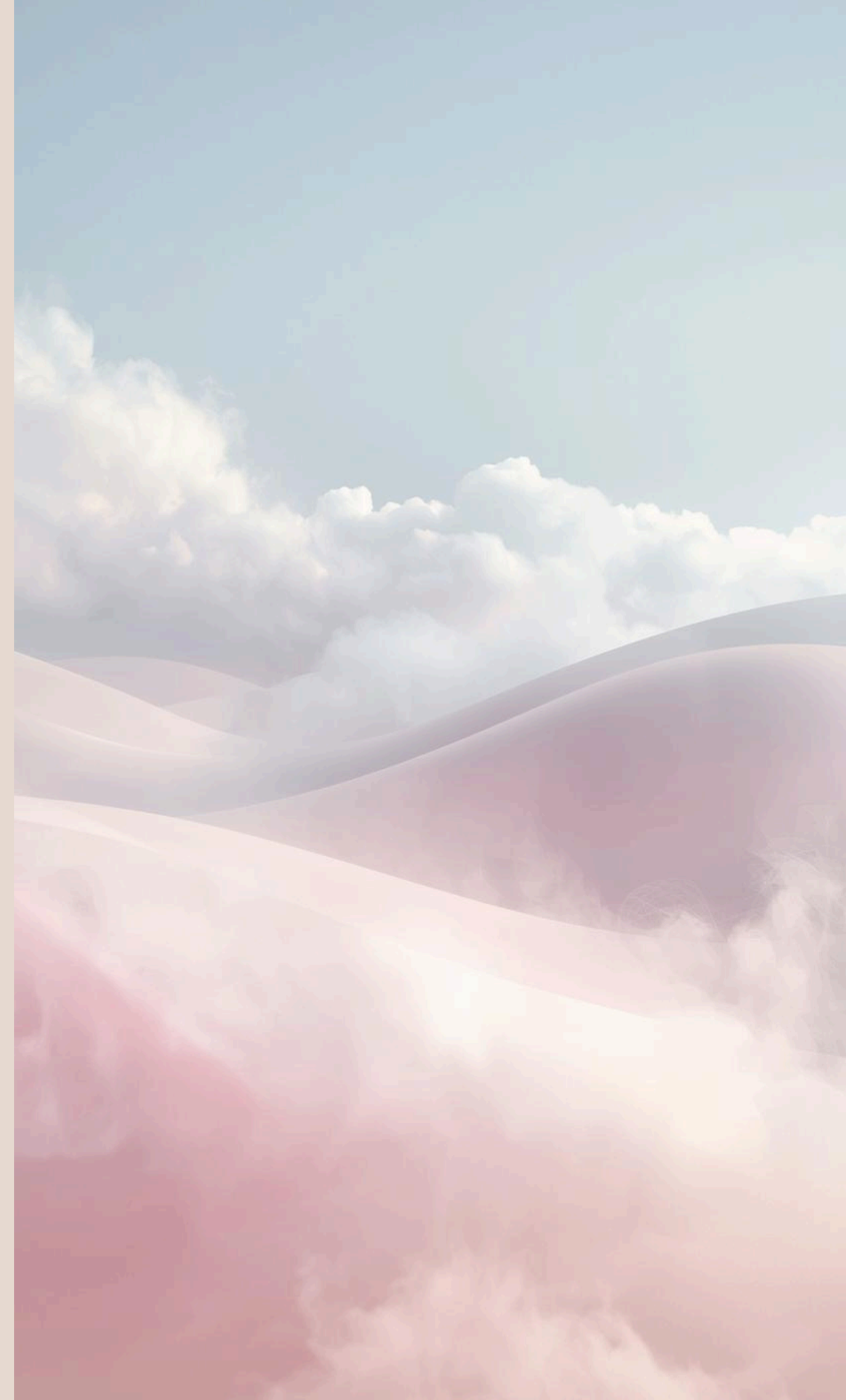
When balance is off, it can affect:

- Mental health
- Academic performance
- Work productivity
- Relationships and social connections

Recognizing imbalance early helps you make small adjustments before stress builds.

Common Struggles

- Many students juggle multiple roles: student, employee, caregiver, partner, friend. Feeling stretched thin is common, not a personal failure.
- Research shows: Students who work while in school report higher stress, fatigue, and burnout, especially when working long hours.

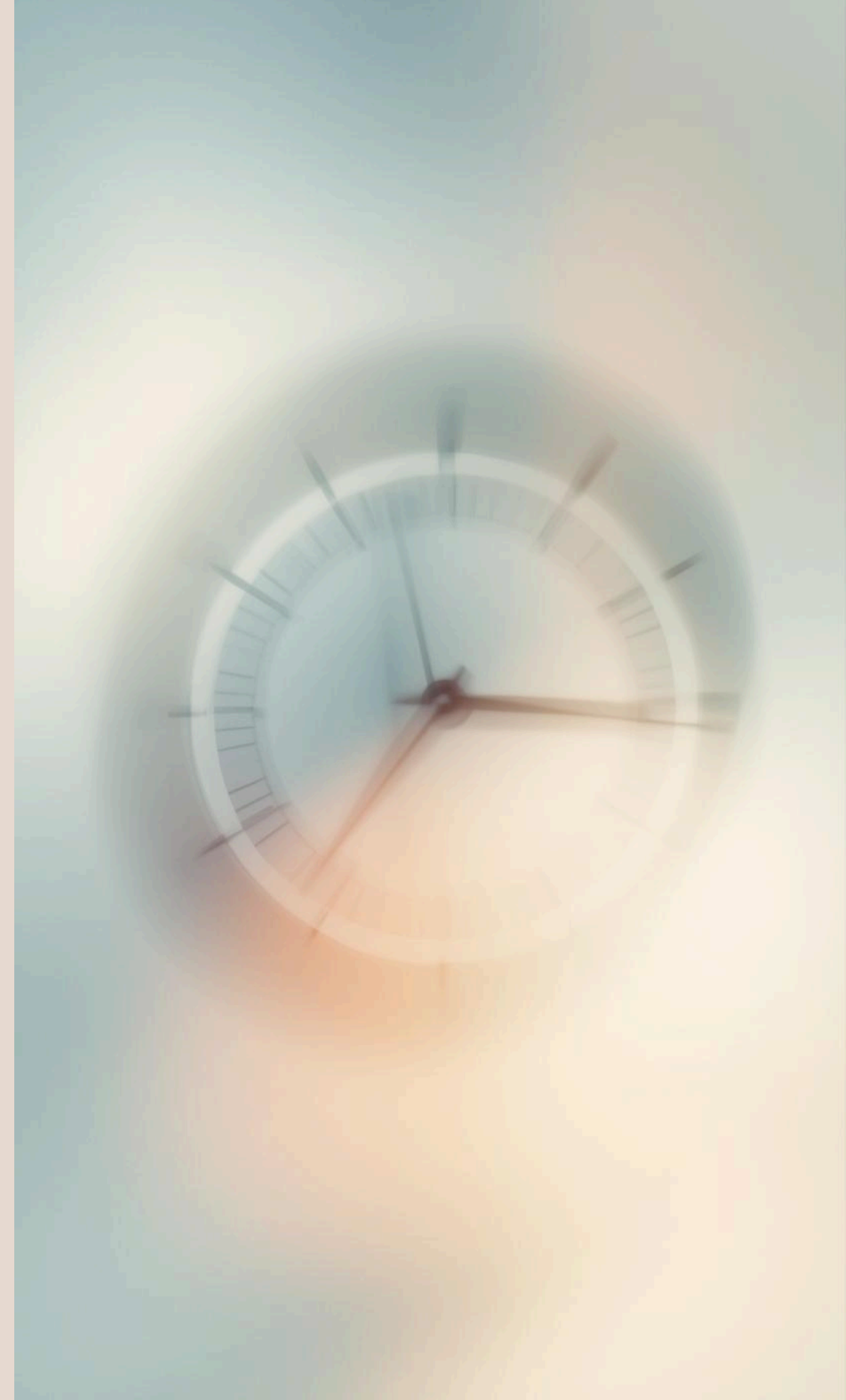


Why Balance Feels Hard

Balance is difficult because many factors are outside your control:

- Work schedules
- Family responsibilities
- Academic deadlines
- Financial pressure
- Social expectations

Understanding these influences helps you approach yourself with compassion rather than self-criticism.



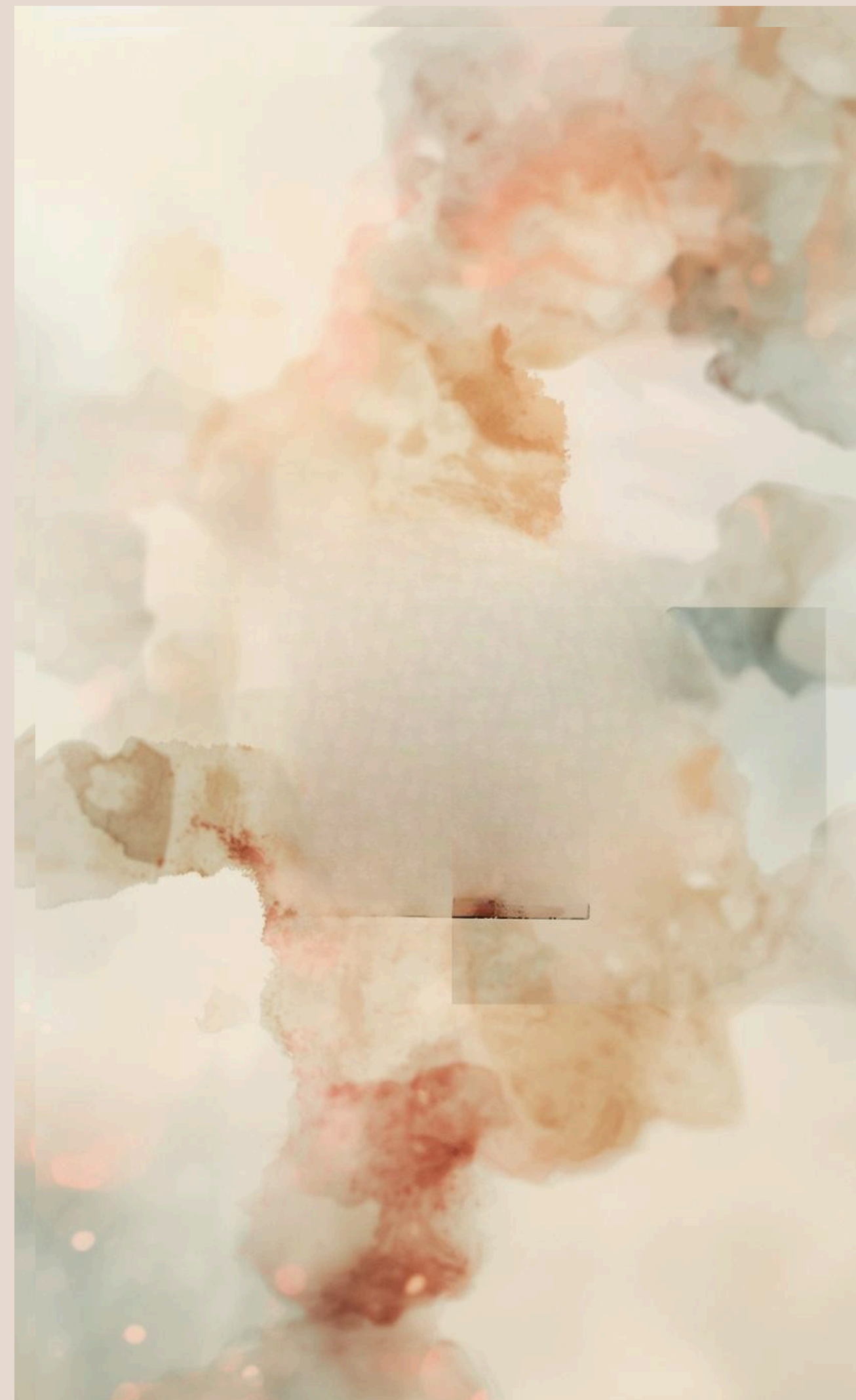
Set Realistic Boundaries

Boundaries protect your time and energy.

Examples:

- "I'm available until 7 PM."
- "I'll respond after I finish this assignment."
- "I can help, but not today."

Clear communication reduces stress and helps you stay consistent.





Prioritize What Matters

Not everything requires equal attention. Identifying your top priorities each week helps you:

- Focus on what truly matters
- Reduce overwhelm
- Stay organized and intentional

Tip: Choose your top 3 priorities each week.

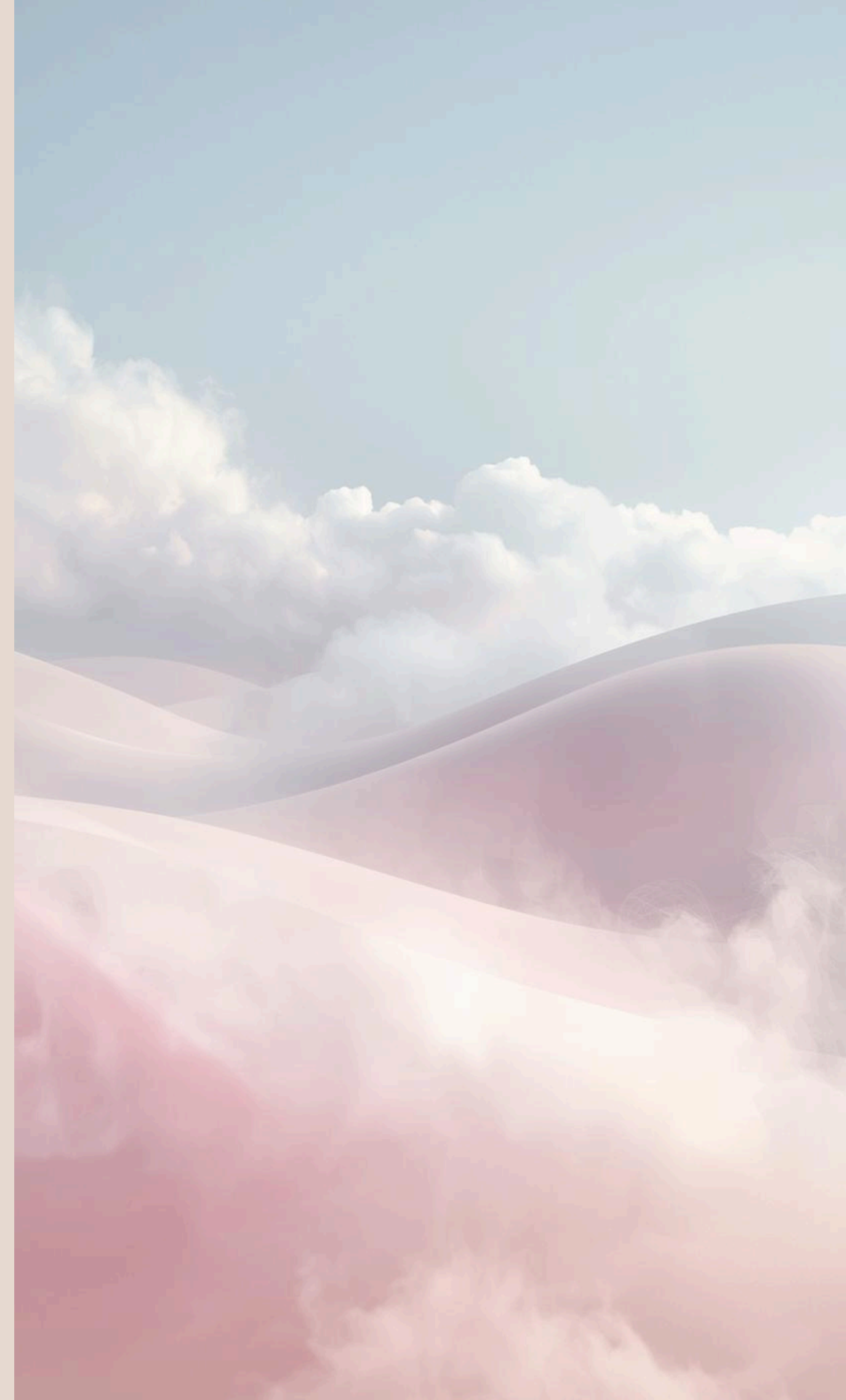
Practice Self-Care

Self-care doesn't need to be time consuming.

Try small habits:

- Stretching
- Drinking water
- A 5-minute walk
- Deep breathing
- A short break between tasks

These micro-practices help reset your energy.





Use Technology Wisely

Technology can support your routine when used intentionally.

Helpful tools include:

- Google Calendar
- Apple/Android reminders
- Notion or Trello
- Time-blocking apps

Choose 1–2 tools that genuinely help, not a dozen that overwhelm you.



Embrace Imperfection

- Balance is not a perfect or static state.
- Some weeks will feel harder than other, and that's normal.
- Giving yourself flexibility reduces pressure and helps you stay grounded.



Your Balance Checklist

Use these questions each week to check in with yourself and make a plan:

1. Priorities:

- What are my top three priorities for this week?
- Do my plans match what matters most to me right now?

2. Boundaries:

- What is one boundary I can set to protect my time or energy?
- Who do I need to communicate this boundary to?

3. Breaks:

- Am I taking short breaks during the day?
- What is one small break I can build into my routine today?

4. Self-Care:

- What is one small self-care habit I can practice this week (e.g., water, movement, sleep)?
- When will I realistically fit this in?

5. Organization:

- What is one tool (planner, app, calendar) I will use to stay organized this week?
- How will I remind myself to actually use it?

6. Reflection:

- How did this week feel overall: overwhelming, manageable, or balanced?
- What is one thing I want to keep, and one thing I want to adjust for next week?

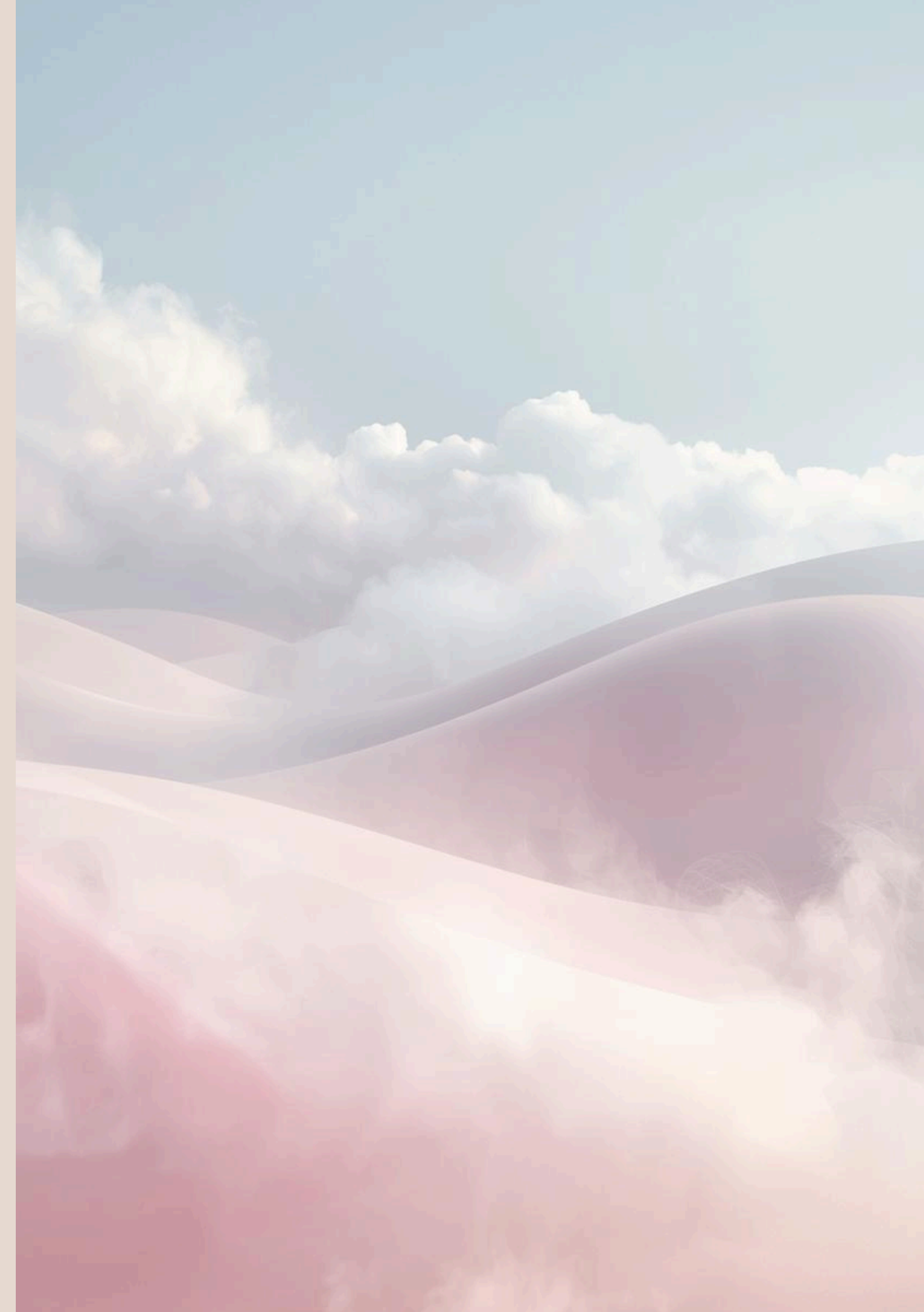
Accountability Helps

You don't have to do this alone.

Accountability can come from:

- A friend/family member
- A coworker
- A classmate
- A study partner
- A mentor

Checking in with someone helps you stay consistent and supported. Accountability doesn't need to be formal. It's simply a way to stay grounded and encouraged.



Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2022). Stress and Your Health.
- Clark, S. (2000). Work/family border theory. *Human Relations*, 53(6).
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2023). Profile of Working College Students.
- American College Health Association (2023). National College Health Assessment.
- Smith, J. & Segal, R. (2024). Setting Healthy Boundaries. HelpGuide.org.
- Covey, S. (2020). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.
- Brown, B. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection*.
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC)(2023). Coping with Stress.
- American Psychological Association (2022). Digital Tools and Mental Health.
- MindTools (2023). Work-Life Balance Toolkit.
- National Institutes of Health (NIH) (2022). Social Support and Health.





Online Resources

Apps

- Headspace – Guided mindfulness and short meditations to manage stress and improve focus.
- Forest – Focus timer that helps you stay off your phone while you study or work.

Podcasts

- The Happiness Lab with Dr. Laurie Santos – Evidence-based strategies for well-being and balance.
- Beyond the To-Do List – A work/life balance podcast focused on practical strategies for productivity, boundaries, and sustainable routines.

YouTube Channels / Videos

- Ali Abdaal – Videos on productivity, studying, and sustainable work habits.
- Thomas Frank – Productivity, study systems, and work/life balance content that's highly relevant for graduate students.

Social Media Accounts

- @nedratawwab (Instagram) – Boundaries, relationships, and mental wellness.
- @thepsychologymum (Instagram/TikTok) – Short, accessible content on stress, emotions, and coping skills.

Final Thoughts

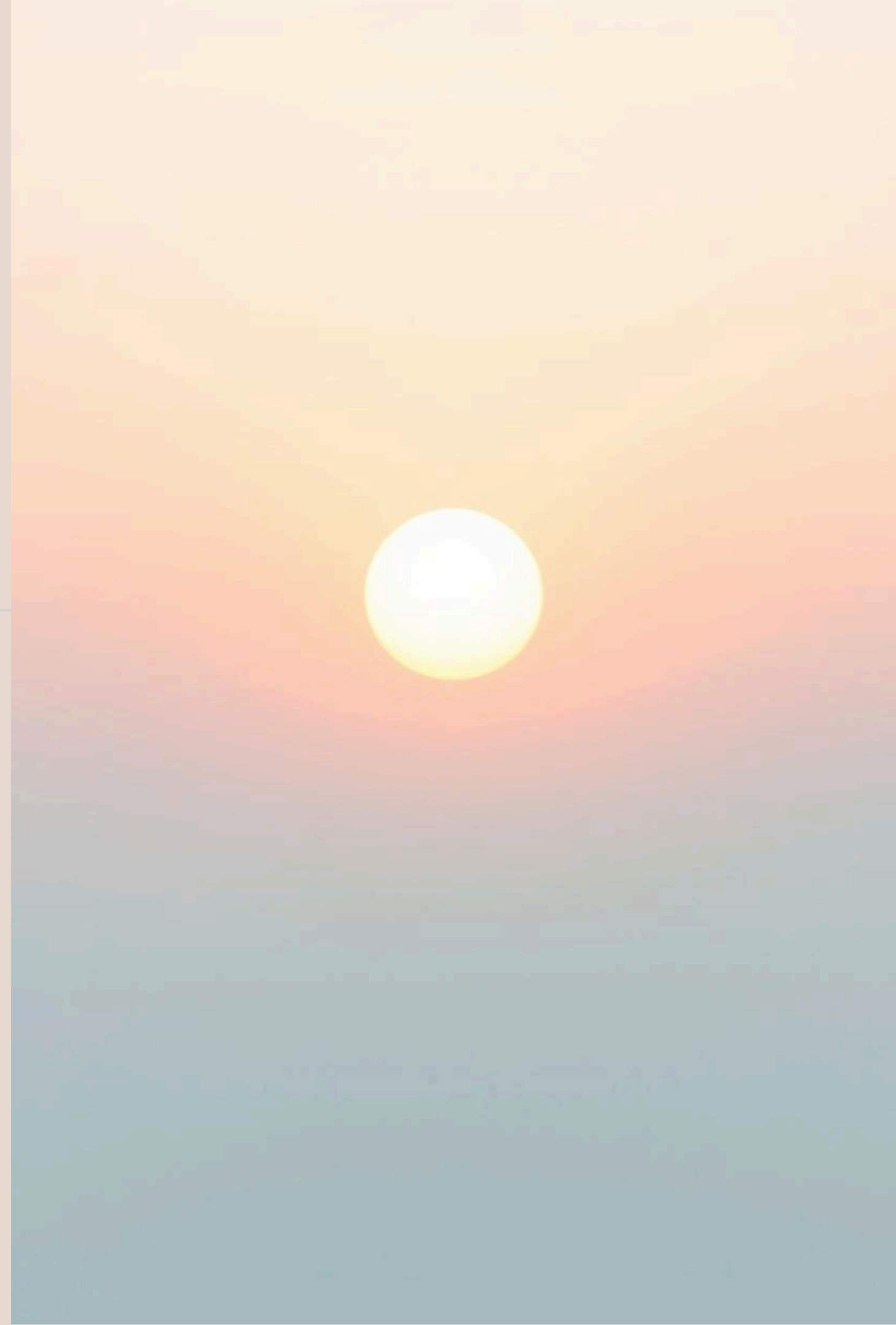
Balance is personal and always evolving. Small, intentional steps repeated over time create meaningful change. You deserve routines that support your well-being, not just your productivity.

Key takeaways from today:

- Balance shifts: It changes with your life, responsibilities, and energy.
- You're not the issue: External pressures make balance harder.
- Boundaries help: Saying "no" is a skill you can build.
- Small habits matter: Tiny, consistent actions support your health.
- Support is valuable: You don't have to manage everything alone.

Plan of action you can start this week:

- Step 1: Pick your top 3 priorities for the week.
- Step 2: Set one boundary (ex: no emails after 8pm).
- Step 3: Choose one small self-care habit to repeat daily.
- Step 4: Use one planning tool to map out your week.
- Step 5: Reflect at week's end: What worked, what didn't, and what you'll adjust.



Thank You

Thank you for watching this webinar. I hope these ideas help you reflect on what balance means for you and how you can move toward a routine that feels sustainable.

Please reach out to Counseling and Wellness Services if you would like more support finding balance in your life by emailing us at Counseling@sph.cuny.edu.