

# Trauma Responsive Educator

*Strengthening the capacity of educators to meet the needs of students coping with trauma*

## Workplace Self-Care

*Caring for your students  
doesn't have to come at the  
expense of caring  
for yourself!*



This brief guide on workplace self-care was developed by the Trauma Responsive Educational Practices Project.

The TREP Project is a research-practice translation project that works to connect research on the science of trauma with the realities of school and classroom management. We aim to create schools and classrooms that can meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students coping with toxic levels of stress and trauma.

Learn more at [TREPEducator.org](https://TREPEducator.org)

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# Workplace Self-Care

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Being an educator is always emotional work, oftentimes challenging work, and sometimes stressful work. BUT it is also rewarding, which is why educators persist even when feeling overwhelmed. Pushing through just because “that’s the job we signed up for” is not beneficial for you, or your students; they benefit more from having healthy and compassionate educators. To ensure that you will have a long career, it is important that you learn to recognize when your stress levels are elevated and become intentional about your self-care.

Truth is, you already know that self-care is necessary for your professional longevity. Like most of us, we don’t prioritize it, so it becomes something that happens after the workday is done. You can’t give your students care you don’t give yourself—at least not for very long.

Prioritizing self-care is not a sign of weakness. It is necessary to balance the natural costs of caring

## ***Maintaining your overall health is the best way to be fully available to meet your students’ needs.***

for those more vulnerable than you. Educators are vulnerable to feelings of anxiety and emotional distress, becoming mentally and emotionally worn out, and feeling overwhelmed by the intensely interpersonal nature of working in schools and meeting the needs of numerous stakeholders, including students, administrators, parents, and colleagues.

If not managed, these feelings can lead to secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue,



vicarious trauma, or burnout. However, these conditions are not signs of personal weakness.

**Self-care is about taking deliberate action, with the intention of maintaining, improving, or restoring health and wellbeing. It is a powerful tool for preventing, managing, and recovering from experiences of stress.**

Make self-care sustainable by integrating it into your daily habits and practices. The goal of self-care is not to add more to your already-full plate or to create additional stress to your daily routine. Self-care is not effective when it feels like a chore because it is based on unrealistic expectations. The aim is identifying some realistic practices that are doable for you.

A central component of self-care is your understanding of yourself and what you need to be well.

### **Realistic (sustainable) self-care practices**

- Engaging in moments of silence
- Rediscovering old or new hobbies
- Establishing stable social networks of support

### **Unrealistic (unsustainable) self-care practices**

- Meditating for thirty minutes in the morning and evening
- Retail therapy
- Accepting every social invitation

Self-care means being more self-compassionate and having less self-judgment. Focus on practices that help you get and stay connected to yourself; practices that help you remain grounded to ensure that you perform at your best AND feel your best.

# Professional Self-Care

Professional self-care includes all of the things that you do at and for work that enable you to meet your workplace responsibilities while managing the many stressors that occur. As your workday becomes less stressful, your overall wellbeing improves.

Self-care was traditionally reserved for outside of work hours. Thankfully, this is changing as we come to understand that integrating self-care throughout the workday is more effective than pushing through difficult days and trying to recover later. Employee distress and burnout has pushed the normalization of self-care as part of what makes an employee productive.

Professional self-care encourages you to identify and amplify the aspects of your work that you experience as energizing, while also thoughtfully minimizing the aspects that you experience as draining.

Self-care is necessary to help you thrive and find joy in the work you do, without experiencing burnout and compassion fatigue. Professional self-care is about creating a healthy work-life integration (not separation) to help work feel less burdensome and more enjoyable.

Compassionate self-care at work is necessary; there's so much that's required but never enough time or resources to get it done. You must engage in daily acts of self-compassion to make it through. Self-compassion is the act of engaging in the conscious and intentional choices to silence your inner critic and replace it with one that communicates gratitude for your small wins and understanding for the things undone.

**Self-compassion is a necessary skill to buffer against the negative physical and mental health consequences of chronic stress.**



## Self-Care is

- **Being healthy and well;** this includes physical and mental wellbeing. This can involve eating healthy and getting enough sleep to be your best self.
- **Seeking support from colleagues;** share the burden by brainstorming ideas and collaborating on large projects, while also reducing workplace isolation.
- **Helping and caring for others;** for many caring for others can enhance their own wellbeing by making them feel good, like they have a greater purpose.



## Think of compassionate self-care as...

*Taking time to intentionally do less for a period of time, so that you can better address your tasks and responsibilities*



*Taking time to connect with yourself to be able to share more of yourself with your students*



*Taking time to clear your mind and reassess your values to create a rewarding and sustainable career*

### *...is not*

- **Being selfish**; while self-care involves prioritizing yourself this is an important element of being able to give your best to others.
- **A cure-all for unmanageable stress**; it is developing new habits and behaviors that you can do to nurture yourself.
- **Adding more work to your plate**; complicated self-care can feel like one more thing to do. Look for sustaining and fulfilling practices that energize you.

# 7 Strategies for Engaging in Professional Self-Care



## Go easy on yourself

We are inevitably our own worst critics. It's easier to be kind to others than ourselves, therefore, whenever you find yourself met with negative thoughts or a feeling of perfectionism, take a moment and ask yourself, "What would I say to a colleague or friend in the same situation?" Then try out the solution you might offer to someone else.

## Set workday goals

Give your workday some additional purpose by setting personal and professional goals. Make sure they are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-based (SMART) goals; this gives you a solid way of tracking progress and feeling good with the results.

## Mingle with your coworkers

Healthy and supportive relationships are a critical part of self-care. For some, socializing with others can bring them joy. If this is true for you, find your core group of coworkers who can champion behind you throughout the workday. Take notice of who feeds your energy and who drains it. Set more boundaries with the drainers. Invest in those who inspire and support you and who understand what it means to have a healthy give-and-take.

## Reflect on previous wins

Most of us have a hard time remembering what happened yesterday, let alone the week prior; we are often so focused on deliverables. Try hitting the pause button with yourself and your team to take a look back at the previous month and name/write down what went well or what felt particularly satisfying.

## Take (or purchase) a nutritious lunch

Though this tip is simple, nutritious meals truly give us the energy to power through the day. Also when you are indulging in your lunch, figure out ways to eat the meal more mindfully which can double as a relaxation technique.

## Switch up your workspace

Your workspace (or environment) can have a significant impact on productivity. Try decorating your workspace by putting up pictures, artwork, or images that inspire you or remind you of the people and things that matter. Also (if possible) incorporate ergonomically correct office furniture to promote comfort, relaxation, and most importantly, good posture.

## Give yourself a recharge and reboot

Many professionals find it hard to take time off from work for various reasons, such as fear of coming back to more work or not having the "time" to take off. However, continuing to operate on limited resources can do more harm than good. Try using your paid time off to take a mental health day where you do not check work emails or think about work but solely relax.

# Assessing and Advancing Your Professional Self-Care

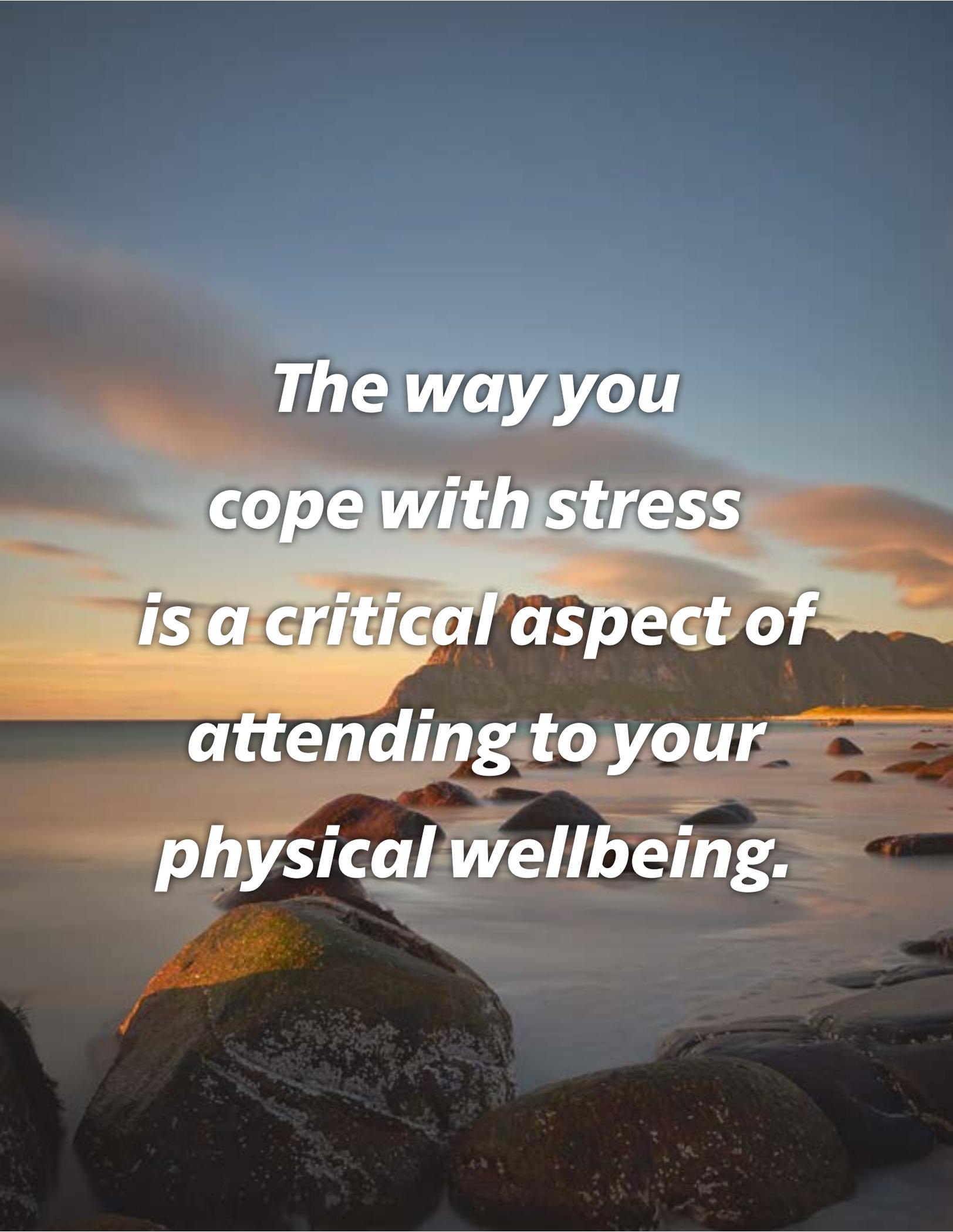
The table below can help you reflect on workplace self-care. When you are finished, look over your responses and listen to your internal self-care dialogue. Make yourself a priority while meeting your responsibilities at work.

Rate your engagement with the following aspects of workplace self-care:

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)	0	1	2	3
Take time to chat with coworkers	0	1	2	3
Make quiet time to complete tasks	0	1	2	3
Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding	0	1	2	3
Set limits with students and colleagues	0	1	2	3
Balance my workload so no one day or part of a day is too much	0	1	2	3
Get regular mentorship or support	0	1	2	3
Negotiate for my needs (support, benefits, pay raise)	0	1	2	3
Have a professional support group	0	1	2	3
Seek professional development in an area of interest	0	1	2	3

Adapted from Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization

What is one element of professional self-care that you want to integrate into your workday?



***The way you  
cope with stress  
is a critical aspect of  
attending to your  
physical wellbeing.***

*As you strive to maintain positive mental and emotional health, it's important to remember that people who have good emotional health can still have emotional challenges or mental illness. Stress with family, work, or school can trigger mental illness or make it worse. Counseling, support groups, and medicines are helpful tools. If you are experiencing ongoing distress, talk with your doctor. They can help you find the right type of professional support.*





# Mental & Emotional Self-Care

Self-care practices are more than just a good workout regimen or a bubble bath. Strong self-care practices, in and outside of the workplace, involve acknowledging and responding to your mental and emotional wellbeing. This form of self-care includes moments for self-reflection, seeking ways to decrease stress, and many other intentional practices that enable you to look inward. Practices that enable mental and emotional self-care can be integrated into your workday.

***Your thoughts and feelings about life's ups and downs influence the way you feel about yourself, and good mental and emotional health helps you see the best in yourself despite challenges.***



Attending to your mental and emotional health has short-term and long-term benefits. In the short-term, good mental and emotional health can help you maintain a positive attitude in the midst of life's challenges, increasing your energy and helping you focus and think more clearly.

The long-term physical health benefits include protecting you from stress disorders like high blood pressure, weight gain, heart disease, etc. and providing a buffer against chronic stress, which can harm your immune system.

There are also long-term interpersonal benefits such as enabling you to maintain deep relationships with colleagues even when the work is stressful. When you're equipped with the skills to manage your emotions, it's easier to productively work through disagreements, talk through your feelings, and show empathy and compassion.

**Emotional self-care** includes the utilization of healthy coping strategies that allow you to effectively manage uncomfortable emotions, such as anger, anxiety, and sadness; as well as helping you to acknowledge and express your feelings regularly and safely.

**Mental self-care** includes engaging in cognitively stimulating and self-reflective activities that strengthen your self-awareness and promote positive personal growth. This is critical because the information you consume and what you think greatly affects your wellbeing.

JUST  
*breathe*

# 5 Strategies for Attending to Mental and Emotional Self-Care at Work

1  
2  
3  
4  
5

## Be aware of your stressors

Everyone is different as it pertains to stressors and how it affects them. For some, stressors can be work deadlines that cause impending doom. For others, it can be taking work home or working with colleagues. Developing self-awareness in this area is the first step in caring for your emotional needs.

## Be transparent with your boss about your emotional needs

In some cases this can be a challenge, especially if you do not have a close or supportive relationship with your boss. Nonetheless, it is important to advocate for yourself and put your emotional needs first. This requires some degree of transparency with your boss.

## Protect your energy

People at work can drain your energy if you let them. Once you recognize who those individuals are within the workspace, try to limit your interactions with them if possible. Also, be aware of topics that can be emotionally provoking or arousing and try your best to avoid engaging in those discussions, as they can leave you emotionally drained.

## Use breaks to detox from work

Treat a break like a break. Walk away from your desk and use that time to recharge instead of working from your desk. This can involve getting out of the building and taking a walk around the block or going for a drive.

## Engage in mentally stimulating exercises at work

Being at work can get repetitive, but there are many ways you can exercise your brain while at work. Completing mentally stimulating exercises at work can help cure boredom on slower days while improving your memory, focus, and recall. Try completing a puzzle, listening to a podcast or TED Talk, or read an online newspaper. You learn about things you're already interested in or discover new interests.

# Assessing and Advancing Your Mental & Emotional Self-Care

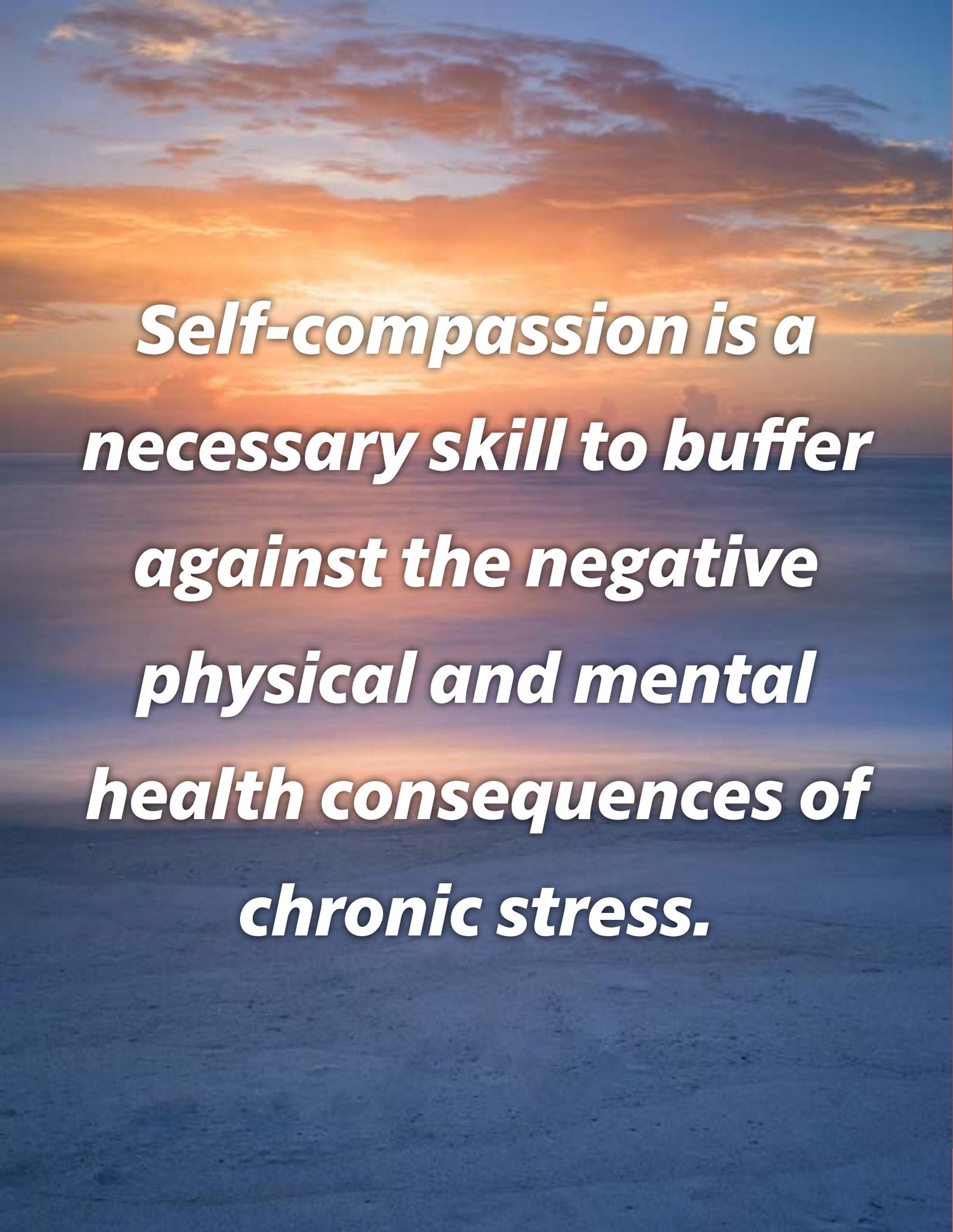
The table below can help you reflect on workplace self-care. When you are finished, look over your responses and listen to your internal self-care dialogue. **Make yourself a priority while meeting your responsibilities at work.**

**Rate your engagement with the following aspects of mental and emotional self-care:**

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings	0	1	2	3
Do something which I'm not in charge of	0	1	2	3
Learn or practice something new: art, sports, etc.	0	1	2	3
Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes	0	1	2	3
Read things that are unrelated to work	0	1	2	3
Seek out and engage in things that make me laugh	0	1	2	3
Give myself affirmations and praise myself	0	1	2	3
Identify and seek out comforting activities, objects, people, and places	0	1	2	3
Allow myself the freedom to cry	0	1	2	3
Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests, etc.	0	1	2	3

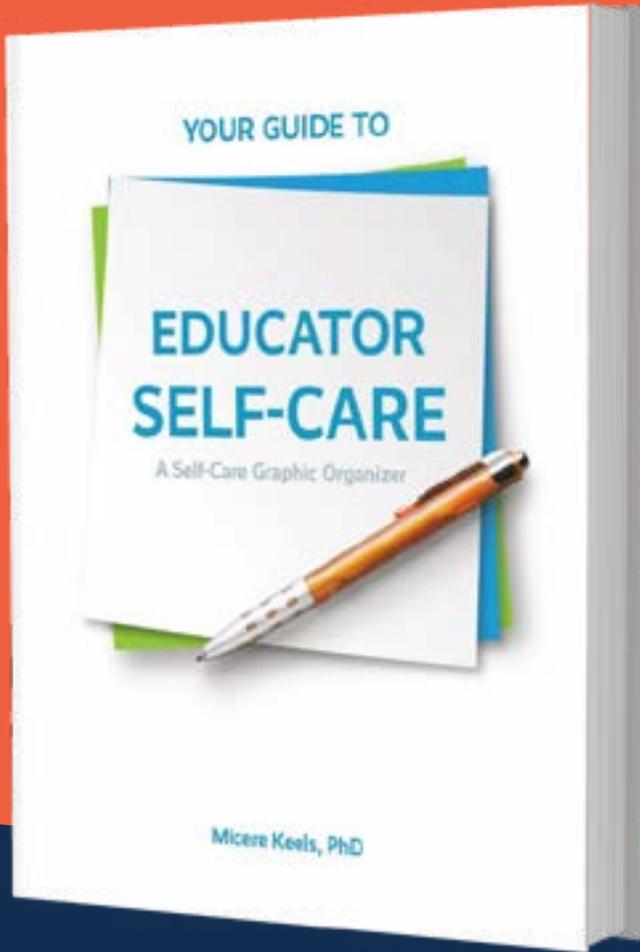
Adapted from Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization

What is one element of mental and emotional self-care that you want to integrate into your workday?



***Self-compassion is a  
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# MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS COPING WITH TRAUMA

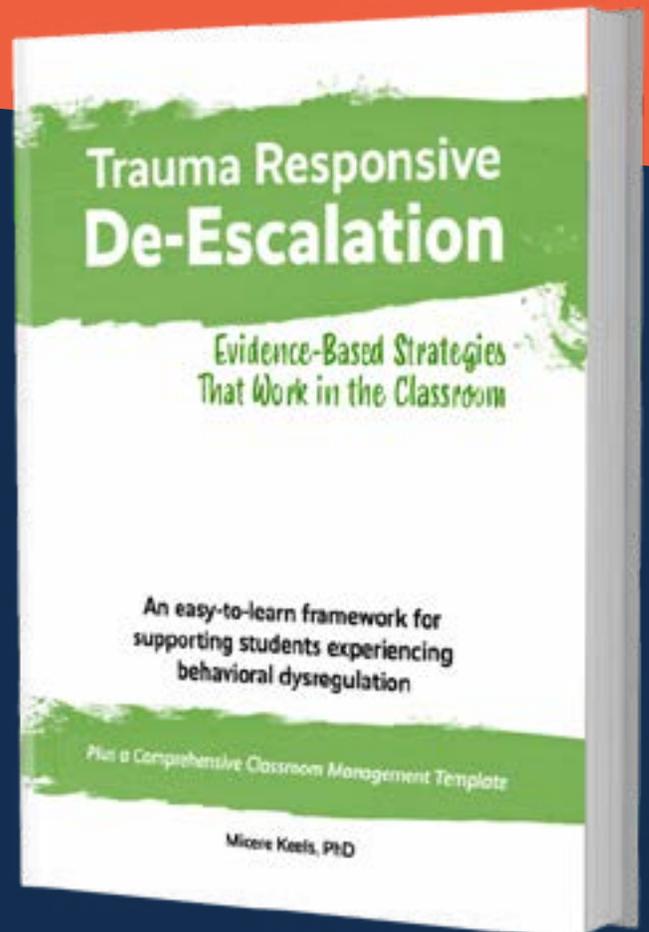


Practice workplace self-care using interactive exercises to support your wellbeing throughout the academic year. Workbook also includes collective-care strategies to create a school climate that promotes wellness.

[CLICK HERE TO LOOK INSIDE](#)

Provide developmentally supportive responses to behavioral outbursts through easy-to-learn de-escalation strategies. Workbook also includes a comprehensive classroom management plan.

[CLICK HERE TO LOOK INSIDE](#)



Order for your whole school or district by emailing: [info@trepeducator.org](mailto:info@trepeducator.org)



# Focus on Movement to Advance Your Physical Self-Care

Physical self-care is one of the most important forms of self-care. It includes: a healthy diet, exercise, seeing a doctor when needed. Although these things can be easily implemented, it is often neglected. Physical self-care is all about listening to your body's needs, such as resting when you are feeling noticeable signs of tiredness. Caring for your physical health is best accomplished as part of your daily habits such as staying hydrated, walking, playing a sport, or taking an exercise class.

Physical self-care is essential because it helps you resist the negative effects of the stressors in life that can't be eliminated but must be managed. **If exercise and healthy eating could come in the form of a pill, it would be considered a wonder drug** because it provides an abundance of health benefits including: reduced likelihood of high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, arthritis. It also improves mood, reduces feelings



## **If you want to take care of your mental health, you have to take care of your physical health.**

of anxiety and depression, boosts self-confidence, and increases energy. And, unlike many pills, the cost is low and there are no side effects.

**The way you cope with stress is a critical aspect of attending to your physical wellbeing.**

Stress is both a psychological and physical experience. In situations where stress is a physical expression, your body begins to display distinct signs such as an increase in blood pressure, shallow breathing, and sweating. What you may not notice is the tensing of muscles such as those in your back and other areas of your body that can cause chronic pain or discomfort.

**Your brain and your body are deeply connected, so if you want to take care of your mental health, you have to take care of your physical health.**

Everyday stress, whether mental, emotional, or physical, creates tightness and pain in your body, and over time, symptoms can worsen to the point where medical care may be needed. Intentionally integrating moments for stretching into your day can give your muscles enough relief from the tension to prevent stress from harming your body.

We can all benefit from stretching; consider doing it while walking around the classroom or school and while sitting at your desk. You can do any stretches that are best for you or try a guided stretch like this one.

# 5 Ways of Incorporating Physical Self-Care into the School Day

1

## Switch up your lunch routine

Switch up your typical lunch routine! Instead of eating at your desk or in the breakroom, try eating outdoors whenever the weather permits. Eating your lunch outside allows you more time in nature; it's easy to forget just how much sitting in a beam of sunshine can boost your mood. It's also a great way to incorporate relaxation into your day, especially if you stick to a "no complaining about students and colleagues during lunch time" rule. Use this time to decompress by finding things to laugh about and build trust with colleagues.

2

## Add short walks outside

Walking in nature allows you to get out of your head, take deep breaths, focus on pops of color, and beautiful aromas. During the school day, you can take a five-minute walk outside at the beginning of your break or prep period to organize your thoughts. This even works in winter, put on your coat and take a brisk ten-minute walk outside to clear your head. If you are an administrator, consider having meetings with individual faculty as walking meetings outside around the school. This can be helpful when you need to have a difficult conversation with a staff member. After work and on the weekend, find a nearby walking trail that allows you to go into the woods, as dense as you can find, to momentarily escape from the pressures of life.

3

## Drink more water

We hear a lot about the health benefits of increasing our daily water intake. Remembering to drink enough water, especially as an educator, is vital because it helps to improve concentration and boost energy. However, it can also be hard to remember to care for yourself during the school day and make time for things like drinking water. Drink more water during the school day by bringing your own water bottle. Sounds simple, but it can help substantially in reaching your water consumption goals. Set a goal for how much water you want to drink by a certain time of the day. It's OK to need bathroom breaks to match your level of water intake.

4

## Eat more mindfully (and nutritiously)

Eating mindfully is the process by which you direct your full attention to how you are chewing and tasting your food, which involves eating slowly and savoring the flavors and textures of the food. Within eating more mindfully, incorporate nutritious meals that have lots of fruits, vegetables, protein, and fiber to fuel your body. Eating mindfully turns the necessary act of nurturing your body into a time where you can also intentionally nurture your soul.

5

## Remember to stretch

Moving your body is necessary to aid in proper blood flow and circulation. Add at least one to two minutes of stretching several times a day. Take notice of places in your body that feel tight and spend some time stretching them regularly. You may wish to explore these Six Daily Stretches, specifically written with educators in mind and find time during the school day to use them. Try using a Work Break Timer apps to remind yourself to stretch.

# Assessing and Advancing Your Physical Self-Care

The table below can help you reflect on workplace self-care. When you are finished, look over your responses and listen to your internal self-care dialogue. Make yourself a priority while meeting your responsibilities at work.

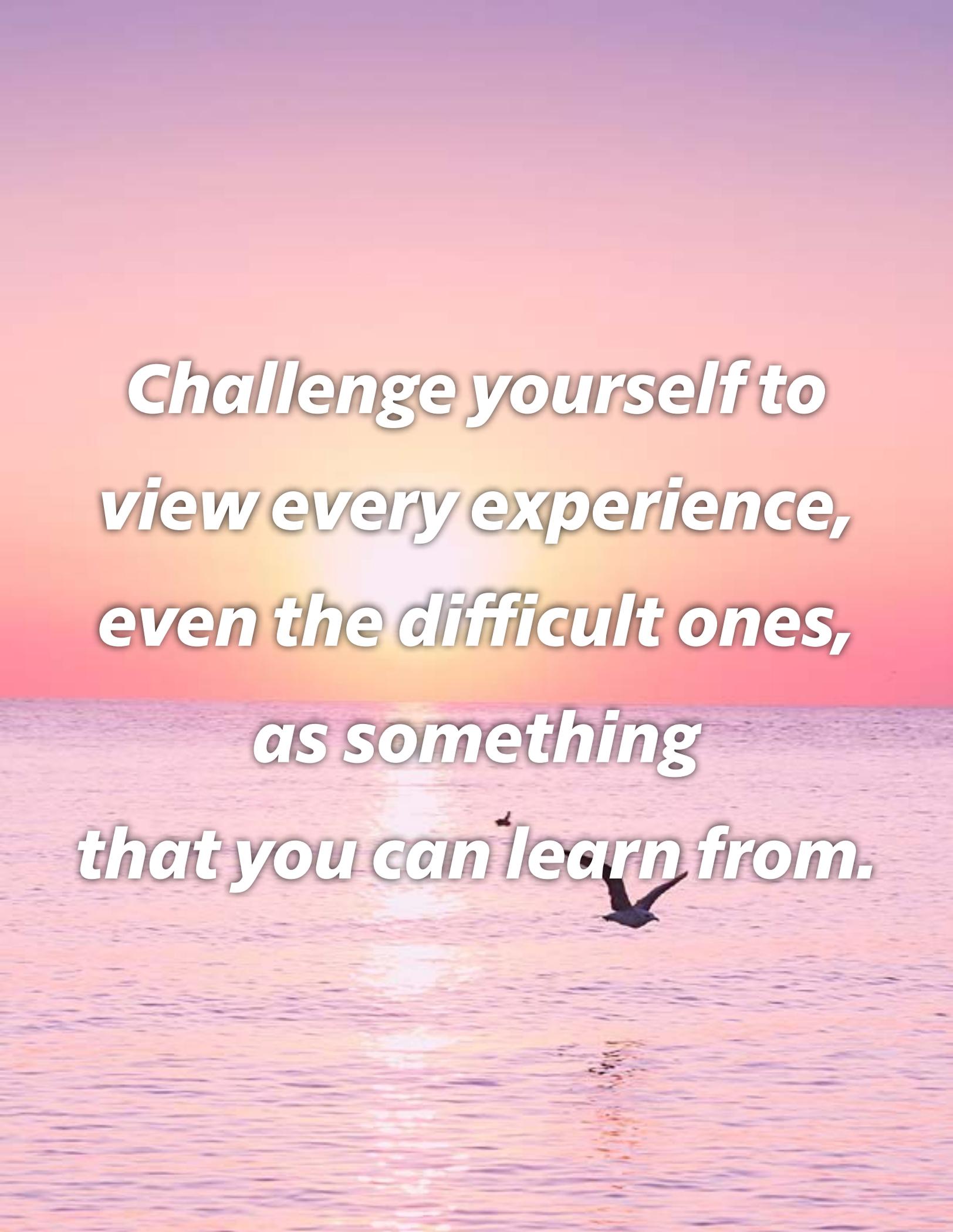
Rate your engagement with the following aspects of physical self-care:

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Eat healthy meals	0	1	2	3
Exercise regularly	0	1	2	3
Get regular preventative medical care	0	1	2	3
Take time off when sick	0	1	2	3
Drink enough water to stay hydrated	0	1	2	3
Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity	0	1	2	3
Get enough sleep	0	1	2	3
Maintain good dental hygiene	0	1	2	3
If you have a seated job, intentionally add movement into your workday	0	1	2	3
Use good smelling bath products so that daily showers become calming moments in your day	0	1	2	3

Adapted from Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization

What is one element of physical self-care that you want to integrate into your workday?

***Challenge yourself to  
view every experience,  
even the difficult ones,  
as something  
that you can learn from.***

The background of the image is a sunset over a body of water. The sky transitions from a deep purple at the top to a bright orange and yellow near the horizon. The water is dark with a shimmering reflection of the sun. A seagull is captured in flight in the lower right quadrant, its wings spread. The text is centered and written in a bold, italicized, white font with a subtle drop shadow.

# *It's the Small Things That Matter*

One of the most important ideas to take away from the concept of workplace self-care is that small, incremental, sustainable practices integrated into your daily routine is the best way to protect both your wellbeing and your professional longevity.



## *Self-Care Throughout the Day*

<b>WAKE WITH GRATITUDE</b>	Begin your day by being intentional about being positive and say three things you are grateful for out loud.
<b>MINDFUL MORNINGS</b>	Practice mindfulness during at least one part of your morning routine: E.g., shower, drinking tea/coffee, eating, etc. to send calming signals to your brain and body.
<b>GOAL SETTING</b>	Set at least one achievable goal for the day, including those for self-care. Make sure that some small act of self-care is on your calendar. Set boundaries to protect them against workplace factors that put your wellbeing at risk.
<b>MIDDAY CHECK-IN</b>	Mid-morning or mid-afternoon, or whenever stress seems to be the highest during your day, check-in with yourself and release growing tension. Close your eyes and pay careful attention to your emotions and body sensations that let you know your stress level is elevated. Take a deep breath and engage in a quick relaxation exercise.
<b>RELEASE PRESSURES</b>	Reflect on your day, with all its challenges and successes. Celebrate coming through it. Release all the worries, grudges, ill feelings, and unfinished work that you can before leaving the building.
<b>PRIORITIZE SLEEP</b>	Honor your need for rest by setting a bedtime alarm to remind yourself that rest is more important than work.
<b>END WITH GRATITUDE</b>	Affirm yourself for at least one of the many things that you did throughout the day.

# Spiritual Self-Care to Strengthen Overall Wellness



Spiritual self-care includes all of the things that you do to connect your mind, body, and spirit. It's also about the practices that you engage in that bring a sense of peace and harmony by connecting your interior and exterior self. Spiritual self-care can, and should, have a very individual meaning. Our understanding of spirituality is rooted in our cultural upbringing and the community in which we live.

**Your self-care practice doesn't have to be focused on religion—how you nurture your soul is entirely up to you.**

Many people underestimate the importance of caring for their spirit. Being spiritual involves finding the time to go outside and connect with nature to cleanse your mind of invasive, intrusive, and negative thoughts. Spiritual self-care can help you find inner peace and live in greater alignment with your core values and beliefs. This practice is also associated with higher levels of optimism, compassion, relationship satisfaction, improved self-esteem, and graciousness.

Spiritual self-care can be broken down into three components: meditation, gratitude, and prayer. There are a multitude of ways that you can practice spiritual self-care and incorporate it into your daily and/or weekly practices. Practicing spiritual self-care has been demonstrated through research to prevent burnout and aid in overall wellness as well as productivity both in and outside of work.

***Using spiritual self-care to reduce the likelihood of burnout***

Burnout is an experience consisting of exhaustion, cynicism, reduced professional productivity and creativity, and reduced compassion to students and colleagues resulting from elements in the job environment. Spiritual self-care can help by providing you with a sense of healing from being overwhelmed or burned out in your professional role, as well as strengthening your ability to manage the psychological and emotional demands of being an educator.



If you feel like you may already be experiencing burnout, try integrating music into your workplace self-care. Try listening to music, it has many healing properties:

- ***Mood***
- ***Attention***
- ***Memory***
- ***Mental alertness***
- ***Physiological calming***
- ***And more...***

When music is paired with a mindfulness practice such as deep breathing, guided imagery, or positive affirmations, it can help us recenter and initiate a series of positive physiological responses.

Choose your music to set your dial to pleasure, bliss, and healing! Listen to your favorite hymn, gospel music, or any music of your choice on your

way to work, during your work breaks, and after work. For example, during planning periods, pop on your favorite tune and notice the difference it can make in your spirit and your productivity.



# 5 Strategies for Connecting with Your Inner Self

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2  
3  
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5

## Take a mindful walk

Mindful walking can help you connect with your body and to attune to what you are thinking and how you are feeling in the moment. Walking while deeply breathing can allow you to press pause on life and just be in the moment. Breathing in the fresh air, feeling the pavement under your feet, and seeing the wide-open sky can be used to ground and nourish the senses. Spending time in nature is consistently highlighted as a great way to rejuvenate our minds and spirits.

## Find positive learning in every experience

Challenge yourself to view every experience, even the difficult ones, as something that you can learn from. Minimize how you are affected by difficult experiences at work by searching for the wisdom to be gained, whether it's a criticism from a colleague or working with a challenging student. Try to use positive words when you talk about challenging situations that triggered you or elicited negative emotions. If you are able to bring positive light to frustrating situations, you will experience less emotional distress during the workday. Learn how to practice reframing during stressful situations at work.

## Clean your space

Research shows that a clean space is associated with a clear mind and less emotional distress. When we have a clean and decluttered space, we often feel more in control of the environment surrounding us. Cleaning your space is a practice that is associated with spiritual self-care because it can help to remove negative energy within the space.

## Practice yoga

Yoga is a great workout, and it's also a great spiritual practice that brings together the mind, body, and spirit. There are many forms of yoga; do a little exploring and find something you like. Consider starting a small group of likeminded colleagues to use an empty classroom to do some lunchtime yoga. Try searching "standing yoga" on YouTube for some exercise videos.

## Use essential oils to increase feelings of peace

Essential oils have been shown to elevate your mood, promote relaxation, increase focus, and bring on feelings of peace. Consider adding an essential oil diffuser to your classroom or office to promote calm for yourself and students. Herbal tea is another method for using essential oils in the workplace. The combination of a hot drink plus the power of the lavender can promote feelings of peace. Taking a few deep inhales of any herbal tea with an aroma that is pleasing to you will work.

## Assessing Your Spiritual Self-Care

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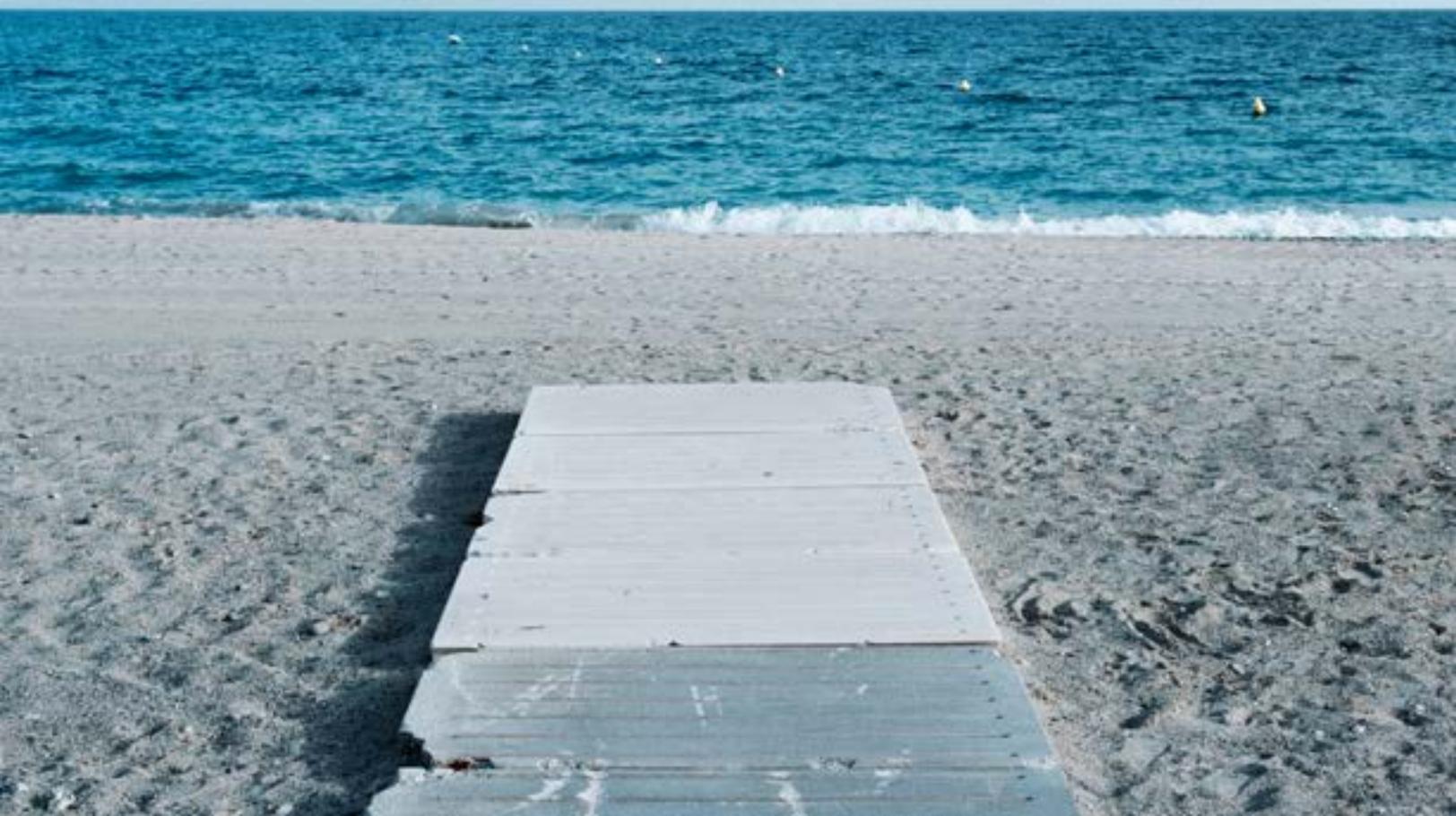
Rate your engagement with the following aspects of spiritual self-care:

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Make time for reflection, mindfulness, and meditation	0	1	2	3
Spend time in nature to ground myself	0	1	2	3
Be open to not knowing	0	1	2	3
Find a spiritual connection or faith community	0	1	2	3
Cherish my optimism and hope	0	1	2	3
Practice something like yoga to connect my mind and body	0	1	2	3
Try not to be in charge or the expert at times and go with the flow	0	1	2	3
Sing or listen to inspirational music	0	1	2	3
Take time to identify what is meaningful to me	0	1	2	3
Participate in causes that I believe in	0	1	2	3
Read inspirational literature or listen to talks	0	1	2	3

Adapted from Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization

What is one element of spiritual self-care that you want to integrate into your workday?

***Find some time each day  
to think about yourself  
and how you show up in  
and engage with  
the world.***



A photograph of several long, slender palm fronds extending from the top right towards the bottom left. The fronds are a vibrant green color and are set against a clear, light blue sky. The lighting is bright, creating soft shadows and highlighting the texture of the leaves.

*Self-compassion is directing  
the care that you give to  
others towards yourself.*



# Strengthening Workplace Relations

Interpersonal relationships are part of what makes our lives worthwhile, whether it is at home with family, at work with colleagues, or socializing with friends. Therefore, it is important that you learn how to listen to and meet your interpersonal needs while also being supportive of others' interpersonal needs.

Establishing healthy relationships at work is an important part of self-care that is rarely discussed. The workplace is where we spend the majority of our waking hours during the week, and toxic relationships with colleagues can harm your wellbeing. Thus, establishing quality relationship self-care at work is critical to being your best self.

Schools are social places where you have to manage many interpersonal interactions; the associated self-care aim is ensuring that most of those interpersonal interactions contribute to filling rather than draining your emotional tank, especially interactions with adults. The nature of being an educator is that each day you are giving of yourself to meet students' interpersonal needs—pouring out of your cup into theirs, so it is critical that staff create a supportive collegial environment where they can fill each other up.

Spending fifteen to thirty minutes each day by yourself and with yourself, being fully present in your thoughts, feelings, and emotions is time well spent with yourself. Caring for yourself is what



## ***Caring for yourself is what allows you to be fully present for others.***

support to work through new ideas for assisting dysregulated students.

Relationship self-care is probably one of the most challenging forms of self-care because it includes others who are important in our lives that may view the actions as selfish. However, healthy interpersonal relationships require healthy individuals; thus, it is essential that self-love is practiced for us to love others.

### **Here are a few proven strategies for developing strong professional relationships:**

- **Consistency:** Showing up each day, saying hello, and asking about your colleagues creates the proximity and patterns of regular interaction with those who are potential friends.
- **Vulnerability:** Being vulnerable can be a lot to ask, but if you and your coworkers share a mutual willingness to “let the other impact us in some way,” this can be made easier. Start off with small acts of professional vulnerability, such as asking your coworker to help you complete a task or even admitting to them that you had a rough day.
- **Positivity:** Talking about the positive aspects of work or ideas for solving challenges increase the likelihood that your colleagues will experience you as supportive and their relationship with you as emotionally fulfilling.

These same strategies can be used to strengthen your support system outside of work.

## **Relationship Self-Care**

allows you to be fully present for others. It's not either-or, maintaining connections with individuals and groups that energize you is part of relationship self-care.

Relationship self-care will look different for everyone, so take time to figure out what this looks like for you. This may include taking the time to explore personal interests and hobbies, and strengthening connections based on shared interests or hobbies.

Having a solid group of colleagues can help you feel more connected to your school and make coming to work more enjoyable. These are the people that you will be able to go to for problem solving

# 5 Strategies for Connecting with Your Inner Self

1  
2  
3  
4  
5

**Boundaries:** It's OK to say, "NO." We live in a culture where we often feel like we have to do everything that is asked of us. However, the reality is that this is not always possible. We have to prioritize our wellness by learning how to say "no." Letting people know that you are at capacity and unable to fulfill new requests is a sign of strength.

**Forgiveness:** Forgiveness is an act of reciprocity. Asking for forgiveness and learning how to extend the same grace are two skills that every relationship requires. Giving yourself and others permission to be imperfect humans means that you'll need to learn how to forgive.

**Open communication:** Have an open and honest conversation about your feelings and what you mean, and be sure to "check for understanding" to ensure that you are hearing each other correctly. Be clear with yourself about the goal of the conversation and ways of reaching that goal while still engaging in mutual respect.

**Realistic expectations:** It is so easy to assign unrealistic expectations for ourselves and others in a relationship. Consider the other person's role in your professional and personal life and the limits of that role. Relationships change; learn to adjust and be as understanding and as flexible as possible.

**Establish a diverse support network:** Your professional support network can include colleagues you work with daily, those that you see at professional conferences and online workshops, and mentors who offer you guidance during transitional moments. Extend your support network by identifying new individuals, groups, or communities that can be a source of professional belonging.



# *Assessing and Advancing Your Workplace Relationship Self-Care*

The table below can help you reflect on workplace self-care. When you are finished, look over your responses and listen to your internal self-care dialogue. Make yourself a priority while meeting your responsibilities at work.

Rate your engagement with the following aspects of spiritual self-care:

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Work collaboratively with colleagues on a project	0	1	2	3
Spend time with my companion animals	0	1	2	3
Ask colleagues for help when needed	0	1	2	3
Share a fear or hope for my career with a colleague I trust	0	1	2	3
Enlarge my professional circle	0	1	2	3
Stay in contact with old colleagues and faraway friends	0	1	2	3
Schedule regular dates with friends, family, children, and romantic partner	0	1	2	3
Get regular mentorship or support	0	1	2	3
Negotiate for my needs (support, benefits, pay raise)	0	1	2	3
Access a professional support group	0	1	2	3
Let a colleague know when what they have asked is more than I can manage	0	1	2	3

Adapted from Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization

What is one element of relationship self-care that you want to integrate into your workday?

***Take time to breathe!***

***Stop everything & take  
three deep breaths.***





*Praise yourself for small changes  
and accomplishments; change  
is never easy; therefore, it is  
important to celebrate each  
step of the way.*

# Minimize Workplace Toxicity Through Environmental Self-Care



Environmental self-care involves the process of attending to how the physical and interpersonal aspects of your indoor and outdoor surroundings affect your wellbeing. It is an important practice that enables you to determine how modifying the environment around you can improve, restore, and maintain good health.

As a first step to attending to environmental self-care, intentionally examine whether your work environment is toxic for your wellbeing.

The level of toxicity can range from chronic unpleasant feelings that arise from being in the workplace, to feeling physically ill such as headaches and stomachaches from having to be in and interact with others in the workplace. Being a happy, healthy, and productive individual is extremely difficult when you're in a toxic environment.

Developing a clear understanding of whether your workplace is toxic is a first step to a better awareness of ways to improve the setting.

A toxic environment is one that has a direct negative impact on your psychological, emotional, and physical wellbeing. Toxic environments can be caused by several different factors, such as unhealthy interpersonal relationships with coworkers or supervisors, negative self-talk about your work ethic or abilities, being overworked, or operating in multiple roles.

**In school, a negative or toxic culture can result from:**

- Lacking a sense of purpose or belonging
- Low expectations and accountability for staff and students
- The blame game, "It's the students; no,



the parents; no, the educator; no, it's the administration."

- Lack of collaboration among staff
- Actively hostile interactions among staff

There are many additional physical toxins (e.g., chemicals and safety protocols), professional toxins (e.g., lack of appropriate training and supervision), and interpersonal toxins (e.g., uncertainty and humiliation) that we must become aware of and be intentional about minimizing.

Existing in a toxic work environment can cause employees to experience chronic feelings of stress that is coupled with an impending sense of doom that looms over the start of each workday. Feeling unhappy or unsatisfied in the work environment due to stress can compromise our immune system that results in a breeding ground for illnesses.

Because a toxic work environment affects mood, depression is among the top three workplace problems employees experience. However, most of the time, employees are not aware of how much the workplace is contributing to their emotional distress. Employees may experience sadness, loss of interest, irritability, frustration, difficulty concentrating, angry feelings, and other emotions that can severely impact health.

Many employees turn to substance use, including alcohol, to self-medicate to cope with the negative impacts of working in a toxic work environment. These remedies can be highly addictive and can result in a downward spiral in all aspects of one's life.

# 7 Strategies for Reducing Workplace Toxicity



**Carve out your zone of control** where you are able to set a positive tone for the interactions that happen within your zone of control. This could be just your desk and the space around it, or a classroom, or a department in the school.

**Seek out positive colleagues**, spreading positivity in a toxic environment can be just as contagious as negative behaviors; celebrating each other and engaging in random acts of kindness can be an antidote to toxicity.

**Generously call your colleagues in** when you feel harmed and need to understand why they behaved in a particular way. Approach the conversation with curiosity and aim to communicate your thoughts, feelings, and actions and understand theirs. Approach each conversation with a solution-focused mindset to repair, resolve, and move forward.

**Compassionately call your colleagues out** when it is important that you interrupt harmful interactions before further damage is done. Focus on using “I” statements to express your perspective of the interaction.

**Remain positive.** Although it can be tough, staying positive in trying times is good for your overall wellness as well as the wellness of those around you. Say positive affirmations to yourself and others.

**Maintain an organized, clutter-free work environment**, as well as a clean and well-maintained mode of transportation to free up more cognitive and emotional space for meeting work expectations.

**Don't forget to have fun at work.** The demands of the workday can make everything serious and tense. Don't hesitate to utilize mindless humor such as funny animal videos to give yourself a shot of laughter. Share one or two with the whole class so that everyone can benefit.

# *Assessing and Advancing Your Workplace Environmental Self-Care*

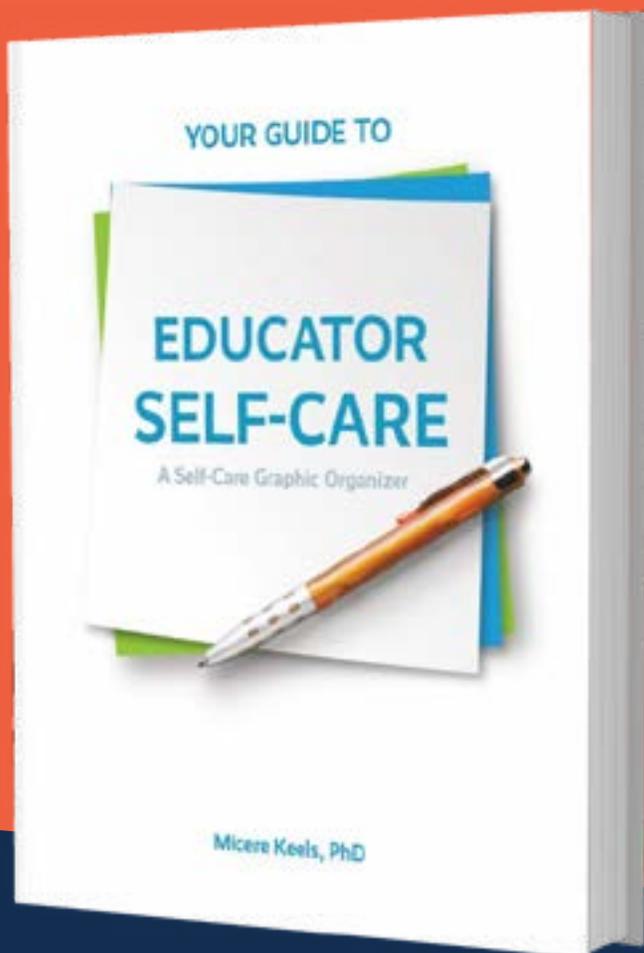
The table below can help you reflect on workplace self-care. When you are finished, look over your responses and listen to your internal self-care dialogue. Make yourself a priority while meeting your responsibilities at work.

Rate your engagement with the following aspects of workplace environmental self-care:

	I never do this OR never occurred to me	I barely or rarely do this	I do this OK (occasionally)	I do this well (frequently)
Intentionally avoided negative workplace gossip	0	1	2	3
Cleared out classroom and office supplies that are no longer used	0	1	2	3
Did something silly with your students just to laugh	0	1	2	3
Suggested a positive alternative to a colleague making negative comments	0	1	2	3
Had a solution-focused conversation about an aspect of the workplace that is toxic for you and others	0	1	2	3
Recognized a colleague for spreading positivity at work	0	1	2	3
Added motivating posters or posters of nature to your wall	0	1	2	3
Compassionately called out a colleague to interrupt harmful statements	0	1	2	3

What is one element of environmental self-care that you want to integrate into your workday?

# MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS COPING WITH TRAUMA

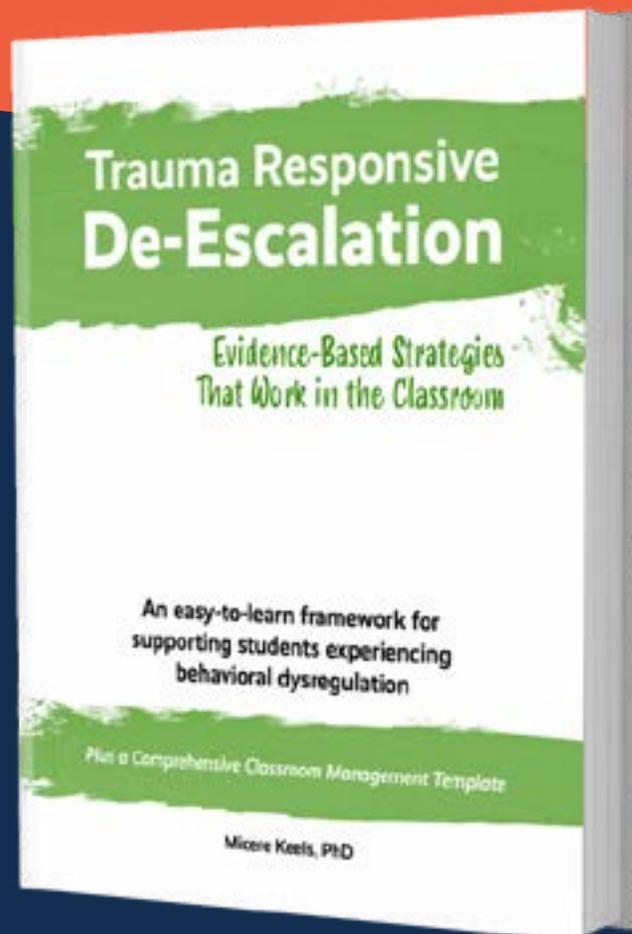


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