

Being an educator is emotional work, sometimes challenging work, and can be stressful work, BUT it is rewarding work, which is why educators persist even when feeling overwhelmed. 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. Self-care is one of the best things you can do for yourself and your students.

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

Start with these strategies that can be easily and intentionally integrated into your daily routines.



Mindfulness At Home: While getting ready for work in the morning or winding down in the evening, take deep cleansing breaths while you pay careful attention to your thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Accept and attend to thoughts that prove to be unhelpful, through affirmations and encouragement.

Perspective Rituals: Upon waking and/or before going to bed, develop a ritual that helps you to keep a healthy perspective. Consider one of the following: Repeat several helpful affirmations; name at least 3 things you are grateful for; recall something funny that happened that day or recently; identify 3 things that you can celebrate about yourself or what you have done that day.



Mindfulness At School: Integrate a morning **Breath Mantra** into your routine of walking through the building and into your classroom or office. Slowly say to yourself, "Breathe in, breathe out," as you take a deep belly breath in, followed by a full exhale. Continue breathing, as you notice what is happening around you, as you walk. Notice the halls, the walls, and any people that you pass. Without judgment, notice the emotions that you feel, in response to the people and things that you see.

Maintain Your Health Through Humor and Celebrations: Intentionally insert laughter into your day with students! You and your students will mutually benefit. Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain. Insert "planned" collective 10-second celebrations for task completion, reached goals, persisting for a set amount of extended time on a challenging assignment, etc. Make sure to celebrate achievement **and effort**.



Mindfulness as a Transition Ritual: On the way home, intentionally think about leaving work behind, while recognizing that you have done all that you can for today and will return to thinking about your students tomorrow. Enjoy and appreciate the scenery as you go. Listen to music or something that generally makes you feel good.

Needing to prioritize self-care is not a sign of weakness. It is necessary to balance the natural costs of caring about and for those more vulnerable than ourselves. Educators are especially vulnerable to feelings of anxiety and emotional distress, becoming mentally and emotionally worn out, and feeling overwhelmed by their students' traumas. The severity and pervasiveness of those occupational hazards, if not managed, can lead to experiencing secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, or burnout. These conditions are not signs of personal weakness.

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

The goal, then, is to engage in self-care practices in each of the seven domains of well-being, listed below. The more of these domains that you pay attention to, the stronger your well-being. That said, establishing a self-care practice in even one domain is a good first step. These simple ideas can get you going.

Self-Care Begins with Small Steps

Physical

- Put one fruit or snacking vegetable into your work bag each day.
- Protect your lunch time at work. Eat and Relax. If eating with students is energizing for you, do that. If not, eat in the teacher's lounge and re-energize.

Psychological

- Practice 5 minutes of mindfulness.
- Do a midday or after school self-check. If you are feeling stressed, intentionally relax.

Cognitive

- Listen to a podcast or audiobook on the drive to or from work.
- Brain breaks: Play a word game, puzzle, or math game for 1-2 minutes, whenever you can.

Social

- Call one friend or family member on the drive home.
- Find activities that allow you to explore new interests, alone or with friends.

Financial

- Create a simple budget, that includes savings. Try to stick to it. Use a fun app to stay on track!
- Meet with a financial planner to better understand your options.

Spiritual

- Listen to music or spiritual podcast that uplifts or soothes, on the drive to or from work.
- Try to see your students with the most challenging behavior, through a spiritual lens.

Environmental

- Purposefully unplug, by taking a walk or resting outside, with no electronics.
- Enhance your surroundings with aromas, table-top water fountains, and/or nature pictures.

Highlight a couple actions that you will commit to starting right away. Consider sharing your goals with a friend, colleague, or family member, to help with accountability.