

TREP Project Resource Brief

Strengthening Workplace Relationship Self-Care

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 wellbeing. Thus, establishing quality relationship self-care at work is critical to being your best self.

Schools are very 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.

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



“[Your] relationship with yourself sets the tone for every other relationship you have.” Robert Holden

Spending 15 to 30 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 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.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation.” Audre Lorde

Having a solid group or “tribe” 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 support to work through new ideas for assisting dysregulated students.

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.

5 Strategies for Relationship Self-Care

- 1 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 that should be respected.
- 2 Forgiveness:** Forgiveness should be 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.
- 3 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.
- 4 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.
- 5 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.

Learn more about relationship self-care:

- [How improving your interpersonal relationships at work can promote teamwork and success](#)
- [Five tips to practice self-care in your relationships](#)

Assessing and Advancing Your Professional Self Care

There are at least 7 domains of self-care that you need to pay attention to:

Professional Self-Care
Psychological Self-Care

Physical Self-Care
Spiritual Self-Care
Relationship Self-Care

Emotional Self-Care
Environmental Self-Care

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

Rate your engagement with the following aspects of professional 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)
Worked 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; Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP; 1996

Reflect on your answers above to identify ways of strengthening your relationship self-care. What is one element of relationship self-care that you are not currently doing that you want to integrate into your work day _____
