

SELF-CARE IDEAS FOR TEACHERS AND EDUCATION STAFF

Teaching is a challenging profession with many pressures and stresses. Therefore, self-care for teachers is critical. In order to support others, we need to start with ourselves. We cannot pour from an empty jug! Improving our well-being also gives us an opportunity to model healthy ways of coping with stress for our students.

Here are some ideas of things we can do when practising self-care. We all fill our cups differently, so while some ideas may be your cup of tea, others might not:

Sleep and food

Look after your physical health through sleep and food. Stick to your usual sleep routine by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day. This will help to maintain a sense of structure. Try to limit alcohol consumption: while a glass or two of wine may be your self-care act at night, alcohol can disrupt your sleep as well as increase anxiety and low mood the following day. Eating balanced meals can help enhance our mood; protein and fats are essential for mood stability. Also consider the properties of the food you are eating. Generally crunchy, dry, sweet, chewy foods are calming and cold, spicy, citrus, sour and fizzy foods are alerting. Use this to plan lunches and snacks throughout the day.



Physical activity

Exercise or physical activity can be a helpful way to de-stress e.g. go for a walk or run, practice yoga, put on some music and dance, and play with the children. Try to exercise when you finish or arrive home from work, as this also acts as a good transition from work to home.



Focus

Periods of focusing on one thing at a time can be helpful. With so many demands on you, it is rare that only one thing is being attended to. Without making a special effort, you can become worn down by giving multiple attention to multiple tasks. A conscious decision to attend to one thing for a period of time will help you to feel a greater sense of control over all the things requiring your time.

Down-time

Allowing time in the day when nothing needs to be attended to. This is perhaps the hardest thing to allow yourself to do. It can feel far too indulgent to do nothing when there are so many things demanding attention. However, a period of doing nothing can be restorative and when tasks are returned to, you can be more efficient because of this period of rest.



Play-time

Allow yourself to be spontaneous and have fun. It's surprising how easy is to forget worries when focused on enjoyable activities and having fun. The problems do not go away, but time away from them can give you space to refresh and consider alternative responses.

Connect

Allow time to connect with others and receive social support (e.g., morning check-in with colleagues and attending a weekly peer support group). Stay connected with friends and family. Arrange weekly walks, movie nights that can help you stay connected and utilise your support system during this time. In addition, take the time to set boundaries that will protect yourself and your energy. It's OK to say no; remember that you have the right to say yes or no, without having to explain your reasons.



Self-regulation

Check-in with how you are feeling at the beginning of the day or before a class. This can help you identify if you are calm enough to reassure and support others. It may mean taking a few minutes before work to practise some calming strategies. Accepting that feeling anxious is a normal reaction to difficult experiences can be a good place to start. Here are some strategies to help regulate your emotions:

1. Practise grounding techniques - '54321 grounding' can help to anchor you in the present moment: note 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 you can smell and one you taste.
2. Practise breathing exercises - For example, 456 breathing helps calm your nervous system to support regulation. Breath in through your nose for 4 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, breathe out through your nose for 6 seconds and then repeat. If you feel a need to release tension, replace the outward breath with an audible sigh, or hissing noise.
3. Label emotions - naming our emotions can help us to disentangle from them. For example saying to yourself 'I am feeling angry' can help you to feel some separation from it, as opposed to saying 'I am angry' which increases connection.
4. Writing in a journal or keeping a note on your mobile phone can be useful.



Scheduling in time for self-care

Whether in the morning, afternoon or evening, try to schedule in time for things that make you feel good. This will look different for everyone, but some ideas could be to go for a walk, visit your favourite restaurant, watch your favourite TV show, read a book, use a shower gel you really like the smell of, create a playlist of songs that make you smile, phone a friend or family, exercise, practise yoga, meditate, get out in the garden, bake, make something. Other ideas can be found at www.wheelofwellbeing.org.



Setting yourself 'worry time'

If you find yourself excessively worrying, set aside 'worry time'. Worrying is a normal reaction during times of stress. Worrying is different from thinking, in that it often involves thinking of the worst possible outcome, is negatively orientated and repetitive. It can be helpful to schedule time into your day for worrying - for example, 15-30 minutes towards the end of the day, but not just before bed, where you reflect on your worries from the day. You may want to write down your worries, which can be therapeutic in itself. Try not to put pressure on yourself to solve your worries (but if your mind naturally goes there, that's fine). If worrying thoughts come into your mind between worry times, try to acknowledge them (maybe make a quick note for later) and put them to one side until your next designated worry time.

Practicing self-compassion

Self-compassion - remind yourself that you are doing the best you can right now, it is okay to feel uneasy and unsure from time to time. Reflecting on your thoughts can help you become more aware of negative thoughts. Once you are more aware, you can label them as 'oh, that's another one of my negative thoughts' and think about introducing some more positive ones. The book 'The happiness trap' by Dr Russ Harris has lots of other ideas to help with negative thoughts.

Enriched school environment

The environments we are in can have a big impact on our wellbeing. By considering what helps us feel calm and ready to engage in learning activity, we can make simple adaptations that enrich the environment for all. These will not be big changes, but as our nervous systems only have a certain tolerance capacity, even small changes add up. Start by taking some time to think about the spaces in your home and work that feel most calming, and those that feel chaotic or just 'off'. Consider what it is in those environments that makes you feel this way. Then go through each of your senses and think about what you like and dislike and make small changes based on the results. Do you like the smell of your soap at home? Would a different smell help to start your day a tiny bit better? What are you looking at each day? Could you add some calming imagery? Can any natural features like plants or wood sculptures or seashells be added to your classroom?

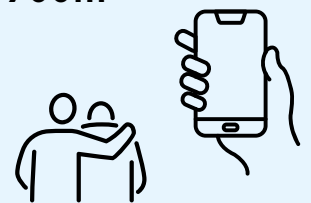
Would a rug on the floor at the front of classroom feel softer and reduce noise a little? Get creative!



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Feeling anxious, fearful, and overwhelmed are normal reactions to stressful situations. However, if these feelings persist longer-term and have an undue impact on your daily life, it may help to access further support from:

- Your support network (family, friends, colleagues)
- Your line manager / supervisor
- Your GP
- For urgent mental health support in Wales call NHS **111** and press **OPTION 2**
- Occupational Health: Cardiff **02920 788301** / The Vale **01446 700111**
- [Educationsupport.org.uk](https://www.educationsupport.org.uk) / Helpline: **08000 562 561**
- [Mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk) / Mind Info Line: **0300 123 3393**
- [Samaritans.org.uk](https://www.samaritans.org.uk) / 24/7 Helpline: **116123**



Helpful websites:

- Anna Freud National Center for Children and Families <https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/supporting-staff-wellbeing-in-schools/>
- NHS UK <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

Visit www.cavyoungwellbeing.wales for Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health information and resources for children, young people, parents and professionals.

Originally created by the Resilience Project team (2021) and adapted by School In-Reach Service (2024).
This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg