



Self-Care For Teachers & Educational Professionals

COVID-19 is an unprecedented event that has affected every community and all families in some way. Everyone is involved in the efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to provide support to children and families in this uncertain time. While teachers and all educational professionals have a responsibility to care for and instruct students, it is also important that they engage in **Self-Care practices** to remain healthy and to place themselves in the best position to [support](#) their students.

What is Self-Care?

Self-Care is the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress.

It is particularly important for teachers and educational professionals to engage in Self-Care practices to ensure that they are physically and emotionally able to support students and families. Taking care of oneself, especially during a crisis, should be seen as an essential and ethical responsibility. Do not put your personal needs aside.

During times of stress, Self-Care is often overlooked or misunderstood. Self-indulgence or unhealthy coping habits should not be mistaken for Self-Care. It is important to know that engaging in true Self-Care practices should never make a person feel guilty, selfish, or more overwhelmed. Self-Care should not be viewed as: being greedy, actions that deplete us, one more item on the “to do” list, something to do “later”, or a quick fix. Self-Care is not negative, but positive action towards wellness.

What are the Benefits of Self-Care?

Research shows us that the benefits of Self-Care include:

- More Energy
- Physical Health Benefits
- Increased Life Satisfaction and Happiness
- Better Relationships
- Better Balance of Life Demands
- Helping Provide [Safety and Security for Families](#)
- Fostering a Sense of Control
- Stress Reduction
- Mental Health Benefits
- Ability to Better Prioritize Tasks and Responsibilities
- Ability to Gain Perspective
- Modeling of Healthy Coping for Children
- Bringing Predictability to Unpredictable Situations
- Facilitating Recovery



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Essential Personal Self-Care Strategies

Personal Self-Care can come in many forms and each can help promote wellness and the ability to care for others. Make it a priority to be a “human being rather than a human doing.”

Teachers and educational professionals are encouraged to read [Self-Care for Parents and Caregivers](#) for specific Personal Self-Care strategies. Try to pick at least one or two from each of the following life domains:

- **Physical Self-Care**
- **Emotional Self-Care**
- **Social Needs & Connection Self-Care**
- **Seeking Support**

Self-Care Strategies for Educators

Teaching is an intensive job, and additional challenges posed by COVID-19 place educational professionals in a very novel and stressful position. At a time where educators find themselves balancing new roles including “teachers as consultants”, instructors using Distance Learning, citizens in the wake of a global pandemic, and as parents / caregivers of their own households, it is crucial that teachers recognize the need for engaging in Self-Care. **Practicing Personal Self-Care practices ensures that you have the health and wellness to thrive and serve the best interests of your students.**

In addition to personal Self-Care strategies, it is also important to have strategies for engaging in Professional Self-Care to successfully navigate professional challenges and to enhance your career. Professional Self-Care is often an overlooked domain. However, research tells us that it is important to engage in professional work that is meaningful and purposeful to support overall health. Especially in a time of crisis, many professionals feel that engaging in work may not be a priority. Educators in particular may feel a sense of being overwhelmed given the unprecedented challenges ahead. However, engaging in **Professional Self-Care contributes to feeling productive and having a sense of normalcy during a time of crisis and is a healthy coping strategy that fosters recovery.**

On the other hand, those who do not engage in Personal and Professional Self-Care may see more negative outcomes and are also at risk for personal and professional burnout, less productivity, and/or compassion fatigue- which will make it much more difficult to properly care for children. If one does not take of care oneself, there will be no energy to care for others. **In addition to personal Self-Care, educators should consider the activities below to maintain Professional Self-Care, particularly in the wake of COVID-19.**



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PROFESSIONAL / WORK-BASED SELF-CARE DURING COVID-19

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create and maintain a schedule - Balance personal and professional responsibilities with Personal Self-Care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make lists and set priorities for efficient time management - Focus on what is practical, even if it is not ideal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Maintain social connections with professionals in your school to build resilience, find encouragement, and feel less alone in your work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create familiar structure and routines into your work day – But do not feel pressured to re-create your typical classroom or schedule.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Stay <u>engaged with your students and their families.</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take frequent breaks to engage in non-work activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Turn off your email and phone outside of work hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Give yourself permission to take on fewer responsibilities and say “No”.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage in regular supervision or consultation with supervisors, mentors, and colleagues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Take care of you and your family’s needs - Use sick leave, personal leave, or ask for a substitute as needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Designate a specific, separate, and inviting work space at home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ask for flexible work times or shift shares if available.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Access services and support from Employee Assistance Programs and teacher wellness initiatives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Seek support and help from school personnel such as crisis team members and mental health professionals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set up or manage an Employee Support Group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Don’t recreate wheels – Use existing resources from your district or <u>OSDE.</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage in virtual professional development for growth and empowerment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Set realistic work expectations - Expect typical productivity to decrease in times of crisis.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a Gratitude and Successes Journal for professional accomplishments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Join professional educational organizations and networks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Post visual messages of positivity in your work space or arrange for <u>uplifting text alerts.</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engaging in professional acts of kindness and / or educational activism or advocacy work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Volunteer outside of your comfort zone within your school community, such as preparing or delivering meals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Look for and talk about gratefulness, goodness, beauty, kindness, positivity, <u>hope</u>, and humor in this stressful time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Celebrate your successes and your colleagues’ successes – Appreciate your work and your growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Feel empowered at the opportunity to be a Change Agent for children and families during a monumental time in history.



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Additional Support

Keep in mind that recovery from a crisis takes time, is different for each person, and may not happen in a linear fashion—especially during a pandemic that does not have a distinct, known end. Awareness, balance, and connection can help!

For Questions, Concerns, or Assistance, Contact the Oklahoma State Department of Education [Office of Student Support](#).

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