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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create and maintain a schedule - Balance personal and professional responsibilities with Personal Self-Care.</td>
<td>Make lists and set priorities for efficient time management - Focus on what is practical, even if it is not ideal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain social connections with professionals in your school to build resilience, find encouragement, and feel less alone in your work.</td>
<td>Create familiar structure and routines into your work day – But do not feel pressured to re-create your typical classroom or schedule.</td>
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<td>Stay engaged with your students and their families.</td>
<td>Take frequent breaks to engage in non-work activities.</td>
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<td>Turn off your email and phone outside of work hours.</td>
<td>Give yourself permission to take on fewer responsibilities and say “No”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage in regular supervision or consultation with supervisors, mentors, and colleagues.</td>
<td>Take care of you and your family’s needs - Use sick leave, personal leave, or ask for a substitute as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designate a specific, separate, and inviting work space at home.</td>
<td>Ask for flexible work times or shift shares if available.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Access services and support from Employee Assistance Programs and teacher wellness initiatives.</td>
<td>Seek support and help from school personnel such as crisis team members and mental health professionals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Set up or manage an Employee Support Group.</td>
<td>Don’t recreate wheels – Use existing resources from your district or <a href="https://www.ok.gov/education/">OSDE</a>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage in virtual professional development for growth and empowerment.</td>
<td>Set realistic work expectations - Expect typical productivity to decrease in times of crisis.</td>
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<td>Create a Gratitude and Successes Journal for professional accomplishments.</td>
<td>Join professional educational organizations and networks.</td>
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<td>Post visual messages of positivity in your work space or arrange for uplifting text alerts.</td>
<td>Engaging in professional acts of kindness and / or educational activism or advocacy work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer outside of your comfort zone within your school community, such as preparing or delivering meals.</td>
<td>Look for and talk about gratefulness, goodness, beauty, kindness, positivity, hope, and humor in this stressful time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrate your successes and your colleagues’ successes – Appreciate your work and your growth.</td>
<td>Feel empowered at the opportunity to be a Change Agent for children and families during a monumental time in history.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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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https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/health-wellness/wellness-strategies