



OXYGEN MASK

CREATING A PLAN TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

OUTCOMES

After engaging in this activity, participants will:

- Reflect on self-care activities in which they are already engaging
- Build awareness of self-care practices and the benefits to their personal life and work life
- Incorporate new ideas and strategies for enhancing well-being, and managing stress; and considering the barriers to good self-care
- Develop a proactive action plan for sustaining on-going self-care

HOW TO USE THIS ACTIVITY

- In a group setting, like a staff meeting, with a partner, or on your own
- For professional development

TIME:

- 45-60 minutes

OVERVIEW

We've all heard those pre-flight announcements about cabin depressurization: first place the oxygen mask over your own nose and mouth before assisting those around you. For educators and school staff, our work involves caring for, supporting, inspiring and teaching others. Ongoing self-care is critical for anyone working in potentially stressful situations, and gives us the capacity to support students, ourselves, and our colleagues.

Self-care is vital to living a balanced life and maintaining one's health and well-being.

Anything we consciously do to take care of ourselves, including limiting or managing stress, practicing activities associated with a healthy lifestyle, keeping things in perspective, for example, can be considered "self-care." Self-care has been scientifically proven to improve mood, boost immune function, promote longevity, raise self-esteem, and increase productivity.

At school, there are a number of things we can do (and may already be doing) individually to support our overall health and well-being. For example, staying hydrated, making sure to take bathroom breaks, taking mini mental "vacations" during the day, or doing simple breathing exercises to stay relaxed and focused can help us all manage the challenges of teaching.

Self-care is not just an individual commitment, but a commitment by colleagues and school leadership to improve school culture.

There are many activities that colleagues can do together to foster a nurturing environment and offer support for self-care. For example, small groups (or even the whole faculty) might get together:

- To walk before or after school
- On breaks to “check in” with one another and talk about how the day is going
- To decompress while sharing a healthy lunch
- At planning periods to collaborate

Unfortunately, there are a few inherent barriers to self-care. As educators, we are used to putting the needs of others ahead of our own. Self-care is often sacrificed for things we can’t necessarily change, such as, work schedule, cost, family pressures, not having enough time, and/or feeling guilty about putting ourselves first. However, small changes over time can yield huge results. We hope you can add to the self-care strategies you may already be practicing—some days a little, and some days a lot.

This activity starts with a self-assessment. In this survey, you will gauge how often you engage in activities that contribute to professional, physical, psychological, emotional, reflective, and connective self-care. Then, using a self-care action plan template, you will be able to create an action plan that reinforces the actions you’re already taking, and allows you to add new activities that you may not have thought about before.

MATERIALS

- **Self-Care Assessment Survey** handout
- **Self-Care Action Plan Template** handout

PROCEDURE

1. Complete the Self-Care Assessment Survey.
2. Tally the results of the Self-Care Assessment Survey according to the directions given at the end of the assessment. You’ll need these results in order to create your individual Action Plan.
3. Once you’ve completed the Self-Care Assessment Survey and tallied the results, use it to complete the Self-Care Action Plan.
4. Keep the Self-Care Action Plan you’ve created in a place where you can easily refer to it.
5. Revisit your Self-Care Action Plan often, so that you can keep track of the activities/strategies that you enjoy or that are working well for you. Update your progress, adjust your plan, and add new practices for self-care.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on self-care and developing a sustainable self-care plan, please visit:

- [Compassion Fatigue & Self-Care for Individuals and Organizations](#)
- [ReachOut.com: Developing a Self-Care Plan](#)
- [Changing Minds Module](#) - Discover promising practices that help children impacted by trauma to heal and thrive.
- [Changing Minds Educator Activity](#) - Building Resilience: Putting Everyday Gestures to Work in Your Classroom
- [Changing Minds Student Activity](#) - Recognizing Resilience: Helping Students Understand the Amazing Teen Brain

SELF-CARE ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Ongoing self-care is a key to living a balanced life. Anything we do intentionally to maintain our health and well-being helps us:

- Refuel, so that we can continue the business of caring for, supporting, inspiring, and teaching others
- Keep things in perspective
- Manage stress
- Foster good relationships

This survey will help you gauge how often you purposefully do the types of things that contribute to professional, physical, psychological, emotional, reflective, and connective self-care.

Directions: For each numbered statement in the six sections below, circle the frequency with which you engage in that particular activity. If you’ve never thought about it, or are not sure, circle “Never.” After completing the survey, you will be given directions on how to tally your responses.

I. Professional

Keeping up with the demands of the classroom, new methods of instruction, and the ever-increasing knowledge in your content area(s) can be challenging. Activities that help you stay inspired and grow professionally are all part of self-care.

How often do you do each of these activities?

1. I set clear boundaries with students, parents, and colleagues.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

2. I seek peer support from my colleagues.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

3. I take time to connect with my colleagues.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

4. I minimize procrastination.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

5. I get—and take advantage of—opportunities for professional development.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

Add up your score: ____/25

II. Physical

A classroom is a high-energy environment. Working in one can sometimes feel like doing high-impact aerobics in that it requires you to perform at peak levels for hours at a time. Staying healthy and fit, and maintaining your energy levels are necessary to do our jobs well. Remember, resting and taking care of yourself if you get sick are also parts of self-care.

How often do you do each of these activities?

1. I find time to eat regularly.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

2. I eat healthy meals.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

3. I get regular exercise.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

4. I take time off when I'm sick.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

5. I get enough sleep.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

Add up your score: ____/25

III. Psychological

Working in schools is challenging and comes with built-in stressors. How do you keep calm and manage to stay level-headed in the midst of commotion? How well do you balance the demands of your job with your personal commitments to manage your work/life balance? Engaging in the activities below can contribute to your overall mental health.

How often do you do each of these activities?

1. I take time away from work.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

2. I take "time outs" and unplug from social media, email, phones and/or internet.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

3. I pay attention to my inner thoughts and feelings.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

4. I pursue my outside interests (e.g. attend sporting events, listen to music, read, garden, go to the theater).

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

5. I feel okay saying “no”.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

Add up your score: ____/25

IV. Emotional

Working in schools can mean prioritizing the emotional needs of students. But what do you do when you need emotional support? Doing the things you take pleasure in, expressing your full range of emotions, and prioritizing healthy, supportive relationships are all part of self-care.

How often do you do each of these activities?

1. I spend time with family and friends.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

2. I stay in contact with people who are important to me.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

3. I find things to laugh about.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

4. I let myself cry or be upset.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

5. I make room in my schedule for a little “down time” to rest and relax every day.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

Add up your score: ____/25

V. Reflective

What gives you a sense of perspective in the face of difficult situations at school or in your personal life? How do you foster your own peace of mind? Reflective self-care is about connecting with something larger than ourselves. It may be found in organized religion, a spiritual tradition, a meditation practice, or taking time in nature. In any case, it's about nurturing your own sense of possibility and optimism.

How often do you do each of these activities?

1. I engage in some kind of reflective practice (meditate, pray, or reflect).

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

2. I spend time in nature.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

3. I do things that inspire me.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

4. I reflect on the impact I make with my students

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

5. I contribute to causes I believe in.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

Add up your score: ____/25

VI. Connective

It's no secret that happy relationships quicken the heartbeat and lower stress at the same time. We all crave a sense of connection. It's one of the most important things we give to our students. Saying, for example, "I'm in Mrs. Jones' class," shows a sense of belonging. However, maintaining healthy, supportive relationships with the people we care about is critical to achieving good work/life balance.

How often do you do each of these activities?

1. I spend time with people I care about (e.g., "date night" with partner, friends, kids, family).

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

2. I stay in contact with acquaintances and networks.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

3. I make time to respond to personal correspondence.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

4. I ask for help when I need it.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

5. I “vent” or share my feelings with someone I trust.

1 Never 2 Rarely 3 Sometimes 4 Often 5 Always

Add up your score: ____/25

SCORING THE SURVEY AND TALLYING THE RESULTS

- For each of the six (6) sections, give yourself points for your response to each of the five statements in that section:
 - Never = 1 point
 - Rarely = 2 points
 - Sometimes = 3 points
 - Often = 4 points
 - Always = 5 points
- Add up the total number of points for each section, and write it in the space provided in the lower right-hand corner of that section, where it says ____/25.
- Rank the sections from highest to lowest number of total points, and enter the results in the table on the Self-Care Action Plan Template. If, for example, you scored the most points on Section II: Physical, you will list that first, and so on, so that the section with the least number of points is in the 6th position. If any of the sections are tied, you decide which to rank higher.
- Ask yourself these questions:
 - Which section scores highest and which lowest?
 - In which sections are there areas of improvement you wish to pursue?
 - What could you choose to do to “bring your score up” in a particular section?

SELF-CARE ACTION PLAN

List the sections of your assessment from highest scoring to lowest in the boxes in the left-hand column below. Then consider:

- Which sections contain areas where you’re doing well? Acknowledge these!
- Which sections contain areas of improvement you wish to pursue?
- Note some specific strategies you can do easily and fairly immediately.
- Note some long-term goals that will take some time to implement. See the list below for suggestions of some additional self-care strategies to consider.
- Prioritize those self-care strategies/activities that most appeal to you.
- Use the self-care action plan to keep track of whether the activities/strategies you’ve chosen suit your on-going needs.
- Post the action plan where you can see it.

| Assessment Sections | Assessment Sections Strategies for Improvement/Long-term Goals |
|---------------------|--|
| 1. | 1. 2. 3. |
| 2. | 1. 2. 3. |
| 3. | 1. 2. 3. |
| 4. | 1. 2. 3. |
| 5. | 1. 2. 3. |
| 6. | 1. 2. 3. |

Activities like taking “stretch” breaks, journaling, and doing deep breathing exercises, for example, have proven health benefits, such as reducing fatigue and improving mental focus. Some additional self-care strategies to consider include:

PROFESSIONAL

- Consult a more experienced colleague who can mentor you.
- Set up a peer support group (i.e. an informal lunch group).
- Read professional journals.
- Seek opportunities for in-service training, staff development, or continuing education.

PHYSICAL

- Participate in a regular physical activity that you enjoy.
- Arrange your classroom so that it’s comfortable for you, and comforting for your students.
- Implement stress-reduction practices, such as stretching and breathing activities, on your own or with your students.
- Make sure that you take time to attend to your physical comfort and personal needs (e.g. eat lunch, take bathroom breaks).

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Engage in a hobby or activity that you enjoy.
- Do something where you’re not an expert or in charge.
- Minimize your response and attention to work-related correspondence outside of work hours.
- Make time for relaxation.

EMOTIONAL

- Acknowledge when you’ve done well! Give yourself a “pat on the back.”
- Seek out positive people, places, and activities.
- Write three things that you’ve done well or appreciate in your life each day in a journal.
- Play a sport, join a club, keep up with your social groups.

REFLECTIVE

- Develop/nurture a connection to a community network with shared values.
- Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life.
- Write in a journal.
- Be open to not knowing.

CONNECTIVE

- Prioritize close relationships in your life (e.g. partner, children, family).
- Attend your family members’ and friends’ special events.
- Cultivate relationships with people outside your profession.
- Maintain a healthy and nurturing physical space or home.

MY SELF CARE ACTION PLAN

| | Strategies for Improvement and Long-term Goals |
|----------------------|--|
| PROFESSIONAL | 1. 2. 3. |
| PHYSICAL | 1. 2. 3. |
| PSYCHOLOGICAL | 1. 2. 3. |
| EMOTIONAL | 1. 2. 3. |
| REFLECTIVE | 1. 2. 3. |
| CONNECTIVE | 1. 2. 3. |