

# SCHOOL STAFF SELF-CARE DURING COVID-19

Districts across the country were able to quickly transition to distance learning as a result of COVID-19 related school closures but remain concerned about the social-emotional well-being of their staff members. Because districts value self-care for staff and believe self-care has become particularly important during the pandemic, Hanover Research prepared the following info-brief to support staff self-care as educators navigate the current crisis.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE FOR EDUCATORS

While self-care should be a priority in every profession, it is particularly important for those in caregiving careers. Teachers, like nurses, doctors, firefighters, police officers, and other caregiving frontline professionals, often experience stigma surrounding self-care; caregiving careers encourage, or require, service providers to focus considerable time and energy on the communities they serve, often leaving not have enough time for themselves.

Many teachers, in particular, are at risk of stress and burnout, and self-care is therefore necessary to maintain good mental health and overall well-being.

Over  
**40%**

of teachers report feeling high stress every day during the school year.



Teaching is tied with nursing as having the highest stress rates of any career.



To evaluate your own stress, click here for the stress assessment from the United Federation of teachers.



Click here to learn more about the importance of self-care for all school stakeholders.

### WHAT ARE COMPONENTS OF SELF-CARE?

Self-care is any action that you use to improve your health and well-being within six components:



PHYSICAL



PSYCHOLOGICAL



EMOTIONAL



SPIRITUAL



PROFESSIONAL



SOCIAL

### CAUSES OF STRESS AMONG EDUCATORS INCLUDE:



LACK OF RESOURCES



CLASS BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS



PRESSURES OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

When teachers' stress and burnout are left unaddressed, teachers' physical and mental health can deteriorate and result in greater turnover in the profession.

### SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATORS



Teaching can be socially overwhelming. Take at least 10 to 20 minutes a day to have a break and decompress.



Have as much compassion for yourself as you would for your students. Prioritize a positive self image and self confidence.



Always keep a self-care "emergency pack" with you with creative and mindful activities to destress during breaks.



Click here for more ideas from Kansas Technical Assistance Network.

## CREATIVITY AS SELF-CARE FOR EDUCATORS

Creativity and the arts help people process problems or situations, make connections between experiences and feelings, and gain new and meaningful perspectives. Creative activities stimulate alpha waves, which are signals in the brain that correlate with relaxation and raise serotonin levels. The arts also help people deal with trauma, illness, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

### IMPACTS OF THE CREATIVE ARTS ON HEALTH AND WELLNESS



MUSIC

Music has been proven to decrease anxiety, calm brain activity, and help to restore functioning in the immune system.



ART

Visual arts help people express difficult emotions, facilitate communication, and reveal one's subconscious thoughts or feelings.



MOVEMENT

Dance, movement, and non-verbal physical expression relieve stress and anxiety and improve physical health.



WRITING

Expressive writing increases health and wellness and improves immune system functioning. Writing is a positive form of reflection.

### ART THERAPY ACTIVITIES

- ✂ Search for writing prompts online.
- ✂ Draw or sketch in a notebook or your planner.
- ✂ Take photos on your camera or phone.
- ✂ Prepare a meal and spend time creatively plating.
- ✂ Dance to your favorite song.

## MINDFULNESS AS SELF-CARE FOR EDUCATORS

Mindfulness practices have been proven to improve or solve a range of physical and mental conditions: irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, psoriasis, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Mindfulness can support self-care and benefit wellness.

[Click here for guided mindful meditation exercises.](#)

**MINDFULNESS:** paying attention to the **present moment**, **on purpose**, **without judgement**.

### BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

- Heightened brain activity to regulate attention toward external stimuli, thoughts, and emotions.
- Increased ability to sustain empathy, prosocial behaviors, and overall emotional regulation.
- Improved executive functioning in areas such as planning, working memory, and problem-solving.

### HOW CAN MINDFULNESS HELP TEACHERS?

During the school year, teachers are prone to increased physiological stress symptoms. However, mindfulness can boost teachers' compassion for themselves and others, reduce burnout, increase effective teaching behaviors, and eliminate biases.

### SIMPLE MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES TO DO ON YOUR OWN

**Mindful Walk**  
Take a walk in nature and stay aware of the textures of your surroundings.

**I Spy**  
Notice and count the different shapes and colors in the vicinity.

**Car Meditation**  
Mindfully transition to your destination in the driver seat before leaving.

[Click here for more mindfulness resources and activities.](#)

[Click here for more information on the science behind mindfulness from the Harvard Gazette](#)

## SELF-CARE FOR EDUCATORS DURING COVID-19

Teachers and other essential workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic compose nearly half of the workforce.

**56% & 64%**

OF AMERICAN ADULTS      OF FRONTLINE WORKERS

...report that their feelings of worry have caused sleep problems, changes in appetite, frequent headaches and stomachaches, difficulty controlling temper, increased alcohol and drug use, and worsening chronic health conditions.

### COPING WITH A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

COVID-19 is causing strong feelings of stress specific to the global pandemic, including fear about one's own health and the health of loved ones. Teachers can cope with these feelings by:

CREATING A PLAN FOR POTENTIAL ILLNESS	UNDERSTANDING THE SYMPTOMS OF COVID-19
KNOWING WHERE AND HOW TO GET TREATMENT	TAKING CARE OF MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH
STAYING CONNECTED WITH LOVED ONES	LIMITING OVERWHELMING NEWS AND MEDIA INTAKE

Self-care can support teacher's **RESILIENCE** and improve their ability to **overcome adversity and adapt to challenging situations**, as required during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**WATCH:** Click here to view a webinar from WestEd on how districts can support staff self-care during COVID-19.

### SUPPORTING TEACHER RESILIENCE DURING COVID-19

The following self-care activities can help boost teachers' resilience during the pandemic and prevent overwhelming stress and burnout.

- CREATE A NEW NORMAL**
- Be realistic and gentle. Set a new baseline for success.
  - Reduce workload for yourself and your students. Reduce the mental and emotional burden.
  - Prioritize **positive relationships**.

- PRACTICE SELF-AWARENESS**
- Regulate emotional responses to fear caused by COVID-19.
  - Use **mindfulness practices** to focus on positive experiences.
  - Understand that **emotions can be just as contagious as viruses**.

- BE SOLUTIONS-FOCUSED**
- Focus efforts on solutions rather than the problems.
  - Think of what **can** be done rather than what can not.
  - Reframe challenges to be more positive learning experiences.

- SET BOUNDARIES**
- Create a workspace to separate work from home life.
  - Take more **breaks**, away from screens, during the work day.
  - Maintain appropriate **social distancing** guidelines.

[Click here for the COVID-19 toolkit for teachers from Resilient Educator.](#)

[Click here for more self-care practices for coping during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

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