**Examining Self-Care**

When faced with challenges, we can use either positive coping strategies or negative coping strategies. Here are some steps you can use to improve your self-care practices. These steps can be done independently or with other educators.

**Step 1: Evaluate Your Coping Skills**

Below are a few examples of each. Which strategies do you use?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Positive** | **Negative** |
| Stretching  Meditation  Listening to music  Exercising  Reading  Going for a walk  Taking a bath  Socializing with friends  Sitting outside and relaxing  Engaging in a hobby | Yelling  Acting aggressively  Crying  Overeating or skipping meals  Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol  Smoking/Drugs  Pacing  Biting your fingernails  Withdrawing from family and friends  Consuming excessive caffeine |

**Step 2: Reflect**

Reflect on the existing coping strategies and self-care tools you have outlined in the previous activities. What’s working? What isn’t working? Keep the helpful tools, and ditch the stuff that doesn’t help you.

**Step 3: Examine**

Are there barriers to maintaining your self-care? Examine how you can address these barriers. Start taking steps toward incorporating new strategies and tools that will benefit your health and well-being.

**Step 4: Replace**

Work on reducing, and then eliminating, negative coping strategies. If you find yourself using negative strategies, then begin by choosing one action you feel is most harmful and identify a positive strategy to replace it. Positive coping skills are an important part of your self-care toolkit.

Options: Write in a journal • Volunteer for a cause meaningful to you • Make a gratitude list • Take a fresh air break • Meditate or listen to guided visualization • Cuddle with pets • Treat yourself to a nice meal • Take a nap • Listen to music • Practice yoga • Lay in the grass • Go for a nature walk • Photography • Read a good book • Write a blog • Try a new hobby • Have an adventure day • Get a massage • Buy yourself flowers • Turn off electronic devices • Have a movie marathon • Play a game • Dance • Wear something that makes you feel confident • Browse your local music store or bookstore • Join a support group • Have a game night with friends • Work in the garden • Get creative: draw, paint, write a song, or cook a new meal

Modified from: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellbeing/files/wellbeing/self-care-starter-kit.pdf>

**Four Burners Theory**

Imagine that your life is represented by a stove with four burners on it. Each burner symbolizes one major quadrant of your life.

1. The first burner represents your family.
2. The second burner is your friends.
3. The third burner is your health.
4. The fourth burner is your work.



Some people assume that to be successful, you must cut off a burner or lower burners. And, to be really successful, you must cut off two to three burners. For example, to be an exceptional teacher, you must place work on high and friends/health on low (or turn them off). However, we know it is important to tend to all burners.

Use this theory to reflect on your self-care practices and classroom practices. You can reflect individually or with other educators.

**Guiding Prompts:**

Currently, what are the levels of each of your burners (family, work, friends, health)?

Do the levels change during the year? How so? Why?

How do the levels of your burners impact your classroom and the decisions you make?

How do the levels impact your relationship with students?

How does you school community or classroom impact your burners?

In a perfect world, what would be the levels of your burners? What could you do to move closer to that ideal image?

Modified from: https://jamesclear.com/four-burners-theory

**Self-Care in the Classroom: Teachers and Students Working on Self-Care Together**

Self-care knowledge and skills are as important for students as they are for teachers. Some teachers work on self-care with their students and make it part of their classroom management plan. Spending time on self-care can be easily justified by aligning efforts with Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards. Here are some ways in which they overlap with SEL performance descriptors.

**1A Identify and manage one’s emotions and behavior**

Stage C: Describe situations that trigger various emotions (e.g., listening to music, talking to a friend, taking a test, being scolded) (Grade 1)

Stage F: Identify factors that cause stress both positive and negative (Grade 5)

Stage G: Practice self-calming techniques (deep breathing, self-talk, progressive relaxation, etc.) to manage stress (Grade 8)

Stage I: Analyze how time management might improve your decision making (Grade 10)

**1B Recognize personal qualities and external supports**

Stage C: Identify community members that can be of support when needed (e.g., religious leader, extended family member, and neighbor) (Grade 3)

Stage E: Identify reliable adults from whom you would seek help in various situations (Grade 6)

**1C Demonstrate skills related to achieving personal and academic goals**

Stage E: Develop a friendship goal with action steps to be taken by certain dates (Grade 5)

Stage G: Set a positive social interaction goal (Grade 8)

Stage J: Analyze how current decisions about health behavior may affect long-term education and career goals (Grade 11/12)

**2C Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.**

Stage A Practice saying “no” to protect yourself from unsafe situations. (Grade 2)

Stage F Practice turning criticism into constructive feedback (Grade 7)

**2D Demonstrate an ability to prevent, manage, and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways**

Stage B Use a checklist to practice the steps of refusing unwanted peer pressure. (Grade 4)

Stage J Analyze strategies for dealing with sexual harassment and an abusive relationship (Grade 11/12)

**3B Apply decision-making skills to deal responsibly with daily academic and social situations.**

Stage F Identify tools to manage time better (Grade 6)

Stage G Use a decision log for 24 hours to identify influences on your health decisions (Grade 7)

**Resources**

**Self-Care Plans**

Developing a self-care plan

<https://schools.au.reachout.com/articles/developing-a-self-care-plan>

Self-care template

<http://socialworktech.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Social-Work-Tech-Self-Care-Plan-en-1.pdf>

**Ideas for Teachers**

Article: Self-compassion for teachers

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/self_compassion_for_teachers>

Blog Post: “How to teach and still have a life this year…”

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/blog-posts/genia-connell/how-teach-and-still-have-life-school-year/>

Book: Simple self-care strategies for teachers

<https://www.stenhouse.com/content/practicing-presence?item_num=1191&r=cc12r101>

**Self-Care Activities**

Poetry templates

<http://www.teach-nology.com/worksheets/language_arts/poems/>

Making yoga fun for students

<https://www.cosmickids.com/>

