

10 TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Everyone has mental health, and your mental health can change according to how you take care of yourself. Our mental wellbeing impacts us in all areas of our lives.

As an educator or school staff member, you spend a lot of energy supporting students and responding to their needs. Working with students is rewarding, yet it can also be physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. While it can be difficult to find time for your own self-care, you need to prioritize your own wellness in order to avoid burnout. The following ten tips will help you find balance and take care of your mental health.

1. Talk with your coworkers and supervisors if you are starting to feel overwhelmed. We tend to shy away from talking about difficulties, but we do not have to suffer alone. Reaching out to colleagues about challenges you're facing at work can be a great way to find solutions together. You will likely discover that others are having similar experiences, and realizing this can be validating and reassuring!

2. Practice mindfulness throughout your workday. Mindfulness exercises can be short and sweet. The simple act of taking some deep, cleansing breaths can go a long way. Try reconnecting with each of your five senses and observing your surroundings. Refocusing your mind in this way can help you feel less stressed and overwhelmed.

- 3. Look after your physical needs. To ensure you have the energy to be present for the students you are supporting, do your best to get enough sleep, eat well, stay hydrated, and exercise regularly. Keep in mind that exercise doesn't need to be a full workout at the gym. Something like a brisk, ten-minute walk can really help boost your mood and overall sense of well being. Our mental and physical health are deeply connected, so taking care of your body will help you to take care of your mind.**
- 4. Practice self-compassion. We're living in uncertain times, and it may be necessary to adjust your expectations about productivity and performance. Remind yourself that you are doing the best you can. Appreciate and celebrate your many strengths.**
- 5. Follow a routine that helps you unwind. While lesson planning and grading can make it very difficult to leave work at work, we all need to find a way to recharge. One good strategy for doing so is to implement a decompression routine in the evening. This routine might involve going for a short walk, doing some gentle yoga, listening to relaxing music, or watching a favourite show.**
- 6. Set healthy boundaries. Saying "no" can be very difficult, but it's imperative to maintaining your mental health. Supporting student needs can be endless, and you need to fill your own cup before you can take care of those around you. If you find that others are not observing your boundaries, have a gentle and respectful conversation with them about how important these boundaries are to maintaining overall wellness.**

7. Make room for fun activities outside of work. Even if it's only for a few minutes a day, take time on a regular basis to do something that you love and that makes you feel alive. Recreation is a crucial part of self-care.

8. Build and maintain supportive relationships with others. Human beings are social creatures, and we have a deep need for belonging. Stay emotionally and socially connected with family, friends, and colleagues, even when it is not possible to be physically present with them.

9. Reach out for professional support as needed. Working with students who have diverse needs or whose family lives are distressing can take a huge toll. If you find yourself emotionally drained by the work you are doing, try speaking with a mental health professional. Seeing a therapist or a counsellor can be a great way to deal with work-related stress and anxiety. Everyone struggles from time to time, and there's no need to suffer alone.

10. Hold on to the joy of what you do. Supporting students is not easy, but it is vital, valuable work. Remembering and reflecting on why you decided to pursue this field in the first place can help you recover your passion when the going gets tough. From day to day, try to focus on small moments of joy in what you do.

Please remember that your mental health matters. You can do your most effective work for students and colleagues when you put yourself first. Best of luck to you in your mental health journey!