

How to Create an Individualized Self-Care Plan

Step 1. Learn about the importance of self-care.

Educators are usually good at thinking about the well-being of others, but not about their own well-being – until it's too late and they are sick or burnt out. Self-care means taking responsibility for yourself to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle at work and in your personal world through individually determined, proactive activities. Completing steps 2 - 7 can help you achieve that goal.

Step 2. Determine your stress level.

It's important to recognize the presence of stress in your life and how it affects you. Many people don't realize the effect that stress has on their lives and health. One quick way to assess your stress level is to complete the informal inventory below by checking off any effects of stress that you are currently experiencing.

Physical Effects

Increased frequency of

- fatigue
- headaches
- sleeplessness
- problems concentrating
- muscle tension
- hypertension

Psychological/Emotional Effects

Feeling

- general uneasiness
- depressed
- negative, cynical
- nervous, anxious
- helpless, not good enough
- overworked, out of control
- underappreciated

Behavioral Effects

Showing signs of

- procrastination
- impatience, short-temper
- low productivity, taking work home
- withdrawal, being preoccupied
- complaining frequently about work

Other ways to determine your stress level include completing a stress inventory (e.g., <http://www.stress.org/self-assessment/>) or doing a personal assessment by simply looking at yourself in the mirror and honestly reflecting on how you look and feel: are you happy, positive, and productive, or are you worn out, anxious, and unsatisfied?

Step 3. Identify your stressors.

Reflect on and make a list of what causes you stress in your work and personal life. Below are general and specific sample lists to get you started in the reflection process.

General Stressors

- Overload (too much to do):

- Pressure (too many demands, obligations, and responsibilities):

- Inadequate rewards (too few satisfactions):

- Interpersonal concerns with coworkers, children, spouse, or other family members:

Specific Stressors

- personal health issues
- isolating work situations
- lack of administrator support
- lack of time
- money problems
- accelerated change
- unrealistic workloads or demands
- pressure to perform without resources
- others:

For a list of life events that typically cause stress, see the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory at <http://stress.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Holmes-Rahe-Stress-Inventory.jpg>

After you've identified your stressors, list your five major stressors under the *Current Major Stressors* column in the table in Step 5.

Step 4. Identify how you typically cope with stress.

Reflect on how you typically cope with stress and check off or list your current coping strategies below. Then write your top five self-care and stress-coping strategies in the *Current Strategies* column in the table in Step 5.

Healthy Strategies (self-care)

- be physically active
- eat healthy food
- practice relaxation exercises, get enough rest
- make time for fun/hobbies
- change/manage the conditions causing stress, be assertive
- see a counselor, ask for help
- follow faith/spiritual beliefs
- other:

Unhealthy Strategies

- live a sedentary lifestyle
- overeat
- try to do it all
- lash out
- take stress-relief medications
- smoke, overdrink
- isolate yourself
- other:

Optional Step: Engage in a personal reflection.

Reflection on values and worldviews can directly affect our self-care, especially in the areas that include our ability to feel gratitude, our place in the natural world, and our acceptance of ourselves and others. Many people find solace and comfort in their deeper values, beliefs, and practices. The following series of questions is provided to help you reflect on a number of ways to view the world that may affect your self-care practice.

- Do you tend to wake up every morning with a sense of gratitude—or—drag yourself out of bed bracing for a trouble-filled day?
- Do you typically count your blessing throughout the day—or—do you use valuable time to ruminate on problems and conflicts?
- Do you tend to work on connecting to and supporting others—or—do you often find yourself acting as an outsider or competitor?
- Do you typically strive to consciously banish hard feelings—or—do you often harbor and focus on resentments?
- Do you tend to sing your colleagues' praises—or—do you put energy into gossiping about those around you?
- Do you typically work well but with a light heart—or—do you often toil ceaselessly at your job?

Step 5. Create your own personal self-care plan.

Stress can be managed by direct and indirect coping strategies.

Direct approaches include removing the stressor, recognizing and changing your perception of the situation so that it is no longer stressful, removing yourself from the source of stress, or limiting your exposure to the stressor.

Indirect methods involve finding ways to minimize the impact of stressful situations. They include exercising, healthy eating and sleeping habits, relaxing, meditating, setting aside time for yourself, working with others to solve problems, asking for help, and personal counseling.

Your goal is to choose and incorporate a daily and/or weekly self-care practice that works for you.

*	Current Major Stressors	Current SC Strategies	Additional Self-Care & Stress-Coping Strategies Direct: remove stressor, limit exposure, reframe attitude Indirect: exercise, eat healthy, get enough sleep, take time to relax, meditate, engage in a hobby, work with others to solve problems, ask for help, get personal counseling; see next page for more specific self-care strategies and activities

* E-eliminate LE-limit exposure RF-reframe (challenge, goal, experience, support) SCS-stress-coping/self-care strategy

One way to create an individualized self-care plan is to follow the assessment and evaluation steps below. Strive to replace as many of your unhealthy strategies as you can with healthy ones reflecting your personal choices.

1. Put an **E** in front of the stressors that you can **eliminate** from your life. For each of these stressors state the method you will use to remove it or remove yourself from it. If necessary, give yourself removal due-date goals.
2. Put **LE** next to the stressors to which you can **limit your exposure**. After each of these stressors state the method you will use to limit your exposure. Brainstorm various ways to achieve your objective: perhaps rework your schedule so that you are not in the same proximity as the stressor at certain times, avoid working on committees or in groups with stress-generating personalities, replace your interaction time/task with another one that fulfills the same need or accomplishes the same task.
3. Put **RF** in front of the stressors that you can **reframe** (look at in a positive light) so that they are not as stressful. After each of these stressors state how you will reframe your attitude toward it: perhaps as a short-term *challenge*? a necessary step on the path to achieving a valued personal or career *goal*? a learning or growing *experience*? a way to *support* others?
4. Put **SCS** next to the stressors that you can indirectly address using **self-care and stress-coping strategies**. Identify and write in a self-care or stress-coping strategy in the additional strategies column.

Some Specific Self-care Strategies and Activities

- Break whatever work you have to do into smaller tasks and schedule your time as if it was money.
- Periodically think of things that make parenting and teaching/managing fun and post a cartoon, funny picture, or humorous story in your workspace.
- Take a walk or do a short meditation during lunch, breaks, or before or after school/work.
- Learn to politely say no when you are asked to do something that you believe is too much to handle (e.g., <http://99u.com/articles/7076/setting-boundaries-saying-no-nicely>). Or, ask for collaboration and support to complete it.
- Pack a healthy snack for mid-day munchies: whole grain crackers, mini rice cakes, fresh fruit, baby carrots, sliced cucumbers, string cheese, nuts, trail mix, or nutrition bar.

- Follow the 20/20 rule: after 20 minutes of sitting, take 20 seconds to do some light exercise or stretches.
- Spend more time with people who energize and inspire you, and less time with people who drain your energy.
- When feeling especially stressed, do some deep breathing: inhale for a count of four and then exhale for a count of four—all through your nose.
- Count your blessings! Train yourself to see the positives and at the end of each day write down six highlights of the day; they can be small or big things.

Resources

Self-Care for U at Northridge (SUN) Program <http://www.csun.edu/eisner-education/self-care>

Healthy Eating <http://www.nutrition.gov/smart-nutrition-101>

Managing Stress <http://neahealthyfutures.org/get-informed/school-employee-wellness/stress-management/>

Mayo Clinic Relaxation Meditation Video <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/multimedia/meditation/vid-20084741>

Mindfulness <http://www.dianegehart.com/page12/page12.html>

Stress Management Tips <http://www.stress.org/management-tips/>

Magazine "mindful: taking time for what matters" <http://www.mindful.org>

Book *Self-Care for Teachers* by Dr. Matthew Allen

Step 6. Make a commitment to self-care.

Decide that self-care is important and make a commitment to it. Share your plan with a self-care buddy, friend, or family member. Make it a weekly practice to review and share your progress with your designated self-care support person.

Step 7. Evaluate your self-care plan.

For self-care to really work involves

- 1) deciding that self-care is important and making a commitment to it, and
- 2) finding what works for each of us individually.

Strive to incorporate into your life at least one new self-care practice a year. Periodically evaluate your plan's effectiveness by repeating Steps 2 - 6. Make any necessary changes and then **recognize and celebrate your progress!**