

# Self-Care Guide



Northrockland Schools SEL Day 2023

*Self-care is never a selfish act  
— it is simply good stewardship  
of the only gift I have, the gift  
I was put on earth to offer  
others. Anytime we can listen  
to true self and give the care  
it requires, we do it not only  
for ourselves, but for the many  
others whose lives we touch.*

— Parker Palmer





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# Why Self-Care?



## **Life is busy.**

**There are always tasks to do at home, work is busy and can be stressful, your children need your time and energy, and your calendar is jammed. In an effort to keep your schedule under control, sometimes you skip meals, miss your class at the gym, or cancel plans with friends.**

When life gets busy, self-care is the first thing we sacrifice. People often think that taking time for themselves in the middle of busy times seems indulgent, but looking after your well-being will help you be productive and care for others.

Self-care is not selfish.

**Self-care helps to prevent burnout.** Excessive or prolonged stress can lead to a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion, often referred to as burnout. Burnout reduces productivity, zaps your energy, and can lead to physical or mental concerns. By incorporating self-care activities into your regular routine, like going for a walk or socializing with friends, you give your body and mind time to rest, reset, and rejuvenate, so you can avoid or reduce the symptoms of burnout.

**Self-care helps relationships.** Self-care helps you to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself and others. Doing things that make you feel physically and mentally good boosts your confidence and self-esteem. When you feel good, you are happier and better able to maintain positive relationships with family, friends, and co-workers. By practicing self-care, you also demonstrate to the people around you that you know how to set healthy, functional boundaries, which sets a great example and also helps to align their expectations of you.

**Self-care makes you more effective.** When you take time for yourself, and give your body the food, rest, and activity it needs, you will actually have more energy to meet the demands of daily life. Much like refueling the engine of your car, self-care activities refuel your body and mind. Bringing more balance to your daily routine will help you be more productive and more resilient to stressors.



*All caregiving begins with self-care.*

## **CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN CAREGIVING**

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### **UNHELPFUL**

- It is not professional to experience emotional responses
- You shouldn't get too close to your students and their families
- You need to keep work at work and home life at home
- It is part of the job to feel stressed out
- I hardly have any time for myself, but that goes with the job
- Self-care is being selfish
- Burnout is a badge of honor

### **HELPFUL**

- Pain and compassion are not separate from work interactions; they are actual representations of people's humanity
- Organizations are social systems, and the experience of work occurs within these relationships
- People's lived experience is not limited only to the context of the work environment
- The division between work and home is artificial and is an unhelpful divide in supporting healthy and meaningful development

# Stress-related Disorders

What happens when self-care is not a priority?

## Burnout

A state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress and is characterized by three dimensions: **exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of reduced professional ability.**

### Symptoms include:

- Somatic complaints
- Lowered immunity
- Loss of motivation and satisfaction
- Irritability
- Social withdrawal

### Contributing Factors

- lack of autonomy
- students unmet psychosocial needs
- lack of supportive supervision
- increase and overdemanding workload

*Self-care is an ethical imperative!*





## Compassion Fatigue

A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by involvement in emotionally demanding situations. Compassion fatigue is likely to occur when a caregiver's ability to care for another is disrupted, due to symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Symptoms include:

- Avoidance of work-related relationships
- Depersonalization
- Insomnia/hypersomnia
- Anxiety and panic attacks
- Significant weight fluctuations
- Increased use of substances

## Contributing Factors

- Aspects of the work (situational variables, painful experiences that students disclose, demands of the work, amount of trauma exposure)
- Aspects of you as the helper (personal variables, coping styles, current life stressors, trauma history, attachment style)
- Sociocultural context (social and cultural variables, racism, poverty, sexism, injustice)



# Creating a Self-Care Plan

# Step 1.

## Identify what's working for you



Taking time to identify your strengths and what aspects of your life are supporting your wellness is the best place to start. Perhaps start by making list of things that are helpful and unhelpful. It is important to be as honest as possible when evaluating your current patterns.

### HELPFUL

- Deep breathing
- 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

### UNHELPFUL

- Yelling
- Acting aggressively
- Overeating
- Drinking alcohol excessively
- Smoking
- Pacing
- Biting your fingernails
- Using substances
- Skipping meals
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Driving dangerously



## Step 2. Ask yourself: What can I add in today?

Sometimes trying to make change can feel overwhelming, especially if you're trying to change everything at once. Adding one thing in successfully can eventually crowd out the unhelpful habits in your life.

## Step 3. Ask yourself: What would my life look like if I made these changes?

Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts...

*Self-care is a disposition, attitude and an ongoing state of body and mind.*



# Daily Self-Care

What is one thing I can add in today to support myself on a daily basis? Do I engage in self-care practices now? Am I more active in some areas of self-care than others? Use the following table to support yourself in the process.

Area of Self-Care	Current Practices	What is one thing to add in?
<b>Physical</b> (e.g. eat regular and healthy meals, good sleep habits, regular exercise, medical check-ups, etc.)		
<b>Emotional</b> (e.g. engage in positive activities, acknowledge your own accomplishments, express emotions in a healthy way, etc.)		
<b>Spiritual</b> (e.g. read inspirational literature, self-reflection, spend time in nature, meditate, explore spiritual connections, etc.)		
<b>Professional</b> (e.g. pursue meaningful work, maintain work-life balance, positive relationships with co-workers, time management skills, etc.)		
<b>Social</b> (e.g. healthy relationships, make time for family/friends, schedule dates with partner/spouse, ask for support from family and friends, etc.)		
<b>Financial</b> (e.g. understand how finances impact your quality of life, create a budget or financial plan, pay off debt, etc.)		
<b>Psychological</b> (e.g. take time for yourself, disconnect from electronic devices, journal, pursue new interests, learn new skills, access psychotherapy, life coaching, or counseling support through your EAP if needed, etc.)		

# Practice Guide

Mind-body practices to help promote wellness



# Meditation Practices

## Equanimity Attention: Inside Out

**Begin this practice with your breath:** extending the exhale, slowing down the body and mind with each revolution of your breath.

Bring attention to the sounds that originate outside of the room--merely noticing the sounds. Try your best not to name them. Keep this attention for approximately five breaths. Now with your next exhale, bring your attention to sounds originating inside of the room.

Repeat this sequence three times. Now, see if you can hold the sounds in the room and outside of the room with equal attention; allow the sounds to blend into your awareness.

Now, similar to the above, bring attention to the sounds originating outside your body. Keep this attention for five breaths. Now shift your focus to the sounds originating within your body. Repeat this process three times.

Now, see if you can hold the sounds from within your body and outside your body with equal attention. Bring awareness to the blending of the sounds for 3-5 breaths.

*Self-care is a practice.*



# Meditation Practices

## Heart-focused Breathing

*Doing this practice will help you cultivate restoring and regenerative emotional experiences that promote growth and connection. Heart-focused breathing can help quiet your mind to assist with concentration, clarity and relaxation. This practice is the foundation of bringing forth restorative emotional states such as kindness, compassion, appreciation and gratitude.*

**Bring your awareness and attention to your breath,** breathing in and out. Allowing your exhale to extend a bit further than your inhale. Once you have achieved this pattern, bring your attention and focus to the area around your heart. Extending that exhale a little bit further.

As you continue to deepen and extend your breath, bring your attention now to the area your heart. Imagine your breath is emanating from the area around your heart.

Next, practice bringing to mind a sense of appreciation and care for someone or something in your life. Allowing this heart-filled presence to resonate with your body and try your best to sustain this feeling as you continue to extend your exhale and relax your breath and your heart.



# Meditation Practices

## Loving-Kindness Meditation

*Practicing kindness promotes wellness and has the potential to improve relationships. Loving-kindness meditation (sometimes called "metta" meditation) is a great way to cultivate kindness. It involves mentally sending goodwill, kindness, and warmth towards self and others by silently repeating a series heartfelt words.*

**Begin by sitting comfortably in your chair.**

Allow your feet to be connected with the floor beneath you. If it feels comfortable and safe I invite you to close your eyes.

Bring your awareness to your breath coming in through your nose, filling your lungs and noticing the air leaving your mouth.

Try to bring your awareness to just one breath in and one breath out. No need to change the speed or rhythm, just simply become aware of the air entering and leaving your body.

Now notice the area around your heart. If it feels comfortable, you can place one or two hands over your heart.

Say to yourself silently:

*May I be happy  
May I be healthy  
May I live with peace and be filled with joy*

Now bring awareness to anything that arises and simply allow this awareness there.

Now I invite you to bring to your mind someone in your life that you love and care for.

Say to them:  
*May you be happy  
May you be healthy  
May you live with peace and be filled with joy*

Allow those intentions to land on the heart of the person you see.

Next, bring to your attention someone who you have had difficulty with in the past few weeks. Maybe they annoyed you or frustrated you.

When you see them in your mind's eye say:

*May you be happy  
May you be healthy  
May you live with peace and be filled with joy*

Now bring into your awareness a community of people.

When you can fully imagine them say:

*May you be happy  
May you be healthy  
May you live with peace and be filled with joy*

Last, bring into your consciousness the entire world and all living beings on this earth.

Say to them:

*May you be happy  
May you be healthy  
May you live with peace and be filled with joy*

Take your last few breaths to become aware of any emotions that are present and be open to them.

*Ring bell.*

# Movement Practices

## 5 Mindful Movements

*This practice consists of 5 simple mindfulness movements. Mindful movement practice requires us to bring focus to our breath, specifically as you breathe in and breathe out. Make sure you bring balance to your feet, not too far forward or too far back, and not too far to the left or too far to the right.*

**MOVEMENT #1:** Start with your hands at your side, and your palms turned in. Breathing in arms straight stretched out straight in front of you and then breathing out bring arms back to the start. Arms should extend to shoulder height in front of you. Smiling on the exhale.

**MOVEMENT #2:** Start with your hands at your side and your palms turned in. Breathing in arms straight stretched out above your head toward the sky, and then breathing out, bringing your arms back to the start. Arms should extend to shoulder height in front of you. Smiling on the exhale.

**MOVEMENT #3:** Breathe in while you put your fingertips on your shoulders and your elbows out to your sides. Breathe out while you release your fingers with stretched out arms.

**MOVEMENT #4:** Start by placing your feet a little bit more than shoulder-width apart and your hands in front of you together. Then you will draw circles with both arms the first half of the circle is an in-breath and second half of the circle is an out breath---breathing in---breathing out and reverse---and then shake your arms and hands out.

**MOVEMENT #5:** Start by placing your feet a little bit more than shoulder-width apart and bend over, so your hands are reaching toward the earth. Breathe in, reaching to the sky and breathing out back down to the surface, remembering to smile. To finish the practice, bring attention back to your feet, touching the ground, breathing in and out five times.

# Movement Practices

## Walking Meditation

*Meditation is a practice of presence that you can bring alive in all settings and activities. The formal practice of walking meditation can be particularly valuable for helping you to cultivate an awareness of your embodied experience in each moment.*

**Begin by choosing a walking path about 8-15 walking strides long.** Start by standing still and sensing the weight of your body at your feet, feeling your muscles supporting and stabilizing you. Take a moment here to find a balance between the front of your feet and the back. Rest your hands at your side or folded behind you.

**As you begin walking,** start at a slower pace than usual, paying particular attention to the sensations in your feet and legs: heaviness, lightness, pressure, tingling, energy, even pain if it's present.

Be mindful of the sensations of lifting your feet and of placing them back down on the floor or earth. Bring presence to each step as you walk in a

relaxed and natural way to the end of your chosen path. When you arrive, stop and pause for a moment. If it helps, you can even close your eyes during these standing pauses.

**As you're walking,** it's quite natural for your mind to wander. Whenever it does, you might mentally pause, perhaps noting the fact of thinking inwardly, or even where your mind went: planning, worrying, fantasizing, judging. Then, gently return your attention to the sensations of the next step.

No matter how long you've spent lost in thought, you can always arrive right here, bringing presence and care to the moment-to-moment sensations of walking.

*Self-care is not a selfish act.*



# Stress Reduction Practices

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

*Progressive muscle relaxation is used to help lower blood pressure and heart rate, improve blood flow, and decrease anxiety. It may reduce the perception of pain.*

*Progressive relaxation can be practiced lying down or in a chair. Each muscle or muscle group is tensed from five to seven seconds and then relaxed for 20-30 seconds. If one of your muscles is hard to relax, you can practice tensing and releasing it up to five times.*

Get into a comfortable position in a quiet room where you won't be disturbed. You may want to loosen your clothing and remove your shoes. Begin to relax as you take a few slow, deep breaths.

Now as you let the rest of your body relax, clench your fists and bend them back at the wrists ...

Tighter and tighter ... feel the tension in your fists and forearms ... Now relax ... Feel the looseness in your hands and forearms ...

Notice the contrast with the stress.

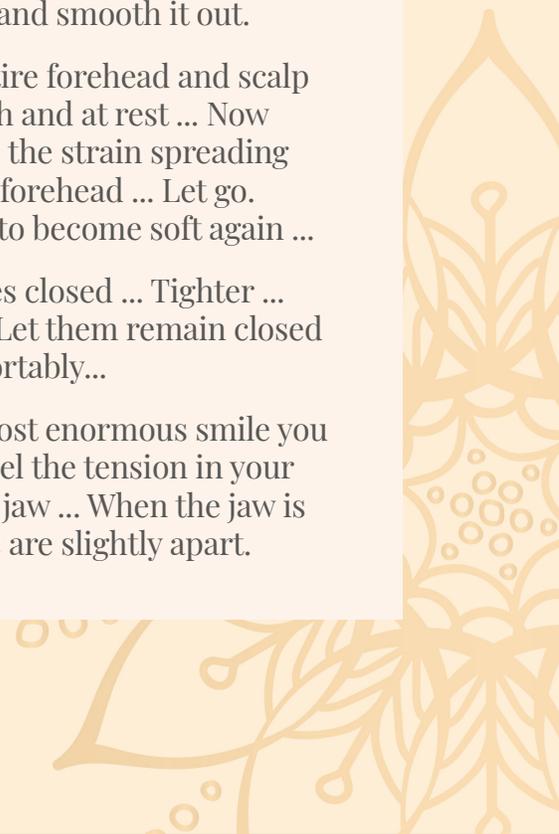
Now bend your elbows and tense your biceps ... Tense them as hard as you can and observe the feeling of tautness ... Let your hands drop down and relax ... Feel that difference ...

Turn your attention to your head and wrinkle your forehead as tight as you can ... Feel the tension in your forehead and scalp. Now relax and smooth it out.

Imagine your entire forehead and scalp becoming smooth and at rest ... Now frown and notice the strain spreading throughout your forehead ... Let go. Allow your brow to become soft again ...

Squeeze your eyes closed ... Tighter ... Relax your eyes. Let them remain closed gently and comfortably...

Now make the most enormous smile you can create and feel the tension in your jaw ... Relax your jaw ... When the jaw is relaxed, your lips are slightly apart.



# Stress Reduction Practices

## Autogenic Programming (Script)

Begin by finding a comfortable position, seated or lying down...

Focus completely on your breathing. Let all other thoughts go.

Breathe in...2...3...4...pause...2...3...  
Exhale...2...3...4...5...

Breathe in...2...3...4...pause...2...3...  
Exhale...2...3...4...5...

Breathe in...hold...Exhale...

Focus on just your breathing. There is nothing else you need to be doing at this moment. Nowhere else you need to be. Allow your worries to be released as you simply focus on the present. Breathe.

Breathe in...2...3...4...hold...2...3...  
Exhale...2...3...4...5...

Breathe in...and out...

Inhale...pause...exhale...

*Repeat the following relaxing statements in your mind, imagining each one:*

My arms are warm and heavy (5x)

My legs are warm and heavy (5x)

My breath is deep and peaceful (5x)

My heart beats strong and steady (5x)

My forehead is cool and soft (5x)

*Repeat this process 3 times.*

Now it is time to reawaken your body from this autogenics session. Feel your mind becoming more alert.

Wiggle your fingers and your toes.

Take a deep breath in as you stretch your arms, reaching high above your head. Exhale and lower your arms.

Open your eyes, and sit quietly for a moment as you become fully alert.

When you have returned to your usual level of wakefulness, your autogenics session is complete.



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