

104 SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR AFTERSCHOOL PROFESSIONALS

Self-care is the action and effort of taking care of one's physical, mental and emotional well-being. It is not about being selfish, but rather about self-preservation. It also isn't about investing in products; it's about investing in one's self.

Self-care is a personal practice that should be exercised daily and for the long term. Beginning a self-care journey may feel daunting and overwhelming with all the information available on the topic. The following 104 strategies are tips to help get you started and/or refine your self-care practices. While there plenty of tips included in this guide, identify those which you most resonate with and will help you on your self-care journey.

Tips for Starting and Maintaining a Self-Care Plan

- 1. Self-care is individualized:** Choose enjoyable self-care practices that are calming and reenergizing in a way that helps you manage stress and fatigue. A practice is not for you if it doesn't bring you joy or induces stress.
- 2. Consider your choices:** When deciding which self-care practices to incorporate, consider practices that you would consistently engage in and activities you have previously participated in that were enjoyable and reduced your stress. Any associated costs are worth the added value if the practice will fit in your schedule of personal and work commitments.
- 3. Create a plan that incorporates the six elements of self-care:** Work on overall well-being by learning more about the six elements of self-care: physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social and professional. Incorporate practices that focus on each area or the area of your lifestyle that needs the most attention.
- 4. Try out different self-care practices:** Try self-care practices in increments or one at a time to find out what you like. If a practice doesn't resonate with you or fit into your routine, try out another.
- 5. Schedule your self-care practices within your daily schedule:** The best way to prioritize and ensure you engage in your self-care practices is to block out time and include them in your daily schedule.
- 6. Schedule self-care practices in realistic increments of time:** Self-care practices do not need to require large amounts of time. A few minutes of activity is enough to be beneficial.
- 7. Make it visible:** Record your self-care plan and place it in a visible location, or set reminders so you are more likely to regularly engage in your plan.
- 8. Share your self-care plan with someone in your support network:** Sharing your plan with others will help you maintain and be accountable for your practices.
- 9. Adapt your plan when needed:** Don't be afraid to change your plan if you are not benefitting from your current practices.

- 10. Consistently practice your self-care plan:** Practice your self-care activities consistently for maximum benefit, making them regular habits.
- 11. Set realistic and attainable goals for your self-care plan once you have selected your practices:** You will be most successful with your practices if you set goals that are small, SMART and one at a time.
- 12. Determine and work on barriers to your self-care practices:** Self-care includes figuring out and addressing any barriers that affect prioritizing or implementing your practices.
- 13. Keep assessing your well-being and self-care practices:** Continue to check your state of well-being to assess for signs of fatigue and stress. Make sure the self-care practices you have implemented continue to be beneficial and fit your current situation.
- 14. Seek professional help:** Seek help if you are experiencing overwhelming signs of fatigue or need to discuss your thoughts, anxiety or fears.

Physical Self-Care Tips

- 15. Learn how to cook:** If you don't usually cook, learn how. If you're an experienced cook, try a new recipe. Cooking your meals can impact your mood and possibly your overall health.
- 16. Try a new food or a new dish:** Recipes abound online.
- 17. Have a distraction-free meal:** Leave work, phone, tech and TV behind during a meal to be present and mindful of your food and those you are sharing it with.
- 18. Drink lots of water:** Stay hydrated, energized and focused by drinking an adequate amount of water throughout the day.
- 19. Plan your meals:** Spend the time to think about and create a weekly meal plan, which can lead to healthier meals, reduction of food waste and improved time management.

- 20. Prep meals ahead of time:** Prepping your meals for the week allows you time to focus on your priorities.
- 21. Be mindful of your nutrients:** Incorporate foods in your meals that positively impact your health and boost your energy, like proteins, complex carbs and leafy greens.
- 22. Keep healthy snacks handy:** Have healthy snacks on hand when your hunger sets in and you need to replenish your energy.
- 23. Reduce your blue light exposure:** Stop using your tech devices a few hours before sleep, or use tools like blue light glasses to decrease eye strain.
- 24. Practice stretching exercises:** Stretching will help relieve tense, cramped muscles.
- 25. Plan a movement activity into your daily routine:** Scheduling movement or exercise makes it more likely you'll engage in the activity.
- 26. Adjust your movement activity to your situation:** Whether a lighter or more vigorous movement, choose a movement activity that feels right for you for that day.
- 27. Invite a friend to join you in your movement activity:** Not only do you get the benefit of enhancing your relationship, but you are more likely to show up when someone is relying on you.
- 28. Move while doing sedentary activities:** Fit in movement like walking, body resistance exercises, jumping jacks or stretching while doing a sedentary activity like watching TV or talking on the phone.
- 29. Enjoy the fresh air:** Take your movement activity outside for any amount of time. This can help decrease tension and increase self-esteem, mood and energy.
- 30. Establish a set bedtime to get an adequate amount of sleep.**
- 31. Boost your quality of sleep:** Block out light while you sleep. Keep your sleep time free from distractions and mental disruptions, and refrain from eating or drinking things that inhibit sleep.

32. Get extra sleep: Take a nap, go to bed earlier or wake up later to get a few extra minutes of sleep into your day.

33. Create a calming sleep environment: Remove your tech devices from your room and use calming practices like journaling, meditation or reading to reduce stress before sleep.

34. Use a stress-release toy: Use a stress ball, fidget spinner or crystals to help release tension and anxiety.

Psychological Self-Care Tips

35. Realize what you can control: Remember that you can only control the things you can control. You are not responsible for all things and should ask for help from those around you.

36. Be honest with yourself: Recognize when you are stressed or fatigued. Acknowledge it and accept that it is difficult to deal with.

37. Regulate your media diet: Limit your media exposure to a level that feels safe to you and keep perspective of what you're exposed to.

38. Take a break from your tech: Plan a time each day to turn off your phone and take a break from your tech devices so you can be present for yourself or others.

39. Manage worry time: Worrying can be exhausting and most things you worry about do not come to fruition. Establish a time during the day as a "worry-free" time to provide relief from these feelings.

40. Set realistic expectations: Make reasonable and achievable expectations for yourself.

41. Differentiate probable versus possible risks: Keep in mind there is a difference between possible and probable risks and just because an adverse event is possible, does not mean it is probable.

- 42. Strive for quality instead of perfection:** Maintain your ideas for quality work but allow yourself to make mistakes and flex your expectations during stressful times.
- 43. Be optimistic:** Practice and model a positive, hopeful attitude and engage in positive self-talk.
- 44. Keep a collection of positive notes:** Collect and reflect upon notes and other items containing nice, positive things about you to improve your confidence and self-esteem.
- 45. Reduce your clutter:** Remove unwanted or stress-inducing things that create clutter in your life, whether it be physical items, hurtful relationships, feelings of guilt or grudges, to-dos that never get done or unachievable tasks.
- 46. Declutter your schedule:** Remove events from your schedule that are not required or don't add value to your life or relationships.
- 47. Forgive yourself:** Treat yourself as you would a friend and allow yourself to be imperfect, make mistakes and leave unfinished tasks on your list.
- 48. Forgive others:** Try to see other points of view and forgive mistakes of those not functioning at their best. Strengthen your tolerance to overlook the frustrating behaviors of others.
- 49. Handle one day at a time:** Focus on the challenges and accomplishments of each day as it occurs.
- 50. Acknowledge your strengths, achievements and confidence to handle future challenges.**
- 51. Do something creative.**
- 52. Find a new hobby:** Be mindful while engaging in your hobby and let go of your stressors.
- 53. Start a journal:** Use a journal to process your emotions, relieve your anxieties, record your daily thoughts and ideas, or practice affirmations.
- 54. Learn a new skill and be mindful of your self-development.**

55. Acknowledge your accomplishments: Take time at the end of your day to acknowledge all the things you did, instead of focusing on what did not get finished.

56. Express your gratitude: Find ways to express gratitude to others. Express gratitude to yourself by journaling or speaking of the things you are grateful for each day.

57. Take some time off to recharge: Allow yourself time off from activity in your daily routine that leaves you feeling exhausted or unmotivated.

58. Listen: Take a break to listen to music, an audiobook or a podcast.

59. Make your task list achievable: When creating your task list, make sure it is short, realistic and achievable so you can feel a sense of accomplishment.

60. Just say “no”: Show that you value yourself and your time and say “no” to things that are not a priority or that you don’t have time for.

61. Spend 30 minutes on yourself each day: Take the time to do something that brings you joy.

Emotional Self-Care Tips

62. Have self-compassion: Be kind to yourself and recognize when you are too hard on yourself.

63. Smile and laugh: Laughter can be restorative and healing. Look for opportunities to engage your sense of humor and surround yourself with people who bring you joy and make you laugh.

64. Seek support from colleagues: Be careful of isolating yourself and seek out trusted colleagues to help you process your feelings and grow.

65. Find your inner child: Think of the things you enjoyed as a child and have fun doing them.

66. Make a self-care playlist: Include 10-12 songs (or more) that make you happy!

- 67. Practice self-affirmations:** Affirmations are the practice of positive thinking and self-empowerment! Come up with 1 -3 affirmations and take time to say them to yourself every morning, evening or whenever you need reassurance.
- 68. Use motivational quotes:** Find several quotes that resonate with you and provide a pick-me-up. Post the quotes around the house, by your desk or places you are likely to see during the day.
- 69. Determine what motivates you:** Write, draw or doodle whatever comes to mind when you think about what gives you the push to reach your goals. Set a timer for five minutes and go for it! Keep the list nearby as a reminder.
-
- 70. Create a relaxation space:** Find an area you can convert into a warm, inviting space to practice your relaxation techniques.
- 71. Read a book:** Find a book you enjoy and read for relaxation and to clear your mind.
- 72. Enjoy the silence:** Find a quiet place to enjoy peace and stillness, especially before the “noise” of your day begins.
- 73. Learn and practice deep breathing exercises to relax.**
- 74. Recite a daily affirmation:** Determine an encouraging statement to recite to help motivate you toward achieving a goal.
- 75. Practice meditation a few times each week:** Take a few minutes and let your thoughts flow or focus on your breathing.
- 76. Plan a day to do nothing but rest and relax.**
- 77. Use aromatherapy:** Create a calming, relaxing environment by incorporating aromatherapy through candles, infusers or essential oils.

Spiritual Self-Care Tips

78. Do a good deed to help someone or volunteer your time: Helping others can take your mind off your own challenges and boost your confidence, self-esteem and overall well-being.

79. Ask for and accept help from others: Asking for help is acknowledging that you know your limitations and shows your ability to trust others.

Social Self-Care Tips

80. Regularly connect with a friend or family member: Make it a special event. Positive connections can help relieve stress and elevate your mental state and sense of belonging.

81. Take a trip or plan a trip: Use the time to disconnect, relax and reenergize.

82. Focus on positive relationships: Spend time with those who give you energy, and limit your interactions with people and conversations that drain you.

83. Think of memories and experiences of positive social interactions: Not grand special occasions that only happen from time to time, but smaller, more ordinary interactions. Share those memories with someone else—maybe even the person or people you had the interaction with. It's a great way to open the door.

Online Self-Care Tips

84. Pick up the phone and call someone to avoid Zoom fatigue.

85. Reach out to someone who is NOT in your work circle—just a simple email or text to say, "Hi, just checking in." Not only might it start a dialogue, but you never know how much it may help the person on the receiving end.

86. Download GamePigeon, which allows you to play simple games like Checkers or Battleship, via text.

(Safe) In-Person Tips

87. Say “hello!” to neighbors. Even a simple wave makes a connection.

88. Meet some local friends at a park for a chat outside at a safe distance or take a walk (with proper precautions).

89. If you are out picking up groceries or running other errands, say “hello” and “thank you” to the people working in the stores you are visiting.

Professional Self- Care Tips

90. Assess work habits: Evaluate if your current work habits are escalating your stress and fatigue, and adjust the practices that lead to these feelings.

91. Establish a sensible pace: Persistent high levels of stress and productivity are not sustainable, and you will need to take time to recharge and rejuvenate.

92. Set boundaries, communicate them and stick to them: Determine appropriate regular work hours, when and how you are accessible to others, and when to turn off your work phone and email. Also set boundaries for your relationships and social media usage.

93. Start a daily workday ritual: Incorporate a small, joyful practice into your day that doesn't distract from your professional responsibilities.

94. Dress the part to boost your mood: Dressing for your professional life can boost your confidence and help you feel ready to be productive.

95. Create a work challenge to help with professional boredom: Consider learning a new skill or researching a company practice you want to know more about.

96. Break your task list into manageable increments: Relieve the stress of trying to do all your tasks in one day or week by dividing them into smaller tasks that can be done across multiple days.

- 97. Take a break:** Take periodic breaks throughout your workday to move, eat, journal, breathe and reset your brain. Take a break for a day or extended period when you are feeling overworked or unmotivated.
- 98. Think of your lunch break as a restorative break:** Step away from your work to do something that will help you recharge for the rest of the day, like taking a walk or going to an exercise class.
- 99. Think of your work environment as your home:** Incorporate things into your workspace like greenery, photos and lighting to make your personal environment relaxing and comfortable.
- 100. Organize and clean your workspace:** Create a workspace that is inspiring and puts you in a productive state of mind.
- 101. Maintain open communication with your supervisor:** Keep the lines of communication open so you can comfortably discuss stressful situations or your health concerns.
- 102. Turn your meetings into walking meetings:** Get the benefit of both the outdoors and movement by having walking meetings with your colleagues.
- 103. Build workplace comradery:** Build relationships with your coworkers by taking your breaks together, eating lunch together, hosting a workplace potluck or recipe swap, or organizing a group activity.
- 104. Express gratitude to your coworkers:** Doing good for others also helps you feel better. Acknowledge your coworkers' successes or write thank you notes of gratitude.

