

SELF-CARE FOR EDUCATORS AND YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Why is self-care essential?

In their work with learners, including students with disabilities, English learners, and learners who have experienced trauma and toxic stress, educators and youth-serving professionals demonstrate incredible commitment. Supporting learners in any way can be challenging, and it is important for educators and youth-serving professionals to make sure that they do not forget about themselves as they care for their students.

Many youth-serving professionals experience burnout, compassion fatigue, or vicarious trauma.

- The term **burnout** speaks to the physical and emotional exhaustion a person may experience as a result of feelings of dissatisfaction, powerlessness, or overwhelm at work. Those facing burnout may find themselves disconnected, anxious, depressed, less motivated, or less invested in their work.
- **Compassion fatigue** refers to the exhaustion a person may feel in response to the emotional weight of continued exposure to traumatic situations or stories of trauma. This emotional depletion may make it harder for a person to show compassion at work or in their personal lives.
- **Vicarious trauma**, also called secondary trauma, describes the change in outlook and worldview that may happen for a person after continued exposure to the traumatic experiences of others. Even without living through the traumatic event themselves, some individuals may develop symptoms similar to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through the indirect exposure to trauma or PTSD itself.



Burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma can compound over time, impacting the wellbeing of educators and youth-serving professionals – and affecting their ability to serve their students. A first step individuals might take to improve their wellbeing is to evaluate their **professional quality of life**. The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) can help educators and youth-serving professionals understand their experiences of compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma so they can better support themselves and their staff. The ProQOL measure and other resources can be found at <https://www.proqol.org/>. (The ProQOL measure is not a clinical tool to be used for diagnosis.)

What students need more than anything else are adults who are doing and feeling well and are able to connect with them. This is where self-care comes in. Burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma can be alleviated through efforts to rest and replenish.

What is self-care actually?

Self-care refers to purposeful and intentional acts that help people recharge. Self-care looks different for every person. Acts of self-care have to actually support and recharge you; self-care is not just what you think should make you feel better. Ask yourself “does this activity make me feel more recharged after I do it?” If the answer is yes, it is a good self-care activity for you. If it feels like the activity takes more from you than it gives, then it may not be the right self-care activity for you.



Reflective questions:

- What do you do for self-care now?
- How would you assess how recharged you feel from your self-care currently?
- Is your self-care "purposeful and intentional"?
- What keeps you from engaging in self-care?

Activity: Make your own self-care plan!

As you develop your own self-care plan, consider these areas of health and wellbeing:

- Mental
- Financial
- Emotional
- Social
- Spiritual
- Physical

There are numerous resources available that can help you improve your self-care. You can get started here:

- [Alive and Well Self-Care Clock](#)
- [Learn to make a self-care plan](#)