

# Self-care & wellbeing for Australian school staff in Term 4

All school communities have had to adapt to major changes this year which has challenged the mental health and wellbeing for many. The roles of all staff in schools, although often rich and rewarding, have never been more complex and challenging. More than ever before it's important that all school staff take time to stop and consider their own wellbeing.

headspace is encouraging all those who work in schools to prioritise self-care. Regularly choosing meaningful and achievable activities can help shape self-care habits, to assist in navigating busy times ahead. Self-care is a prevention and early intervention strategy that is paramount to staying balanced, well, and productive.

A school community can create a culture of self-care by making it an explicit focus. Providing support, such as prioritising time, resources, and a small budget, can strengthen this culture. The benefits are invaluable and some of the best ideas are free!

While there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to self-care, choosing strategies from the following six complementary self-care domains can help reduce stress and enhance wellbeing:

- **body**
- **mind**
- **emotions**
- **spirituality**
- **relationships**
- **work**

People may differ in the domain(s) they prioritise. There is no set pattern for self-care and it's up to each person to find the right balance for themselves over time. It is also important to identify self-care activities to improve wellbeing every day, as well as identifying strategies to use in times of greater stress or crisis.

The following ideas are a starting point for all staff to consider. Depending on work location, or other circumstances including restrictions relating to the pandemic, the ideas may need adapting to suit individual needs.

The list may help inspire other ideas and encouraging each person to do one small thing for themselves each day. This can make a big difference to overall health.

Body	
<b>Take a sensory walk</b>	Take a 15-20 minute sensory walk outside. Use all of your senses and take in your surroundings. What do you notice? For added sensory experience, where feasible, take your shoes off and walk barefoot. If you are onsite, this is a great activity to do as a team, and could be incorporated as part of, or instead of, a meeting. Come together at the end and invite team members to share their experiences and reflections.
<b>Step it out</b>	A lot of us find it hard to fit regular exercise into our busy schedules. If possible, help everyone get a pedometer to count steps. Set an educator target, such as 7000 steps per day, and get moving as a team. You might form a group that undertakes a step challenge to raise funds for a shared cause.
<b>Flex at your desk</b>	Long periods of sitting at desks can be detrimental to physical and mental health. Use desk time for stretching and improving flexibility. Some simple desk yoga poses are suggested on the beyond blue website: <a href="https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/wellbeing/five-desk-yoga-poses-to-incorporate-into-your-work-day">https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/wellbeing/five-desk-yoga-poses-to-incorporate-into-your-work-day</a> . You might develop this further by practising yoga or tai chi – pair up with a colleague or access a class online or onsite.
<b>Keep well-watered</b>	Hydration is really important and it's often something we forget to do during the day. Place reminders all over the school or use online visual prompts, such as screen savers, pop up calendar reminders, to regularly communicate about good hydration and water intake.
Mind	
<b>Share a book</b>	Consider buying the same book for staff to read and share reflections as part of a meeting. You might develop a book club time or space, or staff bulletins where people provide a brief book summary, or contribute to a list of favourite books to read, with a brief review explaining their recommendations.
<b>Write and reflect</b>	Set aside 10 minutes at the end of each day to write down your thoughts and make sense of your experiences of the day. This could be an unstructured activity, where you jot down whatever comes into your mind without worrying about spelling, or grammatical expression. It could be a more scaffolded reflection, as in listing three things you feel grateful for and three things you were challenged by or learned from.
<b>Practise mindfulness</b>	Ask a parent or professional from the community to run a class onsite or online to help staff practice and enjoy gentle mindfulness, meditation or relaxation techniques. If a suitable person can't be found, consider accessing an online app such as Smiling Mind. <a href="https://www.smilingmind.com.au/">https://www.smilingmind.com.au/</a>
Emotions	
<b>Express yourself</b>	Make art, take photos, learn new craft techniques, colour in, doodle. Share your skills and products of your creativity with others – maybe a mini exhibition. Create yourself a sing-it-off and/or dance-it-off playlist of songs that you love and make you feel great. Use your playlist as a transition point between work and home time. If your day presents you with challenge and stress, dive into your music and allow it to help the day's 'residue' to fall away as you sing and move. Use your playlist to start the day or as a transition point between work and home time.
<b>Check-in sessions</b>	An important aspect of self-care in school communities is encouraging individuals and teams to take time to stop and reflect on how they are travelling. Check in sessions can be informal and social or formal help-seeking sessions facilitated by professionals. Such sessions should be clearly differentiated from performance management activities. It is important that these are reflective, and growth opportunities that people feel safe to engage in. School communities will usually have local counsellors or practitioners who can provide such support. Help seeking is something we all need to feel more comfortable in doing ourselves, as well as supporting our colleagues to do.

<b>Spirituality</b>	
<b>Celebration &amp; gratitude</b>	Choose a time that you sit together or meet online and engage in positive reflections on what has been achieved by teams and individuals in previous weeks/months. Alternatively, you might organise an appreciation box, where people can leave anonymous messages of thanks for the generous actions of others. Document and save positive pieces of feedback, compliments and expressions of gratitude you receive, and have this available in a file or folder you can read whenever you need affirmation.
<b>Ground yourself through place</b>	Visit a place that is meaningful and resonates with you – this could be simply sitting still and appreciating a particular site or location, time on land you consider sacred, attending a place of worship, or walking in nature. If you are unable to physically attend your special place, consider setting aside 10 minutes to allow yourself to deeply visualise and connect mentally with the sounds, sights, and sensations you have experienced when you've been there. You might connect with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders or communities to better understand the importance of country and place in their lives.
<b>Relationships</b>	
<b>Self-care lunches and morning teas</b>	Enjoying food together is a great way to connect and chat with others in the team, and to show and share gratitude and thanks for others by caring for their physical wellbeing. In 2020, many of us have had to reconsider the way that we share food safely. If you are working remotely, consider whether you could organise for different staff to post a favourite recipe ahead of time, and then conduct an online cooking session.
<b>Resilience and self-care sessions</b>	There are some great local speakers and mental health organisations who run resilience or self-care sessions with school communities. It can be a great collaborative team exercise in professional development, fostering mental health literacy and practical self-care tips.
<b>Prioritise family and friends</b>	Prioritise the special relationships in your life by starting and finishing work on time wherever possible. Use the transition to home, or create a transition from work routine if you are working remotely, to cue yourself into letting go of the day's events and preparing yourself to be present and available to those in your personal world. Make time to attend the special events of friends or family.
<b>Work</b>	
<b>No email</b>	Try to block out time in your diary where you will not send or read emails. You probably think this is impossible, but it can be done. It might require commitment from everyone at school, and an agreed out of office message. If necessary, delegate one or two people to respond to emails that can't wait.
<b>Clock off time</b>	It can be difficult to find the right work/life balance and fit our workload into the day. We arrive early, leave late, skip lunch, and work on the weekends. Make the decision as a team to leave on time at the same day every week for the month. No one has a chance to feel guilty because we have all committed to it, even the Principal.
<b>Learning from each other</b>	Ask staff about their particular skills and talents, both in terms of work and their personal interests. Match these with skills and interest areas that others would like to learn more about. Consider setting up opportunities for staff to share these skills and interests.