

Tip Sheets

Self-Care Strategies for Child Care Providers: Part 2

While working in early childhood education, you will undoubtedly encounter stressful events and situations each day. It is important to find ways to manage your reactions to stress so you can effectively navigate challenges that arise while continuing to provide quality care and education opportunities to the children.

Cultivating Awareness

The first step in performing self-care is to notice what is happening. While some self-care strategies are chosen as distractions, we are best served when we are first aware of ourselves so that our choices can be intentional and helpful.

Six Steps to Cultivating Awareness

1. Noticing
2. Breathing
3. Scanning
4. Naming
5. Asking
6. Making (a plan)

Notice

First, notice that you are feeling *something* that might be stress.

Breath

Take a slow, deep breath. Repeat.

Scan

As you are taking slow breaths, mentally scan your body. Start at your head and think about going down your body and scanning for stress. This might feel like a tightness, a headache, a constricted

throat, a fast-beating heart, numbness, a stomach ache, tingly feelings, or anything else that makes you think you are experiencing stress.

Name Your Awareness

As you scan and notice how your body feels, name it. Say things to yourself like *I am getting a headache. I can't breathe. My throat feels tight. My stomach hurts...* While you are naming what you feel, continue to breathe and scan. If you can, spend a few moments doing this.

Ask Yourself What Your Body Needs

As you continue to breathe, ask your body what it needs right now and notice what comes to mind. It might be something like a drink of water, a breath of fresh air, a bathroom break, a brief stretch, to get up and walk around, to take a few more deep breaths, etc.

Make a Plan to Manage Stress

As you begin to “hear” what your body needs, make a plan to help your body. This could be an immediate plan to get a drink of water, or it could be a multi-step plan to take another mindful deep breath and setting a timer to stand outside in the sun for five full minutes before going home.

Management of Stress

Science and research have determined several strategies to assist in helping your body manage stress. Below you will find five areas you might use.

It is important to always consult with your doctor about any symptoms of stress you are feeling.

As simple as some of these activities seem, we often forget to do them. Over time and throughout the day, our stress can build up to the point of both physical and emotional symptoms. When you practice cultivating awareness, you can catch yourself throughout the day in moments when your body becomes tight or your breathing becomes shallow and find ways to calm your nervous system.

Slow Breathing

Taking 6–10 slow breaths per minute can calm the human autonomic nervous system.

Exposure to Cold Air or Water

Exposure to cold air or water, particularly in a person’s neck and face regions, has been shown to calm heart rate and the nervous system.

Listening and/or Singing to Music

Listening and/or singing to music has been found to have calming effects on the autonomic nervous system.

Social Engagement

Having social connections is an important aspect of stress management. You likely already have ways you engage with others, but now you can bring intention and purpose to this kind of connection. If you feel like you are wanting to isolate yourself, it is important that you bring to mind the importance of social connection with others.

Benefits of Self-Care and Stress Management

- Improved immunity
- Healthy bodily functions
- Increased sense of well-being
- Better connections with others (empathy, compassion)
- Emotional balance
- Resilience in the face of challenges

These benefits are a good summary of what well-being can and should include and are excellent outcomes for self-care. The habits and practices outlined here are meant to support your professional development of self-care strategies when you experience the inevitable stress that comes from working in child care.

Remember, your well-being is crucial to the well-being of the children for which you care!

When Stress is Too Big

There are times when our level of stress or burnout with our work feels like too much to handle on our own, or even with the help and support of a trusted colleague. It is beyond the scope of this tip sheet to provide mental health training or support, but many people find talking with a professional mental health provider helpful. If you think this might help you, please speak with your supervisor and doctor.

Additional Resources

Self-Care for ECE Providers

<https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Self-Care-for-ECE-Providers.pdf>

Information adapted from Understanding & Cultivating Self-Care Strategies for Child Care Providers curriculum by M. Harrison, Ph.D., LICSW, IMH-E®

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