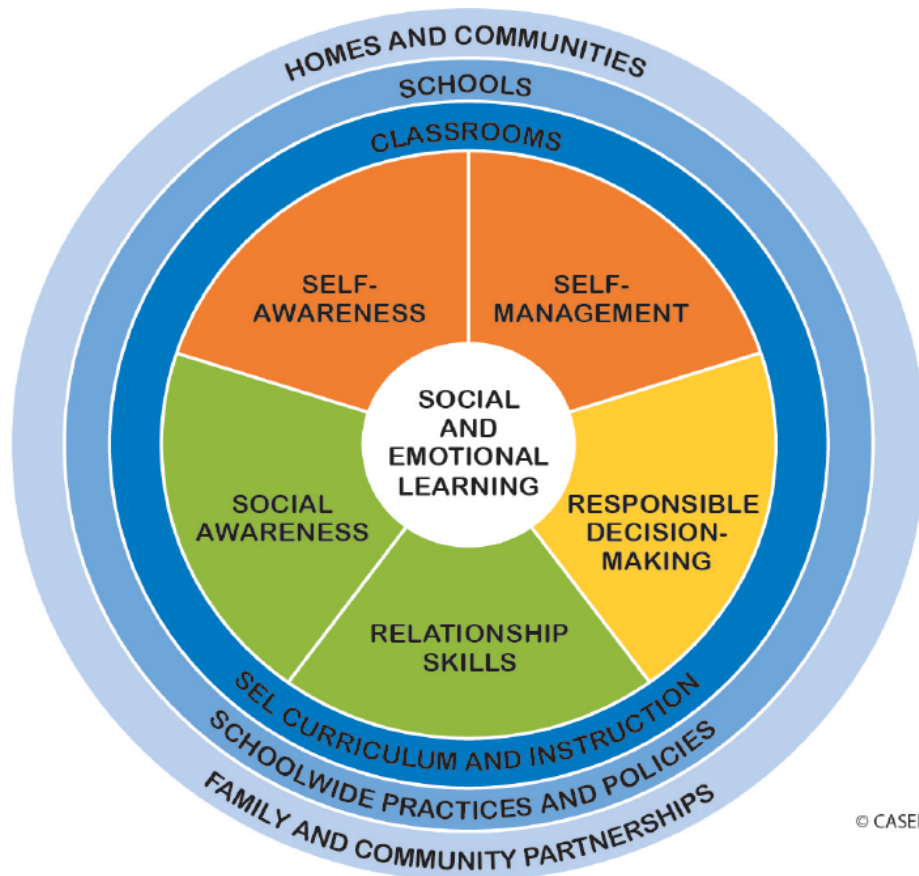


Educator SEL Self-Care Behaviors During Distance Education

Educators serve their vocations with passion, enthusiasm and wisdom. The situation in which we find ourselves related to COVID 19, including isolating at home, a quick plunge into distance education, and uncertainty regarding what school will look like next year, has left many educators feeling professionally overwhelmed, underprepared and ineffectual. Personally, educators, like so many human beings around the world, feel unsure, helpless and even a bit afraid. All of these feelings highlight the need for us to leverage our social and emotional abilities in order to compassionately and effectively care of ourselves and others. Michelle L. Trujillo, author of *Start with the Heart: Igniting Hope in Schools through Social and Emotional Learning* has connected the five competencies identified by the Collaborative of Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) with specific encouragements, ideas or self-care strategies to guide educators through balancing personal and professional feelings, experiences and responsibilities while working from home.



Educator SEL Self-Care Behaviors During Distance Education

SELF-AWARENESS

- Notice when you begin to feel overwhelmed or frustrated regarding an inability to deliver instruction the way in which you are accustomed or when you begin to feel anxious or concerned regarding the uncertainty of what re-entry to school next year may look like. As John Wooden suggests, “Don’t let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.” So, take a deep breath and reflect on attitudes and behaviors that *are* in your control.
- It is okay to acknowledge that this moment in time is tough! Notice when you begin to feel anxious or discouraged and remind yourself that this moment is temporary, and that it is reasonable to feel whatever you are feeling. Give yourself time to sit with that feeling or verbalize that feeling. There is something about verbalizing an anxiety, concern or fear that releases the burden a bit. At the same time, acknowledge that within in this moment there are valuable lessons about life for you, your students and/or your own children to learn. With your family or your students reflect on some of these lessons through conversation, writing or drawing.
- Acknowledge your strengths. There are character strengths you possess that will serve you well as you take on your personal and professional responsibilities. Name them, let them empower you to make a positive difference in your own life and the lives of others. Help your students or your own children to recognize a strength they possess and discuss how that strength may contribute to resilience during adversity.
- There will be times when you will feel that everyone wants a piece of you: your spouse or partner, your kids, your parents, your students or their families...you know who they are. Create a “peace place” for yourself and suggest your family, friends and students do the same. When you notice that you are beginning to feel the demands of others overtaking your sanity and serenity, take time to retreat- if only for a few minutes. Take time to breathe, meditate, pray or read in this place. You are allowed to relax and refresh, in fact, it is necessary that you do so.
- I have heard the term “radical self-acceptance” quite often over the last several months. This may be a the most valuable self-awareness strategy to practice. We are living in a moment with ourselves and our loved ones, in which much is out of our control. If and when we accept this, we can begin to put one foot in front of the other, realizing that there is no “right” way to do this. We get to accept ourselves and our path in this moment and choose to make the most of it. When we accept the reality of our current living and working situation, we will be more able to see the blessing of creating a path through it that honors our family values and our professional growth.
- Be aware of situations that inspire laughter- virtual gatherings with family and friends, funny videos or social media posts, or watching sitcoms on television or comedy movies on your computer. Seek these situations, for laughter is healthy for the body and soul.
- Most importantly, there will be beautiful moments during this season in time, in which you feel joy, gratitude and an abundance of love. Take time to name the experiences that create those feelings and plan time into your day to engage in opportunities to foster this positivity.

Educator SEL Self-Care Behaviors During Distance Education

SELF-MANAGEMENT

- There is much guidance being given to educators during this time connected to lowering expectations in an effort to give ourselves' grace. Grace serves us well in this moment and thus, I would encourage you to take a different perspective. Set *high* expectations for yourself in areas that you might typically find challenging, such as: patience, flexibility, or being still. Use this “growth mindset” shift as a lesson to share with your students or with your own children.
- One of the benefits of living in the reality that so much is out of our control, is that we have an opportunity to reflect on those choices that are within our control. One such can choice is that of nourishing ourselves well. Grocery shopping may take planning, as there tends to be a lapse of time between order and pick-up/delivery, but it is very much in our control to order foods that are nutritious. We can also choose to use food preparation as a time to unwind, be creative or cook with the family. At the same time, there is nothing wrong with throwing in a treat every now and then!
- Movement is good! We know that our students are more productive when they have opportunities to move at incremental times during instruction. We will benefit from practicing this ourselves. Plan 15 minutes of movement for every 45 minutes that you are sedentary. I have also discovered that starting the day with at least 30 minutes of exercise gives me more energy with which to tackle the day.
- It would be very easy to live in our pajamas, sweats or yoga pants during our “stay at home” time. However, there is much truth to the fact that our dress can influence the way we act. Creating a work from home schedule that includes a time to shower and dress for “work” may help to delineate between the time to work and the time to play, rest, exercise or enjoy your family. Even during the summer, it is important to maintain an intentional routine to foster meaning and purpose.
- As educators, we all know that students and adults alike, can become dependent on or addicted to our electronic devices. Because our phones and computers give us constant updates and feedback, we can be drawn in and often distracted by social media, the news and the constant barrage of sad and discouraging information. If we choose to limit the amount of time we spend on our devices, we may find our outlook on life and the future is more positive. Note that I am not advocating complete detachment because we must stay informed in order to protect ourselves and others, we also learn a great deal from each other through social media or reputable websites.
- Breathing techniques or mindfulness strategies have been known to help our students by improving focus and concentration and decreasing anxiety. Likewise, these practices can help us to experience calm and be more attentive to our tasks while working from home. One evidence based resources that I have found to be helpful can be found at: <https://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org/staying-resilient-during-covid-19/> and <https://pureedgeinc.org/>. The Collaborative of Academic, Social and Emotional Learning also has a number of self-management resources for educators that can be found at: www.CASEL.org.

Educator SEL Self-Care Behaviors During Distance Education

SOCIAL AWARENESS

- Look for the good around you. There are so many human beings on the front lines of this pandemic that are serving others with great compassion and conviction and without an ounce of complaint. Consider recognizing an individual or group of people that are making a positive impact on people impacted by this pandemic. Perhaps send someone a hand-written thank you note, create a “Thank YOU” sign to post in your yard or make a phone call of appreciation to someone you know who is working diligently to provide for humanity.
- Notice the ways in which people are appreciating each other. I’ve observed a friendly nature in neighbors (from a distance, of course) that isn’t as prevalent in the busyness of what was our lives only a month or two ago. People are waving greetings across the street, shouting words of encouragement and offering to assist neighbors in need. Families are taking time to sit down for meals. We are playing together and praying together. We are learning together and growing together. As traumatic and tragic as the pain of this pandemic is, as much loss as we have experienced, we have also gained. We have gained perspective of that which is truly important- our humanity.
- I have read many social media posts reminding many of us of our privilege during this global pandemic- that we can stay home and work from home; that we can be safe, warm, educated and well-fed; that we can enjoy quality family time, exercise, rest or reading. I am grateful for these reminders and hope that as we consider our own lives through this lens, we also remember that there are so many students who found their safety and security at school. Let’s do everything we can to stay emotionally connected to them-through phone, email or snail mail- whatever it takes and whatever modality works best for them. This plunge into distance education has shown a spotlight on the true inequities in the educational system. Use this time as an opportunity to peer through the eyes of one who may not be living in the reality of privilege, safety or security. Challenge yourself to better understand the root causes of the opportunity gaps experienced by some our students and commit to apply this understanding to your educational practice when traditional school settings begin again.
- Consider those who have lost their income. Some of us frequent favorite restaurants, can afford to employ someone to clean our house, or spend money on our hair or nails. While we are potentially saving money by eliminating these activities during this pandemic, many of the people who provide these services are going without. If you are able, consider continuing to contribute what you have budgeted for your hair, massage, nails or outings to the person or people who have lost such income.
- Assume the best in others. People may do things or say things that we don’t agree with or understand. Before we jump to conclusions or make judgements, let’s practice patience, tolerance and forgiveness. It’s possible that people who act angry, rude or mean may be feeling uncertain, frustrated, helpless or hopeless. This is the perfect time to seek to understand, to listen more and to come from a place of love in our thoughts and our actions.

Educator SEL Self-Care Behaviors During Distance Education

- Finally, in the midst of this COVID pandemic, we have also experienced a long overdue awareness of the systemic inequities in the educational system and the systemic racism in society that ultimately negatively impacts our students, families and colleagues, as well as ourselves. As educators, we can verbally acknowledge these inequities. We can choose to take time this summer to educate ourselves about the disparities and disproportionalities in education, specifically in our own schools, districts and/or states. If you do not already know, learn the difference between anti-racism and non-racism. Research equity literacy (www.equityliteracy.org) and ask yourself how you might become a “threat to the inequities in the system.” In opening our hearts and minds, by listening, learning and engaging in courageous vulnerability, we will actively practice social awareness.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

- We all know the power of physical connection. When we physically connect with another, we actually get a release of a chemical in our brain called oxytocin which makes us feel good. Unfortunately, to protect ourselves and others, casual contact with neighbors and friends can be extremely dangerous. As such, we must make emotional connection a priority. Through emails, FaceTime, family or friend zoom-type gatherings- we must stay connected.
- Reach out to others. Take time to call an elderly neighbor or someone who you know lives alone to check in, if only to say hello. It is difficult to be cooped up inside without that ability to interact with others. Sometimes, just hearing someone’s voice or words of encouragement can bring hope. The same can be said for our students who may not be turning in work or showing up for virtual classes. We don’t have to simply accept that they chose not to show; we can make an effort to speak with them in person by phone, send them a post card of encouragement or a small token of compassion in the mail-just to let them know that connection is important to you and that you aren’t going anywhere.
- Begin to use the term physical distancing instead of social distancing. This accomplishes two goals. It helps us to emphasize the importance of staying physically distant from each other while this virus is rampant. It also recognizes the importance of staying socially connected, even while we are physically separated. We can remain socially connected by making an effort to stay in touch. We can use social media to play games, share ideas and interact with one another. I realize it is not the same as pre-pandemic, but if we make an effort our relations can grow.
- Grow more intentional relationships with those with whom you are closest. Sometimes in the fast pace of our typical routines we unintentionally neglect people in our immediate family. Create a new routine to make “quality” time out of “quarantine” time. If you have toddlers or school age children, hug them! It sounds funny to say out loud, but sometimes it needs to be said. Physical touch fosters feelings of safety and security, especially during times of uncertainty.
- When we think about relationships, we don’t often think about ourselves. The expectations of learning a new way to teach or lead, coupled with your personal responsibilities at home, can, at times, be overwhelming. Remember to be kind to yourself, and patient too. You are doing your best, so treat yourself well!

Educator SEL Self-Care Behaviors During Distance Education

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

- Consistently practice physical distancing. Remember you are model for others- your children or nieces and nephews, your parents or grandparents, and for your students. When we put into effect practices that protect ourselves and others, we are modeling responsible decision-making. Wearing a mask in public is a good example. Many of us may feel awkward or express concern about how we look in a mask, but we still make a choice to wear it. Likewise, it is tempting to gather with friends who we love and care about, especially if we think they have been practicing appropriate physical distancing. Yet, as responsible role-models, we must be patient and wait until the restrictions are lifted before we act in a way that could jeopardize the health of another.
- Educators naturally have servants' hearts. This is an ideal time to help those in need. There are so many in this world right now who are in need. Consider your strength and talents and determine at least one way in which you can help another human being. It may take time, talent or financial resources- you choose. Now is the time to step into service.
- Ask for help. This is a tough time in our lives for so many reasons. Some many people have lost so much. Most of us have lost our normal routines and activities. Some have lost support systems and stability that they had come to rely on. Many have lost jobs or savings. Others, have experienced the ultimate loss of have lost family or friends to this life-taking virus. It is devastating and traumatic. If you are feeling alone, anxious, depressed or hopeless, it is courageous and responsible to ask for help. If you are not comfortable reaching out to a family member or friend you trust, there are resources available at: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline>
- Finally, remember, as an Educator, you are an Ignitor of Hope. I want to thank you for who you are and all you do in this moment as teachers, administrators, counselors, school social workers, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, as well as any other role you serve to support our school communities. You are something wonderful! Remember that one of the most important ways to ignite hope for your students and their families today, is to first and foremost, take time to ignite hope in your own lives and that of your own families. Here are a few reminders: Take time to breathe- be still for at least a few minutes each morning to remind yourself that this is a marathon, not a sprint an thus it is okay to slow down; Give yourself grace- you don't have to be perfect; Recognize your strengths- you possess a character strength that will make a difference in this moment (Can you name it?); Practice gratitude- each day, recognize a person, place or experience for which you are grateful and bless another with an act of kindness to give that person a reason to be grateful as well; And finally, experience joy- focus on doing at least one thing every day to make your heart smile. Be encouraged to remember that joy can always be found in the little things, like sharing a smile, interacting with a toddler (through phone or social media), appreciating nature, or counting your blessings.