

# Strategies to support your mental health

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In this time of immense challenge, time to take care can be more difficult to carve out. As teachers, we put the needs of our students and others first and so we are left to try to scramble to use whatever little energy and motivation are left for our own needs. You cannot pour from an empty cup!

I know it is not an easy process to carve out time for ourselves, especially with increasing demands and the feelings we internalize that come with those demands.

As we engage with our students around practicing social-emotional learning strategies and/or activities meant to increase understanding around what it means to have good mental health, what if we tried the strategies ourselves? Whether there is a colleague visiting your class to share these ideas with students, or you are facilitating the activities yourselves, what if you practiced too? Your to-do list will be there when the activity is finished, the draft email will also be there. But the difference might be that if you were able to be present to practice one strategy, your mind might feel clearer; your body might feel less tense and your heart might feel more at ease.

So, here are some “practical” ideas you could try throughout your day to help support your mental well-being:

- **Begin your day with gratitude:** Try to flip the script on the “have to’s” and try to replace the “have” with “get to.” Let’s try it, “Today, I get to...”
- **Name it to tame it:** many of our social-emotional learning programs emphasize the importance of naming our feelings. Whether they are comfortable or uncomfortable (not “good” or “bad”), it’s important to work towards releasing judgement but allowing ourselves and those feelings some space. Naming our feeling(s) can help us to move through them with more ease and understanding, and compassion towards ourselves.
- **Transition to work:** Have a transition activity to help you become as present as possible to your work space. This could be deep breathing while setting up your classroom for the morning, listening to some music while you do so and perhaps choosing a calming strategy as part of your morning routine with your students. Practice makes possible!
- **Time during the day for you:** This may seem next to impossible. What if you practiced some deep breathing while at the photocopier—we all know this could be useful in so many ways. Or, when we “get” to be outside for supervision and getting some fresh air, try to seek out opportunities to practice these strategies when you’re not modeling them for your students.



- **Transition from work:** This can be taking a short walk, parking farther from the door when running errands, cranking the tunes in the car on the way home. Creating space between work and home is so very important to ensure we feel as balanced as possible.
- **Bookend your day with “I got to”:** A positive statement about something—anything that you “got to” do during the day that made you feel a sense of accomplishment. These can be tough to find in our busy lives but once you start, you might notice that they are more easily found the more we look for them.

The asks in this article are not easy, but they are important. Whichever idea(s) you decide to try, that decision to try is also self-care! As you keep listening to yourself (your body and mind) and others and keep talking about how you’re feeling and what you need, you will normalize this aspect of supporting your own well-being for yourself and for those around you.

Wishing you all positive well-being,  
Your PL and MAP staff team

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