



TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Self-Care for Teachers of Traumatized Students

By Jennifer Gunn

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It can be difficult for educators, who are so often over-tasked and under-resourced, to prioritize self-care. But doing so is incredibly important and beneficial, both for educators and their students, especially when it comes to supporting students affected by trauma. Teaching is emotional labor, so here are some ways for trauma-informed educators to cope, care for themselves, and prevent burnout.

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Recognize the signs of compassion fatigue

The symptoms of compassion fatigue are similar to those associated with first-hand trauma:

- isolation
- depression
- difficulty focusing
- aggression
- anxiety
- insomnia
- excessive drinking
- appetite changes
- anger and/or sadness

Additionally, some may experience denial. This can be one of most dangerous symptoms, according to the [Compassion Fatigue Project](#). “Denial is one of the most detrimental symptoms of Compassion Fatigue and Life Stress. It can easily hinder your ability to assess the level of fatigue and stress in your life, as well as thwart your efforts to begin the healing process.”

In a school organization, leaders and peers should look for collective symptoms such as:

- chronic absenteeism
- struggles amongst teacher teams
- aggressive staff behaviors
- colleagues feeling overwhelmed or unable to finish their work
- negativity toward school leadership
- resistance to change
- a general apathy toward the school mission and its success

Learn more: [Take the Life Stress Test](#)

In-school support

School leaders can help sooth compassion fatigue by offering professional development around self-care or mindfulness. Bring in a meditation or yoga teacher to lead the staff in some restorative practices. Give your staff an outlet and a safe space to talk about the traumas they’ve taken on, and then provide training on healthy coping skills. Invite a counselor or let the school’s counseling staff run a PD on trauma self-care. Mindfulness strategies, a fun team-building outing, writing exercises, and even small-group counseling sessions help those of us who spend our lives helping others. Not a school leader? Suggest these ideas to your principal or start your own staff wellness group!

Learn more: [Powerful Resources for Teaching Through Trauma or Tragedy](#)

At-home self-care

Teachers are busy, but sacrificing healthy routines to make room for the needs of others only makes us less effective at what we do. Julie Owens, Associate Professor of Education, says, “In order to support students or those around you, you must first support yourself! Think of the banking system. You need to have money to make withdrawals. If you have nothing left to give, because you have not taken care of yourself, your “bank” will be deficient and you will be even more stressed. Practice mindfulness strategies, do things you enjoy, and remember you are worthy of being cared for also.”



mind need right now?

Self-preservation mindsets

It's common for teachers to feel a perpetual sense of failure when they aren't able to fix all of the ills and woes of their students. One way to help build some healthy emotional boundaries is to identify what you *wish* you could do versus what you can *actually* do. You cannot eradicate or prevent all suffering for your students. But you can show up each day, support your students, advocate for them, and love them. Begin each morning by thinking of your students and say to yourself: "I will provide a loving and safe environment in my classroom today." At the end of each day, breathe in slowly to calm your system. Breathe out and say, "I have done good work today. I will let the stress and worry go until tomorrow."

Learn more: [Essential Strategies for Managing Trauma in the Classroom](#)

Build a strong peer network

Don't go it alone. Work to cultivate a school culture where supporting each other is the norm. Building and relying upon small support groups, staff teams or work/home friendships can help make the work more manageable. When we realize we're not alone, the burden gets lighter. It's important that these support networks remain a positive resource, rather than a breeding ground for negativity. Take a walk with a colleague during your prep. Begin meetings with some breathing exercises. Take time to compliment the efforts of others. Positivity is contagious and peer support makes a strong foundation for your hard work.

Jennifer L.M. Gunn spent 10 years in newspaper and magazine publishing before moving to public education. She is a curriculum designer, teaching coach, and high school educator in New York City. She is also cofounder of the annual EDxEDNYC Education Conference for teacher-led innovation, and regularly presents at conferences on the topics of adolescent literacy, leadership, and education innovation.



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