



LIFESTYLE

# How Teachers Can Practice Self-Care for Long-Term Health & Wellness

By Jennifer Gunn

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We all know that healthy eating, sufficient sleep, and work breaks are good practices. But how do we *truly* break through our habits and start a teacher self-care practice that actually sticks? Summer is a perfect time to get going on a self-care journey that lasts. Here's some helpful advice and practical tools to build your self-care routine.

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## Try incorporating the 5-second rule

The good news: it takes just five seconds to break those habits. “The way that our minds are wired and the fact about human beings is that we are not designed to do things that are uncomfortable or scary or difficult. Our brains are designed to protect us from those things.” says Mel Robbins, author of [The 5 Second Rule: Transform Your Life, Work, and Confidence with Everyday Courage](#).

“In order to change... you’re going to have to do things that are difficult, uncertain or scary, which sets up this problem for all of us. You’re never going to *feel* like it.” Robbins’ brain research explores why it is so hard for us to do the little things that will improve our lives, and she found that we make tons of 5-second decisions each day to do or *not* to do what’s best for us. Her advice is to learn to beat your brain and its natural tendency to hesitate. That can start the moment you wake up: deciding whether to hit snooze or get out of bed.

Your brain wants you to do what’s easiest, like staying in bed, but by counting backwards from five to one (like a rocket launch countdown), you begin to train your brain to recognize these micro-decisions and launch out of them. Think about a noisy classroom and a teacher counting down 5-4-3-2-1 to get the attention of students. “The [5-second] rule is a form of metacognition,” Robbins says. “You can outsmart your own brain in furtherance of goals.” The rule becomes a mindfulness ritual that makes you aware of just how many times a day you can decide to act against the hesitancy of your brain. And when you repeat the practice, you’ll find yourself more readily making decisions to do what’s truly best for you. Try it!

To learn more, watch [Mel Robbins’ The 5 Seconds Rule: The Truth About Motivation and How to Be Productive](#).

## Get organized about your self-care

This might be controversial, but here it goes. *Self-care is more important than your to-do list*. “Teacher preparation programs teach ways to become better teachers. Most of those ways involve more time spent on teaching. When we go to professional development, we leave with to-do lists and aspirations to do more and do better,” says teacher and author of [Teacher Off Duty](#), [Jeanne Wolz](#). “Coupled with that, self-care is not a prominent part of our American culture, and many times it’s not something we were taught growing up. Too often, it’s only once people are diagnosed with anxiety, depression, or another mental illness that they are able to receive the education and encouragement they need to take care of themselves.”

It’s time to stop the madness and get serious about self-care. It’s not a luxury. It’s not weakness. It’s not self-indulgent. Teachers are overworked and stressed, and self-care is what makes you capable of being the best teacher you can be — and able to sustain that awesomeness.

While self-care often becomes another item on the to-do list that usually gets shuffled to the bottom and put off, these tools can help get you organized and on a regimen of self-care. Summer is the perfect time to get this practice started, so you’re well on your way come back-to-school time. Start journaling or create a ritual with these practical tools.

### We recommend

[Self-Care Journal \\$10.00](#): Basically a therapist in a book, this illustrated paperback is full of self-care journal prompts and exercises — and it’s super affordable!

### Other great organization tools for your self-care

- [Free Downloadable/Printable Self-Care Checklists](#)
- [Life by Design: 52 Lists, Questions, and Inspirations for Finding Your Happiness \\$9.00](#)
- [Moleskine Passion Wellness Journal \\$15.00](#)
- [Start Where You Are Journal \\$12.00](#)
- [The Five-Minute Journal \\$22.00](#)
- [The Productivity Planner, \\$25.00](#)

## Get digital with your self-care



**Calm:** Accessible on a web browser or as an app, Calm provides meditation, mindfulness, and sleep programs. Meditations are available for things like calming anxiety, developing focus, healing relationships, building self-esteem, and breaking habits, to name a few. There's even a [masterclass](#) with [Elizabeth Gilbert](#), author of [Eat, Pray, Love](#) and [Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear](#). To get started, try the [7 Days of Calm](#) program for beginners.

**Happify:** Set mental health and well-being goals (like conquering negative thoughts, building self-confidence, reducing stress), and [Happify](#) will provide activities to help reach your goals. Happify's "techniques are developed by leading scientists and experts who've been studying evidence-based interventions in the fields of positive psychology, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioral therapy for decades." With a variety of plans starting at \$11/month, this app is a simple-to-use portable self-care tool that will help you make self-care a priority.

**Talkspace:** Need someone to talk to? Need help sorting out your goals and keeping you accountable? Talkspace is therapy on your phone — when *you* need it. Get matched with licensed therapists and text, voice message, or video chat with your therapist from anywhere, 24/7. No need to make time for appointments or traveling. There are a variety of plans that are often cheaper than traditional therapy costs — and you can access help whenever you need it, not just once a week.

We all get busy, and it's so easy to forget to focus on our well-being. When you feel your self-care resolve slipping away, gently remind yourself that you are a light in the lives of your students, your family, and your friends. In order to shine for others, you must take care of yourself. Tape up a self-care reminder so that you're actively thinking about and working toward a more holistic approach to your health and well-being each day.



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*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 co-founder 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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