

AN EMPTY TANK WILL TAKE YOU NOWHERE

Early Childhood Professional Self-Care

McMonagle, A. 2023

Working with children in a caring and teaching role is intensive and demanding. Without taking care of yourself, **you will not have the energy or motivation to support children – an empty tank will take you nowhere.**

Because those working with children need to focus so much energy on others and so little on themselves, self-care strategies are necessary to maintain good mental health and well-being.

Living in a constant state of stress and work is not living at all. It's existing in a self-made state of fight or flight. Not only is it unnatural to live in this state for extended periods of time; its bad for your health.



What is Self-Care

Self-care is an important component of mental health, but there are misconceptions about what it is. It is common to dismiss self-care as 'selfish'. But for those whose profession is to work with children, self-care **is a necessity not only for personal well-being, but for professional well-being.** It is about taking care of your health so that you are able to support and educate children as part of your professional role.



Like sleeping, eating, and breathing, self-care should be a **priority** rather than something we push to the bottom of our to-do list. **Self-care should not be confused with self-indulgence.** Think about this for a moment:

Have you taken a break this week to unwind?

How much did you smile or laugh today?

When did you last say 'no'?

When was the last time you took a day to yourself?

If you answered "no", "not at all" or "I don't remember" to any of these questions, it's time to start taking care of yourself and dedicating time to rejuvenating your mind, and body.

Self-Care Strategies

It is important to find ways to incorporate self-care into your daily life. Making time for **self-care does not require you to rearrange your entire schedule.** By taking small steps every day and figuring out how to take care of yourself, you can cultivate health and well-being.

3 Strategies for Self-care

1. Know your limits, don't push past them

2. Keep taking time for yourself, until you are you again

3. Create a working environment of care



MOSAIC
Digital Solutions for Early Education

www.mosaicearlyed.com

1. Know your limits, don't push past them

Without a sense of compassion for yourself, you cannot practice positive self-care. If you struggle with low self-esteem/confidence levels, find ways to work on this to improve your self-image. It is vital to address this as the starting point of self-care.

Learning to **recognise and process your emotions** can lead to healthy self-care habits. Note things that trigger overwhelm and stress. **Put simple strategies in place to respond to triggers.**

Once you have identified a few self-care activities that work for you, the next step is **making time** for them in your schedule. Sometimes this is as simple as a 15 walk by yourself to decompress and clear your mind.

Stress and burnout can become severe enough that you cannot overcome it on your own. In this case, one of the best things you can do for yourself is to seek counselling or medical support.

2. Keep taking time for yourself, until you are you again



As working with children can be socially overwhelming, make sure to plan at least 10 or 20 minutes a day where you can take a break and decompress by yourself.

Be mindful of the nutritional value of your food choices. Social support is an important factor in self-care, so find a way to connect with loved ones at least once a day.

Incorporate exercise into daily routines where you can. A daily 15-minute walk at lunchtime or in the evening has enormous benefits if you make this a habit.

Find the strength to say 'NO' when you feel others are leaning on you too much.

3. Create a working environment of care

Create a work environment where it is ok to talk about stress

Adopt a **'red flag'** approach where you can signal to a team member that you are struggling and need space. This is important for managers too.

Have regular team meeting and ensure that there is a static agenda item called **'self-care' on the agenda.** This will encourage not only discussion about self-care, it will allow different voices to contribute different ideas.

Have a **dedicated space** for staff if possible. Look at the working environment- creative imagery and music can promote a sense of wellness in the environment.

Take opportunities to participate in professional development opportunities as these will **inspire confidence in your abilities, give you organisational strategies and enable you to** feel less overwhelmed by the job.

If you are a manager, ensure you get mentoring or support on a regular basis as you will not be able to support staff if you are not supported yourself.

And finally..

Self care begins with the mindset that you are in control of your own life and well-being. Don't give away your power, protect it.



Bringing all the pieces of quality early education together

MOSAIC

www.mosaicearlyed.com

info@mosaicearlyed.com

www.earlyedcpd.ie