



# Teacher Self-Care 101 in 2021

**6 LIFE-SAVING TIPS & GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS FOR  
SELF-CARE WHILE TEACHING IN A PANDEMIC**

*EXPERTLY CURATED BY THE TEAM AT TEACHERVISION*

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# Teaching in 2021: A Whole New Way in a Whole New World

Teaching has always been a labor of love. It is generally common knowledge that teachers are overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated, but we do what we do because we care about children and want to influence their futures.

While every year has its challenges, 2020 definitely reset the mark and as teachers, we were forced to take a crash course in words like ‘pivoting’ and ‘fluid curriculum’ and had to redesign our entire instructional delivery system in a mere matter of weeks!

But, from redesigning curriculum to teaching virtually while often juggling a cohort of in-person students with a remote one, WE MADE IT TO 2021! Even with all the bad that came with 2020, there were lessons learned that we hope will stick around as the world [and education system] begins to normalize.

# Tip #1: TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF!

As an educator, we are constantly inundated by requests from students, colleagues and administration, but it's important to take time for yourself. During your lunch, shut off your computer or close your textbook and enjoy the little time you're given for yourself. Close your classroom door or better yet, leave for lunch. Go for a walk or go to your car and listen to music. Overall, just take breaths and revamp.

It's essential to give yourself time to be you—not the “teacher” you—but just you. It's important to have a break during the day that is a true break (not a time to make up for things you haven't completed on your to-do list)!

Don't apologize for taking time for a break; your mental health is important and you have to take care of yourself—if you don't, then you can't take care of others.

If you feel guilty, explore that guilt. A great way to do that is by writing it down, diving into it, and then releasing it. Leave your worry and guilt on the paper, and then take the time you are granted to rest your mind to just be alone and enjoy it. Remember, you have to nourish yourself in order to nourish others.

WRITE YOUR REFLECTIONS BELOW AND THEN LEAVE IT ON THE PAGE

- why should I feel guilty about taking time for myself?

- what should I be doing instead of taking this time? what will happen if I take this time to myself?

- If a friend needed to take time for themselves, would I support them? why or why not? what does that say about my own needs?

## Tip #2: NURTURE YOUR OWN INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY.

As teachers we purport to be "learners" too, but do we ever have the time to learn new things for ourselves that isn't prescribed or dictated for us? (And, I don't mean professional development—I mean the things and subjects we loved which inspired us to become educators in the first place.)

Check out the New York Times Best Sellers list or Amazon's top sellers and find a book to read. As teachers we are trained to read "how-to" books and informational pieces about the latest research or pedagogy of teaching, however fiction can be a great teacher too! When I was teaching I remember promising myself every year that I would read books for pleasure over the summer. But, the reality was that that did not always happen; priorities like PD, master's classes, home tutoring, and trying to keep up with my kids' summer schedules always got in the way!

Recently, I bought a book called The Philosopher Queens by Rebecca Buxton. Even though I studied philosophy during my undergraduate work, it has been a long time since I have worked that part of my brain. As I sat down and read about all of these women who contributed to the field I love, I remembered what it was like to immerse myself into my field again—and it was glorious!

So, maybe think back to that random class you took in college that almost made you change your major, and go into an online rabbit hole researching and learning more about it. Find videos online about whatever subject you choose and watch them and let the wheels in your mind turn.

The glory of 2021 is that we are starting over and there is endless accessibility to information and you can go on intellectual adventures without leaving the comfort of your home, so take advantage of it and dive in. Explore. Ponder. Learn!

Use the mind map below to help narrow your thinking if you can't quite pick one thing to immerse yourself in, and then take off and feed your curiosity!

What do you want  
to learn more  
about?

Key words

Places to Learn More

Important People

Key Takeaways

## Tip #3: FIND A HOBBY.

Whereas intellectual curiosity should be nourished, so too should our creative and adventurous sides. Find a new or interesting hobby—whether it’s writing poetry or photography or rock climbing, find something fulfilling and do it.

Perhaps you aren’t the next Virginia Wolff, Ansel Adams, or world-renowned rock climber Alex Honnold, but you’ll still have fun and that thirst of yours that relies on creative exploration will be satiated.

If you already have a hobby or used to have a hobby but haven’t had time for it in years, reignite that passion and dedicate a specific amount of time each week to it. Maybe you could work in 30 minutes or maybe even an hour. Either way, make it a PRIORITY! Make sure you're doing the things you enjoy while you are able to enjoy them.

If you’re not sure what to do, think of all the things that you’ve ever thought to yourself, “Wow, I’d like to learn how to do that. . .”, and make a list of three to five. Then from those, identify where and how you could get started. Below is a tool you can use to organize your thoughts to get started this week!

Things I want to do

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

where I can do these things?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

who do I call?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

what will it cost?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

what days can I commit?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How much time can I commit?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Tip #4: LET'S GET PHYSICAL!

As teachers we often walk around our classrooms, but this year our physical movement has been limited to our joints and hand muscles typing away over keyboards. And yet, it has been exhausting.

Staring at screens all day is both hard on the eyes and the body, which is why it's essential to find time to physically move our bodies.

Whether it's a walk or a run, on a trail or a treadmill, exercise is key to our overall well-being. It increases energy levels, mood, improves sleep, and helps with focus. While you don't necessarily have to be an Olympic marathoner, 30 minutes a day of some type of physical activity will make you stronger, brighter, and healthier.

But let's be real. We all know this, but it's a lot easier said than done.

Sometimes it can be really difficult to find time for physical activity. While many say it's important to create a schedule and stick with it, I think we have to be more flexible and understanding of our busy schedules, especially in the new remote learning paradigm. Instead of creating a schedule that is set in stone from week to week, every Sunday look at your upcoming week and figure out where you could fit in 30 minutes of time for physical activity.

Maybe you could fit in some time during your child's practice or maybe a walk during lunch would be the perfect time to get moving. Perhaps you could take just 30 minutes immediately when you get home and do some yoga, or take your dog for an extra long walk. Perhaps you can multi-task and walk on the treadmill while you watch your favorite show! Etching out a bit of time for yourself doesn't have to be a huge commitment that breaks your time "bank". Instead, making small adjustments can make all the difference.

Below is a short planner you can use to identify just 30 minutes of time. You don't have to go into great detail, but just adding it somewhere between other scheduled events can help set in your mind that you are in fact going to give yourself that time to get physical, which in turn, can be a way to recalibrate your mental state.

# My Workout Schedule for the Week of \_\_\_\_\_

**Monday**

**Tuesday**

**Wednesday**

**Thursday**

**Friday**

## Tip #5: MAKE A BREAK FOR IT!

So many teachers never allow themselves to be “off the clock”, and this reality is even more true this year. However, it’s imperative to establish a clean break between your work life and your personal life.

With so much of our communication moving to virtual platforms and students emailing questions or texting through the chat at all hours, it’s important to remember that it’s not requisite to answer all of those emails or texts as instantaneously as they come in!

A work/life balance is essential to mental health, and boundaries must be set with your students and their parents. Make clear that you won’t be answering emails after a certain time during the week or on weekends. Put down your grading pen and try to leave your classwork in the classroom when you leave the school building or home desk. While it’s okay to take work home with you on occasion, making a habit of it interferes with the time you have for other parts of your life, such as family time and relaxation, which are just as important.

So set a time to leave the classroom each day. Place the “Out of the Office” response email to set in at a specific time each workday and on the weekends. Turn off the email notifications on your electronic device. And allow yourself to not be a ‘teacher’ for a specific part of each of your days. It’s important to remember that our jobs are supposed to support the life we wish to live, not take up every minute of that life!

Below are a few suggestions to walk you through creating the boundaries you need for yourself so that you can take the time needed to relax and recharge for your next work day.

Check off at least three of the practices below that you believe you can adopt immediately, then slowly add more into your daily routines and rituals, or choose to do all of them at once!

# Making Sure to Take a Break

- Check your emails only when you arrive first thing.
- Make sure you enjoy a duty-free lunch, if possible. If not, make sure to use part of your prep period to regroup yourself. [By union contract, you are entitled to one duty-free period of the day.] Check with your union representative if you're unsure of your district's allowance.
- Leave when your contractual day is over or within 30 minutes after classes get out for the day.
- Use your plan for grading and planning.
- Leave anything that can wait until the next day's plan at school—don't take it home!
- Set a reply email at a certain time. As a gesture of understanding how difficult it can be, I suggest no earlier than 5:00, but choose whatever time is best for you and your time commitments.
- Turn off notifications on your phone, or better yet, set “away” on your work account after hours. Unlike medical professionals and frontline or essential workers, you aren't on call 24/7 and it's important to set those limits, especially when at home and spending time with family.

## Tip #6: LEARN HOW TO SAY NO!

This year has been stressful. And while every year can be stressful and tasks time-consuming, this year has been more so than any year. . . So it's important to be willing to say "no" and stick to it, and not feel guilty!

Teachers have been tasked with completely redesigning their instructional model, their lessons and their learning platforms and delivery systems, and have done so [mostly!] without complaint. However, in many ways this year is just like every year as we are constantly asked to by administration to pick up duties, join committees, and lead some initiative or event. Oftentimes, we feel obligated to agree to these things, but this year more than ever, we need to be okay with saying "no".

When we are endlessly bogged down by things that sap our energy, we often have little left to give to our students and even our own families, and it's important that while we set boundaries and establish norms, we don't take on too much so that we can be invested and fully present when we are at home and living our personal lives.

While we want to do all of the things all of the time, we simply cannot and we have to be okay with that. Sometimes there just aren't enough hours in the day. We have to prioritize our time and ourselves because if we don't, we can't be the educators our students deserve. And this year more than ever, our students need our full attention and commitment to their learning and overall well-being.

Below is space for you to jot down ten reasons for you to say "no" and be okay with it. Declining something doesn't make you less dedicated, nor does it make you any less of an awesome teacher. What it does is allow you to have is time to regroup so that you're there in all the ways that it really counts—for your students as their educator—present, dedicated, and invested.

## MY REASONS FOR SAYING NO

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.