



Teacher Self-Care 101

COACHING FOR HOW TO BE YOUR BEST TEACHING SELF

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Why We Created This Workbook

If you are a teacher, you know that it is a challenging time for our profession. Good teachers are leaving the classroom because they can't afford the cost of living or save for their futures. Good teachers are going on strike because they don't have the resources they need to support their students and meet their needs. Good teachers are working at night and on the weekends in order to keep up with the demands placed on them. Good teachers are putting their needs last, resulting in burnout and illness. A nationwide conference has been designed all around teacher self-care. Teachers are podcasting about their challenges and reaching out to each other on social media for encouragement and support.

The work that teachers do is incredibly important and all-consuming. People who choose to teach do so because they want to help others. They want to share their passion and expertise for their subject matter. People who choose to teach know that they will face challenges, but they enter the work with optimism and hope. Every day teachers make a difference in the lives of children and young adults. This work is powerful, and the people who choose to do it deserve to be treated with respect and have the resources and tools they need to sustain themselves.

I was a teacher for nearly a decade and then an instructional coach. One of the reasons why I left the classroom was that my schedule and salary made it challenging for me to care for myself.

While we cannot change the challenges that teachers face overnight, we can support

teachers with how to best take care of themselves. To create this workbook, I drew from my own teaching and coaching experience as well as consulted the veteran teachers on the TeacherVision Advisory Board. We have put together a starting point for self-care. Each of these strategies (both big and small) will help you put systems in place where you are able to better care for yourself, and by doing so, better able to sustain the demands of teaching.

We hope that this resource is helpful. Please share it with colleagues, and take care of yourself.

Julie



Your Starting Point For Self-Care

You may be wondering how you are going to incorporate self-care throughout the school day. After all, any teacher who has spent time in a classroom knows that even going to the bathroom is challenging, let alone finding time to eat a snack or take a few deep breaths.

I might argue that this is part of the problem. We experience these challenges and even joke about them, but we don't always ask for help or advocate for change. Often the challenges we face are not created by us, but rather by a system that we are a part of. While we might not be able to change the system, we can get curious and question it.

Small Step:

In your next faculty meeting ask your administrators if it is possible to build in some breaks throughout the day so teachers can refill their water bottles, use the bathroom, and reset.

Start With Your Physiological Needs:

We all need water, healthy food, sleep, and movement in order to be healthy. The more that we take care of our bodies in these ways the more stamina and energy that we have. If you don't drink water throughout the day you will likely get dehydrated and that will lead to a headache. If you have a headache you might have less patience with your students or lose focus during your lesson.

Small Steps: (Choose one to start with)

- Bring several reusable water bottles to school with you that are already full of water. Place them in different areas of your classroom, so you can easily rehydrate during your day.
- On Sundays cut up fruit and vegetables and put them in small plastic containers. Store the containers in the faculty lounge fridge. Rather than reaching for candy or that leftover stale doughnut in the faculty room, refuel with a healthier snack.
- Go to bed five minutes earlier than you have been for a week. Then, the following week go to bed ten minutes earlier. Start small, and go to bed earlier and earlier until you feel rested in the morning.
- Before your students enter the classroom, take a minute to stretch. Leave your classroom and take a lap around the halls. Not only are you moving your body, but you can say hi to a colleague and get a change of scenery.

These may seem like very small steps, but what you are doing is experimenting with changes that are sustainable. It sounds great to set a goal to get eight hours of sleep every night, but it is unrealistic that you will be able to achieve that goal every day. Life doesn't work that way. We are humans, not robots. However, adding in five or ten minutes more sleep is possible. Once you start building the habit, you will be more aware of sleep, and how much you need to have the energy that is necessary for teaching.

Your Turn:

Choose one of the bullets from the list above that you are going to try this week. Write it down in your planner or on a sticky note as a reminder. At the end of the week, check in and get curious. Instead of asking yourself if you were able to successfully commit to it, ask yourself how you felt. If you felt better, stick with it until it becomes a habit. Then, pick another bullet from the list. Slowly but surely you will develop a set of healthy habits that will nourish your stamina.

Your Self-Care Starting Point

Which of the small steps are you going to try? Circle the step.

- Bring several reusable water bottles to school with you that are already full of water. Place them in different areas of your classroom, so you can easily rehydrate during your day.
- On Sundays cut up fruit and vegetables and put them in small plastic containers. Store the containers in the faculty lounge fridge. Rather than reaching for candy or that leftover stale doughnut in the faculty room, refuel with a healthier snack.
- Go to bed five minutes earlier than you have been for a week. Then, the following week go to bed ten minutes earlier. Start small, and go to bed earlier and earlier until you feel rested in the morning.
- Before your students enter the classroom, take a minute to stretch. Leave your classroom and take a lap around the halls. Not only are you moving your body, but you can say hi to a colleague and get a change of scenery.

After you have tried the small step, write down how it went. What did you notice?
How did you feel?



How To Improve Your Self-Talk

Do you treat yourself the way that you treat your students?

I know I didn't.

In the classroom I was my own worst enemy. After a lesson that didn't go as well as I hoped, my internal monologue went something like this, "That was terrible. I can't believe how pathetic that was. I thought I had it organized, but no one understood the directions, and the whole thing fell apart. I thought I would be a better teacher right now. My students must think I don't know what I am talking about. I am so glad my administrator didn't see that."

Ouch.

Imagine if I talked to a student that way. I never would.

I believe that we evaluate our teaching through the lens of our own self-talk. By self-talk I mean the chatter in our head, and the stories that we tell ourselves.

I am going to question you to challenge your self-talk.

Small Lesson:

Just because you think something doesn't mean it is true.

Small Step: Bring Attention To What You Are Saying To Yourself

You have a choice in how you speak to yourself. Chances are if you care deeply about teaching, as most teachers do, you are going to be your own worst critic.

Your Turn:

Notice, Redirect, Practice Self-Compassion, and Try Again

For the next week, use this handout to bring your attention to your own inner monologue and write down your negative self-talk. Then, redirect. How can you rewrite the story so you practice self-compassion? Next time that negative self-talk comes up, can you try to speak to yourself differently?

Notice: (Write your negative self-talk here)

Redirect: (What are you trying to say? What is happening here?)

Self-Compassion (Examine your tone and words.)

Try Again: (What could you say to speak to yourself with love and compassion?)

Here is an example:

Notice: (Write your negative self-talk here)

My lesson was terrible and my students didn't understand what I was talking about.

Redirect: (What are you trying to say? What is happening here?)

I am trying to say that the lesson didn't go as I planned or anticipated that it would.

Self-Compassion (Examine your tone and words)

The word terrible is negative and I am making an assumption that my students didn't understand what I was talking about rather than asking them directly.

Try Again: (What could you say to speak to yourself with love and compassion?)

That was the first time I tried that lesson, and I'd like to get some feedback from my students so I can keep working on it before I teach it again. I am proud of myself for trying something new.



Why Are You Doing What You're Doing?

My first year of teaching, I took great pride in the fact that I was one of the first teachers to enter the building and one of the last to leave. I thought the more time I put in the more my administrators and colleagues would respect me and my teaching.

It didn't occur to me to get curious about this belief and where it came from.

As the years went on it became increasingly challenging for me to maintain my schedule. I began to resent this belief. I was tired. I wasn't able to take care of myself, and I wasn't more productive just because I got to school early and stayed late.

I am sharing this with you because I have learned and I believe that often our ideas about productivity and our self-worth are beliefs that we inherit rather than beliefs that are aligned with our values.

One of the first steps you can take on a self-care journey is identifying the beliefs that are keeping you from caring for yourself, and get curious about them.

This doesn't mean that you have to make a dramatic change or stop doing what you are doing. Rather, asking questions about your choices and why you are making them will help you better understand your own values.

When your actions align with your values you don't feel angry or resentful. You have

clarity and find yourself in alignment. Being in alignment is self-care.

Small Lesson:

When your values and actions aren't aligned, resentment builds. Resentment leads to fatigue and burnout.

Small Step: Get curious about your actions.

What are you doing that makes it challenging for you to take care of yourself?

Your Turn:

Make a list of the actions you are choosing to take that are leading to resentment, anger, and burnout. Choose one of those actions. For one week, take a different action. After a week check in with yourself and ask yourself how you feel. If you feel better, consider continuing that change.

ACTION:	HOW I FEEL:



Needs vs. Wants

When I was an instructional coach and I spoke with teachers about why they should prioritize their own self-care, and what that care might look like, the teachers often felt like self-care wasn't a need, but a want.

Many people identify self-care as something that is indulgent. Often this self-care costs money or requires a large time commitment. When I ask teachers what they think self-care is their answers often include things like pedicures, bubble baths, and weekend long retreats.

If taking a bath is self-care for you, keep doing it! However, I think it can be helpful to reframe what self-care can be.

Self-care is not an isolated experience. I believe that self-care is being in an ongoing relationship with yourself where you ask yourself what you need, and do your best to meet those needs knowing that they will change on a daily basis.

For example, yesterday I was really tired. I have a new baby at home, and I am not getting as much sleep as I need. This morning when I asked myself what I needed, the answer was rest. While I couldn't go back to sleep or take a nap, I could drink more water so I don't get dehydrated. I could pause and take some deep breaths. Even though I can't meet this need right now, I can bring awareness to it, and use that awareness to get through my day.

A need is something that you require in order to exist. Food, water, sleep, etc. are all needs.

A want is something that you desire in order to feel good. Chocolate, yoga class, going to the movies, are all wants.

Small Lesson:

Self-care is sometimes tending to our needs. Self-care is sometimes giving ourselves what we want.

Small Step:

Bring attention and awareness to what you want and need. We cannot begin to care for ourselves if we do not know what these are.

Your Turn:

Make a list of things that you need, and make another list of things that you want. When you ask yourself what you need and want on a daily basis, you can refer to this list for ideas and inspiration.

Needs vs. Wants

<p>MY WANTS:</p>	<p>MY NEEDS:</p>
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A To-Do List Makeover

Do you make a daily to-do list? If you do, how many items are on it? Fifteen? Ten? Five? I used to make lists that were so long they wouldn't fit on one page. When was the last time that you got curious about your to do list? Chances are you make the list, don't finish everything, and then beat yourself up for it. Or maybe you do finish everything, and you get into the habit of defining your self-worth through your productivity. Either way, may I suggest a change?

Small Lesson:

We all have an energetic limit each day. Our capacity isn't endless, and despite what anyone might tell you, we cannot do it all.

The tricky part is that our capacity changes day to day. If we don't sleep well, and have a stressful commute we have less energy than if we got a full night's rest. Is it possible to get a good night's sleep every night? Not for me.

Small Step:

Check in with your body, heart, and mind.

Before you sit down to draft your to-do list, I want to encourage you to first take stock of your capacity. Try to approach this exercise with curiosity rather than judgement. You don't have to do or change anything. Rather, you are checking in with yourself,

and that check in is a building block of self-care.

Your Turn:

Ask yourself the question, how do I feel?

Scan your body. Are you tense? Are you relaxed? Are you somewhere in between?

Check in with your heart. Do you feel calm and content? Are you feeling sad or anxious?

Then, check in with your mind. Are your thoughts racing? Do you feel focused?

The answers to these questions will help you determine what is possible for you that day. If your answers taught you that you are tired and scattered today, then you are not taking care of yourself by putting too much on your to-do list. In contrast, if you are feeling calm and capable, you might decide to take on more today.

Small Lesson:

The number of items on your to-do list will be different every day because your energetic capacity is different every day.

Small Step:

Once you have written your to-do list, keeping your capacity in mind, set boundaries for your work.

I use this strategy with students. It can be incredibly helpful to set a timer, and tell your students that they will have thirty minutes to work on a task or an hour to work on a task. This boundary provides structure, and that structure helps us manage our time.

Our work is never done. There are always more lessons to plan, papers to grade, parents to email, and professional development opportunities to sign up for. There are endless social media accounts to explore and comment on, podcasts to listen to, etc.

In order to truly care for yourself you need to be honest about your energetic capacity, and set boundaries for how much time you can work.

If you are tired and scattered, you might work less. Maybe you set a timer and decide that you will grade papers for an hour. When the timer goes off, you stop for the day. I

promise you the world won't end.

In contrast, if you feel energetic and focused, you might set a timer for two hours. The idea is that you establish a boundary so you can meet other important needs like play, rest, and fun.

Your Turn:

This week experiment with these strategies. First, check in with yourself and determine your energetic capacity. Then, write your to-do list with that capacity in mind. Finally, set boundaries for how much time you will work, and try to hold that boundary.

My To Do List

What is my energetic capacity today?

Scale of 1-10

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

1=Low energy

10=High Energy

What I have the capacity to take on today:

My Boundary For Work Today:

Based on my capacity I can work on my list for _____ hours or
_____ minutes.

How did it go? Reflect on your experience.
