

# Trauma-Informed Schools

## Educator Toolkit

**Our mission is to build resilience and success for all North Carolina students and educators. Using school-specific training and coaching, we seek to create safer and more supportive schools that champion the whole child, reduce the impact of stress and trauma, and foster school communities**



### **Part 2:** Self-Care and Collective Care as Key Components of a Trauma-Informed School

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# Self-Care and Collective Care as Key Components of a Trauma-Informed School



**Objective:** Understand the importance of self-care and collective care in fostering a sustainable trauma-informed school environment. Explore practical strategies that support educator well-being, prevent burnout, and strengthen staff resilience.

## WHY SELF-CARE & COLLECTIVE CARE MATTER

Educators play a critical role in fostering safe, trauma-informed learning environments. However, without proper support, the emotional demands of this work can lead to **burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue**—ultimately impacting educators' ability to be present and effective in the classroom.



- ◇ "You cannot pour from an empty cup." Educators must first care for themselves to sustainably care for students.
- ◇ A **culture of collective care** within a school promotes **stronger relationships, staff retention, and a more supportive environment** for students and educators.
- ◇ Prioritizing **self-care and collective care** enhances **emotional resilience**, allowing staff to better manage stress and maintain **empathy and effectiveness** in their roles.
- ◇ Regardless of your position or career, **everyone deserves to take time for their own well-being**. Engaging in self-care is not an act of selfishness; it is vital for our humanity.

## KEY TERMS TO UNDERSTAND

- **Burnout:** A state of physical and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged stress, often leading to detachment, low motivation, and decreased effectiveness.
- **Compassion Fatigue:** The emotional withdrawal, accompanied by mental and physical exhaustion, that takes place when someone cares for people impacted by illness or trauma over an extended period of time.
- **Vicarious Trauma (Secondary Traumatic Stress):** The emotional and psychological impact of hearing about or witnessing trauma experienced by others, leading to symptoms similar to PTSD.

→ **Resource:** [Building Resilience Among Educators](#)



One of the best parts of teaching is the high level of compassion satisfaction we get from our job but the impact of helping CAN create fatigue that diminishes our "why" for teaching.

## SELF-CARE FOR EDUCATORS

Self-care is not a luxury—**it is essential**. Rather than thinking about self-care as something that has to be expensive or time-consuming, such as going on a big vacation or spending a day at the spa, what if we shifted our thinking about self-care to be more about small daily habits and practices we could implement in just a few minutes that would help us regulate and fill us up daily and in a more sustainable way? **Brain-based self-regulation strategies** can help educators manage stress and maintain emotional balance throughout the school day.

# Individual Self-Care Strategies

## Daily Regulation Practices:

- Deep Breathing Exercises (e.g., box breathing, 4-7-8 breath)
- Grounding Techniques (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 sensory awareness)
- Movement-based regulation (e.g., **stretching, brief walks**)
- Reflection practices (e.g., **gratitude journaling, affirmations**)



## Setting Boundaries & Creating Work-Life Balance:

- Designate **tech-free time** at home.
- Set **clear expectations** around availability for emails/messages.
- Practice saying **“no”** when overwhelmed.

## Emotional & Mental Well-Being:

- Engage in **hobbies** and creative outlets that you enjoy.
- Utilize **peer support groups or professional counseling**.
- Prioritize **sleep, hydration, and balanced nutrition**.



## COLLECTIVE CARE: BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL CULTURE

Schools function best when staff members support **each other**. Collective care involves **intentional** efforts to foster a workplace that prioritizes staff well-being. Collective care can be defined as: a culture among staff to support and take care of one another, to feel safe expressing when they are overwhelmed or need to ask for help, and to feel that strong sense of “team” and community with others.

### Collective Care Strategies:

#### Community Building & Team Bonding:

- **Staff Celebrations & Acknowledgments** – Create shout-out boards or recognition circles.
- **Team Outings or Socials** – Plan staff potlucks, wellness walks, or themed days to build camaraderie.



#### Group Wellness Activities:

- **Wellness Clubs** – Offer yoga, mindfulness, or walking groups for staff.
- **Shared Wellness Challenges** – Engage in hydration, movement, or mindfulness challenges as a team.

#### Collective Regulation & Emotional Support:

- **Tap-In/Tap-Out System** – Allow teachers to request short breaks when feeling overwhelmed.
- **Staff Wellness Spaces** – Create a calm space with soft lighting, relaxing music, and resources for stress relief.
- **Allow for breaks when possible:** Explore options for duty-free lunches or genuine planning periods, allowing staff time to enjoy the wellness lounge or recharge as necessary.



→ **Resource:** [Tap In/Tap Out Video](#)

→ **Resource:** [How Right Now: Teaching and Staff](#)

→ **Resource:** [TedEX-How Can We Support the Emotional Wellbeing of Teachers?](#)

## TOOLKIT ACTIVITIES

- **Self-Care Audit:** Assess personal **self-care practices** and identify areas for growth.

→ **Resource:** [Self-Care Assessment Worksheet](#)

- **Collective Care Plan:** Work with your team to develop a simple, actionable plan to support collective well-being.

→ **Resource:** [Collective Care Planning Worksheet](#)



## NEXT STEPS

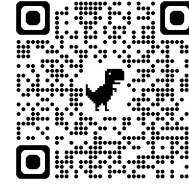
- **Start small:** Choose one self-care strategy and one collective care action to implement this week.
- Encourage **team conversations** about staff well-being.
- Advocate for **administrative support** in fostering a trauma-informed workplace.



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