

Provider Wellness



It is no secret to anyone working in the field of early care and education that child care is a demanding job. Many educators work long hours that often extend after the children have gone home. Burnout is always a concern in our field. But what happens when you combine the typical stresses of the job with a global pandemic that has affected every aspect of life?

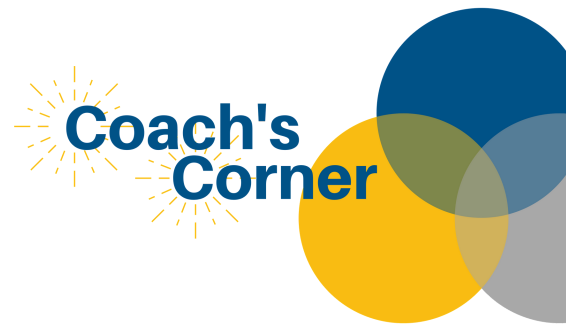
More than ever, quality, reliable child care is needed so that essential employees can continue to do their work; thus putting early childhood educators on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. This can lead to increased stress and anxiety for some.

Stress

WebMD defines stress as “the body’s reaction to harmful situations, whether real or perceived.” We all know that stress is unhealthy; however, small amounts of stress can actually be productive. Knowing that a project deadline is looming may cause some stress for students; but ultimately, it motivates them to get the work done. Problems arise when stress becomes a prolonged event. Chronic, intense, stress can manifest in physical symptoms. According to the American Psychological Association, chronic stress can have an effect on the heart, lungs, musculoskeletal system, nervous system, digestive tract, and both male and female reproductive systems.



While caring for children, it is important for early childhood educators to remember to care for themselves. Of course, this is easy to say, but it can be a bit harder to actually do.



What is Self-Care?

Self-care is defined as:

- The practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health.
- The practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress.

While self-care becomes crucial during times of stress, we should all strive to be proactive and make wellness part of our everyday lives. One way to ensure that you are making time for yourself is to schedule it into your day. Even if it is just a few minutes in the morning or evening.

Keep in mind that self-care can look different for everyone. A quick Google search will show you that there are tons of articles promoting ideas for self-care. There is no "one size fits all" model. Find something that works for YOU; something that nourishes your mind, body, and spirit.

Self-Care Ideas

Physical activity- This can be anything from a quick walk around the block to an invigorating workout. Just getting your body moving can make a difference in your day. YouTube is a great resource for free workouts. You can find a wide variety, including yoga, cardio, martial arts, and weight lifting.

Journaling- This is a great way to organize your thoughts and start tracking habits or patterns. You can start with something simple such as writing three things you are grateful for each day. Journaling has come a long way from the "Dear Diary" days. Journaling can consist of short entries, lists, or even doodles and drawings. Search "Journaling" or "Bullet Journaling" on Google or Pinterest for some fun ideas!

Get creative!- Draw, color, paint, sculpt, craft; the possibilities are endless! Skill level doesn't matter! You do not have to be the best at something in order for it to be enjoyable.

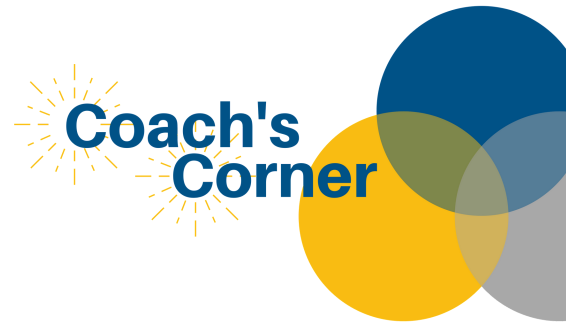
Self-Care Ideas (continuation)

Meditation- This one can be a little intimidating for some; however, it does not have to be! There are many resources to help you get started. There are several guided meditation apps that are free. Here are a few examples:

- Headspace
- Insight Timer
- Calm
- Simple Habit

Mindfulness- Many times mindfulness is discussed in the same breath as meditation. Mindfulness is defined as being fully present and aware of what is happening around us. We practice mindfulness when we actively block out the distractions and focus on what is actually happening in the present moment. This takes practice and it takes patience. Early childhood educators tend to be the ultimate “multi-taskers”. We are used to doing several things at once; however, this can lead to overload and burnout. Throughout your day, try focusing on one task at a time. When a situation requires your attention, take a second to breathe and decide how to handle it. During a time of much uncertainty, working to focus and quiet the “what if’s” is so important. Check out the resource section for more support.





Connection

In addition to carving out time to focus on yourself, it is also important to find ways to connect to others. Thanks to technology, there are many ways to stay in touch even when we cannot gather in person. Delaware Stars is working to make sure that all child care programs are feeling supported during this time. There are several virtual meetings for programs being held via Zoom. Feel free to reach out to a Stars TA for more information..

Our current reality can seem scary and overwhelming at times. So much uncertainty can be hard to manage for children and adults. When I need an example of hope and unwavering courage in the face of adversity, I need to look no further than our own frontline heroes- the early childhood workforce. Early childhood educators are keeping our children thriving and giving their parents a sense of stability. Our youngest children are looking to you for love and guidance, and that alone makes you more than essential.

Resources

Live Meditation

[Saturday Morning Guided Meditation with Kyma Balardo](#)

Link to register: <https://forms.gle/E2HngorwZEQc1uuf6>

Wednesday Evening Mindful Breaks with Kyma Belardo

Link to register: <https://forms.gle/AvYVs3kuu1NrUL846>

Website- [Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org)

Local Resources

Early Child Mental Health Consultation

DSCYF_ECMHS@delaware.gov 302-256-9308

*Can facilitate self-care and mindfulness training, help programs reduce teacher and caregiver stress, support social and emotional wellbeing.

Mental Health DE

<https://mentalhealthde.com/mental-wellness/>

Resources (continuation)

Established professional organizations offering wellness/self-care webinars and resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Talking to and Supporting Children and Ourselves During the Pandemic

<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/4843463476337444880>

Remember to Take Care of Yourself: Six Ideas for Family Child Care Providers

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/blog/six-ideas-family-child-care-providers>

Administration for Children & Families, Early Childhood Training & Technical Assistance System
Practicing Self-Care and Professionalism

https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/itrg/article_self-care_for_teachers.pdf

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) <https://casel.org/>

Weekly Webinars <https://casel.org/weekly-webinars/>

Zero to Three

Mindfulness Breaks: A Weekly Series for Self-Care <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3351-mindfulness-breaks-a-weekly-series-for-self-care>

Mindfulness Toolkit <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2896-getting-started-with-mindfulness-a-toolkit-for-early-childhood-organizations>

Mental Health America

Webinar: Wellness Routines for Uncertain Times

<https://www.mhanational.org/events/wellness-routines-uncertain-times>

Professional Development

Stress and Resilience: Building Core Capabilities Community of Practice DIEEC Virtual Course

Virtual, live training: Mindfulness: A Resilience Practice