

FIVE SELF-CARE TIPS FOR THE TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE EDUCATOR

Teaching requires a lot of emotional labor. Teaching in a trauma-responsive classroom can sometimes increase the amount of emotional labor, especially if you are new to trauma-responsive teaching, attempting to create your own trauma-responsive classroom, or grappling with your own identity as a trauma-survivor. Therefore, self-care is an important component to being a successful trauma-responsive educator. Below are five tips to help get you started on your self-care journey:

1

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO BECOME YOUR STUDENTS' THERAPIST

Being available to discuss your students' educational needs in relation to their trauma-survivor identity is an important component to trauma-responsive teaching (Misawa & Giffin, in press); however, it is equally important to establish and maintain clear boundaries for yourself as an educator. Having a list of university resources available for you to reference if a student is in distress or asking for help regarding their personal life will allow you to direct the student to the appropriate resources while maintaining your boundaries. An example of a useful resource is [974-HELP](#). The 974-HELP referral line was developed to help distressed or distressing students reach their academic goals and to help maintain a safe community and learning environment for all students.

2

BE AWARE OF THE SIGNS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion fatigue is the “emotional residue” due to the strain of working with those who have experienced traumatic life events (The American Institute of Stress, n.d.). Recognizing when you begin to feel the symptoms of compassion fatigue is an important aspect of self-care. Some signs of compassion fatigue include increased irritability or impatience, difficulty planning learning activities, decreased concentration, a general sense of apathy, increased nightmares, and intrusive thoughts about students' traumas (NCTSN, 2008).

3

IDENTIFY WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

During times of emotional stress, it is easy to lose motivation. Identifying and reminding yourself why you became an educator and what about your career is most important to you will help you maintain motivation when you are suffering from personal or professional stress. It may help to work with one of your peers or someone you trust to help you reflect on why you are an educator and in what ways it is important to your identity.

4

DEVELOP CUES FOR ENGAGING IN SELF-AWARENESS

Work mindfulness into your daily routine by establishing cues to practice self-awareness. Some examples include doing a self-check/body scan before a meeting or class, doing a mindfulness exercise when you wash your hands, and practicing deep breathing after you finish teaching a class (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2020). Incorporating moments of self-awareness into your daily routine will help reduce feelings of stress and emotional overwhelm.

5

DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP

Working as an educator can, at times, feel isolating. This feeling of isolation can be compounded when you engage in trauma-responsive teaching due to the increased openness of the learning environment. It is important to reach out to peers, members of your support group, or a professional, such as a therapist or psychologist, if you are experiencing compassion fatigue or extreme stress.

Developing a trauma-responsive classroom helps remove educational barriers for trauma-survivors and will create a safer learning environment for all students. However, it is important to remember to take care of yourself as well. For more information on educator self-care, please visit the following sites:

- [The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: Self Care for Educators](#)
- [The American Institute of Stress: Burnout or Compassion Fatigue](#)
- [Center on Great Teachers & Leaders: Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care](#)
- [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care Packet](#)

REFERENCES

- Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care: Self-Assessment and Planning Tool. American Institutes for Research. <https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Educator-Resilience-Trauma-Informed-Self-Care-Self-Assessment.pdf>
- Misawa, M., & Giffin, A. (in press). Practicing trauma-responsive teaching in adult and higher education: An integrational approach. In L. Douglass, A. Threlkeld, L. R. Merriweather, & R. Barnes (Eds.), *Critical Approaches to Trauma in Adult Learning*. Adult and Higher Education Alliance.
- The American Institute of Stress. (n.d.). Definitions. AIS. <https://www.stress.org/military/for-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue>.
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2008). Self Care for Educators. NCTSN. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//self_care_for_educators.pdf