



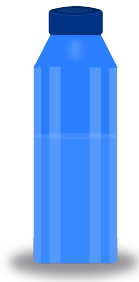
HARNESS THE POWER OF SELF-CARE

It's a radical idea to think of taking care of ourselves when we work in a profession that's all about caring for others, but by now you've read enough to know how important it is. Hopefully you've been practicing deep (belly) breathing and maybe even learned some other kinds of breathing.

So what else can you do to deal with job (and other) stressors effectively so you can:
provide the responsive interactions young children need to grow and develop;
find satisfaction and happiness in your work;
enjoy physical and mental wellness;
and inspire others to do the same?

These suggestions are not meant to replace advice from your health care provider and/or a mental health specialist, especially if stress is creating significant physical and mental health issues. Talk with your health care provider about your stress, especially if you find yourself unable to participate in any of these activities. *Get the help you need.*

START SMALL, CHEAP, AND EASY; THEN WORK UP TO BIGGER THINGS:



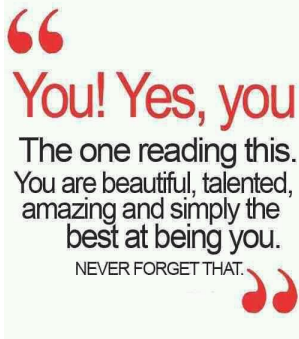
Drink more water (out of a re-usable, BPA-free bottle). What could be easier? Mild dehydration can make you feel tired and give you a dry throat and mouth. Drinking water in front of kids also models its importance. Incorporate language into this activity by saying things like, "We drink because we're thirsty! Water is good for us." Incorporate nutritional messages by saying things like, "Water is better for us than soda."



Sing, dance, and make music in the car, shower, outdoors, and especially in your classroom! Singing out loud will make you and the kids feel better right away, and also help your immune systems. One of the many great things about being an early educator is that you get to sing and dance at work and everyone benefits. Have fun!



Beat on a drum! Drum along with your kids at school. All cultures use some form of percussion - maybe it's because our heartbeats are an internal percussion instrument. Dr. Bruce Perry has developed interventions for children who've suffered trauma, and one of the first recommendations of the treatment is drumming because it has a healing, calming effect. You can use anything for a drum and use your hands to make the beat. Drum on!



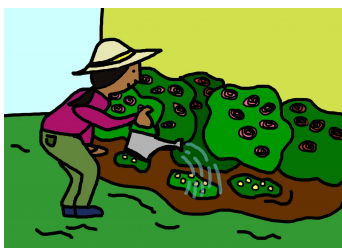
Get inspired! Visit Pinterest, or Google *inspirational quotes* and you'll find lots of fun images you can download and print, or just write on post-it-notes to post around your house, desk, car, and classroom. You can also tape up inspiring greeting cards you've received as a reminder that someone cares about you!



Laugh - it's free medicine. Regular laughter lowers blood pressure and levels of stress hormones, and boosts your immune system. Over time this will make you healthier - and will make those around you laugh, too. Share this gift! Why do you think the Youtube videos of laughing babies get so many hits? It's hard to feel down when watching babies laugh. Click here to get your belly laugh today: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L49VXZwfup8> Just Google *Kids Say the Funniest Things* and you'll find enough material to keep you laughing for the rest of your career.



Pray, meditate, develop a spiritual practice. This can help you become peaceful inside and regain perspective, as well as increase your sense of connection. Look inward and begin to reflect peacefully on events in your life. There is no right way to do this except to keep it simple and do what works for you individually.



Get a hobby. It doesn't have to be expensive or take lots of time, and it can be something you do alone, or with others. Start small: scrapbook, crochet, knit, cook, photograph, garden, zumba, do yoga or tai chi, paint, keep a journal, write poetry, read, quilt. The list is endless!



Set boundaries and limits. We lead busy lives and it's easy to get over-committed, especially if we have kids. There's also a myth that saying *No* is rude or unfriendly. Know your priorities, what you want to accomplish in life, and figure out how much stress saying *Yes* will create. Simply, politely, and respectfully decline whatever the request is. Don't make up an excuse or tell a white lie, simply say, "I'm sorry, I can't do it right now," or "This doesn't fit with my schedule." Remember, your time is just that - **yours** - to do with as you must or wish. Own it.



Take your Vitamin N every day, rain, sun, or snow. And make sure kids get outside every day, especially when they're wiggly and giggly. A daily dose of nature helps with focus and concentration, as well as inner calm. Even if you think you don't have time, you have time for 5 minutes a day! And one other word of advice, leave your phone inside. You've seen the saying, "There's no *wifi* in the forest but you'll get a better connection there."



Sleep! "Tired? There's an app for that!" If you're doing most of the above every day, then you might be feeling well enough to tackle sleep issues. Think of sleep as free medicine - you need it for your health and wellness. Make sure your bedroom is calm and restful; develop a bedtime routine; avoid digital/visual stimulation at least 1 hour before bed (no TV in the bedroom); avoid caffeine several hours before bed; do belly breathing before bed; read a boring book; calm your mind; whatever helps you get a good night's sleep.



Be a friend - give a hug. Develop a support network. No one can understand your work stress like another early educator, including supervisors, directors, and coaches. Seek support from those in the know. And remember, hugging releases a feel-good hormone, so aim for several hugs a day. These can be to/from the kids in your care, family members, friends, and even your pets.



Find a balance. Actually, if you're doing many of the stress-busting activities listed here, you're probably already realigning your priorities and re-balancing your life. Feels great, doesn't it? The important thing is to keep it up in the long run, and not give up when the going gets tough.

Of course, there are many other suggestions for self-care - you can probably recite them by heart: eat a healthy diet; get lots of exercise; avoid sugar and fat; don't smoke; de-clutter at work and home; avoid caffeine, alcohol, and drugs. Somehow, this list of rules to follow seems more stressful than the friendly, do-able suggestions above. Most importantly, remember to be kind to yourself - this is not a contest or competition. There's no such thing as a perfect person, so let go of that idea. Take good care of yourself so you can take good care of our youngest citizens. Best wishes and be well!