



TRANSCRIPT

Strategies for Districts to Support Self-Care for Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic

CHRISTINA PATE

Welcome, everyone. We are delighted to be here with you today to talk about this really important and timely topic. As we know, many lives are significantly disrupted with millions of students now at home, thousands of educators teaching from home, and entire families and communities on lockdown. But in order to support others, we must support ourselves first. And that's the purpose of today's webinar, is to offer some practical information and guidance, grounded in research, to help district staff support educators to cope with the stresses of school closures and service provision and quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now, as we move through the strategies today, many of them will focus on your own self-care as leaders, but what we're doing here is modeling for you strategies and activities that you can implement with your staff and even your students to promote self-care for the entire school community, both now and when you return to campus.

So our strategies today will address healthy mindsets and behaviors; identity, connectedness, and belonging; and healthy boundaries and interactions.

OK, so before we explore the self-care strategies today, we want to start with a prompt. So if you haven't already, please go ahead and send a text to the number 22333 with the code "LAURABUCKNER704"—it's right there on the screen—and wait for your confirmation message. Once you receive that, then I want you to answer this prompt in one to two words. Now, you can send multiple responses, but send them in separate messages. So here we go. And if you don't have text capabilities, no worries; just type it into the chat box.

So I want you to get still for a moment, and if you're comfortable, you might want to close your eyes or shift your gaze to the ground, and then ask yourself, "How am I feeling?" What physical sensations, thoughts, or feelings do you have right now in this moment? Scan your body, scan your mind, and let us know. [pause]

All right, we're hearing already lots of overwhelmed and tired, anxious, anxiety. But I'm also seeing gratitude, curious, challenged. And it's possible to be feeling things on every end of the spectrum, so if you have more than one response, go ahead and type those in now. Yes, "still feeling fatigued and tired" I'm seeing in the chat box. Hopeful, calm. Wonderful. So as you can see, there are a range of feelings that we're all having right now, and sometimes it's possible to have multiple feelings simultaneously.

So this activity is something that you can use with yourself, with your colleagues, and with students, to bring everyone into the present moment. What this does is it brings attention and awareness, and it really gets people ready to engage and focus. So if you're starting off a meeting with colleagues, or maybe you have a challenging call with your boss or an employee, or even a class with students, this is a great exercise to get folks grounded and in their bodies.

So now we're going to start off with the "what" and "why" of self-care. Some of us dismiss self-care altogether because we think it's about spa treatments or beach vacations. And that can certainly be one way that folks relax, but it's not really what we're talking about when we say self-care. Or we hear a lot of folks saying that they don't have time for self-care, and those tend to be the folks who actually need it the most. Now, there are a lot of definitions out there, but generally they refer to providing adequate attention to one's physical and psychological health and wellness, and taking an active role to preserve, protect, or improve one's own health and well-being.

So as you know, we put students at the center of learning. So why should we make educators' self-care a priority? Well, Americans in general tend to idealize and glamourize being overworked and busy and stressed, and in fact, research shows that we associate it with prestige and status. However, we can't pour from an empty cup, and we certainly don't show up as our best selves when we're stressed. So how can we expect staff and students to do that when they're also stressed?

In many helping professions, like doctors, nurses, and counselors, self-care has been described as an ethical imperative. So this means if you can't show up in a present, healthy, and positive way—even with the best of intentions—even if your intention is to be helpful, it can actually be harmful to yourself, to your colleagues, and to your students.

Now, we do know that educator burnout is a substantial concern, and it leads to poor educator retention. In fact, more than 40% of teachers leave the profession within five years. And we know there's higher turnover rates in schools that are serving large concentrations of students of color. There's also recent research that has shown that school leaders have such difficulty with their own self-care that they have stress-related health concerns that exceed that of firefighters and law enforcement.

We also know that educator wellness is related to a variety of student outcomes as well as teacher/student relationships. When educators show up healthy and present, they have positive interactions with their students, and that leads to improved student outcomes of all kinds. You know, we have a real danger in pathologizing students and families and communities under distress. But positive teacher-student relationships can promote empathy, and that can have a profound effect on the ways that we show up as educators, the expectations that we have of our students, and the positive impact it can have on those student outcomes.

Now, one thing to note here is that while educators are leaders, they are often not acknowledged for the vicarious stress and trauma that they experience when working with their students and families who are experiencing great stress and trauma, nor do we prepare educators to interact with students and families experiencing such stress and trauma, despite knowing the significance of these positive teacher-student relationships. These relationships are fundamental, not just for students' social and emotional development, but for their academic success as well. But these relationships can be a real source of internal tension for

our own sustainability. So how can we support students and families with the guidance and structure they need while preserving our own well-being?

So as district leaders, it is critical to understand that vicarious stress and trauma are real, and we need to support educators in their co-regulation of stress. We're going to talk more about those strategies here in a bit, but essentially, district leadership needs to model and be regulated themselves in order to effectively support staff and students. It's also important that district leadership ask staff what they need, especially when stress is high and anxieties set in, like they are right now. Educators may be stuck or feeling wary of asking for help or identifying what they need, so it's important for us to keep those communication lines open and to create psychologically safe spaces to have those tough conversations, and really to be open and non-defensive to what staff have to say.

So the last thing I'll say here is that obviously this pandemic has caused all sorts of shifts and changes in the ways that we go about our day, which has exacerbated stressors. But all of this change means loss. Students and staff are grappling with loss of all sorts. Not just potentially the loss of loved ones from the virus, but the loss of connections, routines, stability, and for many, a sense of safety. So now, more than ever, our self-care is a priority. So what do we do to promote self-care, both in ourselves and for our colleagues?

Today we're going to start with mindset shifts. So first thing's first: we must create a new normal. You're probably already feeling like this is starting to happen. But school will reopen again, and according to public health experts, it's likely to close again. So as we go through the strategies today, be thinking about this new normal. What things do we not want to go back to? This is an opportunity to rethink the way we educate and the way we work. There are a lot of things that weren't working before, so do you really want to go back to the old normal? It was normalized, but maybe it's not the norm we want moving forward. So really be looking for opportunities here.

First is, be realistic and gentle with yourself and with your colleagues, and just set a new baseline. Most educators have not been prepared to use virtual tools, nor were they prepared to shift their existing curricula into a distance learning format. So while you will want to create effective and meaningful lessons and activities, you can't do it all at once or do it immediately. So really allow yourselves and your staff the time and the space to figure out this new normal. Give yourselves and your staff the permission for trial and lots of error. Iterate, but be patient and prioritize, and then let some things go, for yourselves and for your colleagues.

And then reduce the workload for yourself, for your students, for your colleagues. Everyone is undergoing a lot of stress and change, and our physical and mental capacity to handle the load is diminished. So allow yourself to reduce the load, and don't stress about it. For school staff, consider implementing the same lessons as normal, but in smaller amounts. And your school or your district likely has some existing protocols around this, but consider less reading load, less response load. So, for example, if you normally assign five word problems for homework, consider cutting it in half or less, to reduce the mental and emotional burden on yourself, on your students, and on those families that are supporting students.

Now, this translates into the workload for your colleagues as well. So for district leaders, what can you do right now to reduce or free up some physical and mental energy for you and your staff? If you lead meetings, consider holding the same meetings but in smaller chunks, with less

responsibilities. Or just reduce the number of meetings altogether. Overall, shift the focus from academic content to positive, healthy relationships. As you reduce some of the workload, prioritize positive interactions to connect with colleagues, with students, and with families on a personal level, rather than a work or an academic level.

So it's essential for us to be aware of and accept our own thoughts and feelings and adjust our actions accordingly. It's also important for us to feel our feelings. We don't want to ignore them, or deny them, or repress them, but we must not become them. It's really easy to get stuck in them when we're worried about our own health and safety and the well-being of our families and communities. But we simply want to notice them, not judge them, and let them move on.

We want to do our best to stay calm and focused. It's really easy to get caught up in our thoughts and feelings, and it's exacerbated when everyone around us is in a state of fear or panic. But studies show that mindfulness practices can reduce emotional reactivity and support healthy decision-making. Other strategies are simpler, like sitting or walking in nature, or physical exercise, or just talking with a good friend.

The bottom line here is do what works for you. Think about strategies that have been helpful for you in the past and try applying those first. But be really intentional. Create the time for these. Also become aware of the stories you're telling yourself about the circumstances, and then question whether your thoughts are realistic or whether they are fear-based. If you find your thoughts are rooted in fear and you're having trouble staying calm or getting focused, allow and accept your feelings, and give yourself permission to not force or push things.

Many educators are overachievers, perfectionists. We think we need to be available 24/7. But it's OK to let some things go or to reschedule. So if you have a live class or you have an interaction scheduled with a colleague or with a student or a family, consider ways to reconnect when your mind is feeling steadier and more stable. We always think that we must or we should do things if they're on our calendar, but if we're not showing up in a good state of mind, that's actually worse than rescheduling.

Now, like a virus, emotions are contagious, positively and negatively. So do your best as a leader to keep your fear and panic at bay, and support healing and well-being by modeling calm behavior and really trying to show up in positive and optimistic ways. For example, when you find yourself feeling overwhelmed and about to react, just pause, take a breath, notice the thoughts in your mind, the sensations that are going through your body, and give yourself a moment or even more to relax your mind and body before you respond or before you make a decision.

And Kaylene is going to talk a little bit more about some of those strategies, specifically as they pertain to these stress responses.

KAYLENE CASE

Thank you, Christina. As we're reflecting on our current state and we are becoming more aware of what worked for us in the past and where we're presently at, it is so important to understand what our own individual stress responses are. In some situations, it may look different. Depending on the type or intimacy of the relationship, our responses may change.

Considering the size or recurrence of the problem, we might find that we ebb and flow through different responses.

The most commonly reported stress types include fight, flight, and immobilization or freeze. I will highlight a few activities at each state that have been identified to help us get back into sync with ourselves and to be regulated. But most importantly, I want you to remember that you know your own story the best and what you need. Find ways to connect with your all-knowing self. These are only guidelines.

So as we can see on this slide, in fight, we may need to bring our calm back. Often, it's reported in the research that progressive muscle relaxation can be helpful with this, patterned breathing, or meditation. We know that as school leaders and educators, we are mirrors reflecting the climate and culture, setting the tone of our buildings, classrooms, staff, and student morale. We are the barometers of facilitating home-school collaboration, inviting and engaging families to be key stakeholders in their children's education. When we know our individual stress response, we can effectively access our coping skills to match the expectations or demands that are being placed on us.

We all have stress reactions, and we have good days and we have bad days. We're not alone. One of the most powerful things that we can do when we approach opportunities, challenges, or problems is to come with a curiosity and wonderment, seeking help along the way. This way, we can prepare to have our needs met when we become heightened, overwhelmed, or stuck in our emotions.

Our mind is so very powerful, and with routine self-care, we can elicit productive responses using stress in a good way. This is often referred to in the literature as "eustress." We all need a certain level of awareness and arousal to accomplish our goals. This can be referred to as our window of tolerance or optimal state. When we are able to keep balance in our lives, we maximize our skills, and we're able to accomplish our goals.

As we move into our next stress response, it is flight. Often times, we can present as unfocused or withdrawn. And we know intuitively that we need to energize the nervous system. Physiologically, the vagus nerve is responsible for balance and regulation in the whole body. When you stop and think about your unique responses, where do you feel it in your body? For some, there are patterns of muscle tension, headaches, digestive upsets, tight chest, shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, or more. Remember that our bodies are responding to our perceived interpretation and demands in the environment, and we're preparing our internal thoughts and narratives drive our responses.

As we look at flight, we know that in the research, if we can engage ourselves in some rhythmic exercise, powerful yoga, and mindfulness, it can be helpful to get us unstuck. Christina talked a bit about mindfulness, and the research has heavily supported that it's a great stress relief technique. Mindfulness is really a sense of identifying where we are at emotionally without passing judgment—"What should I do? What could I do? Why?" But just really sitting with it, being in that emotion, reflecting, pausing, asking ourselves what we need.

Through this practice, we know that the research supports that our abilities to problem solve, use judgment, and assess situations effectively is much more increased. Other benefits can include focused attention, intentional decisionmaking, better working memory, and cognitive

flexibility, as well as overall emotional regulation. When we as educational leaders engage in mindfulness, we're really coming back to ourselves, we're recentering, and we have a greater awareness to do the necessary work of creating an environment to maximize students' educations as well as professionals' work environment.

As we move into the next state, which is immobilization or freeze, and we raise our awareness around self-care, and know what our individual responses are, we know that sometimes we're stuck. And the challenge with this particular state is we need to activate our nervous system so that we can have an action. So you'll want to engage in a variety of activities. What I commonly see is running, dancing, Tai Chi.

But the key behind immobilization or freeze is to really bring our thoughts and our focus to what's happening in our body so we can really connect with what it is we need. What is our individual stress responses? Really, truly, I see this as being limited only by our own creativity. Remember, these are guidelines, but we all have unique and individual stories and narratives that get us to where we are and have us fall into our stress response patterns.

At this point, I'd really encourage us as an audience to think about a time and imagine what you look like in your different states. Maybe there was a situation that was salient to you or a problem that you were working out. Where was your window of tolerance? What was your optimal ability to handle it? What skills or resources did you have to address it? Are there people that you could ask for help? And most importantly, what do you need to have your needs met?

I think the biggest piece, the takeaway in this section, is that self-care includes routine, positive practices, and mindful attention to one's physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual selves, within the context of our personal and professional lives.

CHRISTINA PATE

Another way that we can shift our mindset and behaviors is through taking a solution-focused approach. So rather than enmesh problems or get into analysis paralysis, start searching for solutions. So this involves either having conversations with other people or even just kind of contemplating or having an individual consideration of some alternative solutions. Challenge those previously held beliefs that you had, and consider some perspectives outside of yourself or your immediate group. Because we all know that we can get stuck in an echo chamber, and it's often pessimistic. Which is what we're talking about next—so shifting the negative to the positive, or from pessimism to optimism.

It's normal for us to think that we can't before we can, but don't get stuck here. Immediately challenge that notion and redirect your focus forward versus backward. Take perspective and be patient with yourself, because you will figure this out. And overall, focus on what you do like and what you do want, rather than all the things that you don't like and you don't want. These simple shifts can have a profound impact on your well-being and really create shifts in the ways that others respond to you as well.

Now, one of the ways that we can do this is through practicing what we call reframing, so identify the positive aspects from the negative. So, for example, you might take a sheet of paper and create two columns, negative on the left, positive on the right, and list all the negative aspects of your circumstances first, and then go back for each one and reframe it to

something positive. Some people call this the silver lining; some people call this the blessing in disguise.

So an example is, you might have social distancing on the left as a negative, and then physical distancing on the right as a positive, because we're keeping ourselves and others healthy and safe. Or you might have isolation and loneliness on the left as a negative, and have solidarity and solitude on the right as a positive, because we're unifying around a cause, and this creates opportunities for alone time, for quiet time to think, to relax, or to recover.

Or you might have remote work plus homeschooling on the left as a negative, because you have too many people in the house, and you have too much to do all at the same time. And then you might have connected and involved on the right as a positive, because life is usually so busy I don't have time to connect with my family and friends as often as I would like, and I'm not usually as involved in my child's education as I would like. So those are just a few examples.

And this is really related to the next one here, which is looking for opportunities in the challenges. Try to search for meaning in the lessons that are coming from the challenges and uncertainties. There are actually opportunities hidden in there if we just go looking for them. So again, what you do want is—this new normal, what do you want it to look like? What do you want to leave behind in the past and let go of? And what opportunity do you have during this challenging time to make something better?

Next is to practice gratitude. And I know this can sound cliché, because it can be hard to kind of see the light in the dark, sometimes. But practicing gratitude can begin to shift our lens from pessimism to optimism. If we take some time to express our appreciation and gratitude, we can help ourselves and each other through these challenging times.

So some ideas include personal journaling—so either three things you're grateful for each morning when you wake up, or maybe each evening before you go to bed. Or you can write gratitude letters to colleagues, to friends, to students, to families. Or you could also just speak your appreciation. Pick up the phone or call in a video to your colleagues, to your friends, to your students. And post on social media, because we all know that social media could use some more pro-social posting, with all the negative stuff out there.

And last is to demonstrate compassion to yourself and to others. So it can be hard not to judge and criticize yourself or other people right now, especially those who have responses that are a lot different from yours. So try to connect with others through active listening, seeking to understand rather than be understood, and to strengthen feelings of concerns for others—not just those suffering from the virus, but those suffering from the virus of fear and panic.

And then having compassion for yourself. Be kind to yourself. Don't push yourself so hard. Try not to judge and shame yourself for what you think you're not doing or should be doing. And really speak to yourself the way that you would a dear friend. Because at the end of the day, we are all doing the best we can with what we know, with what we have, and where we are in life. People do well if they can. So please remember that.

And the last piece here is just to encourage openness, flexibility, adaptability, and humor. So most of us already use flexible and adaptive strategies in our daily lives when we deal with sick children at home or when we have schedule changes. So now more than ever, we need to apply

the skills of shifting our mindsets, our perspectives, and our actions when unexpected events arise.

And even finding the humor in the distress can really be a healthy coping mechanism during these challenging times. These mindsets will be critical for us to remain calm, to think clearly, and to make conscious choices rather than succumbing to the overwhelm or feeling hopeless or chronically anxious, and they can be developed and improved in a lot of ways that are backed by research. So we will want to be flexible with our colleagues, with our students, with our families. So that may mean we need to adapt policies or be more flexible with workloads. So again, seek to understand, and adapt accordingly.

Take physical and mental breaks. This includes breaks from screens of all kinds—computers, phones, televisions. A lot of us think that a break from work is getting on social media or just zoning out to a movie, but we need breaks from those screens. Breaks can also include just moving from one room to another if that’s possible, or shifting your location within a room if that’s not possible, or going outside if that’s an option, or finding a natural light source.

And then find opportunities for laughter and humor. It could be as simple as just having a fun conversation with a colleague or a friend, and it’s not focused on work or stressful things. And then whatever mind-body activities that relax or invigorate you, depending on those stress responses—jogging, yoga, exercise, listening or dancing to music, taking a walk outdoors. Whatever works for you.

So this slide is really just a summary of the content in the previous section and can be used as a quick reference later on with the handout that we’ll be sending you. And I’m going to turn it back over to Kaylene. We’re going to do some reflecting and discussing, because that was a lot of content for this first section.

KAYLENE CASE

It was. As we’re thinking about those mindsets and strategies, you can see we have two questions here on the slide. If you could take a moment to journal on your own, or if you feel comfortable, chat in the chat box, some of these things. What helped you manage these unexpected events? And in what ways can we really apply these to the new normal?

As I reflect on my own practice and what’s out there in the system for me, I’ll share that really letting go of the unknown has been so helpful. Being comfortable and willing to take risks. Using humor and laughing often, even at myself. And being vulnerable. Having compassion. Honoring where I’m at, and having the grace to ask for help. Think about what we can control and what we can’t. We’re really looking to share perspectives here. I see there’s a few of us on this event. And we’re not alone. We are all connected. I see many things coming in the chat box.

As we are connecting—thank you so much for your responses—humans are social creatures, and educators most certainly are. We’re working from home—especially in lockdown, social isolation or a quarantine situation can be so incredibly isolating. Further, many educators’ identities were tied up in helping and serving others, so disconnection from others can feel like a loss of meaning or purpose.

The following are some ideas that we have for maintaining a sense of purpose and belonging. First, we suggest being intentional about connecting with colleagues to provide social and

emotional context to the remote work that we're now doing. Facilitating learning in these times is particularly difficult. Thus, you need virtual connection with friends and colleagues who understand your circumstances more now than ever. Initiating connections with students and families is equally important, and encouraging your colleagues to do the same.

If you or your colleagues don't have virtual access to each other or to students, you can write letters and mail them. You can make phone calls or schedule walk-bys or drive-throughs. You want to do this where you can safely wave or speak to colleagues or students from a distance, but near their home. We've had some instances where, for different birthday parties or celebrations, or as students have that loss around prom and graduation, there's some unique efforts that different teams have done to connect and honor the social distance norms.

If you have virtual access to colleagues or students, you can send them messages. You can create online hubs for connecting or offer community hours where they can come and check in and chat with you about non-work or non-academic themes. So there's a lot going on.

As we're getting ready to kind of move back in, we wanted to do another word cloud, because we think it's a great visual to bring all of us together in this large format, to see where we're at. And one of the questions we'd like you to think about is—how are you feeling with communication since COVID-19? What have been some of the barriers around communication, and what have been some of the successes?

So if you can go ahead and use the text "LAURABUCKNER704" to 22333—the same one we did before. Text one- or two-word responses. I see quite a bit coming up. Much varied, lagging skills, miscommunication. Yes. Political. Thank you for your input.

You know, communication is so interesting, because there's so many different layers. We have our district layer, our leadership layer, interacting with our colleagues, parents, and students. There's so many different perspectives for us to consider. And as we think about these new ways of communicating, it is so important for us to be very clear and concise in what we're doing. We're more connected now.

As we talked earlier, many district leaders and staff have had an increase in meetings to plan and get up-to-date information on how best to respond to this current pandemic. The need for us to be consistent and actionable is tantamount for us to ameliorate the stress and anxiety of our staff, our students, and our families. It really is OK for us to go slow, say that we don't know, and disseminate information when there is a consensus. As leaders, remember that we are really setting the stage for success, and we define the expectations that allow our educators to excel at their craft.

Be aware that for some, finding a place to set up or do virtual conferencing may feel uncomfortable, when they're inviting professionals, students, and parents into their personal lives. There may be limited access to personal space and technology. We know it has its difficulties such as rolling outages, securities of virtual platforms, battery power, and computer capabilities. Some families have difficulty accessing the speed of internet or computer technology to effectively work on this new educational platform.

There's really a different level of intensity when working in front of a screen. I, for one, can relate to eye fatigue and muscle tension, thinking about our ergonomics and where we're setting up. We've heard from around many different areas that these are prevalent amongst

our professionals. Being aware of the need to create breaks for ourselves is so important and meeting our individual needs.

As leaders, we have a very special role. We should take time to ask ourselves and our staff what they need, and we can be creative in finding the ways to meet these. For example, I've heard of some districts actually providing a dedicated paid time for staff to engage in some of the mindfulness activities and/or different stress coping skills that we've discussed today.

In this next section, we're going to go ahead and address some ideas around common concerns that have been expressed. And just like we said before, this is a slide that is a summary of content, and it can be used as a quick reference later, along with the handout that we'll be sending out to you.

As we get ready to go into our next section on healthy boundaries and interaction, we would like to hear from you. Type into the chat box or journal on your own—how do you create a sense of belonging and connection before social distancing when you could meet in person? And now, how might we adapt these strategies to work remotely? And Christina will carry us into our next section.

CHRISTINA PATE

All right. I'm just waiting to see what some of the conversation points are coming up. We had a lot of stuff around too much Zoom [laugh] happening, too much technologies, and also not being able to connect the way they would like, because obviously a lot of our students and families don't have virtual access to things. So lots of things that we're grappling with right now, which is why it's more important for us to really take care of ourselves so we can get creative in the ways that we can figure out how we can keep those connections going with our students and families, and with our colleagues, too.

OK, so for healthy boundaries and interactions, this means knowing what your limits are and clearly communicating what you will allow and what you will not, as well as what you need. I've been seeing all kinds of stuff coming up in the chat box around too much work, never having any time off work, so we're going to talk about some of those boundaries here today.

Let's face it; educators are helpers, and it's often hard for us to say, "No." However, having blurred boundaries isn't helpful for anyone, and in fact, it's harmful for both parties. So establishing clear and healthy boundaries can really support health and wellness for everyone. And some people need more connection and interaction right now—physically, socially, and mentally—while others need more quiet time and solitude. So it's important to understand what you need and then to be able to clearly communicate that to others.

So one thing we might not realize, especially if we're more extroverted or we're used to being in large, crowded families or community settings, is that we are often so overstimulated as human beings, and our nervous systems need regulation. And when it is overstimulated, it can impair our ability to relate and to reason effectively. So as you're working on creating some physical and social boundaries in your own life, be mindful of what your colleagues are experiencing as well, and try to offer some support.

Find a place where you can be alone, even if it's just for a moment, once a day, and encourage your colleagues to do the same. For some folks, this might even be your bathroom. Do what you can [laugh]; take what you have. But for those of you who have it available, it could be the

backyard, the sidewalk, the front porch, sitting in your vehicle alone. Wherever it might be for you, take a moment for yourself. If you're taking care of children alone, find times when you can find some solitude, like during naptime or after bedtime.

Communicate when you need space. And this includes space with online interactions, too. We can get caught up in back-to-back Zoom calls, and Zoom chats, and people are texting you and calling you, and it's overloading. We need to make sure that we have space with online interactions, too. So create a norm that all members of your school community and your household need space, and that it's normal, and that it's healthy to communicate that need. So you may need to create a word or a phrase or a signal when you need space, and at any time when that prompt is used by a school community member or by a family member, it is honored.

Equally as important is to communicate when you need more connection. Ask others if there are ways that you can connect that also respect their needs and their boundaries. And then set boundaries around physical touch. This will be really important as school reopens, but for now, it's folks in your household and people in your community. And this can be challenging, especially with family members, but find ways to create physical boundaries that respect each other's need to protect one's health.

So, for example, your neighbor or a family member outside of your home may think it's OK just for a quick visit—"I'm just going to pop on by." Just because it's family or friends doesn't mean that you have to allow it. So determine what's right for you, and right for your family, and check with federal guidelines on safe and healthy practices. This is a great time to practice saying "no" so that when we come back to school, we can assert those healthy boundaries.

Everyone responds or reacts differently to stress, so validate and accept your own feelings, and understand that others' thoughts, their feelings, their reactions, are their responsibilities, not yours. You can set healthy boundaries with others around what you will allow, and what you will not. So, for example, you might say, "I know that you're anxious and afraid right now, but I need you to speak calmly and respectfully to me." You should encourage your colleagues to do the same with each other, and with you. And respect others' decisions, but know what's right for you.

If you need, you can set boundaries on conversations. So, for example, you might say, "Talking about this again is making me more anxious. Can we talk about something else?" And then as I said earlier, have compassion for yourself and others. There's no need to judge the way other people are thinking or responding to this. We're all doing the best we can.

So I'm going to turn it back over to Kaylene to talk a little bit about work boundaries and information boundaries, and then we're going to wrap it up with another discussion.

KAYLENE CASE

Thank you. And we will have some time for Q&A. I do know that there was some questions around some of the stress response, so we'll save that for the end. But kind of jumping into "Work: Strategies for Ourselves and Colleagues," we really wanted to highlight the importance of creating communication norms and expectations for ourselves, colleagues, students, and families.

It's important to create clear and consistent messaging for our staff, really making sure we elicit feedback from everyone and ensuring that that communication is reciprocal. As leaders,

be clear about when you are available and when you're not. We all need boundaries around our time and our work. Just because you're working from home, you can still set official work hours. An idea that often comes to mind is, don't send a reply to non-essential work emails at night or on the weekend. Remember, as leaders we're modeling what those expectations can be, and we're doing that self-care so that it becomes a climate and culture of norms. Leaders can create schedules for clarity and stability for ourselves and others.

It's kind of interesting because if you're teaching at home and also schooling your children simultaneously, you really need to be extra realistic with yourself. Try to identify times where you can focus attention on your work, and identify where you can focus attention on your children. We can't do it all simultaneously.

Be gentle with yourself and others. We are all doing the best that we can. And know that when we reach out for help, we can encourage others to do the same. It's OK. You really want to create that climate and culture that we're in it together, regardless of our role and responsibility. We do have others that we can rely on. And if we set that up, if our educators are struggling, let them know who and how they can reach out for support. Don't be afraid to show your own vulnerability as a leader. That can be so powerful in our leadership roles and with our colleagues. Let them know when we're over capacity or when you need support.

We can create a workspace for ourselves even if we're in a shared room, house. We can create physical space that is designated for just our work during the day, ideally not where you sleep. [laugh] Make it functional and supportive as we're trying to navigate this new normal of working from home, which for many educators is very much outside their realm.

It's interesting because we know that we need to take more breaks. Adults need breaks after 20 minutes of staring at the screen. Sometimes it can be as simple as looking at our screen and then focusing on something that's in our environment that's a little further away, to give our eyes that break. We have different timers on different platforms that we're using that can remind us to get up and move. So there's just a lot of different nuances that we're all figuring out with our work.

And then when we move into our news and media and other information sources, it's so important for us to monitor the amount and type of information that we're taking in. Be a critical consumer of the information from the outside of ourselves, our family, and our friends as well as the media. Because in times like these, we often feel like life is so out of control. Only we can control what and how much information we seek and consume. When we do choose to consume, focus on our facts. Consult reliable and up-to-date sources. Limit the amount of time spent talking about COVID-19 with family, friends, and colleagues. Limit social media to fact-based and reliable sources. Limit the amount of time spent reading, listening, or watching the news.

It's really important to encourage our colleagues to do the same. You may need to set a boundary with yourself or others around media or conversations. For example, you might say, "Watching this before bed makes it difficult for me to fall asleep. Can we watch something else?" And Christina, when we go into our friends and families and colleagues, did you have some things you'd like to add?

CHRISTINA PATE

Yeah. So friends, families, and colleagues can all be a great source of support when you're feeling stressed or when you're feeling down. And it's totally normal to have a low mood or some anxiety. But if you're noticing intense, persistent, or prolonged feelings of hopelessness or despair or anxiety, none of those are normal. You want to seek professional help if you feel that fear or hopelessness is significantly disrupting your daily functioning.

And then also be on the lookout for signs of distress in your colleagues, and let them know where they can find support, or help get them connected to some support. You may be feeling helpless in how to support your colleagues or even your students or your families, or maybe even yourself, but you are not alone. There are helpers everywhere. You can engage wraparound services through your school or district to creatively support staff and students and families. And many mental health providers are offering remote sessions by phone or video if needed. And then there are community helpers everywhere, including police officers, fire fighters, SROs, healthcare providers. So connect with help wherever you can.

So as just with the last two sections, this slide is a summary of the content. You can use it as a quick reference later, along with the handout that we'll be sending you. Thank you so much for giving to us in all of the work that you do to serve our students, our families, our communities, and just really being there. We know how hard you work and how hard you're going to continue to work, and we just thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

KAYLENE CASE

Yes. Thank you so much. It's all of us together that are going to make such a difference in navigating our new world right now. So, thank you.