

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

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West  
Region 15 Comprehensive Center  
Center to Improve SEL & School Safety

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# Webinar Series: Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Educators and Students

- **Today:** Strategies for Districts to Support Self-Care for Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- **July:** Strategies for Districts to Support Student and Staff Social and Emotional Needs Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic and Plan for a Trauma-Informed Approach to School Reopening
- **September:** The State Role in Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in Schools in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic



# Today's Speakers



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Deputy Director, National Center to  
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Behavior Specialist and School Psychologist,  
Douglas County School District  
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# Today's Purpose and Strategies

*To offer practical information and guidance grounded in research to help district staff support educators to cope with the stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic*



Healthy Mindsets and Behaviors



Identity, Connectedness, and Belonging



Healthy Boundaries and Interactions

# What are you feeling?

## Word Cloud Activity

Share 1–2 words that describe any physical sensations, thoughts, or feelings you have right now *in this moment*

1. Text 22333
2. If you have not yet joined: Type in the code LAURABUCKNER704
3. Text your 1–2-word responses. You can submit multiple responses!

# Self-Care: What and Why?

# Self-Care: What

Many definitions exist, but generally refer to:

- Providing adequate attention to one's own physical and psychological health and wellness
- Taking an active role to preserve, protect, or improve one's own health and well-being

Has also been described as an “ethical imperative” in many helping professions



# Self-Care: Why?



Burnout and Retention



Student Outcomes



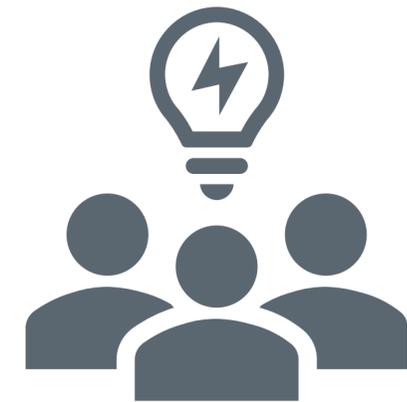
Teacher-Student Relationships

Empathy for Self and Others; Vicarious Stress and Trauma



Exacerbated by Shifts to Distance Learning & Other Pandemic Stressors

We put students at the center of learning – so why should we make educators' self-care a priority?



# Healthy Mindsets and Behaviors



# Create a “New Normal”



- Be realistic (and gentle) with yourself, and encourage others to do the same
- Reduce the workload for yourself and others

# Self-Awareness



THOUGHTS AND  
FEELINGS



CALM AND FOCUSED



SELF-STORYTELLING



CONTAGIOUS  
EMOTIONS

# How do you respond when stressed? How do your colleagues respond?

## “Fight”

Individuals may become angry, agitated, or keyed up under stress



This style will respond best to stress relief activities that quiet you or your colleagues down, such as:

- **Meditation**
- **Progressive muscle relaxation**
- **Deep breathing or guided imagery**

# Stress Response...

## “Flight”

Individuals may tend to become depressed, withdrawn, or unfocused under stress



When presenting with this style, the best way to regulate and reduce stress includes activities that are stimulating and energize the nervous system, such as:

- **Rhythmic exercise**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Power yoga**

# Stress Response...

## “Immobilization”

Individuals may tend to “freeze” or become “stuck” under stress



If this is the response, the challenge is to first rouse your nervous system to a fight or flight response so you or colleagues can employ the applicable stress relief techniques. To do this, choose physical activity that engages arms and legs, such as:

- **Running**
- **Dancing**
- **Tai Chi**

Perform them mindfully, focusing on the sensation in the limbs as you move.

# Optimistic and Solution-Focused



Solution-Focused



Pessimism to Optimism



Opportunities and Meaning



Gratitude



Compassion – for self and others

# Encourage Openness, Flexibility, Adaptability, and Humor



Be flexible and ready to adapt to unexpected events



Take physical and mental breaks



Find opportunities for laughter and finding humor



Mind-body activities – mindfulness, jogging, yoga, exercise, listening or dancing to music, walking outdoors, etc.

# How Districts Can Support Healthy Mindsets & Behaviors

- Ask educators about their workloads
- Set realistic expectations and support educators in meeting them
- Model self-awareness and self-reflection in district communications
- Acknowledge, support, and normalize different stress responses
- Encourage educators to practice self-care and connect them to available resources
- Provide forums for educators to share what is going well and make meaning together
- Demonstrate flexibility in district policies, as appropriate and possible

# Let's Reflect and Discuss!

Type into the chat box...

What mindsets and strategies have supported you/colleagues in the past when managing change and unexpected events?

In what ways might you/colleagues apply them during this “new normal”?



# Identity, Connectedness, and Belonging

# Sense of Purpose and Belonging

Many educators' identities are tied to helping and serving others – disconnection from others may feel like a loss of meaning or purpose.



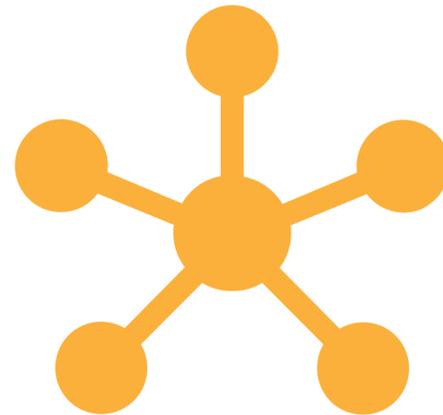
Be intentional about connecting with colleagues to provide social and emotional connection remotely



Encourage colleagues to initiate connections with students and families for non-academic reasons

# New Ways of Communicating:

As many of us are moving into a virtual platform, we need to be clear and concise in our communication while maintaining the social graces of interaction.



- More Connected
- Intimacy Barriers
- Intensity
- Ergonomics

# How Districts Can Support Identity, Connectedness & Belonging

- Provide opportunities for educators to connect with each other
- Host virtual “office hours” to allow educators direct communication with district staff
- Host virtual check-ins for informal discussions among educators
- Ensure district communications are clear, timely, and proactive

# Let's Reflect and Discuss!

Type into the chat box...

How did you create a sense of belonging and connection before social distancing, when you/colleagues were in person with others?

How might you/colleagues adapt these strategies to develop and maintain healthy connections remotely?



# Healthy Boundaries and Interactions

# Physical and Social: Strategies for Yourself and Colleagues



- Find a place where you can be alone, even for a brief moment.
- Communicate when you need space. Create a norm and normalize this.
- Communicate when you need connection. Ask others if there are ways to connect that respect their needs and boundaries.
- Respect each other's needs to protect health by limiting physical touch.

# Social, Emotional, and Mental: Strategies for Yourself and Colleagues

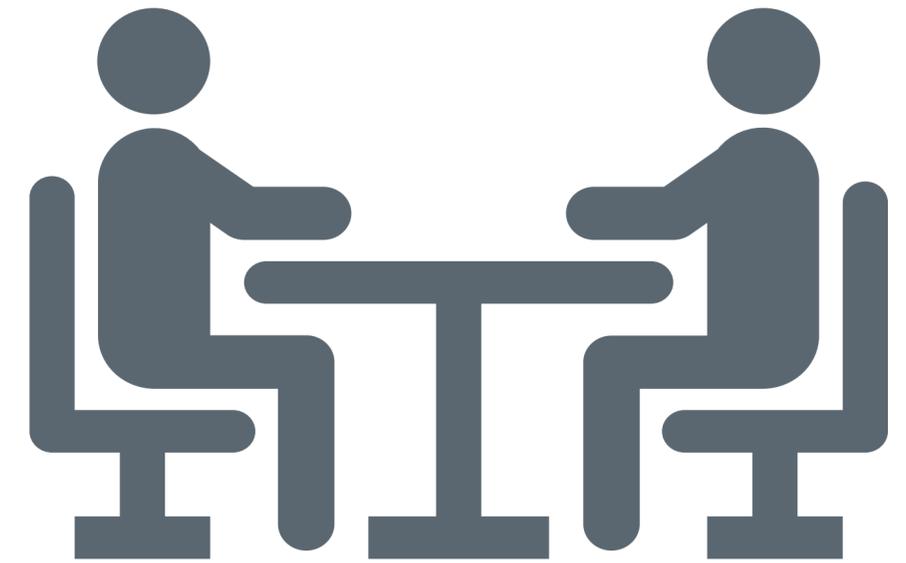
- Validate and accept your own feelings without judgment
  - Understand that others' thoughts, emotions, and reactions or responses are their own and their responsibility, not yours
- Approach interactions with **curiosity** and **openness** (versus defensiveness)
- Respect others' decisions, but know what's right for you
- Have compassion for yourself and others – no need to judge



# Work: Strategies for Yourself and Colleagues

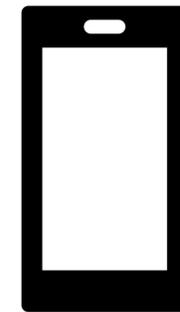
Create communication norms and expectations – for yourself, colleagues, students, and families

- Provide clear and consistent messaging to students and families. Elicit feedback. Ensure communication is reciprocal.
- Be clear about when you are available and when you are not. We all need boundaries. Set official work hours. Set virtual travel hours.
- Create schedules for clarity and stability – for yourself and others.
- Create a workspace for yourself.
- Take more breaks. Schedule breaks.



# News, Media, and Other Information Sources: Strategies for Yourself and Colleagues

- Monitor the **amount** and **type** of information you take in
- Be a critical consumer of information
- Set boundaries with yourself and others



# When to Seek Help for Yourself and Colleagues



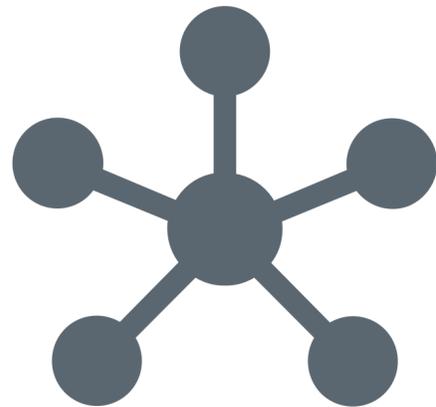
Friends, families, and colleagues can be a great source of support when you're feeling stressed or down.

A low mood or some anxiety is normal but intense, persistent, or prolonged feelings of hopelessness, despair, or anxiety are not.

Seek professional help if you feel your fear or hopelessness is significantly disrupting daily functioning.

# You are not alone, there are *helpers* everywhere...

Engage wraparound services to creatively support students and families in need.



Many mental health providers are offering remote sessions by phone or video if needed.



Community helpers (e.g., police officers, fire fighters, SROs, health care providers)



# How Districts Can Support Healthy Boundaries & Interactions

- Provide various connection channels to meet different needs
- Share communication norms for online meetings and interactions
- Revise and/or create policies and procedures as needed
- Provide two-way communication opportunities for educators, families, and students with district staff
- Encourage the use of set working hours and scheduled breaks
- Use district media channels to share positive stories and connect educators with students and families
- Create fact sheets about relevant district benefits and employee assistance programs

# Let's Reflect and Discuss!

Type into the chat box...

*Knowing limits and clearly communicating what you/colleagues need can be challenging during these times.*

What boundaries do you/colleagues need to be clear about and which ones can be flexible while we prepare for schools reopening?

How can you honor your boundaries while respecting the boundaries of colleagues?



# Contact Us



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## Join us in July for Part 2:

### *Strategies for Districts to Support Student Emotional Needs Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic and Plan for a Trauma-Informed Approach to School Reopening*

Things we'll consider:

- How can you incorporate healthy mindsets and behaviors into schools' daily routines for both educators and students when schools physically reopen?
- How can you continue to support healthy boundaries and interactions for both staff and students when schools reopen?
- What structures and supports may need to change to support those?

# Thank you!

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