

SuperEval Blog

School Leaders and the Importance of Self-Care (<https://supereval.com/blog/school-leaders-and-the-importance-of-self-care/>)

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[content/uploads/2020/10/AdobeStock_317566628-scaled.jpeg](https://supereval.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/AdobeStock_317566628-scaled.jpeg)) *In case of low oxygen pressure in the cabin, please secure your mask first before assisting others.*

We've all heard the above announcement by flight attendants every time we travel by plane. While we may inadvertently tune out this instruction — the underlying lesson is invaluable: You must take care of yourself first in order to be able to help others.

To say that these are unprecedented times is an understatement. To say that these are stressful times is a drastic oversimplification. No one could have predicted that 2020 would bring a global pandemic, the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives, and societal change that—while crucial—has led to periods of unrest in our communities. School faculty and staff that have predicted their education modalities on in-person engagement for years are now being challenged to learn new technologies to help students advance academically, socially, and personally through unfamiliar, remote technical interfaces. So yes, this year has been stressful. But in times of stress there are lessons and opportunities to grow. One lesson that we can learn is that we need to give ourselves the time, space, and grace to accept that these are challenging times and come to terms with the unexpected changes in our personal lives and our work environments.

As a school leader, your faculty, staff, students, and community are looking to you for reassurance, guidance, and stability. One way you can instill a sense of trust is by first prioritizing your mental health (<https://supereval.com/blog/make-mental-health-a-priority-for-staff-and-students/>) and emotional well-being to ensure that you can continue to be the best leader, mentor, and family member needed by all the people in your life.

Five Ways School Leaders Can Practice Self-Care

#1 – Take Time To Be With Your Loved Ones

Social distance does not mean being anti-social. Humans need social interaction. In fact, it's a critical component of our emotional well-being. A Harvard study recently said, "Dozens of studies have shown that people who have satisfying relationships with family, friends and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer" (Brody, 2017).

Even though you are invaluable to your school district, you are irreplaceable to your family and friends. Work certainly matters, and ensuring a consistent quality education for our young generations is vital. However, take time to be present for your family and friends.

Connect with your children, partner, neighbor, friend, or family member. Have a family game or movie night. Call an old friend. Schedule an outdoor or Zoom coffee hour. Having a conversation or a few laughs is sometimes just what the doctor ordered!

#2 – Talk to Your Fellow Leaders

Remember, you are not the only school leader facing these challenges. There are others in the same boat. Talk to other administrative leaders to determine how they are adjusting to the new needs for school safety and remote learning. Discuss best practices, share resources, and offer support. While every district's needs are unique, administrators can learn from one another how best to continue communicating with parents, engaging the community, and ensuring a safe and clean environment for students. Every school is experimenting with strategies to mitigate educational barriers and support students who have the unexpected challenge of continuing the normalcy of education during a global pandemic. Sharing learning and resources are crucial to success.

#3 – Take Care of Your Physical Health

Many Americans are electing to delay routine medical care out of an abundance of caution. Many people worry about overtaxing our healthcare system, while many others fear being in a healthcare facility in which fellow patients may have contracted the COVID-19 virus. While these concerns are understandable, you cannot overlook your health. Especially during a physically and emotionally challenging time, when you might be putting in extra hours of work, helping your own children learn remotely, or coordinating family responsibilities, you must still prioritize your physical wellbeing.

Do your best to get 30 minutes of exercise at least five days a week, even if it's simply taking a 30 min walk. Take part in stress reduction activities such as yoga, stretching, or meditation. Continue to eat a healthy balanced diet even if the once routine grocery shopping process has turned into a stressful uncertain situation. Consider food delivery services, meal prep kits, and healthy delivery options that can take some of the burden out of food preparation while still ensuring that you are maintaining a healthy, balanced, and nutritious diet that will keep you energized throughout the day.

#4 – Pay Attention to Signs of Stress

If you find that you cannot sleep at night, regularly have an upset stomach, chest pain, headaches, nausea, or other physical symptoms of stress and anxiety (<https://supereval.com/blog/five-ways-to-de-stress-at-home/>), talk to a healthcare professional. Emotional stress can create extreme physical reactions, and if left untreated, can escalate into a severe health scenario. If you are concerned about going to your doctors' office, inquire if telemedicine is an option. Many healthcare organizations are now allowing telemedicine services to treat patients for routine services and non-emergency care while maintaining safe social distance from the comfort of their homes. Your insurance plan might also cover such convenient services, so refer to your benefit plan or call your insurance carrier to confirm coverage.

#5 – Remember That It's Ok to Ask for Help

Perhaps you have lost somebody that you love due to COVID-19. Maybe you fear you will not meet expectations from parents and community members to ideate innovative solutions to remote or hybrid learning challenges. Perhaps you are understandably scared to get sick. You most certainly are feeling pressure to be the most accessible and capable version of yourself for the people in your life. Know that when you feel like you cannot continue to carry the responsibility of work and family on your own, it is wise to ask for help.

It is responsible to ask for help even as a leader and a seasoned veteran educator. If you need time to care for an impacted loved one, learn new procedures or technology, or even a mental health day, ask for what you need. None of us can adjust to the new normal alone. It will only be through shared collaboration and cooperation that we will overcome adversity. Ask for help and know that there is no shame in needing to take a breath to learn a new skill or reassigning a task to somebody with the skills better suited to complete the task.

The faculty and staff in your school district rely on your leadership, guidance, and consistency. To be the best resource and the best version of yourself possible, ensure that you are taking time for regular self-care. When we finally look back with the satisfaction of knowing that we beat COVID-19—and we will—you will want to also look back with pride knowing that the stress and uncertainty of a global pandemic never destroyed your hope or damaged your health.

Sources:

Brody, J. (2017, June 12). Social Interaction Is Critical for Mental and Physical Health. Retrieved October 12, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/12/well/live/having-friends-is-good-for-you.html>

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