



Practicing Self-Care and Professionalism

People who take care of others often put their own needs last. Does that sound familiar? Caring for yourself is important for your health and wellness, and it is directly related to your ability to care for others and succeed at work. Although you can't avoid all stress, too much stress can make it hard to provide care for others, especially infants and toddlers who depend on your physical and emotional availability. Taking care of yourself also protects you against the negative impact stress can have on your own physical and mental health. This [newsletter](#) from The Office of Head Start, The National Center on Health (2014) shares questions to help you think about the signs and symptoms of stress along with ideas for how to recognize stressors.

The Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation at Georgetown University has created [a series of free resources available online](#) to help you learn ways to care for yourself better, reduce stress, and avoid burnout. The following are some of the resources available on this site.

- ◆ *Taking Care of Ourselves: Stress and Relaxation*
 - A free downloadable booklet in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), to learn about how to recognize your sources of stress and how to reduce stress.
- ◆ Stress Reduction Workshop that includes the following:
 - PowerPoint presentation;
 - Stress log template;
 - “Talk Back to Your Unhelpful Thoughts” tip sheet; and
 - “Making Praise Sandwich” worksheet.
- ◆ Posters to combat stress—colorful posters in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) with effective ways to reduce stress are available to download and post in different areas of your program or home.
- ◆ [Bookmarks](#) that can be downloaded and printed onto heavy-stock paper with tips on deep breathing.
- ◆ [A series of recorded relaxation exercises in English and Spanish](#) designed for families and Early Head Start and Head Start staff to help reduce stress.

[Early Essentials, Webisode 6: Self-Care and Professionalism](#) (2018) is a brief webisode that offers tips about how to manage stress when working with young children and their families. This video is part of the *Early Essentials* series from the Office of Head Start's Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, which offers key messages and helpful resources to get staff started with the youngest children and their families. This video has a [Quick Start Guide](#) with teaching strategies and resources.

The Office of Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center [also offers the Encourage Healthy Eating Habits](#) web page. [This page provides tips to help children and adults eat well and stay healthy.](#)



Reflective Questions to Support Self Care

Increasing Health and Well-Being

- ◆ What is one thing I did in the past month to support my health?
- ◆ What is one thing I can do tomorrow to take a step toward better health? For example, you could call your doctor to schedule a long-overdue appointment, commit to making one healthy food choice, or take a brisk walk to get your heart pumping and boost your energy.
- ◆ Do my nutritional choices support my health and well-being? If not, what positive changes can I make?
- ◆ What do I need to be happier and healthier?
- ◆ What is one phone call I can make or website I can visit to move me forward on my journey toward a stronger sense of well-being?

Promoting Happiness and Reducing Stress

- ◆ Do I experience stress connected to my work? Are there other sources of stress?
- ◆ What tools or resources can I use to help me manage stress?
- ◆ In what areas of my life could I use some support?
- ◆ What resources are available in my community to help me meet these needs?
- ◆ What activities make me feel relaxed and happy?
- ◆ When can I schedule some “me” time, even just for a few moments, to do something that will help me be balanced and reduce my stress?

Getting Support from Mentors

- ◆ Whom do I know and respect that might serve as a strong mentor to me?
- ◆ How can this mentor help me in my work with infants and toddlers?
- ◆ When can I approach this person to schedule a time to talk about a possible mentoring relationship?

Developing Supportive Peer Relationships

- ◆ Which of my friends or colleagues has professional beliefs and philosophies that are like my own? How can I spend more time with this person?
- ◆ In what ways can I confide in, listen to, and develop a mutually supportive relationship with this person?
- ◆ How might this person’s positive outlook benefit my work with young children and their families?
- ◆ How might I positively influence this person’s work?

Be sure to recognize the importance of taking care of yourself. The time you invest in your health and happiness will never be wasted. Make yourself a priority. The work you do with infants, toddlers, and their families is priceless, and you deserve every bit of self-care.



The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with state and territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

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A Service of the Office of Child Care**

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