



Universal PreK (UPK) Café

August 14, 2020 – Issue 36

Dear Friends,

As early childhood educators, there are many changes that you are navigating right now due to the coronavirus. Schools and programs are continuing to adapt to new schedules and new ways of teaching while you are working to keep up with the needs of your students, your family, and your friends. It's understandable that you have been feeling overwhelmed and even frustrated.

The Agency of Education's Early Education team recognizes all the amazing work and support you have been providing to Vermont's children and want to be sure that each of you are finding time to practice self-care that is essential and beneficial to your well-being, especially during these times of uncertainty and transition. You may be looking for ideas on how to practice self-care or—how to find time to practice self-care. To help with this, we would like to share a few ideas that you can reference when you feel the need to take some time for yourself.

1. Set and maintain boundaries.

Dealing with changes to [routines and schedules](#) can be challenging. Working from home can blur the lines of when the workday starts and ends. Determine a schedule that considers a start and end time, your self-care practices, and breaks.

Students often use visual schedules and graphic organizers to organize information. Those same tools can help you process your thoughts and prioritize tasks. For example, when-then sentences can help set and maintain boundaries. You might write, "When it is 10 a.m., then I take a five-minute break." Post your when-then sentences near your work station as a visual reminder of your self-care commitments.

2. [Identifying Your Feelings](#)

It's important to recognize and name your emotions. When you're aware of a new feeling, take a moment to reflect:

- Name the feeling and why you may be feeling that way.
- Think about what you might need at that moment and in the future.

For example, you might say, "I'm feeling overwhelmed because there is a lot of new information about how my curriculum will change. I need a five-minute break. Then, I

need to write down my questions and identify a person on my team who I can problem-solve with.”

You also may want to schedule a time in your day to reflect on your emotions and needs. Journaling, art, music, and other creative outlets can help you process how you are feeling.

3. Recognize what is and isn't in your control.

With a rapidly changing world and the sudden shift in how you teach, it can seem like there are more questions than answers. This can cause worry and anxiety. One way to gain perspective is to recognize what is within your control and what isn't.

For example, you might be learning how to meet the needs of your students who learn and think differently during distance learning. Something in your control is the ability to review your students' 504 or special education accommodations and think about how to apply them. Something outside of your control is finding out when you'll be able to teach all your students in person again in the classroom.

Allow yourself to be vulnerable and be okay with saying that you don't know something. This is a time for you to learn as well.

4. Joy and Gratitude in Difficult Times

Look for moments of joy and connection and hold on to them. Try writing down humorous moments, something that made you smile, or something you're thankful for. You can write these moments in a journal or jot them down on a note to put on your desk at home. You can also share these moments with your students and ask them to share their own. Students and families are going through a lot right now (as are all of us teachers!), and these moments of joy and connection can mean so much amid the unknown and ever-changing world.

5. Use self-care routines throughout your day.

Starting and ending your day with self-care practices can be very helpful. You might start your day with a guided meditation and end your day with exercise. It is also important to look for small ways to take care of yourself throughout your day. Consider trying this [deep-breathing exercise](#) for teachers as a midday break. You can explore this [self-care infographic](#) for more ideas.

No matter which self-care practices you choose, remember to use them throughout the day. Stop to reflect on your feelings when you're upset. Pay attention to self-talk. Can you talk to yourself the way you would talk to a friend? Remind yourself what is in your control when you're anxious.

Resources

[Taking Care of Yourself](#) This infographic from the Barton Research Lab at Vanderbilt University provides tips on how to take care of yourself.

[Calm in the Chaos of COVID-19: Helping the Helpers](#)

This webinar from the Early Intervention Training Program (EITP) at the University of Illinois discusses the importance of self-care, especially during stressful times. Simple self-care strategies to manage our own stress levels are shared, along with a tool for honest self-reflection, so that we can be present for those who rely on us at home and at work.

[Managing Anxiety around Covid-19: Tips for You and Your School Community](#)

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence/RULER provides a webinar as well as a document of strategies and other resources to manage stress.

Vermont Resources

[Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#)

The Agency of Commerce and Community Development recognizes that many are facing social and financial challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The agency provides various resources that are available to assist individuals during this challenging time.

[COVID Support VT](#) offers self-help tips, resources, and a way to connect to existing mental health and community services.

[Vermont 2-1-1](#) provides connections to other mental health and substance use providers in the State of Vermont.

Again, thank you for all the work that you do and for your continued work supporting Vermont's young children and families.

If you have received this issue from a coworker and would like to be placed on the UPK Café listserv, please email Leslie at leslie.freedman@vermont.gov.

Be well and stay healthy!

The Early Education Team