



Universal PreK (UPK) Café: Special Series Issue #1 March 17, 2021

Dear Friends,

This issue of the UPK Café is the first in a series you'll receive through the end of this school year. The series focuses on recovery, reconnection, and resources to support school district recovery and implementation plans.

The pandemic has given rise to new logistical, technological, and social-emotional needs for educators, staff, children, and families, and you have continued to work to meet and exceed those challenges. It also has provided us with a unique opportunity to stop and reflect on past practice that may, in fact drive positive change.

The Early Education Team recognizes your dedication and the incredible work you have done thus far so that each and every child participates within a safe, healthy, supportive learning environment. Your well-being is related to children's social-emotional skill development as well as the quality of the teacher-student relationships formed, both of which carry important implications for each child's development. It can be easy to forget about your own emotional well-being. This can be particularly true during difficult times of increased stress as is likely the case this school year. So, this UPK Café is about putting yourself first so you can take care of others.

Your Emotional Well-being

Below you'll find a number of ideas to support your own emotional well-being. Give one or more a try this week!

- **Show Yourself Compassion:** Mental and physical health are often linked with eating healthy, exercising, and getting enough sleep all have been shown to relate to individual well-being. Try building more compassion towards yourself into your daily well-being efforts. Try to recognize self-defeating statements and replace them with more positive thoughts. Self-compassion is known to improve overall psychological and emotional well-being and mood.
- **Find time for you:** Find time to decompress during or after your busy workday. This can be as simple as taking a short walk to clear your head or speaking with a friend or partner about your day. If during the workday, try to find a couple minutes where you can allow yourself not to think about your work responsibilities. This can be challenging, but whether it's meditating or practicing mindfulness for a couple minutes, reading a chapter in a book, or

engaging with your family, this will help you recharge and approach the next day with energy.

- **Connect with others:** This will likely benefit both you and them, as these relationships have consistently been shown to impact well-being. If you feel you are struggling, reach out to a friend, a therapist, your director or another co-worker. Sometimes the simple act of just letting someone know that you need assistance or are having a challenging day can make you feel better.
- **Find purpose:** Remembering why you became an educator and what it is you are passionate about in early childhood, can help change a mindset from negative to positive. The role of an educator is extremely important so reminding yourself why you went into this field can be useful for helping you remain engaged and feel valued.
- **Creating a Healthy Work Culture:** Educator and staff well-being is connected closely to the climate of the program. Taking the time to connect with educators and finding opportunities to check-in, team build, and promote connections between educators is likely to go a long way. This idea applies to director simply letting an educator know that they are valued and appreciated can pay dividends in building a supportive environment and a positive program climate. These little steps of making yourself available and communicating with other educators have been shown to increase educators' satisfaction and engagement and reduce burnout and turnover.

Don't forget, you are a person whose mental and physical health matters, so take the time to take care of yourself. We value you! Each and every child and family values you!!!! Thank you!

Additional Resources:

[PreK Learning at Home: Supplemental Resources for Early Educators](#). Agency of Education. (5/27)

[RESTART & RECOVERY: Considerations for Teaching & Learning: Pre-K to 3rd Grade Recovery in School Year 2020-2021](#). Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). An updated complementary resource for SEAs that are helping local districts to enhance the transition to reopening for young learners.

[5 Strategies for Teacher Self-Care](#). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. This guide offers self-care ideas from the field to help teachers.

[Tips for Supporting Yourself During the Pandemic](#). National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. This 2-page guide offers easy-to-follow tips for self-care. [Spanish](#)

[Brief Guided Meditations for Mindfulness](#). (Vermont Agency of Human Services AHS YouTube channel, Sampler of Guided Mindfulness Meditations, from 3 minutes to 25 minute samples. (all ages)

If you have a resource you'd like to share on **UPK Café** or have been forwarded this issue and would like to be added to our mailing list, please contact Leslie at leslie.freedman@vermont.gov.

Thank you!