

# Staff Self-Care September 2019

Promoting the wellbeing and mental health of all staff in Australian Schools

We all know that a focus on self-care and wellbeing has untold benefits for the success of a school community.

We know that the health, wellbeing, and safety of Australian school staff underpins their performance, capability, satisfaction, and engagement.

headspace acknowledges that school staff have rewarding roles and also acknowledges the complexity and challenges that may impact health, wellbeing, and safety.

In 2019, headspace is promoting a number of 'Self-Care September' strategies and approaches for Australian school staff. These activities are aimed at strengthening wellbeing, resilience, engagement, connection, help seeking, and early access to support.

A school community, especially its staff, can create a culture of self-care by making it an explicit focus. Whilst individuals may differ in what strategies work for them, support for self-care from a school's leaders can strengthen this culture. This might mean prioritising time, resources, and a small budget towards staff self-care. The benefits of self-care are invaluable and some of the best ideas can be free.

The following tips may seem simple, but can make a big difference to the overall health and wellbeing of school staff. With practice and integration of these small strategies into every day routine, self-care can become part of an individual's life and a school's culture. Benefits can include feeling calmer, clearer, more energised and focused, and this may increase contribution, performance and productivity.

Here are some suggestions:

<b>Clock off time</b>	In Australia we find it difficult to find the right work/life balance. Many of us struggle to fit our workload into the day. We arrive early, leave late, skip lunch, and work on the weekends. September is offering you the chance to clock off on time. Make the decision as a team to leave on time on the same day every week for the month of September. No one has a chance to feel guilty because we have all committed to it, even the Principal.
<b>Mindfulness meeting</b>	Mindfulness has enjoyed a surge of popularity in recent years in schools - and with good reason: research and evidence into its benefits are clear. As a team commit to starting every staff meeting with a quick mindfulness session; only 3-7 minutes can do the trick. Simply download an app such as Smiling Minds, Calm, or Headspace and enjoy a few minutes of stillness before the meeting commences. For some of us, it may be the first time that week that we have sat still, and it really is a gift.
<b>Silent sensory walks</b>	This is a great activity to do as a team and is a good meeting replacement. We often get so busy that we disconnect with our physical environment and stop recognising the different aspects of our working space. Commit to a 15-20 minute sensory walk around your school. Take in the sights, smells, and touch of the things that make up your school environment, use all of your senses. You may notice things you've been missing, or get ideas on ways to enhance your school environment. Come together at the end to discuss everyone's experiences and ideas. For added sensory experience, where the environment allows, take your shoes off and do the walk barefoot. Evidence shows that the nerve endings in our feet can create elevated and positive brain activity.
<b>Mindfulness minutes for everyone</b>	In addition to practicing some mindfulness in your staff meetings, lots of schools are embracing a quick 3-5 minutes of mindfulness every morning to get the learning day started. Let the class come in, get settled, and for 3-5 minutes encourage both the students and teachers to come into the day with a calm and relaxed beginning. It takes practice, but it becomes easier and you will notice the difference that a few quiet minutes can make to the beginning of the day.
<b>Buy a book</b>	One of the things we often hear from educators is that they would love to find time for more reading. This September, commit some money to buying the same book for each staff member to read throughout September and make it the talking point of a few of your meetings. It's a great way to learn collaboratively. Our recommendation this September is Brene Brown's "Dare to Lead". She also has some excellent new resources on her website especially for teachers and educators, called "Daring Classrooms". Check them out!
<b>The daily steps reminder</b>	Exercise is a wonderful way to promote good health and wellbeing. A lot of us find it hard to fit regular exercise into our busy schedules. This September everyone can get a pedometer or another way to help count your steps. Set a staff target, such as 7000 steps per day and get moving as a team.
<b>Celebration &amp; gratitude meeting</b>	Choose a time during September that you are going to sit together as a group and engage in positive reflections on what has been achieved by teams and individuals through the first 3 terms. We get so busy and bogged down we often forget to sit and take pride in the immense effort and contributions people make.
<b>Art therapy sessions</b>	There is something relaxing and calming about painting, drawing, and colouring in. For a simple session as a team, photocopy some mindfulness colouring pages and have them on the staff room table with coloured pens and pencils through September. Encourage people to come together during break times and sit and create together. You may also like to find a local artist or arty parent to come and run an arts therapy session with the team.
<b>The daily water reminder</b>	Hydration for humans is really important and it's often something we forget to do during the day. Through September place reminders all over the school as team reminders about good hydration and water intake. This may also be a great way to focus on healthy eating habits during September.

<b>Check-in sessions</b>	<p>One of the most important things we can do for staff self-care is give individuals and teams the chance to stop, reflect, and talk about their experiences. Each school community will have local counsellors or practitioners who you can hire for a day or two so everyone has access to an individual check in session. It's a great way to get a sense of how individuals are travelling and to explore your experience this year. It's also a really critical behaviour to role model and develop. Help seeking is something we all need to feel more comfortable in doing. Showing vulnerability, the capacity to develop emotional tools, and the ability to talk openly with someone independent of the school is one of the best investments school leaders can make this September.</p>
<b>No email days</b>	<p>You probably think this is impossible, it's not! Some international companies are embracing "no email" days and it's allowing them time to focus on something they have been wanting to give attention to such as thinking about a project; meeting with teams; and doing some professional reading. All it requires is a full commitment from everyone at school, and a great out of office message for everyone, such as – "Thank you for your email, today is a self-care day at our school and we will respond tomorrow". If necessary, delegate one or two people to respond to emails that can't wait.</p>
<b>A stretch class</b>	<p>During September ask a parent or professional from the community to come in and run a stretch class. Nothing over the top, just some gentle stretching of some of our major muscle groups and limbs.</p>
<b>Self-care lunches and morning teas</b>	<p>Enjoying food together is a great way to connect and chat with others in the team. You can either ask people to bring a plate or pay for some local catering. It's a good way to show gratitude with food. Do a couple of these throughout September and maybe come up with some themes for the dishes. Maybe arrange for additional supervision support so no one misses out because they are on duty.</p>
<b>15 minute favours</b>	<p>This is a rewarding activity to do as a collective team. You create a space in the staff room where there is going to be a "15 minute favour" noticeboard. Each staff member writes down a small task, job, or something they have been avoiding doing or don't have the skills to do. Each staff member chooses something on the notice board that they have skills in doing and the 15 minute favour is offered. It might be: do duty for someone, help someone clean out a cupboard, help mount some art, help tidy a shed, help type up some documents, help move some furniture, or help run a class.</p>
<b>Resilience and self-care sessions</b>	<p>There are some great local speakers and mental health organisations that love coming to run sessions with school staff. Find someone in your area that can be a guest speaker and run a resilience or self-care session. It's a great collaborative team exercise in professional development and might provide some great mental health literacy and practical tips for self-care.</p>
<b>Group or team reflection practice</b>	<p>Just like the individual check in and chat sessions, it can also be incredibly helpful to enable teams within the school to sit and engage in a guided reflection session. This can be facilitated by a professional counsellor or reflective practice specialist. It's a great team check-in and grounding experience, and can recharge your batteries and connect you for the rest of the year.</p>