

Teachit's wellbeing collection

Teachers' wellbeing guide

teachit

Foreword—Teachit's wellbeing collection

Research by the Teacher Wellbeing Index, Education Support (2021) reports that teachers have consistently lower wellbeing and higher rates of workplace stress, depression and anxiety than the general population, meaning that, sadly, more and more teachers are leaving the profession.

With this in mind, we've created a wellbeing collection to support three key areas: self-care practices, time management and mindfulness. The writers of our wellbeing guides are experienced teachers who have worked long and hard to balance their professional and home lives. They have also, with much trial and error, learned how to prioritise their wellbeing while doing a very challenging job at a very challenging time.

Self-care, like all habits and routines, has to work for your life and routine and around you. And it takes a bit of time to get into an effective rhythm. We hope our guides and journal give you some tips and ideas to try as you set out on — or continue with — your wellbeing journey.

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Introduction

The benefits of wellbeing and self-care practice are well-documented. And it makes complete sense. After all, how can you care for others without caring for yourself first? But as a busy teacher with a never-ending to-do list, it can feel impossible to find time for self-care.

As a result of this neglect, our bodies and our minds suffer. We don't have time to include exercise in our daily routines, so we start worrying about our health or feeling bad about how we look. We're so busy that we grab junk food or unhealthy snacks instead of planning healthy meals. We even neglect seeing the doctor because we just don't have time.

If you're constantly feeling tired and overwhelmed, it's time to start making some changes. Practising self-care for just a few hours a week can have a big impact on your physical and emotional wellbeing.

In this guide, you'll learn why self-care practice is so important, how to set goals for the changes you want to make and how to build self-care into your daily life and achieve a sense of wellbeing.

Self-care is not selfish



Practise mindfulness



Plan a healthy diet



Take time for yourself



Be social



Get enough sleep



Exercise regularly



Take breaks during work hours



Enjoy nature

Defining self-care

What is self-care?

The World Health Organisation defines self-care as 'the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider'.

For the purpose of this guide, we are going to focus on the things you can do to take care of yourself and improve your physical, mental and emotional health.

There isn't a right or wrong way to include self-care in your life. Your self-care routine may look completely different from another teacher's self-care routine. As you go through this guide, you'll discover the best ways for you to add self-care to your daily life.

Self-care comes in many forms. You might choose to exercise more or eat better. You might want to read, relax in a bubble bath or listen to music. Your self-care routine should consist of things that you enjoy and that make you feel better when you do them.

Why is self-care important?

Self-care may just seem like one more thing to do in your already busy day. However, the benefits of self-care will help you manage the stress factors in your daily life. Self-care promotes positive health outcomes, like living a longer life and developing better ways to deal with stress.

Self-care is especially important for teachers. Teaching-related stress leads to burnout and the high turnover rate in education. Self-care is important because it can help us become better parents and teachers. When we take time for ourselves, we have more energy to put into all aspects of our lives.

What does research say?

Researcher and teacher Alyssa Westring has been studying self-care for nearly two decades. She has found that people fall into a never-ending cycle of fulfilling their responsibilities to other people in their lives. They end the day exhausted and without any energy to focus on themselves.

Westring says that research shows that 'nurturing our brains, bodies, and spirits can help us be more effective at whatever we put our minds to'. That's why self-care is so important. If we don't take care of ourselves, we can't be our best for the other people in our lives.

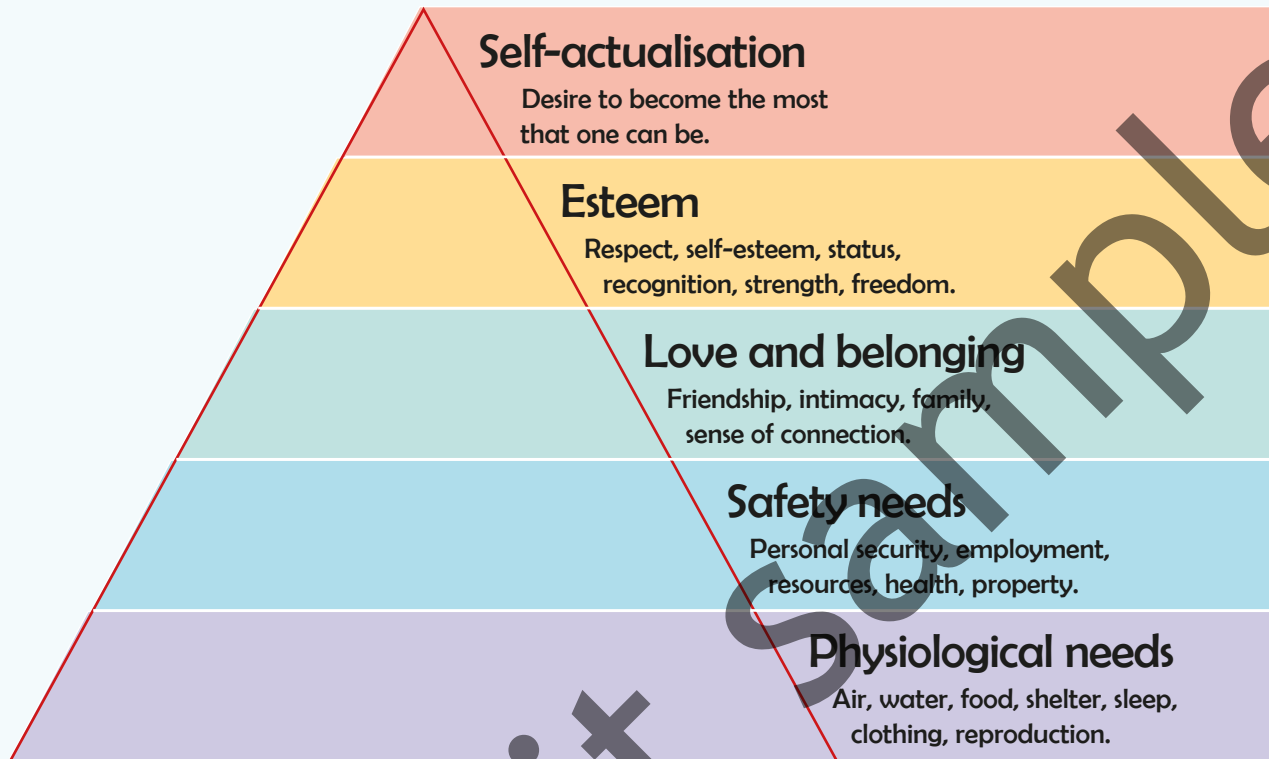
Westring and organisational psychologist Stew Friedman found that most people operate with a 'trade-off mentality'. That means that they regard self-care as just one more thing to do, believing they'll have to stop doing something else in order to build self-care into their lives. For example, they believe they can't exercise because they have to do some marking or take their child to football training.

Instead of thinking about self-care as an entirely separate entity, think about how it can be incorporated into activities you are already doing, for example walking laps around the football pitch while your child's team is training. That way, you're fulfilling your responsibilities as a parent and getting exercise at the same time.

Westring suggests finding the types of self-care that work best for you, starting with small, doable changes, and finding ways to integrate self-care into the different parts of your life. In this guide, you'll focus on all three of these steps so self-care becomes a necessary part of your daily life, rather than one more thing you have to do.

What do experts say?

According to American psychologist Abraham Maslow, your basic needs have to be met before you can focus on social and emotional needs. He created the Hierarchy of Needs to show the five levels of needs that every person requires and how they build on each other.



The lower levels of the pyramid have to be fulfilled before you can even start to think about being a better teacher. That's where self-care comes into play.

- By making sure you're getting enough water, healthy foods, and sleep, you fulfill the 'Physiological needs' at the bottom of the pyramid.
- Taking care of your health and having a job helps with the 'Safety needs' section.
- Spending time with friends and family is required for the 'Love and belonging' part of the pyramid.
- Taking time for yourself and building self-esteem, strength, and respect for yourself are all necessary for the 'Esteem' level of the pyramid.

You can't reach higher levels of the pyramid until your basic needs are met. So, while you're worrying about being the best teacher or the best parent, you're probably neglecting a lot of the lower-level needs that are required to help you meet your goals.

By starting at the bottom of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and working your way up, you'll start to see your motivation increase. You'll be able to spend more time on your social needs to help you build stronger relationships with your family and your students. You'll also be able to work towards self-actualisation, when you can become the best you can be.

What do teachers say about the importance of self-care?

Anyone who says teaching isn't a stressful job obviously hasn't talked to anyone in the profession recently. The high turnover rate in education, the number of teachers on antidepressants and anxiety medications and the number of teachers who are experiencing burnout are just a few signs that things need to start changing in the teaching world. The need for self-care becomes very evident when talking to other teachers at school or scrolling through teacher Facebook groups. It seems as though everyone is feeling overwhelmed and that there is no way to escape all the stresses of the teaching profession.

These are just a few quotes from teachers that show the overwhelming stress that comes with the job and the effects it can have on our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

While we don't have control over government mandates, curriculum requirements or student behaviours, there are things we can do to improve our lives. Self-care is a good starting point.

Where's the best place to start?

The journey to wellbeing starts with small steps. Trying to change every aspect of your life at once just isn't realistic. In this guide, you'll learn how to find the best self-care practices for you. You'll set attainable goals and build healthy habits to help you meet those goals.

If you're ready to start your self-care journey, you're already in the right place. This guide will show you how to build self-care practices into your daily routine. Just turn the page and get ready to improve your physical, mental, and emotional health. Start by completing the Physical self-care assessment.

' Let's talk about how many of us are feeling **overwhelmed**, **depressed**, and **drained** going into summer after this past school year. '

' I rarely take time off during the school year. **I feel super guilty** about it and stress the entire time if I need to be gone. '

' Any others who get **terrible knots** in their neck, shoulder, and back? I'm constantly on my computer inputting late work and doing end of the year tasks. **Too much stress!** '

' I **left teaching** last year because the stress was horrible and I just **wasn't enjoying life** anymore. '

' Doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, therapists, and counsellors need to find ways to help those in education cope with the overwhelming amount of stress and strain, both physically and mentally. With the overwhelming number of increasing demands, requirements for curriculum, and the behaviours that both students and parents are displaying, we are all suffering in every aspect of our lives. '

Physical self-care assessment

Directions: Write a number on each line to show how often you are currently meeting each self-care need.

1	I rarely or never do this.
2	I sometimes do this.
3	I always do this.
4	This is something I want to do more frequently.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I exercise for at least 30 minutes each day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I take care of myself while teaching (using good posture, not straining my eyes or voice, using relaxation techniques).
<input type="checkbox"/>	I eat healthy meals with four or five servings of fruit and vegetables each day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I drink eight glasses of water each day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I participate in activities I enjoy at least once a week (exercise, craft or other hobbies).
<input type="checkbox"/>	I spend at least 30 minutes relaxing each day (meditating, reading, taking a bath, etc.).
<input type="checkbox"/>	I get regular health checks, including doctor visits and dental appointments.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I get at least seven hours of sleep each night.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I take time to reflect on my day and to show gratitude.

Goal-setting tips

Look back at your Physical self-care assessment. You might notice that you have chosen the number 4 for some of the self-care statements. That shows that there are things you want to do to take care of yourself, but you're not currently making them a priority.

That's where goal setting comes into play. Setting goals will help you focus on those areas you want to improve. Here are some tips for setting and sticking with your goals.

1 Choose one goal at a time.

Look back at your Physical self-care assessment and choose the one self-care practice you think will be the most valuable. Make that your first goal. When you try to do too many things at once, you're more likely to feel overwhelmed and give up on them all. Once your first goal is met and the activity becomes a habit, you're ready to choose a new goal.

2 Start small.

If you want to increase your vegetable intake each day, start by assessing how many servings you're eating now. If you're only eating one serving of vegetables a day, it's going to be hard to jump straight to five servings. Start by adding one more for a few days and gradually work your way up to five.

3 Make the self-care activity part of your daily routine.

Ultimately, you want these activities to become habits: things you do every day without even thinking about them. The best way to do this is to build them into your daily routine. For example, make sure you pack a serving of vegetables with your lunch every day.










4 Use a goal-tracking sheet to monitor your progress.

It's easy to forget to keep track of your progress in a busy day or week. That's why it's important to use a goal-tracking sheet. Keep it close by so you can easily note when you've made progress. You'll find goal-tracking sheets and tips to help you achieve your self-care goals in the next section of this guide.

Choosing your first goal

If you have several things you want to improve, start by choosing the one that you think will have the biggest impact on your wellbeing. When you see the positive impact it's having, you'll be more motivated to keep working on your self-care goals.

Choose your first goal from the list below and turn to the relevant page in the guide for tips and goal-tracking sheets to help you achieve it.

GOAL	GO TO PAGE
 Exercise more 12	12
 Improve self-care in the classroom 18	18
 Increase relaxation time 23	23
 Eat more healthy foods 25	25
 Drink more water 29	29
 Have more fun 40	40
 Get regular health checks 43	43
 Sleep more 47	47
 Spend more time reflecting and being grateful 51	51