



Avoiding Burn-Out

How do we feel better?

Some ways include:

- Practicing self-care
- Being aware of and sharing our own experiences
- Accepting help from others (saying YES!)
- Focusing on the positive & practicing gratitude
- Having a sense of belonging and significance
- Reducing our stress response
- Increasing our relaxation response.

People DO better

when they

FEEL better.

Self-Care/The Role of Stress.

Negative stress can be defined as the fear you don't have the resources to successfully meet your challenges. Stress is not caused by the events, but by our perception, accurate or not, of not having enough resources such as time, money, rest, emotional support to handle the challenge.

Know Your Internal Resources.

- (1) Personality/temperament traits such as persistence, courage, resilience, intelligence, kindness, playfulness, sense of humor etc.
- (2) Skills you possess (well-organized, detail-focused, adaptable, flexible, creative, good at emotional regulation, experience with tools for stress reduction)
- (3) Wisdom you have gathered over the years (knowledge of what works and when)
As people age, they develop more internal resources as they learn from their life experiences.

Expand your resources.

- 1) **Figure out what your own needs are so you can find out how to get help to get them met.**
Do you have needs with concrete areas such as driving, cooking, childcare? Motivation and support to start/maintain exercise, healthy eating, self-care habits? Feeling valued and acknowledged in your different roles by getting emotional support and recognition? Other?
- 2) **No one person can meet all your needs.** Partners, friends, family, community members, paid support are all potential resources.
- 3) **Ask for what you need.** Women (and some men!) often have issues asking for help. Remember that asking for help is giving your friends/family/coworkers the gift of being needed. There are times in everyone's life when they need help, and times when they are able to offer help.
- 4) **Grow your internal resources.** What could you do to increase your internal resources? How can you be okay with asking for help?

Exercise: Write down 2-3 long-term needs you have, and 2-3 short-term needs. What is a first step you could take to accessing/finding resources to meet these needs?

Stress Management Tools

The art of saying “no.” You can reduce stress by reducing how much you are responsible for. Consider cutting back on unrewarding activities.

Exercise: List your goals for the year. What are you hoping to make happen this year—for yourself, your children, your family? Try stating your goal in the positive: *“My goal is for our family to become closer and spend more relaxed times together.”* *“My goal is for everyone to get good sleep.”* *“My goal is to feel like I have enough time to do what is important.”* *“My goal is to spend time taking care of my health.”*

Then check in with these goals before saying yes to a new commitment.

Ask yourself if this new commitment brings you closer to your goals. If not, find a way to say “no.”

Saying “NO” Options:

Pretend someone asks you to help out with volunteer event at school/church and try out these ideas.

- 1) Just say **“no.”** No explanation, no detailed apologies. Just say no. And move on.
- 2) **“No, sorry, I’m not able to help out right now.”** Similar to saying “no” but a bit gentler.
- 3) **“No, because.....we’ve all been sick, I have too much going on, my family needs me to focus on them right now, etc.”** Warning: Sometimes others will try to deal with your reasons by saying—“it’s really flexible! You can fit it in around stuff!”
- 4) **“No, but how about.....?”** (This is sort of like telling your kid “yes” to a cookie....after lunch.) Offer a time when you could be available. Like next year. Or say “No, but how about if I come early and help set up with my kids?” This only works though if you truly do want to help.
- 5) **“I don’t have my calendar with me. Email me and I’ll let you know.”** (Harder to get away with in today’s world of connectivity.) This works well in that it puts space between the request and your answer, giving you time to carefully consider the commitment. Many people also find it easier to say no via email.
- 6) **“I need to check with my partner/kids/boss.”** When you involve someone else, it shifts the responsibility from being all on you to others. This allows you the opportunity to discuss with others whether or not you can make this commitment.
- 7) **“No. I’m sorry. I limit my volunteering to my children’s school.”** This makes the rejection less personal and direct as it applies to everyone. Of course you need to stick to this policy if you use it!

Think about the difference between restorative, regulating and ‘relaxing’ activities!

- **Restorative**= brings more energy to you (may also be relaxing), you go below your baseline
- **Regulating**= helps you handle challenges, brings you back to baseline when you are above it such as full of intense emotion or below such as when you are low energy.
- **Relaxing** = provides entertainment, pleasure, a “break” but may take energy.

Identify (and use) stress reduction tools that are restorative and regulating.

Try moving away from “big” practices such as yoga, meditation, hiking, exercise, journaling, massages, pedicures, vacations to small practices that are easy to incorporate into the day. Small gestures of self-care and self-repair throughout the day and week have a cumulative effect much larger than any one big practice. The brain responds to brief, repetitive experiences to create and strengthen new neural pathways. Plus they are much easier to fit in! Research showed that five minutes of mindfulness daily was better than 20 minutes meditation on weekend.

Create a “micro-practices” toolkit for yourself.

Identify one or two tools and try using them daily for 2-3 weeks. See if you notice any difference in your stress level after the first week. If not, try increasing the frequency, or using a different tool.

*Please be aware of the limits of your own body. If something does not feel comfortable or hurts, don't do it! The goal is to find something that works for YOU, which may be different than what works for a friend, partner or child.

** Note that many of these tools can be adapted and used with kids! Or partners..... or other parents at your school....

(1) Active Tension Reducer:

Inhale as you progressively tense major muscle groups for 5 seconds, exhale and then relax, breathe in/out for 10 seconds. As you relax, add cue word or phrase “relax” “it's okay” “it will all get done” “I am doing what I can.” “I have enough time.”

Repeat cycle of tense/release twice before moving onto next muscle group. Start with lower limbs/feet, move up to chest/abdomen, then shoulders/arms, end with neck/face.

(2) Wring it Out.

Sit upright in chair. Slowly and gently twist body to the right from your hips to your head. Turn around as far to the right as you can. (If there is a handle on the chair, feel free to grab onto it to help you turn further.) Hold for 10 seconds or longer, allowing your muscles to stretch/relax. Deep inhale and let go as you return to center. Repeat on other side. Visualize squeezing out stress/strong emotions present in your body right now. Close by shaking out arms in front of you to release.

(3) Finding Your Place.

Choose a small object to hold in your hand. As you start/end your day, at work, at school, at home, close your eyes, hold the object and say “I'm part of a large community of people who care about children around the globe.” Imagine all the other parents and educators who are starting off their days to care for children, in many countries and different places. Know that you are part of this web of people who care for and nurture young children.

(4) Car Door Moment.

As you put your hand on the car door to head off to school, or a meeting, think to yourself: *“I do this work because _____.”* Get in touch with your motivation before you move into the next task or role . Something is inspiring you to do this work. Remember your purpose and place it front/center in your mind.

(5) Getting Away.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a favorite place, happy and peaceful. This can be a real place, or one you create in your mind. Call to mind as many aspects of this place as you can. What can you see? What does it smell like? When you listen, what sounds can you hear? What does the air feel like? What else do you notice? Let yourself enjoy this image for 1-2 minutes. Tuck this image deep inside yourself that you can use to center and calm yourself as you need throughout the day. To help with the transition of leaving this place, draw your attention back to your body and begin to notice the sensations it is offering. What is below your feet? Wiggle your toes and fingers. How does your neck/back feel? Notice the image is getting smaller, but not leaving.

(6) 4-7-8 Breathing.

Inhale for a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7, then exhale your breath as if blowing out through a straw for a count of 8. Repeat 3 x. OR change the count so it works for you! (4:4:4)

7) Cross-Crawl. (Energy booster)

March in place, knees high, arms swinging, crossing right elbow to left knee, left elbow to right knee. As you march, say to yourself: *“I am awake and ready!”* Do for 40-60x. (About a minute).

8) Deep breathing. Pull bellybutton towards spine. Imagine string pulling you up from the top of your head. Inhale a deep breath, focusing on drawing your breath up from your belly. Slowly exhale. Repeat.

Note: Some of these exercises are drawn from an article by Ashley Davis Bush *“Using Micro-Practices for Self-Care” Psychotherapy Networker, May/June 2015*