

Self-care summer advice for education staff

Self-care may not be the easiest thing for education staff to practise. Schools and colleges can be challenging environments to work in at times, and during term time, your focus will be on your pupils and your to-do list.

That's why the summer break can be the best time to develop good self-care habits, so that when term starts again, you may have techniques you can turn to in stressful times.

Self-care has become a buzzword in recent years – but self-care doesn't just mean things like exercise and mindfulness, although those things may certainly help some people. It can also mean prioritising your own wellbeing, setting clear boundaries and saying no.

Children's mental health charity Anna Freud and education staff mental health charity Education Support have teamed up to share advice on how you can practise self-care this summer.

Prioritise rest

The pace and demands of working in a school or college can make it difficult to prioritise relaxation – but allowing yourself time to rest is important for both physical and mental health. 'Allowing' is the operative word here – it is very easy to feel guilty for relaxing, especially when you have so many other things that need to be done. But when you rest, you're not only reducing stress; you're also giving yourself the opportunity to be more engaged in things that do require your attention.

Think of the end of the academic year like the end of a race. After completing a marathon, runners will take time to let themselves recover and rest. By doing so, they are ensuring that they will be replenished and ready for the next race – and runners know that rest is just as important as active training.

1 Replenish yourself

This will vary for different people. You might recharge your batteries by spending time alone reading or walking in nature. Or you might find that seeing friends and family re-energises you. Pick a mix of things that make you feel relaxed and recharged.

2 Make a wellbeing action plan

Plan what you are going to do to look after your wellbeing during the summer, and try your hardest to stick to it. It may help to write down some of the things that help you to refer back to.

3 Do things that make you feel like 'you'

Education staff are incredibly passionate about what they do, but it's important to remember that this isn't your whole identity. It might be a hobby, seeing or chatting with friends and family, or making a meal. Remember that you are a person beyond your job. Engaging in our passions and making time for loved ones can energise us and help prevent burnout.



Reviewing boundaries

Working in a school or college means that you're caring and conscientious, and you want to help and support those around you. But without boundaries, your caring nature can easily lead to feeling overwhelmed and overworked. The average teacher, for example, is physically present at school or college for around eight to nine hours daily and can then spend several more hours at home planning and marking. Without clear boundaries and the ability to say no, this can easily become unsustainable. If you've felt your boundaries slipping during the term time, the summer holidays can provide a good opportunity to re-establish your personal limits and firm up boundaries.

Saying 'no' can be a vital act of self-care. It can help make space for the things that are important to you – but it's not always easy. Try these three simple tips:

1 Set time during the holidays when you will work and when you won't

For some education staff, doing absolutely no work in the summer may not be practical and may cause you more stress. You may need to support your students when exam results come out in August, for example. It's different for everyone. Some educators work the first week tying up loose ends or the last week to prepare for the start of term. If you're someone who prefers to do some work during the summer, think carefully about when would be the best time for you. Remember though - the priority is to carve out time when you can completely switch off from the job.

2 Use automated responses

Send automated responses to parents and colleagues when you're not available or to remind them of your office hours. You can still make it clear that you will be available during an emergency. This can build trust and connection, while also establishing clear boundaries (did you know you can send automated messages from email and WhatsApp?).

3 Remove email apps from your phone

This is one of the best ways to ensure that you have some downtime and that you don't feel the excessive pressure to respond to every message immediately.



Build healthy habits for the academic year

It's very common to start a new academic year with many aspirational habits that you are determined to keep to, only to find that you've lost track a few weeks in. This is completely normal and nothing to feel guilty about.

By establishing healthy habits throughout the summer holidays, they're more likely to become embedded patterns of behaviour that you find easier to stick to once term begins. You don't need to be too ambitious – even the smallest things can make a significant difference to your overall wellbeing. Try these three simple things:

1 What are your wellbeing non-negotiables?

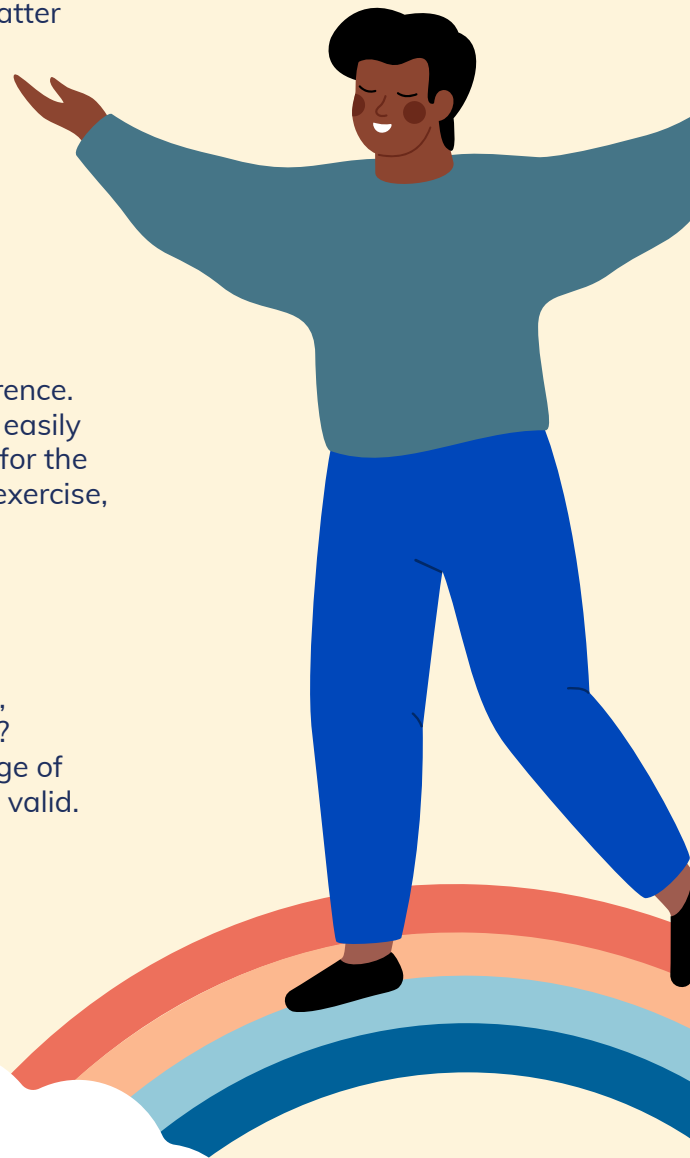
Consider what wellbeing actions you will do no matter what, and make a note of them. These actions should keep you balanced and help you feel good. It could be regular exercise, time to enjoy a hobby or a simple routine that helps you organise your time. Share these with your colleagues, friends and family so it becomes widely understood that you keep this routine.

2 Start your day well

Starting your day on the right note can make a big difference. Use this summer to try and find something that you can easily do each morning that helps you get in the right mindset for the rest of your day. For example, this could be a breathing exercise, some simple stretches or a guided meditation.

3 Do a weekly wellbeing check-in

Are you looking after your wellbeing in terms of exercise, nutrition, sleep? How are your thoughts making you feel? Recognise emotions and accept that experiencing a range of emotions is O.K. – we're all human and our emotions are valid.



Get support when you need it

Self-care can be a useful tool, but sometimes difficult emotions can become overwhelming. If you need to talk, don't suffer alone. Speak to friends, family or call Education Support's free, confidential helpline, staffed by qualified counsellors and available 24/7 on 08000 562 561.