

The importance of self-care and wellbeing

For those working in school communities impacted by a disaster

OVERVIEW

Working in a community impacted by a disaster is challenging, yet it also has the potential to be immensely rewarding. Community recovery occurs over the years following a disaster. Many people, particularly in rural areas, work and live in an affected area. For these reasons, exposure to traumatic and distressing information will likely be frequent. To reduce the likelihood of adverse health effects and to promote wellbeing, identifying and putting in place strategies to manage one's health throughout recovery is vital.

Wellbeing is a state of being connected to a person's emotional, physical and social health. People with higher levels of wellbeing generally also have higher happiness and life satisfaction levels.

Self-care refers to the strategies, practices, habits, and routines that assist in creating and maintaining a state of wellbeing. Key strategies that promote wellbeing must be remembered and maintained in a post-disaster context. They are represented by the acronym RAC:

- **R - Rhythms and routines:** these should be restored as soon as possible after a disaster to help maintain work-life balance and ensure adequate relaxation.
- **A - Active management:** of the pillars of wellbeing, including sleep, exercise, diet, recreation, as well as leisure and pleasure.
- **C - Community and social supports:** being connected to the community and taking the time to preserve and maintain relationships is crucial to remaining socially supported.

This information handout provides self-care tips and suggestions for those working in a school community impacted by disasters. It is suggested that you create your own plan for self-care.

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Individual self-care

- **Physical self-care:** for example, regular physical exercise; healthy eating. Avoiding excessive amounts of stimulants such as coffee, tea and energy drinks; getting massages; good sleep hygiene. Taking regular rest breaks and holidays.
- **Psychological self-care:** for example, meditative and mindfulness techniques. Read literature unrelated to work. Decrease stress in your life. Write in a journal. Notice your inner experiences (listening to thoughts and emotions). Undertake new activities to stimulate creativity and thought.
- **Emotional self-care:** for example, engage in positive activities; spend time with family and friends; stay in contact with important people in your life; do things that make you laugh; say positive affirmations to yourself.
- **Spiritual self-care:** for example, spend time with nature; pray; meditate; sing; read inspirational literature; identify what is meaningful in your life and notice its place in your life; try at times not to be in charge or to be the expert.

- **Balance:** for example, strive for balance within your work-life and workday; strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play and rest.

Self-reflection

- Decide how you will set aside time for self-reflection.
- After an activation, take time to self-reflect and consider any reactions you might have. This involves 'digesting' experiences to gain a healthy perspective.

Professional development

- Be confident in knowing that your leadership team are key in supporting you in your workplace.
- If you are experiencing difficulties or have questions, do not hesitate to talk to your leadership team. They can help you to build on skills and knowledge by providing advice and feedback.
- Consider what you can learn in this unique situation and suggest professional development or training themes to achieve learning.

Workplace management

- Ensure that you are familiar with workplace protocols and systems. This may relate to general work duties and activations after emergency events.
- Familiarity with such protocols and systems will help to lower your own anxiety/arousal and give you an increased sense of confidence.

Supporting colleagues

Knowing how to support colleagues is important, and recognising typical stress reactions is an important first step. Common reactions include being upset and emotional, irritability/anger, physical agitation, forgetfulness and becoming confused.

- Be aware that for most people, such reactions settle pretty quickly.
- Give them some space to digest their experiences. However, also make use of informal time such as tea breaks/lunchtime where people can support one another through general conversation.
- Avoid judging or giving an opinion.
- Try to 'depersonalise' difficult interactions and recognise that it is created by the situation everyone is in.
- Avoid advising people what they should be thinking or feeling.
- Provide support in practical ways.
- Remind them of their own self-care plan.