

SEL for Educators: 10 Activities to De-Stress

Educators, we know you have a lot on your plates right now. Online and distance learning, canceled school events, and disruptions to your personal lives are just a few of the big challenges you are facing.

Now, more than ever, we need to find ways to effectively manage our stress. If it gets out of control, stress can lead to harmful health concerns like anxiety and depression, hypertension, and headaches.

Be proactive about keeping your stress levels under control. Try these 10 de-stressing activities to find out which work best for you.

1. Stress Triggers

Stress can be caused by many different factors — long hours, frustrations around technology and virtual learning, too much news exposure, etc. Make a list of all the stressors in your life, noting those you have control over and those you do not. Begin tackling the list by choosing one or two items you have some control over that cause you the most stress. Make a plan to manage the stressor(s), write down a

goal, and create accountable measures to help you follow through.

2. Deep Breathing

Deep breathing can have a powerful physical effect in reducing tension and helping the body relax. [Clinical research](#) shows that regular deep breathing exercises affect the heart, the brain, digestion, and the immune system. They can have immediate results and can also be used to reduce the production of harmful stress hormones.

Try the equal breaths exercise. Breathe in for a count of four, and out for a count of four. Continue for a few rounds, then try adding an extra count (in for a count of five, out for a count of five). You can continue this exercise until you feel your stress levels decreasing and your heart rate slowing.

3. Sleep

Many folks are experiencing sleep disruptions these days. But getting enough sleep is critical to your health and to reducing stress. Try setting an alarm for when it is time for bed and do your best to get seven to eight hours of sleep each night. Most smartphones have a feature that reduces blue light in the evenings — try putting your phone on this setting after 10 p.m. to help your eyes relax. Maximize the sleep you do get by “unplugging” (i.e. turning off the

computer, phone, TV, etc.) an hour before bed.

4. Good Nutrition

A healthy diet does wonders for your health and state of mind. Try to eat nutritious foods and cut down on fatty or sugary foods that deplete your energy. Also, be sure to drink plenty of water. An estimated 75% of people in the U.S. are chronically dehydrated. A good rule of thumb is to drink eight, eight-ounce glasses of water every day. You may need more or less depending on the climate you live in, your body type, how much you exercise, etc.

5. Exercise

According to [the Harvard Medical School](#), regular aerobic exercise (like walking) can help boost memory and critical thinking, improve sleep, and reduce anxiety. Find creative ways to exercise while sheltering in place. If you can, go for a 20-minute walk and enjoy some fresh air. Many companies and organizations are offering [free online workout classes](#). Regular exercise will help you feel more energized and much healthier.

6. Support Network

Establishing a good virtual support network is critical to maintaining healthy stress levels, especially during this time when we are physically isolated from one another. Lean on

your colleagues for advice, trade ideas, and create mentoring relationships. Friends and family can also provide invaluable support by lending an ear on especially difficult days. You can further expand your network through [educator-based online support networks and learning communities](#). Join one or more, and share in a wealth of knowledge from educators across the country.

7. Organization

Being organized is a proactive way to reduce stress while you work from home. Just think about how much time you waste searching through email or computer files to find what you need, rewriting misplaced work, or trying to manage your calendars. Setting an organization plan, and sticking to it, can help reduce stress, improve efficiency, and make you a more effective remote educator.

8. Meditation

Meditation, or mindful awareness, can have a tremendous impact on your ability to de-stress. Meditation has been practiced for thousands of years and can bring clarity to your thoughts and promote peace and balance. Even a few minutes of meditation can significantly reduce stress. [Listen to this SEL Chat Podcast](#), presented by Meaghan Dunham, to get tips and tricks for practicing mindfulness and meditation techniques at home during COVID-19.

9. Visualization

[Visualization](#) is another effective tactic for reducing stress. Give it a try. Sit comfortably and think about a peaceful scene (a beach, the mountains, a favorite spot in your neighborhood). Or, visualize yourself realizing a goal — like finally getting back in the classroom!

10. Laughter

Even during trying times, we need to find humor. It will do wonders for relieving stress. [According to the Mayo Clinic](#), laughter promotes a stronger immune system, increases your ability to cope with difficult situations, and can improve your mood by lessening depression and anxiety. Find ways to laugh every day — share a funny meme or joke with colleagues and friends or watch a favorite funny movie or television show.

We are certainly going through challenging and stressful times. Put your social-emotional skills to work and develop a plan to tackle stress before you get overwhelmed. We hope these de-stressing tips are helpful to keep you happy and healthy!