

Mental Health Breaks for Staff

Staff mental health needs to be prioritized just the same as student mental health. Dedicating time throughout the week or during staff meetings to have intentional mental health breaks can encourage staff to practice self-care and recharge. These breaks can be used to role model activities that staff can use in their classrooms to give themselves a mindful break, and even lead students in one as well.

1. 5 Senses Grounding Technique

Activity adapted from [PositivePsychology.com](https://www.positivepsychology.com), [The Five Senses Worksheet](#)

Time: 3 minutes

Purpose: To practice a grounding technique that can be used when feeling overwhelmed, and to encourage awareness of the present moment.

Activity: At the start or end of a staff meeting, take a few moments to quietly guide the staff through the following steps:

- Step 1:* Notice 5 things you can see.
- Step 2:* Notice 4 things you can feel.
- Step 3:* Notice 3 things you can hear.
- Step 4:* Notice 2 things you can smell.
- Step 5:* Notice 1 thing you can taste.

Modification:

- Extend the activity by having staff connect with a partner or small group and discuss how they feel after moving through the activity. You can provide a few prompting questions such as: *Do they feel a sense of calm? Did the senses connect them to any memories or experiences they have had?*

2. Body Scan Activity

Activity outlined in [Mindfulness Exercises](#)

Time: 3 minutes

Purpose: To settle the mind by checking in with the body and to create a sense of calmness and grounding.

Activity: Lead your staff through a mindful scan of their bodies by using [this script](#). After the scan, ask the staff to take a couple of minutes to check in with their bodies. Prompt them to ask themselves if they feel calm and grounded? Where did their minds go during the activity?

3. Compliment a Colleague Day

Activity adapted from [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health, Take Your Break - Energizing](#)

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: To create a positive work environment, and lift spirits by giving and receiving recognition and compliments.

Activity: Encourage staff to be intentional in finding ways to give shout-outs to one another. Staff can set a calendar reminder once a week or once a month to think about positive things colleagues have done, and then send that individual a compliment by email, a handwritten note, a phone call, or face to face.

Modifications:

- Make this a regular school activity by scheduling a Compliment a Colleague Day once a week or once a month for the whole staff.
- Make a visual display for the staff compliments on a bulletin board using sticky notes. Staff can add their compliments to this display.

4. Calm Breathing

Activity adapted from [Anxiety Canada, Calm Breathing](#)

Time: 3 minutes

Purpose: To role model effective technique to slow down breathing when feeling stressed or anxious to reduce them to a more manageable state.

Activity: At a staff meeting, guide staff through the following steps so they get familiar with a breathing technique they can use if they notice they find themselves in a stressed or anxious state.

1. Sit upright and support your arms on the side-arms of a chair, or on your lap.
2. Take a slow breath in through the nose, breathing into your lower belly (approx. 4 seconds).
3. Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds.
4. Exhale slowly through the mouth (for about 4 seconds).
5. Wait a few seconds before taking another breath.
6. Do 6-8 of these breathing cycles per minute for however long you feel is necessary.

5. Self-Care Checkup

Activity adapted from [PositivePsychology.com. Self Care Checkup Up](https://www.positivepsychology.com/self-care-checkup/)

Time: 10 minutes

Purpose: To become aware of the need for self-care, and set goals to enhance well-being to meet areas of self-care that might be neglected.

Activity: Using the Self-Care checklist, ask staff to reflect on their personal self-care habits and determine areas of growth. Ask staff to:

1. Fill out this [checklist](#).
2. Reflect on answers and determine areas of growth.
3. Choose 1 of the 5 categories you would like to focus on.
4. Pick 1 or 2 specific areas for growth from the chosen category.
5. Write an intentional, measurable goal to achieve desired growth.
6. Post this goal somewhere that you will see it at least once a day.

Modifications:

- Ask staff to share their goal with an accountability partner.
- Set aside time at a monthly staff meeting for staff to formally review their goal or choose a new goal or area of growth.

6. Count Up Activity

Activity outlined in [Toolbox Count Up](#)

Time: 5 to 10 minutes

Purpose: To create calm and focused collective energy in a group.

Activity: The goal is to count up to 20 as a group. Only one person can say one number at a time. If two staff members speak at the same time, the entire group is to start over and begin counting from one again. Explain the goal to your staff and let them figure out who starts!

Modifications:

- Ask staff to close their eyes and relax.
- This activity works virtually as well.
- Try this activity with your class.