

C&C Tips: Strategies for Self-Care for Mentors

The intrinsic rewards often felt by those in helping professions can be deeply meaningful and satisfying, but the work is challenging. We as Check & Connect professionals need to adopt strategies for self-care.

1. Maximize the experience of professional success

- **Positive change in the student.** Recognize student success, even the small successes. Celebrate these successes with students.
- **Recognition by supervisors, work peers, and others.** (Hopefully they're reading this.) When you are recognized, soak it in!
- **Expert content knowledge.** Review the manual, consult with others on a regular basis, strive to engage in best practice.
- **Relationship processes.** Regularly reflect on how well you built a relationship. Be sure to put students first and focus on the relationship as much or more than the "paperwork".

2. Strive to continuously develop in your role as mentor

- Learn new strategies for working with and engaging students by reviewing the manual, attending professional development sessions (be sure to ask your coordinator for PD when you identify a need!), or talking with other mentors, coordinators, and school personnel you work with.
- Listen to and be open to feedback provided to you from your coordinator, students, families, and other individuals you work with.
- Pursue small tasks within the school that fit into your role and are of interest to you. Maybe you love knitting and have some students that expressed an interest – start an after-school club to teach knitting. Or maybe you're good at math and have students who are struggling – you could help out in the math class and provide extra support to your students and to the teacher.

3. Increase professional self-understanding

- Regularly reflect on your practices and your attitudes.
- Learn to identify when you are starting to move toward a low point, such as feeling a lack of optimism that students can change, feeling uncommitted in your role, or feeling unwilling to persist - and consult with your coordinator or other colleagues.

4. Create a "professional greenhouse"

Meaning, surround yourself with people and activities that will help you grow professionally and make you feel supported. It is created when you are:

- in a work environment that promotes a healthy other-care/self-care balance
- receiving support from peers and mentors;
- mentoring others; and
- having fun.

5. Minimize ambiguous professional losses

Lack of closure (like when a student moves or transfers to a new school) can be a major stressor for mentors. Anything you can do to try to put some closure on the relationships, whether in-person, by phone, or by email - the better for both you and the student.

6. Focus on balanced wellness (physical, spiritual, emotional, and/or social)

Cultivate a collection of activities and leisure pursuits as a diversion from work-related stressors.

Reflection

What are some ways that you practice self-care in each area? What else is important to you in creating your "professional greenhouse"? What can you commit to trying in the next month?

Adapted from Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson (2001). Career counseling for longevity: Self-care and burnout prevention strategies for counselor resilience. *Journal of Career Development*, 37(3), pp. 167-176. New York, NY: Springer Science. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1007830908587>