ONTARIO ENGLISH Catholic Teachers ASSOCIATION

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MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS



THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

By Simon Dallimore

As teachers, we care for a lot of people in our lives - our students, our colleagues, our immediate and extended families, our friends - the list goes on and on. But how often do we stop and make time to care for ourselves? We are so busy worrying about and caring for others that we can neglect our own needs and miss the signs that our own well-being may be suffering.

It is important to take time to check-in with ourselves and determine how we are doing. Our mental health, like our physical health, can be considered as existing on a fluid **continuum** that runs from optimal mental health to mental illness. We move back and forth along this continuum throughout our day, weeks, months, and years.

Self-care is something that can be built into our daily routines, just like we do with our physical care. It is about building supports that help you to recognize when your mental wellness has changed. It is about self-care practices you do on a regular basis that help support your mental wellness. You most likely have daily routines built into your schedule to care for your physical health, such as brushing your teeth or going for walks, but do you have a mental wellness routine? A lot of what we do for our physical wellness may also help our mental wellness.

Self-care is a purposeful approach to prioritizing your well-being. It starts by making time for you and being aware of how we are really doing. Regular self-check-ins are important. Be honest with yourself. If you are feeling tired and run down, consider why that might be. Are you shutting yourself off from friends and family or are you able to make time to socialize?

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Do you feel sad some or most of the time? Do you know your own signs and symptoms that indicate that you might need some help?

The Canadian Mental Health Association reminds us that having a self-care plan can improve our mental health, boost our self-esteem, and increase our overall wellbeing. It is the small things we do in our daily life that help us to cope with some of the stress and anxiety we feel. It can help us to build resilience.

A **self-care plan** can include:

- Prioritizing sleep
- Drinking enough water
- Exercising
- Being outside in nature
- Making time to see friends and family
- Using breathing techniques
- Doing activities or hobbies that you enjoy
- Mindfulness activities
- Meditation
- Setting boundaries, such as screen time
- Using a schedule that includes time to spend with friends and family

It is not about doing everything all of the time. It is about being aware of what you need and finding things that you enjoy doing. It is also about realizing when your self-care plan is not working and need to turn to a professional.

If you would like more information about self-care plans, you can find workshops through the Association's **Professional Pursuits** program. The **Community of Care** is another resource that focuses on self-care. The articles and resources available in the Member Mental Health and Wellness section of **catholicteachers.ca** may also be of benefit.



When someone asks, "how are you," take a minute and consider how you are really doing. You do a lot for others. Make sure that you also take some time for you.

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