ONTARIO ENGLISH Catholic Teachers ASSOCIATION

ARTICLE

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

CREATING A SELF-CARE PLAN



By Simon Dallimore

Creating a self-care plan is about putting yourself first. Putting yourself first is not always an easy thing to do. As caregivers, we are usually at the bottom of our own list of people to care for. However, it is important that we are aware of how we are feeling day to day and that we prioritize our own wellbeing so that we can continue to be there for those we care for.

There are many different resources and plans available online, which can make selecting one feel daunting. If you are considering a self-care plan, it is best to keep it simple. Focus on your immediate needs and the things you enjoy doing. You can add different elements once you become more comfortable. It is important to keep in mind, however, that there is no single plan that is right for everyone. Similarly, you do not have to do everything in your plan all of the time. Be compassionate with yourself and give yourself the opportunity to be flexible with the plan.

If we consider our mental health as existing on a continuum, then we can recognize that our mental health and wellbeing moves along that continuum, from good health to mental illness. A self-care plan can help us to focus on where we are and what we can do to help us stay in the healthy zone of the continuum. It is not always easy to know when our wellness is at risk. We spend so much of our time caring for others, we often forget to check-in on ourselves.

A self-care plan includes an awareness of how we are functioning day to day, and activities or strategies that can help us stay in the healthy zone of the mental health continuum. The strategies may be daily things we do to maintain our mental wellness, or they can be strategies we use when we notice that our mental health has moved on the continuum. As we become better at recognizing our own needs, we should also become better at identifying when we might need professional help.

The **first step** in creating a self-care plan is to check-in with yourself. How are you doing? What is your energy level? Do you find that you are withdrawing from friends and family? Are you feeling isolated? How do you handle conflict? There are many self-assessment guides available online, such as the guide recommended by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Canadian Mental Health Association provides a mental health meter you can use to check on several different mental wellness measures. It is important to take the time to check-in on yourself. Be honest with how you are feeling. Using the guides on a regular basis can help you to be more aware of your own mental wellness, and can help you to know when you might need to spend some more time caring for you.

The **second step** in creating a self-care plan is to think about things you already do for yourself or would like to try. What activities bring you joy? You can use the Canadian Mental Health Association's Guide to Self-Care to help you record the things you love. This worksheet will also help you consider different ways to implement your self-care.

Take a look at your list. You might have some things that are easy to incorporate into your day such as going for a walk. These are things you can do on a regular basis to help you maintain your mental wellness. They can become part of your daily routine. There may be some things on your list that take more effort to complete. These might be things that you can do when you feel your overall wellness has slipped on the continuum. Whatever your list includes, it is important to remember that it is not necessary to do all the things on your list all of the time.

Self-care is something that requires our attention. It needs to be deliberate and purposeful. Creating a list and looking for ways to incorporate some of the activities into our daily lives is a great start. As you continue with your self-care plan, it should become easier to work these strategies into your day, which will help you to set boundaries to protect your own wellbeing. A self-care plan does not mean that you will never have bad days or will never need professional help. It is a guide to help you care for yourself and help you to monitor your own wellbeing.

Self-care is about prioritizing yourself. Life will always have stressful moments. Making time for yourself can help to reduce some of the stress you face and can have positive effects on your mental health. We are caregivers for so many people in our lives. It is important to also make time to care for yourself so that you can continue to support all the other people in your life.



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