



Virtual Learning Series:

Care for the Caregiver

This week, we'll focus our deep-dive on Care for the Caregiver. In these unprecedented times, many of us are both taking care of others, either in our work or at home or both, while also having to cope with all of the new stress that comes with fighting COVID-19. It is important now more than ever to ensure that we're practicing kindness and compassion not just with others but with ourselves! This week we will be doing a deep-dive into the ways that we can care for ourselves as a way of practicing trauma-sensitivity and self-awareness.

By the end of this week participants will be able to:

1. Apply a trauma-sensitive framework to self-care
2. Define self-compassion
3. Differentiate between self-care and self-awareness

4 Trauma Sensitive Strategies

In our introductory [Trauma Sensitive Strategy training](#) we introduce 4 primary strategies:

1. **Empathy** - Empathy is feeling listened to, validated, and safe when expressing how you are feeling.
2. **Strengths-based Approach** - Employing a strength-based approach means focusing on the positive characteristics one is bringing to the table over deficits.
3. **Predictability** - In uncertain times, predictability promotes a sense of safety and control.
4. **Prevention** - We often invest an exhaustive amount of time and effort into managing negative feelings or behaviors as they emerge rather than working to deal with the underlying causes. It's important though to practice noticing and regulating our emotions and behavior BEFORE we enter a triggered state.

What is self-compassion?

Self-compassion is extending the same kindness and lack of judgement we offer to others, to ourselves. Think about whenever a friend is struggling with something, or simply having a hard day, the warmth and support you provide that person. Self-compassion is giving yourself that same level of understanding

Why ‘Care for the Caregiver’?

“In recognizing how the COVID-19 pandemic can lead to individual and collective trauma, and the negative mental health affects people may face in response, it is important that we support ourselves and others throughout this time. Having a set plan for responding to mental health needs, just as one would have for protecting one's medical health, is important.”

-Danielle Render Turmaud, MS, NCC.

Level-set

Everyone is in a state of uncertainty right now because of COVID-19. It is important to “meet yourself where you are” and become self-aware of the feelings this situation is bringing at the individual level.

Feeling stress, anxiety, and fear (just to name a few) are **normal!**

Compassion Fatigue

As a caregiver, whether a parent, educator, or service-based provider, it is important to remember that it is a lot of work. Being “on,” listening with empathy and finding solutions can be tiring. [Constantly receiving but not unloading](#) adds up over time and can be mentally (and physically) exhausting.

Being Your Best Self

Supporting your own social and emotional wellness is necessary to bring your best self when supporting others. It’s OK to know when you need to “tap out” in order to manage your own stress and triggers. Creating a culture of accountability with colleagues is a helpful tool to ensure support is still available, even if you personally can’t give it.

Trauma-sensitive Self Checklist

Practicing self care is important for everyone, but especially for those of us who work in caring professions, like teaching. We often prioritize ensuring a positive school and classroom climates, however it's important that we extend these strategies and skills for ourselves as well.

→ **Empathy** - We might think of empathy towards ourselves as self-awareness +. This might look like remembering to normalize and contextualize our feelings, and listen without judgement to our thoughts and feelings.

- ☐ *Am I taking stock of my feelings without judging them?*
- ☐ *Am I giving myself the benefit of the doubt? (i.e. I am doing the best that I can given what I am experiencing)*

Practice tip: Try using the [Mood Meter app](#) or journaling to record how you're feeling without judgement.

→ **Strengths-based** - In this moment we are all confronting new challenges, and trying to learn the skills needed to catch up to these new demands. That's why it is especially important to reflect on our strengths and not get too fixated on our shortcomings

- ☐ *Have I taken a moment to reflect on what I am good at right now?*
- ☐ *Can I think of a way to flex my strengths in the tasks I need to accomplish right now?*

Practice tip: Start the day with something you know you can flex your strengths on to help give you a boost of motivation for the day!

Trauma-sensitive Self Checklist

→ **Predictability**- With so many things up in the air, and changing rapidly, predictability can be particularly comforting. Predictability and routine can help us regain some sense of control, and help lessen anxiety.

- ☐ *Do I have any daily routines that help me feel grounded?*
- ☐ *Have I thought about what parts of my day/week need to be predictable in order for me to feel grounded?*

Practice tip: Try drawing yourself a routine tracker like this [Self-care Corner](#) template!

→ **Prevention** - Once we become aware of our feelings and triggers, we can practice preventing what some call “emotional anarchy”, that feeling of uncontrollable snowballing feelings.

- ☐ *Am I able to recognize when I’m falling into repetitive negative thoughts?*
- ☐ *Am I able to examine the source of thoughts?*
- ☐ *Do I have a set of soothing practices I can use if I’m feeling like my emotions are starting to get out of control?*

Practice tip: If you know there is a time of day that is hard for you plan a break or fun activity during that time.

Adjusting expectations

If you are familiar with the [Mood Meter](#) used in many SEL curricula, you'll know that moods can be charted based on energy level (low-to-high) and pleasantness, or how pleasant that mood feels in our body (also low-to-high). Different tasks work better for different moods or states of mind.

Part of practicing self-compassion is taking stock of how we're feeling, and adjusting our expectations based on where we're at. Trying to ignore how we're really feeling and power through can leave us feeling demoralized or exhausted.

Try practicing naming the expectation you've set, any pressure you're feeling, and then adjusting your next step based on your energy and pleasantness. Example below:

Expectation: I want to clean my apartment today.

Pressure I'm feeling: I can't let my standards go, I need to keep everything clean otherwise.

Instead of striving for perfect, how can I break this need down into parts?

What parts can I accomplish with the energy I have right now?

What can I do when feeling low energy/unpleasant:

Maybe right now I make a list of the different cleaning tasks I need to do.

What can I do when feeling low energy/pleasant:

Maybe right now I start with just one task, and do my favorite one first.

What can I do when feeling high energy/unpleasant:

Maybe right now I put on loud music and rage clean - release some of my negative feelings by really scrubbing, or doing something with immediate benefits.

What can I do when feeling high energy/pleasant:

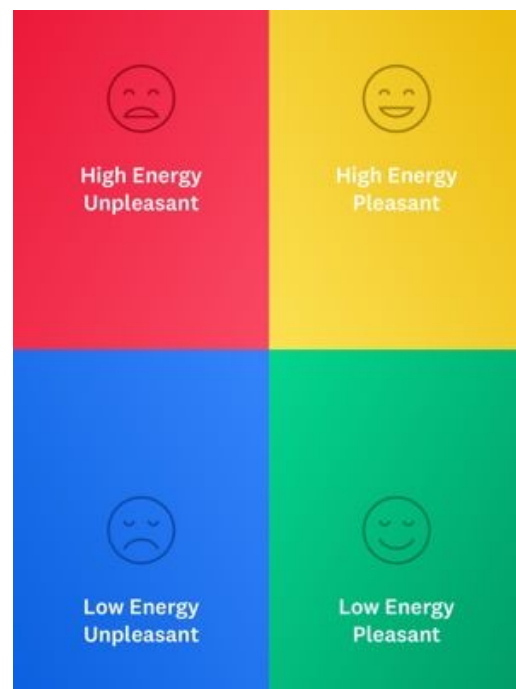
This might be the perfect time to tackle the whole project!

How to Practice!

Use this form any time you notice that you're being hard on yourself, feeling overwhelmed, or even just in the mood to practice self-reflection!

Expectation:

Pressure I'm feeling:



**Instead of striving for perfect, how can I break this need down into parts?
What parts can I accomplish with the energy I have right now?**

What can I do when feeling low energy/unpleasant:

What can I do when feeling low energy/pleasant:

What can I do when feeling high energy/unpleasant:

What can I do when feeling high energy/pleasant: