

Self-Care and Coping for Louisiana Child Care Professionals During COVID-19 Pandemic

As child care professionals, your current focus is likely on the children in your care—both those you may be caring for now and those that you look forward to caring for again. However, the importance of caring for the caregiver cannot be overstated during these difficult times. This tip sheet aims to provide some ideas for self-care and coping for adults taking care of young children, whether or not they are currently working in a child care setting and for when they return.

Strategies to use now and later:

- **Be kind to yourself:** While many are discussing how this time allows us to learn new skills, the truth is that staying home for several weeks and/or having fewer contacts with others can be very hard. Allow yourself to find a routine and pace that works for you and your family. Give yourself a break, speak kindly to yourself, give yourself the grace you extend to others.
- **Find a flexible routine:** Going to work each day becomes routine for most of us. When that routine changes, it can be disruptive for children and adults alike. Find a general routine that works for you and your family but allow flexibility within that routine when needed. For example, you may need to go to bed earlier some nights or take a nap some afternoons, but each day start with breakfast, followed by household tasks, maybe some basic exercise, etc.
- **Be mindful throughout the day:** Find joy and accomplishment in simple tasks such as making your bed, reading a book to your child, or brushing the dog's fur. Think about what you are doing, why you're doing the task, and take pleasure when you can. Even mundane tasks such as straightening a room can bring joy when you consider that you are taking time to make your environment more pleasurable for yourself and anyone that you live with.
- **Take advantage of the outdoors when possible:** If you have a space to sit, walk, or move outdoors, try to make this part of your everyday routine. If you do not have a safe space in which to do this, open the blinds and curtains in your house to let the sun in when possible. Open the windows if possible and safe and enjoy the sights and sounds that are different from your space at home.
- **Practice breathing:** Take a few minutes and breathe. While seated, put your feet flat on the floor. Put your hands in your lap. Sit up straight. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable doing so. Breathe in deeply through your nose. Let your chest and belly expand fully and then breathe out fully through your mouth. Taking four, slow, deep breaths can reset your mind and prepare you for the day or for what is next. Try it now!
- **Check on others:** Sometimes we help ourselves by checking-in on those who may need a little extra attention. Is there a neighbor, friend, or family member who may be struggling? Send them a text, give them a call, or schedule a quick video chat if that feels comfortable. By reaching out and doing for those in our circle, we also increase our own connections, which are so important during this time.
- **Have some fun!** While our options may be a bit limited right now, think of what you enjoy or what you used to enjoy when you were a child even. Try it out. Watch an online video, catch up on that series that all your friends are talking about, color a coloring book with your child (or even by yourself!), do a puzzle, play hide and seek, dig out an old board game, create a scavenger hunt for adults and kids, build a house with playing cards, make cookies. This might even be a good time to learn something you always wish you had, like crocheting, baking, drawing, etc. Engaging your mind in an activity that is fun is a great way to de-stress and to strengthen relationships.
- **Enlist family members to help with household chores:** Even young children can learn to help with basic tasks. Toddlers can put all the toys into baskets or bins, a four-year-old can learn to sort laundry, a five-year-old can dust mop the kitchen floor. Household chores can become part of the daily routine and can even be fun while taking pressure off of the primary caregiver. If you live alone, break household chores down into just a few per day to give yourself a break (see first bullet)!

Strategies to use when returning to work:

- **Have a plan:** Getting back into your work routine may be challenging, especially when you are caring for young children who are also trying to reestablish their routine. Following a reasonable schedule that allows time to settle in while still being fun and engaging for the children will help to ease the transition. Predictable routines are best for children, but don't get so stuck that you forget to allow flexibility when needed.
- **Work as a team:** While each person will be responsible for his or her own classroom, there will be times when assistance and support is needed. This is particularly true for teachers who work alone in the classroom. Centers should develop a system that allows teachers to have breaks throughout the day to attend to personal needs or to take a few mindful moments to de-stress. This parallel process where teachers feel supported cascades down and has positive impacts on their ability to support the children in their rooms.
- **Ask for help when needed:** If you're feeling particularly stressed during the transition, don't be afraid to ask for help. Despite our best plans, sometimes there are hiccups along the way. When this happens, you don't have to struggle alone. Speak up and state your need for help. The [TIKES mental health consultation team](#) is available to provide support to centers and specific classrooms to provide tips, support, resources and referral information for those who need it.
- **Practice forgiveness:** Early childhood professionals provide a critical service, as we've seen throughout this pandemic. Many have stepped in to care for children in a variety of ways during a very stressful time. There is no such thing as a perfect caregiver or a perfect child, even under the best of circumstances and there may be times when we are not our best selves. In those instances, it is important to remember to forgive yourself and try again the next time. That may mean the next interaction with a child, parent or co-teacher, or the next half of the day, or the next day altogether.
- **Don't forget to engage in regular self-care:** Remember to use the self-care strategies that you practiced during the pandemic (see above). It is best to do these things regularly instead of waiting for the stress to build to levels that make it more difficult to manage. Some strategies, like deep breathing, outdoor time, and fun activities (whether active or quiet), can be incorporated into the daily schedule so children can participate too. Getting outside and using large muscles are also great stress relievers for adults and children alike. Taking care of yourself is necessary if you are to take care of others. Making this a priority will go a long way towards easing the transition back to work.