

# "How Are You, Really?"

## TEACHER WELLNESS

Across  
Learning  
Environments



# SCENARIO

## “How are you, really?”

On the drive to school I feel it – my heart starts racing and I’m feeling on edge. It’s Monday morning. My lesson plans for the week are merely outlines, unlike the masterpieces I used to write when I was single. But I know I can get through today and fill in the details on my plans for the rest of the week...Oh! Wait!



There’s a faculty meeting after school today! I’ll lose some time there. I hope none of my colleagues called out today. The last thing I need is to be asked to cover a class during my prep period. When will I find the time I need? I have to get my son to karate tonight. What will we have for dinner? How will my students behave today? Mondays are so unpredictable and I’m already overwhelmed. My thoughts are spinning out of control.

Before going to my classroom, I stop by the school office to check my mailbox.

*“Good morning! How are you?” asks my colleague.*

*I muster a socially appropriate smile and reply, “I’m good; how are you?”*

*My colleague must have seen through my response. “But how are you, really?”*

## Why Should We Care About Social Emotional Skills for Educators?

The prevalence of teacher burnout, frustration, and compassion fatigue is alarming. Teachers are more likely than the general population to report experiencing frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression (2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey). It’s not surprising then to see that a 2021 survey found that one in four teachers considered leaving their job by the end of the 2020–2021 year. Black teachers were more likely to plan to leave the profession.

We need to invest time and resources in teacher well-being because it impacts our students, as well. There is substantial evidence indicating that to take care of teachers is to take care of students and support their learning. Adult well-being has an effect on students’ well-being, their motivation to learn, overall school climate, and student academic performance.

**How do we teach our children self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision-making (CASEL 5), when we ourselves are struggling to invest time and energy in our own social and emotional well-being?**



# Taking Care of Myself is Taking Care of My Students



Let's meet Jennifer Heaphy, a second-grade teacher from upstate New York, in the profession for thirty years. When the children returned to in-person learning from COVID-19, they had to be retaught everything – from sitting in their seats to active listening to learning how to take turns. She was exhausted.

So many teachers across New York can identify with the sentiment of being too exhausted helping students recover from the challenges of the pandemic to help themselves.

**But wouldn't the reverse of that statement be true?**

*“If I help myself and reinvest in my own social and emotional health, am I not helping my students recover?”*

As educators, we cannot provide guidance to students if we do not take care of our own basic needs. The bonus? Taking care of our own health as educators presents an opportunity to show our students what managing emotions, setting personal goals, and investing in healthy relationships look like in difficult circumstances.

## Modeling Wellness for Students

Let's return to the CASEL 5 SEL competencies that we want our students to acquire and consider how you can practice those same skills for your own wellness in ways that positively model social emotional health for your students.

### Teacher Wellness Behaviors

Collaborate with colleagues in different variations, such as professional learning communities (PLCs), informal team-building, thought partners, peer reviews, and community-building circles. Use connection-building exercises that deepen professional relationships. Express gratitude to your colleagues as often as you can.

*Social  
Awareness and  
Relationship  
Skills*

### Modeling for Students

Show students how to work together when there is a problem to solve by sharing the details of select peer collaborations (e.g., a PLC or a thought partner exchange). Be specific about how you listened to others' perspectives, demonstrated empathy, resolved conflicts, and communicated effectively. Not only will you feel good investing in and celebrating your professional relationships, your students will benefit from observing your social skills.

# Modeling Wellness for Students (Continued)

## Teacher Wellness Behavior

Openly share where you are on your own emotional barometer. Am I arriving at class feeling guilty, anxious, practical, or confident? Did something trigger my stress? How can I hit reset to be present and effective for my students?

Self-  
Awareness  
and Self-  
Management

## Modeling for Students

Identifying your emotions, linking them to your behavior, and speaking about your stress-management strategies encourage your students to be disciplined about their own self-direction. You can share your own state of mind and coping process for being “learner ready” before asking them to share theirs. Conduct deep-breathing exercises together to bring everyone to a learner-ready state when needed. An emotional barometer is a tool that can be used in in-person and remote community-building circles, as well.

## Teacher Wellness Behavior

When we get overwhelmed, our ability to make caring and constructive choices can be diminished. And teachers likely make more decisions per day than the average adult! One way to ease your decision-making process is to be open with your students about your classroom decisions. Share the “why” of the learning choices you are offering and how you believe it will impact them.

Responsible  
Decision-  
Making

## Modeling for Students

When you are transparent with students about your classroom decisions, try framing it this way:

1. Define the decision that needs to be made.
2. Share the options you are considering, the pros and cons of each, and how each option will impact the students.
3. Solicit student input.
4. Choose an option, act on it, and then evaluate the results with students.

As you do this, showcase your skills:

- Demonstrating open-mindedness
- Making a judgment after analyzing information
- Anticipating the consequences of your actions

# Key Terms



## Trauma

Refers to an event, a series of events, or circumstances that are experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening, that overwhelms the ability to cope, and that has adverse effects on mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being

## Secondary Traumatic Stress

The emotional distress that results when an individual hears about the traumatic experiences of another individual, such as hearing trauma survivors' stories and seeing high levels of stress resulting from a traumatic event

## Compassion Fatigue

"The physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced by those who care for sick or traumatized people over an extended period of time"

## Burnout

"...[P]hysical and mental exhaustion, a sense of dread about work, and frequent feelings of cynicism, anger, or irritability are key signs of burnout. Those in helping professions (such as doctors) may notice dwindling compassion toward those in their care. Feeling like you can no longer do your job effectively may also signal burnout."

# Building Resilience

**Just like our students, we can experience a range of trauma responses that can impact our day-to-day life.**

COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA	
EMOTIONAL	Irritability, sadness, anxiety, depression, guilt, grief, fear, apathy/numbing, agitation, anger
BEHAVIORAL	Withdrawal, aggression, increased conflict, crying frequently, excessive worry, difficulty communicating or listening, blaming other people for everything, changes in energy levels, regressed behaviors (children), increased risk-taking (e.g., substance use), decline in school/job performance
PHYSICAL	Headaches/stomachaches, heart racing, fatigue, muscle pain, disrupted sleep/appetite, heightened startle response
COGNITIVE	Confusion, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, racing thoughts, preoccupation with the event (e.g., intrusive thoughts/memories, trouble thinking clearly)

Source: *AIR, Center On Great Teachers and Leaders*

The Center On Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research identifies common factors associated with resilience in the face of trauma, adversity, and secondary traumatic stress. It's worth noting that teaching across learning environments also requires resilience, the capacity to adapt positively to adversity or challenges. These **protective factors** that help us cope with adversity may also serve us well as we shift from in-person to remote to hybrid learning environments.

## Protective Factors that Build Teacher Resilience

- Sense of control
- Sense of meaning and purpose
- Spirituality
- Self-awareness and emotional regulation skills
- Social support
- Healthy coping style
- Humor and optimism
- Cognitive flexibility
- Positive thinking
- Adaptability to change

Source: *AIR, Center On Great Teachers and Leaders*




# Portable Teacher Resilience Practices

Let's look at that list of **protective factors that encourage educator resilience** and consider some examples of supportive and portable practices, as well as digital tools.



	PORTABLE PRACTICE OR DIGITAL TOOLS
Sense of control	Set boundaries around your work and personal lives: consider turning on the <u>vacation reply function</u> of your email after a specific time in the afternoon and over the weekend.
Sense of meaning and purpose	Spend 20 minutes <u>life crafting</u> to chart a path to achieving your goals and hone your sense of purpose using a short series of writing prompts.
Spirituality	Spirituality, which can <u>protect</u> against symptoms of anxiety, is not the same as religion. Spirituality is typically associated with seeking a sense of peace and a search for meaning in life. <u>Headspace</u> offers science-backed mindfulness tools and provides free access <u>for K-12 teachers</u> .
Self-awareness and emotional regulation skills	<u>Digital journals</u> can help us observe our emotional state and see patterns in our thoughts and behaviors over time. <u>Gratitude journals</u> , when used consistently, have been <u>shown</u> to improve mood and a sense of optimism (and as a bonus...it's good for sleep!).
Social support	Try keeping track of your relationships, perhaps in <u>Google Sheets</u> - who are the friends, family members, and colleagues in your support <u>network</u> ? When did you last check in with them? <u>Spend time together</u> ? When are their <u>birthdays</u> ? Are you due to reconnect with the people most important to you?
Healthy coping style	There is an abundance of portable tools/apps that can help develop healthy coping habits. Here are just a few to explore: <u>MoodKit</u> , <u>Habit Tracker</u> , <u>Worry Watch</u> , <u>Ten Percent Happier</u> .
Humor and optimism	Envision the life you want to have with this <u>free digital vision board maker</u> . Find more ways to <u>laugh through this laughter toolbox</u> . Watch a few episodes of <u>Abbott Elementary</u> if it's not "too close to home"!
Cognitive flexibility	Sharpen the saw now and then! <u>Test your cognitive flexibility</u> with this fun brain teaser. Or set a goal to try a new activity once a month - visit a new part of town, volunteer, take a class, try out an instrument; all of these novel activities build your cognitive flexibility!
Positive thinking	Become more aware of your tendency to think glass half-full or half-empty with an <u>optimism test</u> . Become a student again by trying online <u>positive thinking</u> classes.
Adaptability to change	Try something <u>new and fun</u> in educational technology. You will feel proud of your new skill and you can celebrate your growth mindset!

*Now it's your turn!*



In your workbook, you will have a chance to reflect on your own well-being by doing a self-assessment and creating a well-being plan!





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# About Us

## **The TALE Academy**

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

## **The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project**

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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