



Shelter In Grace

A Guide to Support Staff Wellness

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Background

The unprecedented phenomenon of COVID-19 has changed the landscape of many aspects of our lives. The amount of computer time causing burnout, work isolation and “Zoom Boom Fatigue” has further upended life, as we currently know it, as we shelter at home trying to adapt to a “new normal.”

This pandemic has taken its toll on everyone, leaving many feeling confused and deeply frustrated, and the loss of loved ones has left many of us heartbroken. All of this is occurring within the context of the deep concern educators and health care staff have for the wellbeing of the students they serve.

Given these highly troublesome times, it is essential to integrate more health and well-being support to your staff in order to feel more united and uplifted.

This is a great time to ensure that your organization models compassion and resiliency through wellness-care practices so that the staff feels validated and appreciated, with a sense of belonging. This *Staff Wellness Guide* can be the starting point to creating healthy connections with each other through authentic, thoughtful wellness support for everyone.

Intention

This guide is for managers, coordinators, education leaders, and youth leaders facilitating either virtual or in-person meetings in order to promote staff health and well-being. It can help cultivate a collective staff commitment to self-care activities to recharge resilience. Wellness should be integrated into the workplace well after students return to in person instruction.

In following this guide, staff can create a new vision of self-care work practices by *sheltering-in-GRACE* in wellness, one breath at a time.

Mindfulness Historical Context

The practice and name *Mindfulness* were created by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who developed *Mindfulness-Based Stress Management* (MBSR) in 1979. His inspiration came after attending a Buddhist insight meditation retreat. The lineage of Mindfulness methods has its origins from both Theravāda-based *vipassanā* and non-dual Mahāyāna approaches rooted in a different context from Indian and East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is imperative to recognize that Mindfulness has deeper roots than the Mindfulness practices that have become popular in western culture.

Planning Wellness Activities

Leaders can use the practices throughout this manual to increase wellness in staff gatherings and meetings.

The following are options to build familiarity with incorporating wellness into daily practice at work. The intention is to be supportive and give a foundation to build upon. The rest of the guide includes a menu of wellness activities to choose from to implement wellness in meetings.

Please be mindful of including all participants' levels of ability and provide inclusive options.

Option #1

"Stay Fit & Get Lit":

15 minutes at the top of your scheduled agenda staff meeting for the self-care activity.

- Mindful Meditation Moment (4 min.)
- Brief Check-ins (optional breakout rooms) (5 min.)
- Chair Stretches (3 min.)
- Low-Impact Cardio (2 min.)
- Move My Mood (dancing) (1 min.)

Option #2

"The Recharger":

8 minutes scheduled in the staff meeting agenda for the self-care activity.

- Mindful Meditation Moment (4 min.)
- Chair Stretches (3 min.)
- Brain Break (1 min.)

Option #3

"Take 5":

5 minutes scheduled in the staff meeting agenda for a virtual self-care activity.

- Mindful Meditation Moment (4 min.)
- Chair Stretches (1 min.)

Option #4

"Dance Out Loud":

2 - 3 minutes scheduled in the staff meeting agenda. Play one song for everyone to freestyle dance in between agenda items.

- Move My Mood (dancing)

Option #5

"Brain Break":

1 minute scheduled in the staff meeting agenda for a brain break activity in between agenda items.

- Brain Break Activity

Option #6

"Mindful Meditation":

4 minute Mindful Moment Meditation scheduled at the start of staff meeting.

- Mindful Moment (4 min.)

Staff Meeting Check-Ins

As a leader, there is value in holding space for staff members and youth to share *how they are doing* in order to build community care. Decide how you would like to set up your check-ins with the staff from the suggestions below.

Establish What Your Check-Ins Will Look Like:

- Invite the staff to check in one at a time.
- If this is a virtual meeting and/or you have a large staff, invite staff to meet in up small virtual breakout rooms.
- Allow the staff to read the list of questions and journal for self-reflection.

Guiding Question for Check-Ins:

- Did I start my day with my self-care plan?
- What positive and affirming morning ritual did I start today with?
- What kinds of new things am I learning to create?
- What expectations of normal am I willing to let go of today?
- Did/will I spend some time outside today?
- Who did/will I reach out to and check in on?
- What exercise did/will I do today?
- What am I grateful for in my life?
- Did I make time for self-reflection, prayer or meditation today?
- What breaks did I give myself from my work day?
- Am I getting enough rest?
- Am I drinking enough water?
- What nutritional foods am I eating to boost my immune system?

Guiding Question for Small Group Discussions

- How do you feel about your current self-care practices?
- In what areas of self-care are you doing well?
- What areas can you improve?



Mindful Meditation Moments

Workweek Daily Meditations to Start the Meeting

The following script is an example to pull from to create mindful moments in your staff gatherings. This script is a starting place and can be used as a stand-alone or in addition to the other meditations listed. It can be fun to name the moments in your staff gatherings after days of the week such as “Mindful Monday, Tune In Tuesday, Wellness Wednesday, Thankful Thursday, and Forgiveness Friday.” The meditations can correlate with the theme of the day.

Daily Mindful Moment Script

I am inviting you to sit comfortably and to close your eyes or let your eyes soften their gaze onto a fixed point. (Tapping the meditation bell is optional)

Allow your shoulders and face to relax.

Slowly breathe in and out at your own natural pace as you begin to settle in, connecting to your breath in this moment. (Allow 5-10 seconds of silence)

If your mind begins to wander in a thought, say to yourself “thinking” and return to your breathing.

Slowly breathe in and out at your own natural pace.

(Allow 30 seconds to one minute of silence before inviting the next part of the guided meditation or closing.)

Menu of Meditations

Use these meditations on their own and/or in addition to the day of the week meditations.

Pre-Weekend Self-Care Visualization Meditation:

I am inviting you to imagine what your self-care practice will look like this weekend. How will you recharge yourself?

Is there something new to create or explore to fulfill your passion? If so, what would that look like?

Slowly breathe in and out.

(Allow 30 seconds to one minute of silence before inviting the next part of the guided meditation)

Self-Care Visualization Meditation:

I am inviting you to imagine what your self-care practice will look like for the rest of the day. See it in your mind’s eye. How will you take care of yourself?

What kinds of breaks from technology will you give yourself?

(Slowly breathe in and out)

What healthy foods will you eat to maximize the nutrients for the body?

(Slowly breathe in and out)

How much water will you drink to hydrate the body system?

(Slowly breathe in and out)

What kinds of exercise or movement will you do to maintain your well-being?

(Slowly breathe in and out)

Grace and Gratitude:

This is an invitation for you to open up the heart space of grace and gratitude, and think of something that you are grateful for in this practice of taking *nothing* for granted and honoring *everything*.

What are you grateful for?

Slowly breathe in and out and see if you can connect with gratitude on a feeling level.

(Allow 30 seconds to one minute of silence before transitioning out of the guided meditation)

Forgiveness:

In the practice of forgiveness, I want you to think of someone ***who said something to you that hurt your feelings***, and try to forgive that person.

Slowly breathe in and out *(pause 3-5 seconds)*.

Now think of a time when you said something to ***someone else and it hurt their feelings***.

Try to forgive yourself.

Without any judgement, notice what may arise and slowly breathe in and out *(pause 3-5 seconds)*.

Closing Meditation:

I am now inviting you to repeat to yourself after me:

May I be peaceful. *(Allow everyone to repeat to themselves)*

May my colleagues be peaceful. *(Allow everyone to repeat to themselves)*

May my family, friends and community be peaceful. *(Allow everyone to repeat to themselves)*

May the whole world be peaceful. *(Allow everyone to repeat to themselves)*

Thank you for our **Meditation Moment**. You can open your eyes.

(Tapping the meditation bell is optional)



Get Lit and Stay Fit!

Physical Energizing Exercises to Boost Your Wellness

"Aside from the physical health benefits, exercise can also improve mood and mental health."

- Rance Bryant, M.S., Director, Riverside Wellness and Fitness Center

Stay-Fit Activities

According to the World Health Organization, "Just taking a short break from sitting, by doing 3-4 minutes of light intensity physical movement, such as walking or stretching, will help ease your muscles and improve blood circulation and muscle activity. Regular physical activity benefits both the body and mind."¹

The following activities are starting points for health and well-being:

- Start with the *Mindful Meditation Moment* for that specific day.
- Follow with *Stay-Fit stretches and exercises* (choose as many as time allows).
- Remind staff to go at *their own pace* and to do what feels manageable, as each person's limits, flexibility and range are different and to stop immediately if at any time someone starts to feel uncomfortable.
- Make sure to keep your water bottle nearby and stay hydrated!

Stay Fit Stretches and Exercises

As we shelter-in-place, most likely you and your staff are more sedentary than usual. Planning a simple self-care boost through stretching and low-impact cardio activities at the start of your virtual staff meeting not only promotes health and well-being for your staff, but also models how much you value everyone's wellness.

According to Healthline, "cardiovascular exercise can also help lower blood pressure, and keep your arteries clear by raising 'good' high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and lowering 'bad' low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels in the blood."²

These *Stay Fit* activities are intended to help reduce any tension from bad posture or stress that usually builds up in the neck, shoulders and lower back due to long periods of limited movement and sitting. Additionally, they help to recharge and relax the body.

- **Stretching Exercises:** these help enhance blood flow, mind-body relaxation, and reduce pain and stiffness.
- **Cardiovascular Exercises:** low impact & dance exercises promote cardiovascular heart health.

For all exercises, it can be helpful to play calming music in the background to create energy to move the body.

1 World Health Organization, "[Healthy at Home - Physical Activity](#)"

2 Marcin, Ashley. February 25, 2020. "[What Are the Benefits of Aerobic Exercise?](#)"

Head & Neck Warm Ups (Up-and-Down Movements):

- Start by sitting up straight with your shoulders level.
- With the head, slowly look down & up in a continuous motion six times, going back and forth (for example, *down* is 1, *up* is 2, repeating all the way to a count of 6).

Shoulder Roll Warm Ups:

- Begin with rolling the shoulders back in a big circular motion three times.
- Reverse the direction by rolling the shoulders forward three times.

Arm Stretches:

For right shoulder:

- Gently reach your right arm across your body towards your left forearm as far as you can go, with the back of your hand facing front.
- With your left hand, grab your right wrist and gently extend your right arm straight across your body, giving a stretch to the right shoulder
- Breathe in and out two times during the gentle stretching for the right shoulder.
- After the second exhalation, release the arm.

Repeat for left shoulder:

- Gently cross your left arm across your body towards your right forearm as far as you can go, with the back of your hand facing front.
- With your right hand, grab your left wrist and gently extend your left arm, giving a stretch to the left shoulder
- Inhale and exhale twice during the gentle stretching for the left shoulder. After the second exhalation, release the arm.

Chair Stretching - for Lower Back and Leg Stretches:

- Sit in your chair (at least 3 feet away from your desk if possible), then:

Right knee:

- While sitting in your chair with your back straight, start to grab your *right* knee with both hands, pulling your right knee towards your chest.
 - Do not lean forward and keep your back straight.
 - Make sure your shoulders are level and relaxed.
- Continue pulling your right knee towards your chest as you inhale and exhale twice.

Repeat for the left knee:

- While sitting in your chair with your back straight, start to grab your *left* knee with both hands as you pull your left knee towards your chest.
 - Do not lean forward and keep your back straight.
 - Make sure your shoulders are level and relaxed.
- Continue pulling your left knee towards your chest as you inhale and exhale twice.

Chair Reach Side-leans:

- Sit in your chair, with your arms relaxed at your sides.
- Keep your posture facing forward and hold in your core stomach muscles.

Start with your right side:

- Begin to lean to the right, reaching your *right* hand to touch the floor (if you are able).
- Return back to a sitting-up position and continue holding your core stomach muscles in throughout the leans back and forth.

Repeat with your left side:

- Continue moving by leaning to the *left* side with your *left* arm as you reach to touch. Immediately return back to an upright position, and repeat, alternating sides.
- Count each side-lean as one.
- Do twenty right & left floor reaches in total.

Standing Quad/Hip Flexor Stretch:

- Stand tall and engage your core by pulling and holding your stomach muscles in.
- Hold onto the back of your chair to help keep your balance, if necessary.
- Bend your right leg to bring the right heel up towards your right gluteal muscles (your bottom) and grab your right ankle with your right hand.
- Pull your ankle into your glute, and do not lean forward. Inhale and exhale twice, then release the ankle.
- Repeat on your left side.

March in Place:

Low-cardio exercise to increase the heart rate, support hip flexors and core stability.

- Stand up and move your chair out of the way.
- For a few seconds, individually shake out your arms and legs before marching to help with blood circulation from sitting.
- Begin by marching in place lifting the opposite leg and arm (right leg with left arm, and left leg with right arm).
- Engage in lifting the arms and legs as high as your hips (if possible), with an increased tempo going back and forth. This will help increase the blood circulation.

Chair Leg Lifts and Stomach Core Conditioning:

- Sit in your chair (at least 3 feet away from your desk, if possible)
- Let your arms rest, hanging down at your side
- Sitting in your chair with your back straight, pull your *stomach muscles* in during this exercise.
- With your right leg bent, lift your right knee up towards your chest as high as you can (while keeping your left foot firmly on the floor for balance) and release it back towards the floor.
- As the *right leg comes back down*, you can immediately lift your *left knee up* in the same motion (while keeping your right foot firmly on the floor).
- Continue to alternate with the left leg and the right leg, back and forth.
- Count each leg lift as one leg lift.
- Do twenty leg lifts in total with all of the participants.

Disclosure:

Please be mindful when participating in any of the suggested exercises that there is a possibility of physical injury as there is with any physical activity, depending on an individual's physical condition. The author is not a medical doctor, and you should consult your physician before starting any exercise program as each individual's physical condition differs.

Zoom Boom Fatigue

Activities to Use During Extended Meetings

According to a recent *United Healthcare Report*, 13+ hours are spent on screens per day since COVID-19 emerged.³ The new phenomenon called *Zoom Boom Fatigue* is real, causing many people to feel exhausted, anxious, irritable, and burnt out.

Making time for breaks during a Zoom meeting, aka “*Brain Breaks*,” allows the brain to reset from processing information. They can help recharge the body so that you can work more successfully while preserving your health and well-being. The following activities, while simple in nature, allow participants to relax from the overload of stimuli that can build up during the workday.

Choosing one or two of the following *Brain Break* activities for the staff to engage in brings relaxation and a sense of playfulness to a meeting.

Brain Break Activities

Brain break activities can help reset the attention-span clock, reenergize and refocus from spending too much time in long meetings. Brain breaks positively impact our emotional states. The hippocampus part of the brain can only process so much information at once. Too much stimuli can cause information overload, fatigue, and make it hard to focus. Brain breaks support the staff to recharge even in the middle of meetings, promoting self-care through playful activities.

While sitting in your chair:

Marker Flip Toss:

- Hold a marker (like a Sharpie, with the cap on!) in your right hand.
- Flip the marker in the air (one full circle) and catch it in the right hand.
- Flip the marker 3–5 times, then switch hands and try it with the left hand.
- Try flipping the marker to the other hand, and then back.

Hand Wipes:

- Sitting in your chair, put your hands out, palms facing forward.
- The right hand goes up and down in a vertical motion.
- The left hand goes sideways in a horizontal motion.
- Try moving both hands at the same time, one going up and down, and the other sideways.
- Then try switching hands and repeat the movement.

3 United Healthcare | eyesafe, “[Screen Time 2020 Report: Attitudes and opinions of employers and eye care providers about screen time and blue light](#)”

Finger-Thumb:

- Sit in your chair, bend your arms in front of you and put your fists side by side.
- Point your *right index finger out* in front of you, as if you were pointing at the screen. At the same time, stick your *left thumb upwards* toward the ceiling.
- Now switch: point your *left index finger out* in front of you. At the same time, pointing your *right thumb upwards*.
- Now switch...and switch again...How fast can you go switching back and forth?

The Nose Knows:

- Sit in your chair in a relaxed position.
- Grab your *right ear lobe* with your *left hand*, and your nose with your *right hand*.
- Now switch: grab your *left ear lobe* with your *right hand*, and your nose with your *left hand*.
- Switch.
- Repeat in rapid succession.

Rub-a-Dub:

- Stand up.
- Pat your head with your right hand.
- Rub your stomach with your left hand.
- Switch hands.



Mindful and Motivating Music

Incorporate Music

“The brain responds to music it enjoys with a powerful adrenaline, dopamine, and endorphin rush, all of which energize effort and alleviate pain. For this reason, musicologists describe music as ergogenic, or work-enhancing.”

- Kelly McGonigal, PhD. - Author of The Joy of Movement

Welcome Music

Consider playing calming and upbeat instrumental music as the staff are joining meetings. It is always fun to invite staff to share their favorite music and create a playlist. Music has a way of turning on the natural chemical dopamine, which floods the brain with gratification and motivation.

Collective Listening and Sharing

Plan ahead to have one or two songs played approximately two minutes before starting the meeting. Invite a staff member (ahead of time) to share and submit a song that is inspiring, playful and uplifting to be shared during the pre-welcome listening time as the staff is joining meetings.

Suggested Welcome Music Selection:

Don't Worry, Be Happy by Bobby McFerrin

Carmel by Joe Sample

Giant Steps by John Coltrain

I Can See Clearly Now by Jimmy Cliff

Let It Flow by Grover Washington Jr.

Caribe by Spyro Gyra

Golden by Jill Scott

Move My Mood Music!

"Human beings are wired to connect...social behavior is a critical part of our adaptive toolkit."

- Michael Platt, Ph.D., Biological Anthropologist

Suggested Exercise Music Selection:

Good Feeling by Flo Rida

I Got You (I Feel Good) by James Brown

Your Love Keeps Lifting Me Higher and Higher by Jackie Wilson

I Gotta Feeling by Black Eyed Peas

Happy by Pharrell Williams

Walking On Sunshine by Katrina and the Waves

Break My Stride by Matthew Wilder

Don't Stop Believin' by Journey

Three Little Birds by Bob Marley

I'm Still Standing by Elton John

Shotgun by Jr. Walker & The All Stars

Celebration by Kool and The Gang

Shake Your Body by The Jacksons

Got To Be Enough by Con Funk Shun

Get Up Everybody by Byron Stingily

Made For Now by Janet Jackson

Sing A Song by Earth Wind and Fire

Jam by Michael Jackson



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