

Reader Series

Wellness and Self Care

Making a commitment to wellness and self-care has never been as important as it is now. Navigating the realities of a global pandemic and the disruption and fear that accompany it, call for a renewed emphasis on staying well.

The World Health Organization defines wellness as “**A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.**” Achieving wellness supports learning and growth, acceptance of our self and others, and increases our capacity to regulate our own emotions. When we view wellness as a result of our choices and behaviours, it empowers us to take steps to care for ourselves and proactively achieve optimal levels of physical, emotional, spiritual and social well-being.

Spend Time in Nature

Spending time outdoors is one of the most reliable ways to boost our mental and physical well-being. In one study, researchers compared inflammation levels of people who spent time in urban centres to those who spent time in nature. They found that the nature dwellers had significantly lower levels of inflammation. Inflammation is a normal physiological response to injury and threats, but if it is not kept in check, it can lead to a host of illnesses including auto immune diseases and cancer. Spending time outdoors affects our longevity as well. In one study, residents of areas with more green space had 12% lower mortality rates. The key factors identified were reduced risk of cancer, lung and kidney disease. When we spend time in our natural environment, our stress levels go down, our activity levels rise, we enjoy better air quality, and we strengthen social bonds.

Establish Healthy Boundaries

Personal boundaries are the limits we set that teach others how to treat us. Boundaries are key to healthy relationships and self esteem, but many people find it difficult to set and maintain them, especially when it comes to saying “No”. When we don’t establish boundaries and we engage in people pleasing behaviours to the detriment of ourselves and our own needs, we are often left feeling angry, resentful and victimized. Before we can establish our own boundaries, we have to identify our core values, what matters most to us, and what we are comfortable with. Once we have identified our own values and what we will and will not tolerate, we are better equipped to recognize if, and when someone has violated our boundaries.

Politely, but assertively communicating boundaries to others is the next step. There will be a period of discomfort. There always is when we try new things, but the results are worth it. These include stronger relationships, improved self esteem, freedom from guilt and self doubt, and the respect of others.

"Honoring your own boundaries is the clearest message to others to honor them too"

-Author Gina Greenlee



Meditate

Meditation is the process of quieting and calming the mind. It involves turning focus away from the external world and being attuned to our inner state; of being fully present in the here and now. There is mounting scientific evidence that meditating for as little as 20 minutes each day can result in significant mental, emotional and physical benefits. Researchers from Harvard University found that meditation increased neural connections in areas of the brain responsible for memory and learning. In other studies, meditation has been scientifically proven to:

- Increase physical and mental performance
- Relieve physical pain
- Reduce substance abuse
- Help manage symptoms of ADHD
- Bolster creativity
- Reduce the need for sleep
- Improve digestion
- Alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Strengthen the immune system
- Cultivate compassion and empathy



- **Practice Self-Compassion:** Self-compassion involves treating ourselves with warmth, kindness, understanding and a non-judgmental attitude. By practicing self-compassion in the face of failure, frustrations, and loss, we build our resilience. After a significant setback, the way we talk to ourselves and process the experience can impact how we will respond to similar situations in the future. Asking ourselves, “How would my loved ones who care deeply about me treat me and talk to me about this event?” can help guide our self-talk and promote self-compassion.
- **Self-Reflect:** Self-reflection involves examining one's own thoughts and feelings to gain insight. However, in a society fixated on a “go, go, go” mentality, it's difficult to find time to reflect. Something as simple as setting aside a portion of the day to journal can increase self-awareness and improve emotional wellbeing. Recording our thoughts, feelings, observations and experiences during difficult times can help us find meaning in life's struggles and challenges.

Achieving wellness in the workplace, no matter where that may be, is an important factor in overall well-being. Helping you feel engaged and invested in the success of the department is a key goal of Families' Employee Development and Growth Committee. Be sure to visit the [Families Employee Development And Growth Committee Site](#) where you can access a variety of wellness resources including:

- [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)
- [Free Guided Audio and Video Files for Practicing Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction](#)
- [Tools for Psychological Growth and Mental Health](#)
- [Crisis and Non-Crisis Regional Contacts](#)

In addition to these resources, Organization and Staff Development (OSD) offers the following wellness related courses and webinars: *Five Steps to Managing Workplace and Personal Stress*, *Relational Well-Being Meditative Technique*, and *Wellness Conversations*. To learn more, visit the [Organization and Staff Development website](#).

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