



## Do Self Care

Working with students with refugee backgrounds exposes teachers and other professionals to very difficult situations and heart-wrenching first-hand stories. This material can be challenging to process, and can erode one’s fundamental sense of safety and well-being.

Self-care is key to remaining healthy in work with students with histories of loss, grief, stress and trauma. Teachers were asked what strategies they use to:

- help regain and maintain calm?
- gain a sense of personal balance between work and home?
- remain hopeful?

In addition to teacher tips, the following includes ideas from The Child Trauma Academy’s free on-line course [The Cost of Caring](#).

Self-Care	Tips from Other Teachers and other Key Informants
	I think teachers need to be recognized for the work they are doing by colleagues and administration. I think that all staff need a clear understanding of the nature of the work. Professional development on trauma for whole schools is important.
	Luckily, I work in an amazing school with a staff who are highly sensitive and attuned to these students. All staff are aware of the needs of these students.
	Instructors and teachers should acknowledge that their roles are more complex when teaching refugees from war-affected countries – they become co-learners, advocates, challengers, guides, mentors, counsellors and facilitators ( <i>Magro, 2009</i> )
	I needed to talk about my students and their stories with supportive colleagues and friends. It is a lot to hold on to by yourself.
	Cohorts of teachers of refugee students, multi-cultural contacts, interpreters, etc. can help to ease feelings of helplessness and ensure that students’ more complex needs are being met.
<b>Strategies to calm myself down</b>	
	I think one of the best strategies that has helped me is the thought that “I am not perfect”. I make mistakes and that’s okay as long as I am reflective about them. When something doesn’t work or I have handled something incorrectly, I always ask myself “what went wrong and what do I need to do to improve?” It always surprises me just how willing these students are to give me a second chance to do better the next day.
	I have adopted the mindset that these students are in my classroom now, and they are safe now. That’s what matters.
	I remember to model what I am asking the students to do. “Deep breath. I am safe. I am relaxing. I can handle this.”

	Be kind to yourself. Spend time with people that you love. Seek strong supports. Be self-encouraging. Cry when you need to cry. Laugh lots. Seek connection locally, away from work. Be present at the local community resource centre. Help a neighbor. Plant a garden. Enjoy your community.
	When I feel myself becoming angered or upset with a student, I will often ask the student to excuse me and I will employ the STAR method myself. ( <u>S</u> top. <u>T</u> ake <u>A</u> breath. <u>R</u> elax.)
	There is no better way to combat secondary traumatic stress than to take good care of your physical and mental health.
	Playful and healthy activities assist in dealing with the overwhelming feelings of sadness and frustration. In particular, nutrition and healthy exercise are key.
	Journal. Do non-work related reading. Visits museums. Attend sports events. Hike. Go to the theatre. Focus attention away from work.
	“No” is an important word for managing stress. Learn to choose discomfort over resentment.
	Feeling overwhelmed? Take that as a cue to set boundaries.
	Ask for help. Seek practical strategies to manage stress. Breathe deeply, often.
	Take space and time to recover from difficult events or uncomfortable feelings. Take time to rest. Ask for help as a way to manage stress.
	What to do at work? Take breaks. Complete tasks. Set limits with students and colleagues. Be flexible in tasks.
	Create balance by being with children and adults who have not experienced trauma. Emotionally healthy children can bring joy, hope and meaning to our lives.
	Leave work at school when it is time to go home. This can be stressful for teachers working with complex students. Taking work home might include replaying situations or conversations over and over again. Taking work home might include reviewing challenges to find solutions. Setting boundaries of “work time” and “my time” are important in regaining control over your life. Rest and leisure are part of this.
	Finding places to debrief at work. Debriefing at work allows time and opportunity to talk about how you are feeling and how work is impacting you. Make sure this is an emotionally safe place with an emotionally supportive and understanding person. A supervisor who understands the importance of debriefing, without judgment, can have very positive impact. In addition to understanding the complexity of your work, your supervisor might be able to generate strategies for managing work-related stress.
	Find a mentor who has flourished emotionally and spiritually in life.
	Be positive about the world. After exposure to client experiences it can seem that the world is deteriorating. Remember that although bad things occur, so do good things. Seek the good. See the good in what you do.