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## Taking Care of Ourselves

### INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the workbook “Taking Care of Ourselves,” published by Georgetown University’s Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or self-reflection.

### Goals

- ◆ Understand how stress affects teachers’ health, effectiveness, and relationships with children.
- ◆ Consider the negative effects a teacher’s stress can have on children who experience trauma.
- ◆ Identify the signs and causes of stress.
- ◆ Explore strategies to manage stress and prioritize self-care.

### Activity

- ◆ Read and complete the workbook.
- ◆ Use the questions below to reflect on your stressors and their impact on your relationships with children in your care.
- ◆ Develop and implement a plan to manage your stress and prioritize self-care.

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**The quality of [teacher-child] relationships is heavily dependent upon the caregiver’s physical and mental well-being and shapes the basis for all future relationships.**

**Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Georgetown University**

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the workbook? Why was that fact, idea, or example meaningful to you?
  
- ◆ Close your eyes and think about a time when you felt high levels of stress. Now consider your interactions with others while you were feeling that way.
  - How did your stress levels affect the quality of your interactions with others?
  - How can our stress levels shape children's future relationships?
  
- ◆ Why is it essential that we manage our stress when caring for a child who experiences trauma?
  
- ◆ When we engage in self-care activities, we can reduce our stress levels leaving us better able to handle challenges, support children, and build relationships. Take a moment to identify 1-2 ways you currently engage in self-care. How do you feel before, during, or after? How can you expand on your self-care routines?
  - Select one new self-care routine to use or choose a way to expand a current one.
  - Implement for a least one week. Notice how your routine supports you to handle challenges and build relationships, and adjust as needed.
  
- ◆ When we take time to identify our stressors, we can better avoid or cope with them and reduce their negative impact on our relationships with children. Take a moment to identify 3-4 of your stressors. As you list them, jot down the ways they affect you physically, mentally, and emotionally.
  - Select one stressor and identify one strategy you will use to deal with it in a healthy way.
  - Implement that strategy for at least one week. Notice how your strategy supports you to manage your stress and adjust as needed.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To learn more about managing stress and prioritizing self-care:

- ◆ **Source:** Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, Georgetown University
  - ◆ **Recordings:** Relaxation Exercises
  - ◆ **Link:** [https://www.ecmhc.org/relaxation\\_exercises.html](https://www.ecmhc.org/relaxation_exercises.html)
  - ◆ **Description:** This series of short, recorded audio exercises promotes deep breathing and relaxation for early childhood educators. They are available in English and Spanish.
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- ◆ **Source:** Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University
  - ◆ **Video:** Stress and Resilience: How Toxic Stress Affects Us, and What We Can Do About It
  - ◆ **Link:** <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/stress-and-resilience-how-toxic-stress-affects-us-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/>
  - ◆ **Description:** In this video, you will learn more about toxic stress, how it affects us, and how we can cope in ways that build resilience for ourselves, our families, and our communities.