

# Self-Care for School Counselors

Self-care for counselors and educators is an absolute MUST. This work is challenging, detail-oriented, sometimes frustrating, often emotional, and if we don't build up ample energy reserves, the potential for job burn-out is huge. Here are a few ideas to prevent burn-out and recharge your batteries. If you have other self-care ideas, please share them at [www.school-counseling-zone.com](http://www.school-counseling-zone.com). I'd love to add them to the list.

## SELF-CARE AT WORK

~ **Find a sounding board:** Designate someone you trust to be your sounding board when things get stressful. Confidentiality is essential, so if there's not someone on your campus you fully trust to keep confidences, choose someone off-campus who can be reached by phone. (If you vent with anyone about students or parents, honor confidentiality by not using names.) The ability to call someone and rant for five minutes at any time during the day is priceless.

~ **Ask for support:** Along those same lines, remember to ask for help, support, and ideas from colleagues, supervisors, or mentors. School counselors can't know and do everything (though we feel like we're supposed to sometimes), so model for your students that asking for help is healthy and natural.

~ **Take your lunch break:** Take enough time for a healthy lunch EVERY DAY. If you're feeling closed in, eat in the staff lunch room or whatever is provided for you so you can socialize. If you'd rather have some time alone, find a quiet place to eat, or go off campus if you can. If you eat in your office, DON'T do work-related paperwork while you eat. Turn on some music, close the door, relax, and recharge.

~ **Keep your work at school:** Build in time during the school day to do your paperwork and make needed phone calls. No matter how busy you are (and we do know how busy you are), you'll be far more effective in the big picture if you leave your work at work every day. The work will still be there tomorrow.

~ **Work within your Circle of Influence:** If you're not familiar with the concept of "circle of need" and "circle of influence," here's something to consider. The circle of need (all the students and families who need your help and services) is huge, and trying to meet all the needs in that huge circle is overwhelming and unrealistic. The circle of influence is the amount of work (phone calls, 1:1 student interactions, groups, paperwork, meetings, etc.) you can actually reasonably complete in a day, week, month, or school year. If you focus on what you can actually do within those parameters, you'll be more effective and more efficient than you will if you try to do it all.

~ **Choose your self-talk:** Have something (or a list of things) you can tell yourself when things don't go well, so you can keep your perspective. For example, if you see a student heading in a negative direction despite some great ideas you've offered, you may tell yourself, "Even if she doesn't listen now, I may have planted some seeds that will bloom sometime in the future." Or if a student tells you something difficult he's dealing with that you can't do anything about, you can tell yourself, "Well, I was present for him, I really listened, and I know he felt heard and validated. If nothing else, I know there's real value in that."

~ **Stay out of Chronic Complaint Mode:** When you're with colleagues, leave or stay out of conversations that turn into chronic complaint sessions about students, parents, colleagues, or administration. Venting is one thing, but getting sucked into a whirlpool of negative conversation will sap your energy and not resolve a thing. The same goes for gossip and any kind of communication triangle. Direct, assertive conversation is more professional and more effective.

~ **Take pro-active steps:** If you do need to have a conversation with your department head or administrator to speak up about something frustrating, make a list ahead of time of your frustrations, and for each one, make a specific request about what you'd like to be different, or suggest a solution if you have one. Your meeting will probably be much more productive, and you'll present yourself as pro-active instead of negative.

## **SELF-CARE ON YOUR TIME**

~ **Do what you love to do:** Make time regularly to do something you really love to do -- all the better if it's completely unrelated to school. Do it every week, or every day if possible. This is your investment in you. You build energy reserves, and then at work you can give from your surplus instead of trying to give from an empty cup.

~ **Vent your frustrations:** Find outlets for your work-related (and other) frustrations and stresses. Go for walks or hikes, go to the batting cages, sing, dance, have real conversations with people you love and trust, write unsent letters (and shred them), go out in the desert and yell, or whatever works for you. Try several outlets until you find the ones that work best for you.

~ **Spend time in your favorite zone:** Find a creative outlet you can get so immersed in that time ceases to exist. You've probably found one sometime in your life -- go back to it and spend some time there again. The restoration and revitalization are wonderful for you and for everyone who comes in contact with you.

~ **REST:** Rest and sleep. Rest and read. Rest and putter. Rest and lie on the couch. Take some time to do nothing and enjoy it. This is also a major investment in you, and it allows you to model the best kind of self-care in our fast-moving, overly busy, chaotic society -- DOWN TIME.