



Learning and Self-Care Strategies

Name: _____

Parkdale Project Read



Learning and Self-Care Strategies

This booklet is for learners who may feel “stressed” or “stuck” when they are learning. There are helpful strategies to help learners to feel less “stuck” and less stressed with their learning.

Sometimes we cannot change things in our lives. Other times, how we feel about ourselves can make our learning hard. It often takes time to get to identify our needs and know what works for us. It does not happen overnight; it is a process. Learning new ideas is part of that process. At the same time, identifying our learning strengths and needs is helpful.

Importantly, at Parkdale Project Read (PPR), we know that stress can make learning difficult. We try to make PPR a safe learning environment that makes learning fun and also less stressful. It is helpful to remember that it is not just our minds that learn. It is also our bodies, spirits and emotions. When we include all four of these parts, we come to know and like ourselves better. We also come to learn that we each have our own strengths and unique needs. Knowing all this can make learning more enjoyable and less stressful.



Does my past affect my learning?

Often, our past affects the way we feel about others and ourselves. If we did not get love and care needed as children, this neglect can impact our self-esteem. In addition, our past schooling experiences can also interfere with how we learn. Being mistreated and not supported in school and at home can affect our self-esteem and learning abilities.

Later in life, when we are learning, old hurt feelings may resurface. These feelings can interfere with our concentration and memory, which makes learning difficult.

Many times, it is helpful to explore how our past has affected us. To help us understand why we may experience difficulty with our learning, we may find talking with a supportive friend, counselor, instructor or tutor, helpful. Sometimes it helps if you can talk about your past. If you want, there are people you can talk to about your past in a safe and confidential manner. We have a trained counselor for learners. We can always refer you to a suitable person. If you need help, just ask a staff member. Also, writing and drawing may help us express ourselves when we have a lot of worries and concerns on our minds

“I can’t focus on my reading and writing!”

When we have a lot of worries on our minds we may experience difficulty with focusing on our reading and writing. Stress in our lives can also affect our learning. Our difficulty in focusing can be frustrating. We find that talking with someone about what is on our minds can be helpful. Often, when we share with someone, we feel better. We may also learn more about ourselves.

We may learn that our minds are busy with fears and concerns, which could be related to our past. These feelings are very much part of our lives today and may affect our memory. When our minds are busy, it is normal to experience difficulty concentrating on our schoolwork. Study breaks and stretching can be helpful in getting the blood moving. Doing something fun can also help when we feel tired.

Other helpful suggestions...

- Set learning goals and break them down into small steps
- Put aside what you are studying and do something different. Return to what you were doing later.
- Practice relaxation exercises. They can help us to relax our busy minds and stressed bodies. They help us release anger or tension in our bodies.

Short exercise to help with tiredness

Rag Doll Breathing

- Stand and breathe deeply as you slowly bring your arms above your head. Stretch for the sky.
- Hold your breath in this position for a few seconds.
- Exhale and let your arms and body drop — like a rag doll. As you bend your knees, drop your hands near your ankles.
- Repeat three times, and remember to breathe!

“I can’t focus on my reading and writing...”

I have difficulty learning when...

“I *can* focus on my reading and writing”

Write about what ~~works~~ for you when reading and writing.

I can learn when I...

Why living a healthy lifestyle is important?

What does living a healthy lifestyle mean? It means balancing mental and physical health with regular exercise, a sturdy social support, improvement in diet, and a sufficient amount of sleep. Living a healthy lifestyle is simple and just another good habit to form.

Living a balanced lifestyle by keeping fit and eating right helps most students not only manage stress, but control it too. Physical health is just as important as mental health. We can benefit from living a well-balanced life by controlling the way we feel, handle stress, and have relationships.

Stress "signals" fall into four categories: thoughts, feelings, behavior and physical symptoms. When you are under stress you may experience:

Feelings	Thoughts	Behavioral	Physical
Anxiety, irritability, fear, moodiness, embarrassment	Self-criticism, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, forgetfulness or mental disorganization, preoccupation with the future, repetitive thoughts, fear of failure.	Stuttering or other speech difficulties, crying, acting impulsively, nervous laughter, "snapping": at friends, teeth grinding or jaw clenching, increased smoking, alcohol or other drug use, being prone to more accidents, increased or decreased appetite.	Tight muscles, cold or sweaty hands, headaches, back or neck problems, sleep disturbances, stomach distress, more colds and infections, fatigue, rapid breathing or pounding heart, trembling.

What is self-care?

Self-care is doing things that nourish the whole self — emotions, body, mind, and spirit. We try to balance our life needs. We do this by connecting with supportive and caring people. We also try to connect with ourselves. This connection taps into our inner wisdom, where we learn more about our own limits and needs. Self-care can also move us towards healing some of our past wounds. It can help us deal with life's daily stresses, including being a full-time student.

Emotional self-care

- Spend time with people you enjoy being with
- Nurturing and supporting ourselves
- Love ourselves
- Spend time playing with children and pets
- Allow time to express our emotions in a safe way
- Re-read favourite books, and re-view favourite movies
- Celebrate and praise ourselves
- Laugh --maintain your sense of humor, including the ability to laugh at yourself. Rent or take yourself to a funny movie: the more inane the plot the better. Laughter is good for you

Psychological self-care

- Make time for self-reflection, relaxation and play
- Find time to write or draw your feelings and thoughts in a journal
- When needed, talk with a counselor or a good friend— someone you trust
- Connect with others, such as community, family and church
- Use your imagination and participate in fun activities
- Be gentle with oneself

Physical self-care

- Eat nourishing foods and eating a variety of foods. Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and grain products.
- Avoid foods that are high in sugar and salt content.
- Eat three regular meals a day and less is more.
- Seek a diet low in fat and cholesterol



- Regular movement of the body and choose a type of exercise that you like; make it group activity and do it during the day.
- Finally, walking and stretching can be done anywhere and is good for the mind and body.
- Get enough sleep

Tips:

1. Have a regular bedtime
 2. Use your bed for sleeping and not as an all-purpose area
 3. Avoid caffeine after lunch, such as tea, coffee and some drinks may last as long as 8-12 hours.
 4. Drink a glass a milk at bedtime (if not allergic or okay with diary)
 5. Avoid sleeping pills
 6. Sleep in the dark
 7. Don't try to force sleep on yourself. Sleep when you ready to.
- Include pleasure and comfort in your life

Spiritual self-care

- Time for reflection
- Make a spiritual connection, such as mosque, church, community and nature
- Sing
- Pray
- Meditate



Journal Reflections

What are your experiences with exercise and relaxation?

How successful we are at exercising depends in large part on how past experiences with exercise. Examine your own feelings about, and personal history of, exercise.

Overall, how do you feel about exercise?

What obstacles stand in the way of your obtaining adequate exercise?

Describe your past experiences with exercise. Would you say your history with exercise has been good or bad? Why?

What is your favourite form of exercise or relaxation? What do you like about it?

What steps could you take in the future to ensure that you get an adequate amount of exercise?

From Feldman, R.S. (2003). Power Learning. New York: MacGraw Hill

Why Time-Management?

One of the greatest sources of stress is over commitment or poor time management. Plan ahead. Make a reasonable schedule for yourself and include time for stress reduction as a regular part of your schedule.

Trying to take care of everything at once can seem overwhelming, and, as a result, you may not accomplish anything. Instead, **make a list of what tasks you have to do**. Do one at a time. Check them off as they are completed. Give priority to the most important ones and do those first. If a particularly unpleasant task faces you, tackle it early in the day and get it over with; the rest of your day will include much less anxiety.

Most importantly, do not overwork yourself. Resist the temptation to schedule things back-to-back. All too often we underestimate how long things will take. Schedule time for both work and recreation. Too much studying is actually inefficient and can lead to burnout. Recognize when you are most stressed and allow yourself some reasonable breaks. When things feel especially difficult, take a walk or otherwise change your scenery.

Movement of the body

Moving the body gets the blood flowing, which is good for both the mind and body. Walking, stretching and yoga are excellent activities to get the blood moving. Stretching can be done anywhere and everywhere and can help with sore and tired muscles.

Mediation and Yoga

These activities help relax the body and clear the mind of worries and clutter. Many people find yoga and mediation also healing. It is an opportunity to learn more about oneself. There are many ways to mediate. For example, many women find dancing, walking, jogging, and art meditative.



This is a standard form of quiet mediation.

- Sit in a comfortable position flat on the floor with the hands in lap
- Focus on your breath and notice each breath as it goes in and out
- Pick a word, a sound, or an object to focus on
- Try focusing on what you picked
- The word can be your name, or “peace”, or OM— or for someone you are grieving for.
- Observe thoughts, sensations, feelings that come to your mind,
- After watching them, let them go to clear your mind.
- Try this process from 10 to 20 minutes.
- Keep practicing — the benefits are worth it!

There are many ways to make learning fun. Doing activities that you like is a good start.

- Connect with friends
- Take a relaxing bath
- Get involved with your community
- Write and draw your feelings and thoughts.
- Tell and write your life story— storytelling
- Cook and write down your favourite recipes
- Express yourself with paints, pencils, clay, paper and beads.



Self-care: what works for you?



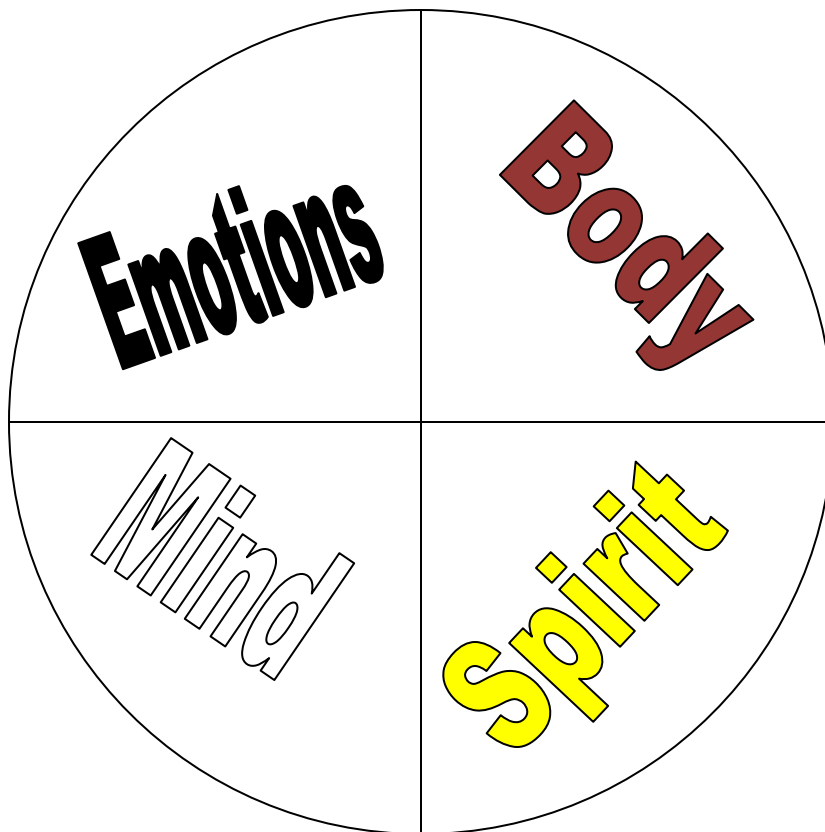
How can I bring the “Whole Self” to learning?

At Project Read, we encourage learners to bring their whole selves to learning. This holistic approach values the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual in learning. When we engage the whole person in learning, creative possibilities open up. We also recognize and appreciate our different learning styles and strengths.

There are many ways that a learner can bring the whole self to learning. Reflecting on how our different parts —emotions, body, mind, spirit —can support or hinder learning is a good start.

Learning to play with voice, song, art, breathing, drumming can be fun and sociable. There are many ways to explore learning that build community connections.

The idea of bringing the whole self to learning is based on the First Nations’(Aboriginal) medicine wheel.



What is self-expression?

It is using different types of art to express and communicate your unique self. Writing, singing, clay, collages, dancing and drawing are good ways to express your emotions, imagination, and creative self!



Journal writing

Journal writing can be an opportunity to explore and reflect on your feelings, thoughts, and ideas. It can be an opportunity to give voice to our desires, needs and wants. At the same time, it shows us our pain and disappointments that we did not deserve.

Here are some possible suggestions for your journal:

- Write, sketch and/or draw your experiences, thoughts, and emotions.
- Ask yourself: How do I feel right now? What colour are my emotions?
- Record your dreams and hopes for the future
- Tap into your imagination using different textures, such as, pictures, photos, lace, feathers and paint.
- Write and/or draw feelings or visual images.
- Write or draw about where you have come from, where you are now and where you would like to go in the future

Why Take Study Breaks?

Every 20 minutes it helps to take a break. It helps with your learning. What should you do on your study break? Anything that relaxes you and lets you work some of the stress out of your system! Here are a few suggestions for both long and short study breaks.

- Stretch and move
- Make a cup of tea, coffee, clean, read a book
- Connect with friends

Anything else?

Inspirations

I use my journal to remind me of the importance of always moving
forward in the healing process
We must do the things we think we cannot do.

by
Eleanor Roosevelt

No person has the right to rain on your dreams.

by *Marian Wright Edelman*



Walls have been built against us, but we are always
fighting to tear them down, and in the fighting, we grow, we find new
strengths, new scope.

by Eslanda
Goode Robeson, quoted in *A Day at a Time*

The highest mountain can't be raced; it's something you must slowly climb.
Recorded by Ida Cox, blues singer, from "The Hour Mama"

Easiness

I do not fight against forces but let myself be guided through them with ease.
I flow from one situation to the next and know that I will be in the right
place at the right time.

"I like to laugh; I like to have a great time. But I also have a right to my
anger, and, I don't want anybody telling me I shouldn't be, that it's not nice
to be, and that something's wrong with me because I get angry"

Maxine Waters

Caring

It is time to care for you. Lovingly take pleasure in your positive attributes. Do not deny your needs, take care of yourself.

Caring for others must be backed up by doing what is needed for yourself first so that you are able to continue caring. Your guides are watching you over you at this time. You are cared and loved.

unknown

I haven't a clue as to how my story will end. But that's all right. When you set out on a journey and night covers the road, you don't conclude that the road has vanished.

And how else could we discover the stars?

by *Nancy Willard*



Your inspirational thoughts or quotes.....

Resources

Parkdale Community Information Centre

416-393-7689

1303 Queen St. West (upstairs in the Parkdale Library)

Monday to Friday 10 – 6

Services: Community information and referrals of all kinds; assistance in filling out forms; calls to government agencies; odd job registry; housing registry.

Toronto Public Library - College and Shaw

416-393-7668 766 College St.

Register at COSTI - Corvetti Education Centre for **free yoga and mediation classes** at 760 College St. or phone 416-534-7400.

Please phone for the schedule

Sistering II –

416-588-3939

220 Cowan Ave. (in Masaryk-Cowan Community Centre)

Services: Drop-ins, meals, recreation for socially-isolated women.

Parkdale Community Health Centre

416-537-2455 (telephone) 416-537-6417 (fax)

1229 Queen Street West

Toronto, Ontario M6K 1L2

Women's Connection is a program for women who have experienced abuse or are at risk of experiencing abuse. Activities include counselling, documentation, legal, groups, public education, and community assistance.

St. Joseph's Women Health Centre

416-530-6850

Women's Counselling Referral & Educational Centre (WREC) 416-534-7501