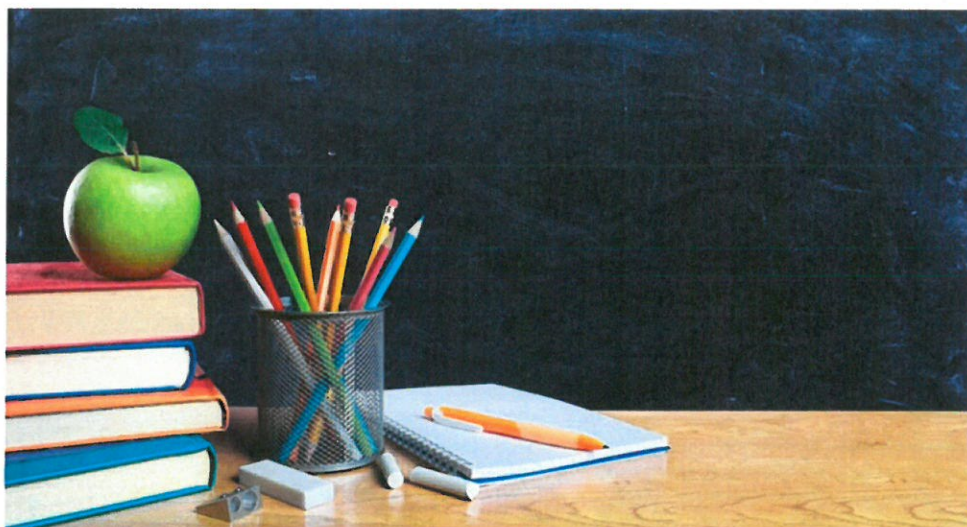




Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
EDUCATION

“OUR WELL-BEING AS TEACHERS DURING COVID-19”



DIRECTORATE: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

JULY 2020

building blocks for growth



Ikamva eliqaqambileyo!



OUR WELL-BEING AS TEACHERS DURING COVID-19

Ladies and Gentlemen

The year 2020 is a one full of trials and tribulations for all of us and for all people around the world. What we are experiencing during this year is something we have never experienced before, or perhaps even thought of. The Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) experienced around the globe has become a common threat. The disease has a devastating effect which is death, death of many people. People – hundreds or thousands – are dying fast. At this point in time we need to work together, put aside all our differences and confront this Covid-19 pandemic.

To be able to do so, we first need to know and understand Covid-19, know how it attacks and also know its symptoms.

Covid-19, according to medical experts, scientists and researchers, is a respiratory disease that mainly affects the lungs. It affects and damages not only the lungs but also the heart, brain, nerves, kidneys, vessels – in other words the entire body (WebMD, 2020). These experts argue that Covid-19 attacks when viral particles land in one's nose or mouth. "Some viral proteins on the virus connect with specific receptors on the surface of our cells, allowing entry. Once this virus enters, it quickly turns the cell into a factory, making millions and millions of copies of itself which can then be breathed or coughed out to infect others" (WebMD,2020).

The known symptoms of Covid-19 are coughing, sneezing, flu/fever, high temperature, itching in the throat, dry throat, shortness of breath and loss of smell and taste.

The Covid-19 has ground much of our society to a halt. Education, important as it is, has come to a standstill. Teaching and learning are something we have never known and experienced before. Indeed, education has entered uncharted territory. We need to stop the spread of this Coronavirus before it leads to the destruction of humanity as we know it.

During this period of Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that we look after ourselves as teachers. Our well-being as teachers – our happiness and health- is very important. Our learners' well-being as well as their learning and performance at school are

dependent on our well-being as teachers. Covid-19 has a devastating effect on the health and well-being of all of us, and therefore it is important to look after ourselves.

One of the key strategies for supporting our well-being as teachers is SOCIAL SUPPORT. According to Collie and Martin (2020) **Social Distancing** (actually meaning physical distancing) of 1.5 to 2 metres, as identified by the authorities, is a crucial step to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Social distancing of 1.5 to 2 metres is very important to keep when we are with other people. However, whilst ensuring physical distancing from others we should maintain social support. We need to enhance our well-being as teachers through strong social support. At these unprecedented times, and in fact at all times, social support is essential for our well-being as people (Collie and Martin, 2020). Therefore, it is important to engage in physical distancing whilst we maintain social connections. This we can do by chatting with our families, relatives and colleagues using telephones, chatting with our learners at the prescribed physical distance or on-line and also arranging virtual meetings, video-conferencing, etc. for interactions with others.

One thing we ought to know is that as people we are mutually dependent. We rely on others for our well-being just as they rely on us. If you are not feeling well as a person, for instance, it is another person who will help you get well. If you are not happy and you talk to another person about your feelings of unhappiness, you feel better. If you are socially connected you become healthier than a person who is lonely. You are able to share feelings and are therefore able to cope well.

Good health comes from regular positive social contact with family, friends as well as colleagues. Once one loses happiness one loses health. Happiness comes through our interactions with other people and through strengthened social ties which improve our personal health. At this point in time, our efforts as teachers should be on developing strong social connections more than ever before, as this Covid-19 will be with us for some time according to medical experts and researchers.

Covid-19 is a direct threat to our lives. As teachers we like keeping up to date with news from the media – reading newspapers, using social media platforms, watching and listening television news. When we see headlines on Covid-19 in media our panic response starts. We become anxious, so anxious that we involve ourselves in a lot of precautionary measures. From a positive note, our anxiety helps us to cope, bond

together from a physical distance and slow the spread of coronavirus. In other words, our anxiety, uncomfortable as it may, is sometimes a good thing, especially if we manage it well. However, we need to make more efforts to prevent panic as it may be contagious.

We should avoid making ourselves more stressed about Covid-19. We should stay calm and pay attention to our normal daily activities and engage, as far as possible, in our usual routines – whilst dealing with the virus. We need to seize opportunities to smile and laugh as these relieve stress and anxiety. We also need to limit our exposure to media to reduce anxiety, as reading about Covid-19 in newspapers and watching television throughout the day can make us even more anxious. The traumatic events that we see over the television create more stress than ever and create more panic. We need to avoid that exposure and be extra-kind to ourselves. This is a hard time for everyone and we are all in this together. What is essential is to maintain strong social support with our families, friends and colleagues at work as this is likely to be helpful to navigate Covid-19 (Collie & Martin, 2020).

Another key strategy we can use as teachers to support our well-being when manoeuvring Covid-19 and its impact is ADAPTABILITY. Adaptability is very important to cultivate our social well-being. Collie and Martin (2016) argue that adaptability refers to the extent to which we are able to adjust our thoughts, actions and emotions in order to effectively navigate new, changing or uncertain situations. When we are faced with new challenges that interfere with our well-being we need to tackle them head on. We should learn to swiftly adapt to change and deal with our anxiety. Understandably, change and feelings of loss of control are things that cause anxiety. However, when new things occupy our space and just do not make sense at all, what we need to do is try to adjust and adapt. If we do not adapt to change and to the changes effected, and to be effected in our work as well, we are likely to experience feelings of burnout.

Changes are effected in the country due to Covid-19 and they will be created in our work as teachers as well. We need to refocus our minds. We should strive to adjust and adapt, failing which our work will be affected negatively as well as the performance of our learners. When we feel uncomfortable and stressed, we need to do some exercise. Physical exercise is very important to one's health. It helps to improve our

immune response and improves our health. For acute stress we can do breathing exercises of deep breathing and slowly releasing the breath. This exercise helps to calm our bodies.

Some of us have already adjusted to the coronavirus and to the changes it has come up with. For instance, handshaking – important as it is in our culture and communities when you meet someone you know and love – we have eliminated it, as well as hugging and kissing. All this we do to keep ourselves and others safe from getting or spreading the coronavirus disease.

Our well-being as teachers is crucial to effectively perform our duties as teachers. We, teachers, should know that we are held in high regard in our communities. The prevention of the spread of Covid-19 in our communities is seen to be our role. It therefore means that our own well-being should be in a good state. If we have healthy bodies and healthy minds, minds which are free from illness of any kind, Covid-19 will soon be a thing of the past in our country.

As we are facing and dealing with this cruel coronavirus, a virus that infects so quick, that spreads so fast and that kills so quickly it is very wise to follow strictly the basic precautions laid to avoid being infected by the virus and die. Some of the precautions are:

- Wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water for 20 seconds.
- Use hand sanitizer only when you cannot wash your hands as mentioned above.
- Wear a face mask at all times when leaving home, going out to public places. Please make sure the mask covers the nose and mouth properly. The face mask helps us to protect ourselves from getting infected with the virus and also to protect others from being infected by us, if a person already has the virus but does not know at the moment, or show any symptoms. If you find that your mask is not fitting, try different styles or designs.
- Keep social distancing (physical distancing) of 1.5 to 2 metres from others.
- Sneeze or cough into a bent elbow or tissue and throw the tissue away into a dustbin. Wash or sanitize your hands straight after that.
- Maintain good personal hygiene.
- Do not share personal items like pens, books, food, drinks, etc.

- Consult a doctor immediately if you are not feeling well.

This is how we can look after our well-being as teachers as well as reduce the spread of Covid-19, death, or else eliminate death caused by the virus altogether. If we strictly follow these basic precautions to avoid being infected by the virus as teachers this will also be beneficial to our learners' well-being as they will imitate our behaviours and further pass on the lessons learnt from us to their parents and siblings at home, as well as to their relatives and friends. Once this happens it will create more purpose to our days and well-being as teachers.

LET US KEEP OUR TONGUES POSITIVE. THE WORLD WILL LOVE US.

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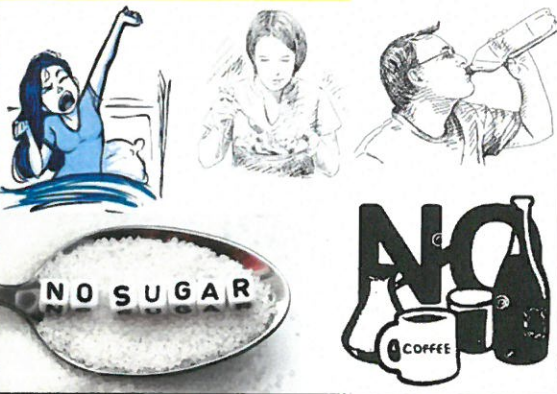

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SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR OUR TEACHERS

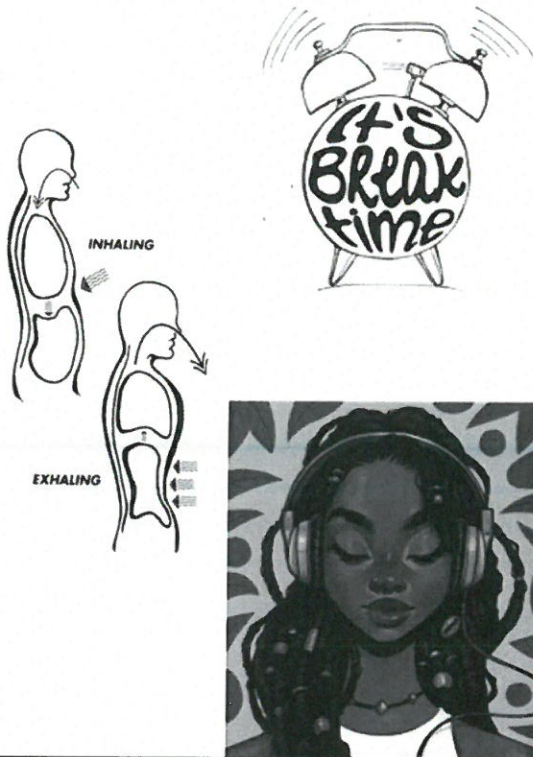
“Caring for yourself so you can care for others”

What is self-care for teachers?

Self-care for teachers means you as a teacher are taking the time and making the effort to look after your physical, mental and emotional health. This will enable you to thrive as an individual and as a teacher. Without looking after yourself, you may not have the energy and ability to help your learners in the best way possible.

Strategy	Description
<p>Back to basics</p> 	<p>As much as it feels like you have so many roles to fulfill and so many responsibilities, let us take a moment to check that we are fulfilling our basic needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you sleep enough? • Have you eaten? • Do you drink enough water? • Cut back on sugars, caffeine and high calorie snacks.
<p>Shorten your list</p> 	<p>It may feel like you have so much to do and each one is just as important as the other. This may be true, but a priority list could take a lot off your shoulders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your top 10 priorities? • Rank these from 1 - 10. • Circle the top 3 and focus on these. • Only once these 3 are complete - head on to number 4...5...etc.

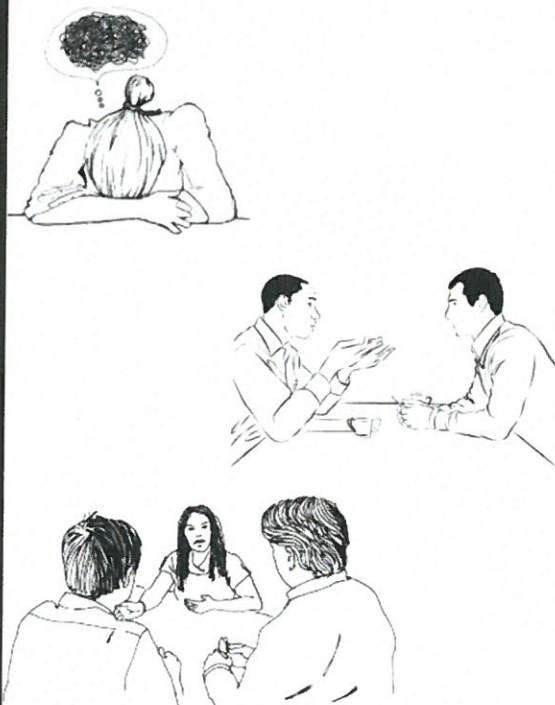
Take breaks!



On any given day at a school it is one full of multiple tasks and challenges. A 5-minute break can go a long way to relax your mind, help you rewind and enable you to tackle the next task with full focus.

- Set out small relaxing tasks that take no longer than 5 minutes of your time.
- Do a breathing exercise - breathe in for 3 counts and out for 4 counts. Try it.
- Play a relaxing song on your phone.
- You could even do these during class time while the learners are working independently.
- Self-care is not something that only takes place at home, self-care should take place in small ways throughout your day.

Reach out



You do not need to have all the answers all the time. You are allowed to be unsure, scared and vulnerable. You are allowed to need help from time to time.

- Seek support from a psychologist, your colleagues, family or friends. Or from all of the above!
- Ask for help from your colleagues or seniors if you feel stuck, confused or overwhelmed.
- Reach out to your partner, family members or relatives for support. We are all in this together and we are all facing challenges in different ways. A little help from our loved ones goes a long way. Teamwork makes all the difference!

Me, myself and I



You are worthy of your own time, your own love, your own effort and your own care. Often times we reach out and forget that we also have the power and the ability to love and care about ourselves.

- Make a list of the things that you feel feeds your heart, your body, your soul.
- Pray, run, sing, dance!
- Make time for at least one thing you love to do each day.
- Laugh - laugh out loud. Laugh until you cry or laugh until you forget why you are laughing. Laughing therapy is real!

Stress triggers



Stress is a normal part of our lives. Believe it or not, stress can be a positive thing in our lives. The right amount of stress can help us to push harder, achieve what we set out to achieve and stay motivated and excited about our careers and lives. However, once stress becomes too much to handle it can lead to undesirable outcomes.

- What makes you feel like your wheels have fallen off? Stuck, scared, angry, overwhelmed or numb?
- These feelings are totally normal.
- Recognize these triggers - what does it feel like? Does it happen during a certain time of the day?
- Avoid these situations and if you do find yourself in these situations, find ways of calming down. Regroup and try again.

*You deserve
love & care
from
yourself*

*I am
equipped with
uniqueness
to shine*

*Self love
is not
selfish*

Activity 1:

Below are a few examples of what you may already do as a way of taking care of yourself. Circle the ones you do and add some new ones that are applicable to you to the list below. Share this list with your loved ones so that they may get to know you better and are able to support you better too.

What do I do for self-care?

- Get plenty of sleep •
- Enjoy sunshine •
- Cook a healthy meal •
- Write or draw •
- Positive self-talk •
- Text friends •
- Take a walk or cycle •
- Tidy up your room and work space •
- Read a book •
- Read about people's lives that may be more complicated than your own •
- Work in your garden •
- Scroll through Facebook •
- Talk to your loved ones •

Activity 2:

There is strength in numbers. It can be helpful to get other teachers involved in your plan of self-care. Try the suggested activity below:

In a meeting or with a group of teachers, take time to set personal goals and encourage each other.

For this activity, get into small groups of two or three.

Step 1: Spend a few moments on your own and think of 3 to 5 goals you have set out for yourself in terms of self-care. Write each one down and use this as a guide for your self-care plan.

Step 2: Share the above goals with your colleagues and be very specific about each goal that you have shared. Plan ways in which you can track your progress.

For example: If you plan to run three times a week, use a diary to mark the days you were able to go for a run. Review at the end of each week or every 2 weeks, whichever way works for you. This way you will clearly see if you are making time to look after yourself.

Step 3: Brainstorm in your group about ways that you could ensure that self-care remains a priority. Find ways that you could encourage one another.

Step 4: Make a group agreement to check in on each other each week. Each person can be responsible for another person and it then becomes your responsibility to check in on your colleague and ensure that he/she is looking after themselves.

•• BUT REMEMBER: SOCIAL DISTANCING KEEPS YOU AND YOUR FRIENDS SAFE ••