

#25 SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS



An apple a day
is the secret of happiness

So schools will again be closing this week thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic. But many teachers' emotions vacillate between relief and anxiety about how we will deal with the rest of the school year.

Let me paint you a picture! Imagine your kitchen cupboards lined with bottles of apple sauce, the fridge crammed with apple juice and in the oven, a sweet-smelling apple pie. On the table are baskets full of shiny red apples ready for the eating.

Okay, okay I know you are going, "Aowa wena, no ways am I spending my time in the kitchen during this holiday!"

Well, here is another picture: You are standing by the kitchen window overlooking your backyard where the branches of the apple tree is sagging from a good harvest. "How beautiful," you think as you notice the potential for apple sauce, and juice and apple pie.

"I shall pick apples today", you say, "But first let me sort out the kids, and deal with that mountain of school admin and, *o ja*, I have to go shopping".

Fast forward a few weeks and let's step outside into your back yard. See and smell the *vrot* and fermenting apples underneath the tree, the crop that never lived up to its potential for sustenance and special moments with the family savouring the apple pie.

"Hey banna," you think, "It has all gone to waste" as you grab the hoe and black bags.

But I am sure you know that the moral of my story has nothing to do with baking or apples really, except that I want you to think of the weeks, days, minutes and seconds that make up the school holiday, as apples. These apples of time can either nourish your body and soul or land in the wheely bin having served no purpose whatsoever.

"Ah, but you don't know my life," you say, "I have so much to do, to catch up on and the kids are home, they have to be fed and entertained and I am deathly tired. I don't have the energy to turn apples into pies."

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I don't doubt that being at home is not really a holiday but that is exactly why I am reminding you to not waste this crop of time apples. Your wellbeing cupboards are bare as it is and that has to change if you are going to survive the rest of the year, and possibly another mad year after that.

Here are my **suggestions**:

- **Deliberately cultivate a relaxed frame of mind** by taking time during the first day or two to sit under your symbolic apple tree (I am talking about that place or time where you can be quiet to pull yourself towards yourself without interruption and if you don't have such a place use bath time or drive time).
- **Reflect on and assess your state of wellbeing** and get clarity on what it is you need and what it is you have to do during this time. It is always a good idea to write it down or make a mind map. That forces the muddled-up thoughts and emotions into clear observations to be transformed into an actionable plan. Yes, you have read right. I want you to **plan your holiday**. And no, hope is not a strategy!
- First prize would be for you to **completely unplug from work**. If you can, do. But although it is good for your physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing to be totally disconnected from work, it can actually make us more stressed. If, all of a sudden we stop doing things, and going places and seeing people, the prolonged high levels of adrenaline in our bodies, can make us feel anxious, affect our sleep and lead to lethargy. The danger is that if we have not planned how we are going to spend our time, our default reaction is to turn to work activities, and before long we are back behind the computer. More rotten apples in the bin.
- If you would like to catch up on work- or home-related demands, do that. Just make sure to **balance** it with time to relax and recharge. Be sure to stick to your schedule. If not, chances are you won't be doing either properly and you will arrive back in class with stinky rotten apples stuck to your shoes and nothing to eat in your lunchbox.
- So, **create a schedule** that includes all the must do's and ample time to relax. That way when you take time out, you will not feel guilty for not doing what you think are supposed to be doing. Do work in the morning and take the afternoon off, or the other way round, whatever suits your family's rhythm. When it is time to relax, make sure you completely unplug from work.

Do what you need to do but at all times make sure what you do is an activity that makes good use of your time.

And if you consider the idea of planning to relax contrived or pointless or you are too worn-out to even bother think of it this way, this break is an opportunity to invest in yourself and good investments like an apple orchard requires planning, planting and a clear purpose if it is going to yield plentiful fruit.

"It's when the apples ripen in the fall that I come to realize what the trees have been up to all summer. And when the fall of my life comes, will I have apples?" – Craig D. Lounsbrough

Keep well and enjoy your holiday
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