

#8 SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

Talk yourself around to wellbeing

I was shocked last week when it was announced that one of the teachers at our school had contracted the Covid-19 virus. Not that it happened, rather by the reaction of some of my colleagues. Some bordered on hysteria expecting the worst, some showed anger to the point of sounding like they were accusing her of being negligent and irresponsible while other were upset, even crying. I was more rattled by their responses than the news. And anyway she has not been admitted to hospital or anything. She is merely self-isolating and resting. Am I being too relaxed and indifferent or are they over-reacting?

Although there will be exceptions, if you reflect on who responded in what way with regard to a person close to you contracting the Covid-19 virus, chances are it would be the same way they react to most things in life. A crisis like this pandemic, merely reinforces the way we see our world and the way we speak our world.

Our worldview is based on how we believe the world to be. In turn, our beliefs are based on the assumptions we make from what we choose to observe. Note, I said 'what we choose to observe' because we tend to not observe the world objectively. We might think we are rational, open-minded beings but actually we are always looking to find support for how we understand the world. You must have noticed that enthusiastic people always find something to be excited about while fearful people always identify a threat or problem in every situation.

These beliefs about the world are expressed through our choice of words, our dominating emotions, our attitudes, evaluations and perceptions spoken out loud.

When working in teams all types worldviews are useful as it keeps a balance in the group. But in times of uncertainty, emotions like fear becomes dominant causing us to get ourselves

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stuck in extreme reactions, from being overly pessimistic to overly optimistic. The first type of reaction leads to catastrophizing or experiencing things as worse than they are while the latter may cause us to overlook important clues as to the severity of a situation.

But even more powerful than the way we communicate with others, is what we tell ourselves. In psychology, this constant chatter of our inner voice is referred to as **self-talk**. Our self-talk can be a truly positive force expressing self-validation, personal efficacy, acceptance, if not optimism, hope and joy despite difficult times. But what we tell ourselves can also be destructive in many ways making us feel vulnerable and powerless. We consider ourselves unable to deal with what we consider an indomitable threat.

Fortunately we can change how we talk to ourselves. Instead of undermining yourself with your self-talk, choose to support your wellbeing this way:

- **Accept things as they are:** It is no use pretending Covid-19 isn't happening but neither is it useful making it worse than it is. Just accept that we are amidst a pandemic and we will have a different way of life for a long while still.
- **Think positive:** Approach the situation with an attitude of being able to solve problems. And even if you can't solve every problem that you are presented with, you will be able to deal with it in a more positive and productive way.
- **Choose how you see the world:** Use your mental filtering system to prioritise your own wellbeing. Highlight the good things that happen like the many people who recover from the virus or the way you and the learners have adapted to the new protocols. Celebrate your victories, all of them no matter how small. Avoid the news if it upsets you, avoid people whose emotional responses upset you. And if you can't practice not reacting.
- **Recognise at least 50 shades of grey:** One of the easiest ways to use self-talk as a weapon of self-destruction is to see things as either good or bad, a catastrophe or a conquest making you a victim or a victor. However, life is not like that, not before the pandemic nor during or post the pandemic. Life is found in the in-between spaces, in the grey area between extremes. Some days you will feel strong, other days not. Some problems you will be able to solve, others not. It does not make you powerless, weak or a failure, it makes you human.

What we believe, we become. If we change the way we look at the world, we change our beliefs and as we change our beliefs we change how we look at the world and with that the running commentary in our heads and the stories we tell the people around us are transformed.

Go on, talk yourself around to wellbeing.

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