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COLLEGE**

8 April 2020

Dear Teachers from Independent Schools,

Herewith a second instalment of the Self-Care Snippet to follow the initial document shared on the ISASA website on 1 April 2020. Please feel free to edit, to share, to distribute and to use these resources in any way that you see fit to help lift and hold our teaching profession during this time. We can be incredibly proud of the wonderful work that our teachers are doing, and I see it as our duty and responsibility to keep those teachers well, in all senses of the word.

Thank you for the work you are doing.

Take care and stay well,

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Self-Care Snippet 2: 1

Working from home as a teacher does not come naturally, to me anyway, and certainly this is something many of you have shared. You have reflected on missing seeing your colleagues, interacting with students and being able to teach as we normally do from a place of comfort.

One of the aspects that I have found particularly challenging during this time is establishing the **pace of work**. At school, we have tidy, clearly demarcated structures for the day, whereas at home, this pace may have become blurry and difficult to anticipate and even manage. It leads me to the comparison of an athlete...if your pace is too fast you may burn out quickly and to draw on a previous metaphor, run out of fuel before the finish line. Too slow and...well we all fear that, don't we?

Managing your pace during the last stretch of this race is absolutely vital. We must remain focused on being present and staying with the moment. We need to remain mindful of the expectations that we need to meet to make it to the end of the race, but we need to be aware of the conditions of this race and take precaution. We are not running on astroturf with the best spikes and an Olympic trainer. We are not fit for this race. We have not trained for this race. This is new. There are bumps, pebbles, gosh even some rather large uphill along the way! We are going to stumble. We may even fall. We are going to get a stitch and we may even have to stop for a break and get some water.

What we need to give ourselves during this time is grace. We need to be able to put down that extra heavy backpack to lighten the load. We need to be able to park some of the guilt that we may be experiencing now. That may include that we are not delivering at the highest level to which we are accustomed. It may be that we are not happy with the end product of that online lesson or how we looked or sounded in that video. It might be that we are not being the most dedicated partner or parent at this time as we feel stretched and depleted. We need to be able to recognise that we are just beginners in a very different world. We don't know how to 'be' just yet. That means we cannot possibly be our best selves. Give yourself the grace in acknowledging that and crediting yourself with the great strides you have made in starting.

Pace is also having the wisdom to know when to slow down and when to speed up. In athletics, this is an art. It is equally so when it comes to your own wellbeing. Right now, you need to maintain your pace. But you need to also take time to slow down and take care of yourself. You need to feed your body, feed your soul and give yourself strength for this race. We cannot give out energy that we are not replenishing.

Mary-Anne Radmacher said, "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes, courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, I will try again tomorrow."

May you have courage today and always.



Self-Care Snippet 2: 2

Sheryl Sandberg is a tech exec, author and billionaire. She is the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook and you might be familiar with her book, *“Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead.”*

Her perhaps (slightly) lesser known book, *“Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience and Finding Joy”*, was co-authored with Adam Grant and tells of her real-life devastation of losing her husband and navigating a new world ahead.

Some journalists have referred to this current pandemic as a time of grieving. While this grief is for the most part, experienced in the collective conscious and cannot be compared to the immense loss experienced when we lose someone dear to us, there are some valuable insights from this book which I think can help us to consider how to appreciate our current version of “Option B”. Let’s be real, none of us signed up for this, right? But in the face of this crisis, we have had to pull together and to reach deep to access our strengths, draw on each other’s gifting and learn new skills so that we can make learning happen.

Sandberg shares the following pertinent quotes which I believe really talk to our current reality. Firstly, ***“It is the hard days – the days that challenge you to your very core – that will determine who you are. You will be defined not just by what you achieve, but by how you survive.”*** Again, in line with my writings so far, I emphasise to you that there are various aspects that require our attention right now: achieving our work expectations, meeting the needs of our families and meeting our own needs. All of this is critical not only to survive, but to some extent to thrive and to find our joy to feed our souls.

The second quote that I think is relevant is this, ***“Motivation comes from working on things we care about. It also comes from working with people we care about.”*** It is so critically important that despite us being busy with so much right now, we know that we have each other. At the moment we are embracing aspects of change. That is not easy for many of us. But, for some members of your team, this is their space of best potential. Having the people that thrive on change taking us forward is a gift. It is the same with technology, it is the same for those that are introverts. While some of us may be experiencing our greatest time of challenge, others have the internal resources and innate abilities to be able to help guide and lift us through what is an area of gifting for them. Let’s continue to reach out and share our gifts in various areas as we rise over the next week.

Lastly, Sandberg says, ***“Trying to do it all and expecting that all can be done exactly right is a recipe for disappointment. Perfection is the enemy.”*** Here I also draw on Brenè Brown, who refers to herself as a ***“recovering perfectionist”*** and an ***“aspiring good-enoughist”***. Let’s try to embrace this today. Let’s show up and give it what we’ve got, but let’s also be kind to ourselves and to others. We are giving of our best. Using Brown’s analogies again, we are all in the arena, that is what counts.



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The final quote is rather controversial in terms of language and so I have “poetically” altered it, but it is the most quoted of all of the references for “Option B” and is one that I do think bears relevance. In having to face a father/daughter dance shortly after losing her husband, Sandberg was feeling desperate. The advice from her friend? ***“Option A is not available. So let’s kick the ‘heck’ out of Option B.”***

Let’s do this thing. We have overcome so much in getting to this point. Congratulations on your own personal successes in this time. They are immense, celebrated and valued.



Self-Care Snippet 2: 3

When this journey began, I think we all (initially) thought that one of the things we would all have when working from home was additional time. I remember us joking about how our desktop folders would be so neatly organised (mine are worse) and we would have time to really focus on those things often shoved to the bottom of the pile.

Perhaps it is worth relooking at that now that we have lived the last few weeks...as they say, hindsight is always 2020. (Ironic. Isn't it)

While we certainly have been gifted time in the sense of additional time to sleep in, fewer hours in traffic, more time to focus on individual students and how they are learning by being able to focus on their work more intensely than in a classroom...so much has come with it that our time has had to be re-allocated in a sense. With being at home, we are now teachers to our children – this requires time, focus and intense energy. We are now partners for the full-day, not just at night when our husbands/wives return home from work and on weekends. We are now even called on by our pets for devoted attention for more hours of the day than usual because we are present!

We have more household responsibilities than we usually do, we have more meals to think of and take care of during the day we have to give more attention to matters in our homes such as maintenance or creating spaces for 'home offices' and the like, that there was no need to think of three weeks ago.

Aside from the physical dedication of our time, our cognitive energies are being focused on a diverse range of new things. The obvious new skills we have learnt and how we have adapted our teaching has taken energy (remember these are now no longer habitual, these are new networks we are developing, and our brains are working super hard at getting this right). In the background, we have Covid-19, whether we choose to or not, operating as a constant hum. The anxieties of the virus, the implications, the economic impact, the questions around our future planning, questions about daily planning like shopping...the list goes on.

Now let's add to that that we are all operating on some level of trauma. And what happens to our brain during trauma? We flip our lids. Herewith a link to Dan Siegel explaining the hand model of the brain: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOT_2NNOC68. A quick summary? Our pre-frontal cortex which controls our executive function shuts down and our reptilian brain takes over. We are not firing on all cylinders!

Lastly, we are in the final few days of term. Let's imagine that this was a normal term and everything had proceeded according to plan. How would you be feeling? For myself, I know that I would be feeling tired, probably overwhelmed, I would have my checklist ready of things I needed to ensure were completed properly before holiday.



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Taking this entire picture into account, reflect on how you are feeling about your current goals and the expectations on yourself. You may be experiencing a sense of frustration. You may feel disappointed in yourself that you are not achieving more, accomplishing more, taking things to the next level. I guess, when we consider the logical path of how we got here it makes sense, right? But now factor in everything that I have shared in addition to that logic. And then factor in your own context. The personal circumstances you find yourself in and what you are holding right now for yourself, for your family, for your friends, for your community, for South Africa, heck, even the world. I think we need to cut ourselves a little slack...

Newt Gingrich said, "Perseverance is the hard work you do after you already get tired of doing the hard work you already did." (<http://www.thinkexist.com>)

You have been here before, in this place. Yes, there are more rocks in your path...even a couple of boulders. But look to what you normally do, what you do at this time of term that helps you to recharge. Find that one thing today that will keep you on track. Find another one tomorrow. A really simple way to do this, if you are struggling, is to make a list of the 5 senses and then allocate things to each sense that give you a sense of joy. For example, for me, under the sense of smell, it would be lighting a fragrant candle...

Let's handle the rest of the term with the courage and tenacity that we do every single time.



Self-Care Snippet 2: 4

My message to you today is to take stock of where you are and to go easy on yourself. We are entering a week which may present some different challenges to you. I can just imagine that when you read that sentence a feeling of dread settled over you...more challenges??? Come on! I didn't sign up for this. I want to get off this ride!

What I mean by different (note: not more 😊) challenges, is that this week is a week of settling. It is a week where we have tried most of the new things...the novelty of doing an exercise class online, baking, creating schedules...has most likely started to wear off. And here's what is also important...if you haven't tried an online exercise class, you have yet to bake your own loaf of bread and you have not printed out and laminated a schedule for every member of your family to ensure balance and wellness...hey, that's just fine too!

This week, you need to cut yourself some slack. You may be feeling a little more tired than usual as your body adjusts to a new rhythm. You may be feeling increasingly frustrated in staying at home. In fact, this morning I googled the term "Covid-19 agitation", I mean you would think I would hit some serious results right? What I did find was an excellent article by Harvard University, that had some great tips:

https://www.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/content/coronavirus_HUHS_managing_fears_A2%5B5%5D.pdf

In this article some of the common reactions that the authors have noted include difficulty concentrating or sleeping, anger, anxiety, scepticism or bravado, overexposure to the media and feelings of loss.

They suggest that we keep things in perspective, stay informed, practice mindfulness and allow our rational mind to hold the fort rather than our emotional one.

Please read the whole article, much better than my oversimplified summary.

So today, amidst whatever authentic and valuable feelings you may be experiencing, go gently with yourself. Notice the emotions and try not to judge yourself harshly for how you might be managing this time, acknowledge that you **are** managing this time. If you feel that you are not managing or not managing in a healthy way then it is important to reach out and connect with someone.

My wish for you is that in this, you experience a sense of serenity. According to Harold W. Becker, "Serenity is the tranquil balance of heart and mind." (Retrieved from:

<http://www.thelovefoundation.com>).



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You may be familiar with the Serenity Prayer:



(Retrieved from: <http://www.writeher.com>)

Today I offer you another, anonymously written version of this prayer:



And these final thoughts for today:



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Reference: Davis, Mary (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.everydayspirit.net>).



Self-Care Snippet 2: 5

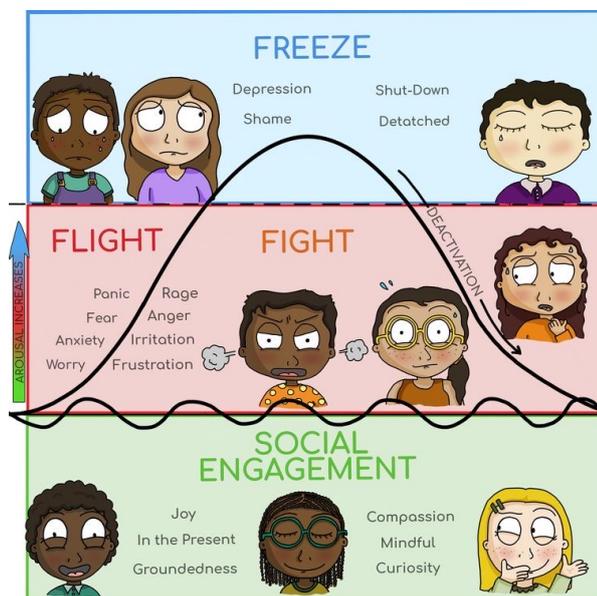
I have been doing some reading on Polyvagal theory over the last few months. Polyvagal theory is based on work by Dr Stephen Porges and is a relatively new field of study. It proposes that instead of having 2 states of emotional regulation (sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system), we have 3.

This is how we initially understood it:

A simple example, a springbok is hunted by a lioness. The springbok makes a run for it (sympathetic nervous system: fight/flight/flee)...when the lioness catches up, the springbok goes limp (parasympathetic nervous system-freeze)...feigning death until it spots the opportunity to make a run for it in the space of distraction (back to sympathetic nervous system).

Porges suggests that we have a third system, which is when we are at our best, which he refers to as connection, we are socially engaged.

This is what it looks like:



(Image retrieved from Pinterest, source unknown)

We are not facing any lionesses now, unless on the virtual game drives at Kruger (🐆) but we are certainly being activated by environmental stress. It is likely that many of us are operating between the “flight/fight” stage and “social engagement” phase if we are functioning pretty well. There may be times of worry, panic, frustration, but also times where you are able to feel present, feel grounded and compassionate.



It is when we enter the phase of “freeze” that we require intervention and support as we are unable to access our resources effectively to gain the support we need and so may need help.

Our goal, through this time and entering the holidays is to be socially engaged. In this state we should be physically well, sleeping and eating properly, feel emotionally open and regulated.

How do we get into this state, besides the ways that we have discussed already? If you are talking Polyvagal theory, we are talking about the physical activation of states. Basically, the vagus nerve is the longest nerve in your body. It connects our brains to our bodies and is referred to by Gould (2019), as the “Body’s Communication Superhighway.” (Retrieved from <http://www.livescience.com/vagus-nerve.html>). It originates in the brain and carries sensory information throughout the body, significantly influencing our immune system. It directly affects our heart and breathing rates as well as our digestion (you might have heard the term rest-and-digest). It also carries signals from our internal organs back to our brain. Pretty important nerve to be looking after I would say, since 90% of nerve fibres connect back to your brain through this nerve! (Reference: Schwartz, A. (2015). Natural Vagus Nerve Stimulation. Retrieved from: <https://drarielleschwartz.com/natural-vagus-nerve-stimulation-dr-arielle-schwartz/#.XotLtC97GfU>)

There is a great deal of promising research emerging, demonstrating how the vagus nerve can be stimulated to address issues such as inflammation, anxiety, anger and stress; primarily through slow abdominal breathing, using any technique with which you feel comfortable (Bergland, C. (2017). *Diaphragmatic Breathing Exercises and Your Vagus Nerve*. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/the-athletes-way/201705/diaphragmatic-breathing-exercises-and-your-vagus-nerve>). It is also stimulated by humming and singing.

You may be familiar with 4-square breathing. To start, draw a square in the air with your index finger. Draw the first side of the square while counting to 4 and inhaling deeply. Hold the breath for 4 counts while drawing the imaginary second side of the square. Exhale for 4 counts while drawing the third side of the box in the air and lastly hold for the last count of 4 while drawing the last remaining side of the square.

Another technique is 7-11 breathing. Breathe in for the count of 7 and out for the count of 11.

There are several other apps that may also offer some great exercises, try Calm, VirtualHopeBox or Headspace as a start.



Polyvagal Theory - An Intro

Ventral Vagal

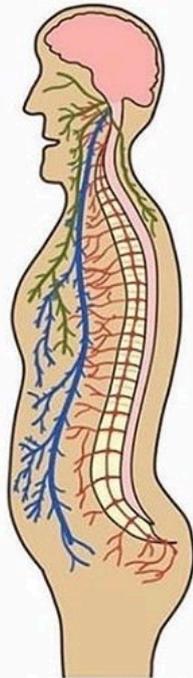
- Social Engagement Network
- Location: Face, throat, chest
- Ability to talk, engage, co-regulate, self-soothe and remain calm
- Top of the regulatory and evolutionary ladder

Sympathetic

- Fight & Flight (Mobilization)
- Location: Along the spinal cord
- Mobilize the body to fight, or run away from danger
- Increased heart rate, tense muscles, fast shallow breathing
- Middle of the regulatory and evolutionary ladder

Dorsal Vagal

- Freeze, Collapse, Dissociate (Immobilization)
- Location: Diaphragm, heart, gut
- Shut off from the threat, when can't fight or flight
- Decreased heart rate, low energy, depressed, numb, shut down
- Bottom of the regulatory and evolutionary ladder



@Ayan_Mukherjee-

Reference: Mukherjee, A. (2019). An Introduction to Polyvagal Theory. Retrieved from: <http://www.picuki.com>

Diagram Notes:

Ventral Vagal-Social Engagement, Sympathetic-Fight/Flight, Dorsal Vagal-Parasympathetic/Freeze. We want to be heading up the ladder...you will notice that the states are linked to parts of the body. There is a lot more to this theory that is really fascinating!

One of the things that we need for social connection is, well, social connection. So, at this time, we are at a disadvantage if all of our communication is online and we are not seeing the facial expressions and hearing the intonation of voice etc., that comes with communication. It remains important that we connect with others during this time – family, friends – over the phone or via video chat if you can. If you cannot do it in real time, try to at least send a voice note or make a call, this makes all the difference to connection.

Take a deep breath and have a beautiful day!



Self-Care Snippet 2: 6

Today's self-care snippet comes from Brené Brown's podcast, *Unlocking Us*. Her episode, entitled: *Brené on Anxiety and Calm and Over/Under-Functioning*. The full episode can be accessed here:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/za/podcast/unlocking-us-with-bren%C3%A9-brown/id1494350511?i=1000470370881>

In this podcast Brené Brown speaks about what she calls our "patterned habitual ways of managing anxiety" that we learned (most likely) in our first family. Through this, she intends to help us to create a greater self-awareness about how "we show up in anxiety and how we move through it."

According to Harriet Lerner, who Brown quotes frequently throughout the podcast, anxiety is one of the most contagious emotions we experience and is rarely the function of an individual but is more often the function of groups. So too, (fortunately), is calm.

Brown describes two patterns of responding in anxiety, which we should hold lightly (bearing in mind her research on shame).

The first, is over-functioning. Over-functioners tend to rescue, try to control the situation and take charge in situations of crisis. Often, they appear to micromanage and become task-driven, rarely taking the time to self-reflect or introspect. Over-functioners "do" to avoid "feeling".

On the other hand, there are under-functioners. Under-functioners do not do well with anxiety and tend to invite others to take over. They are at times described as irresponsible, "not being able to take the pressure" and "flaky". Under-functioners present as fragile in situations of crisis and requiring protection.

These are unwanted identities (shame) and as **patterns** of behavior they do not define our identity, but rather functions of our roles, possibly within our family as children, birth order or similar factors, speculates Brown.

What do we do with this information? We need to recognise that these patterns simply represent our armour. This is what we wear when going to battle with anxiety. As with so many things psychological, recognising and naming the patterns is the first step to meaningful change. Thereafter, Brown suggests that over-functioners work on tapping into their vulnerability and under-functioners work on maximizing their strength and competence. It helps to visualize this as a continuum or scale of balance that we are attempting to master in the quest for obtaining calm.

What is calm? Brown gives this beautiful definition: "Perspective, mindfulness and the ability to manage emotional reactivity."



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At the moment, things are hard and the fear we are experiencing is real, Brown acknowledges. But she reminds us that calm is a practice that we **choose**.

She suggests the following steps:

1. Try to be slow to respond and quick to think.
Do you have all the information that you need to respond emotionally to this situation?
2. Stay mindful that calm has an impact on situations of anxiety. Calm and anxiety are both contagious. Do you want to infect or heal?
Small things matter; ratchet down your tone of voice, cadence and volume. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know". We don't know right now.
Practice emotional non-responsiveness.
Remember the influence of mirror neurons-we match the level of intensity around us.
3. Breathing (as with yesterday's snippet), is the best place to start.
4. Stay aware of your patterned responses and name it if you feel anxious, talk about it calmly.
5. Finally ask yourself the question, will freaking out help the situation? The answer is always no.

The news right now is hard. It is going to get harder, says Brown. Let's be aware. **Our calm can be as contagious as our anxiety.**