

Q. Are there some specific school nurse words of wisdom given their roles as being responsible for many lives in an environment that is changing often?

A. Part of this is having a routine and expectations for your own day for what you want to accomplish – priorities, families to talk to, students to check in with, teachers to connect with. During this COVID time, setting boundaries is so important including being able to say no. Develop scheduled times people can talk to you about COVID or wellness, etc., so you are not inundated all day and can prepare yourself for those moments. Be able to negotiate time for yourself and the other professionals you work with. It is hard when you want to be effective in the job in the moment. Carving out time for yourself is really important. Get administrative buy-in for wellness activities.

Q. Sometimes we turn to coping mechanisms we may not even realize. When we find ourselves in these uncomfortable spots, what are some positive coping mechanisms that are your favorites for this specific population? What negative coping mechanisms should school nurses look for?

A. Deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation is at the top. Shut the door, go into the bathroom to take some deep breaths or splash cold water on your face. Google progressive muscle relaxation and learn how to use it – start with specific muscle groups to squeeze then let go. Try to think about your toes in your shoes to get grounded and think about where your body is in contact with the earth. Be mindful of physical experiences which can be very grounding. Also, be comfortable saying “I don’t know” to set limits and keep from being over committed.

Negative coping skills to avoid or be mindful of are things such as yelling, giving up on solving problems or issues at hand, alcohol, cigarettes, jumping on your phone to be distracted from emotions. Also keep an eye on bringing work problems home, so you do not take your agitation from work out on partners, kids, and others.

Q. Are caffeine and chocolate good or bad coping skills?

A. Don’t rely on them as your primary stress reliever. Food is not a good choice to relieve stress. If there is a food that you really look forward to and can eat a small amount of, that can reduce stress. Caffeine can increase anxiety and blood pressure, so large amounts will not help.

This is where mindful practice comes in – if you indulge in a pumpkin spice late in the morning and savor the experience that is different than plowing through a second pot of coffee or a box of chocolate.