



CR Mental Health Monday Weekly Digest Teacher Edition

\*\*\*\*\*

# Self-Care Tips (2)

Mind and Body Connection



by **Heather Ness** on April 20, 2020

We finished up another week working with students and you may have noticed a few things about yourself. You may have noticed your heart beating a bit faster, tightness in your chest, or the inability to focus when you really want to. You may notice these physical responses when you walk into a store, watch TV, look at social media or simply think about today's new norm.

Would it surprise you if I said this is pretty common and you're not alone? This physical response is actually part of the sympathetic nervous system that triggers the fight or flight response, then moves to the parasympathetic nervous system that helps us calm our body. Basically, we hit fight or flight and escape the stressor then slowly return to a calm state.

So what happens when the stressor is ongoing or chronic and you can't fight it, run from it or calm it? Some might physically and mentally check out while others feel those physical body responses. This can look different for each individual and leave that feeling of uncomfortableness that we just can't shake. Research is showing that with chronic stress the Ventral vagal nerve network is at play. It is a network that helps us stay calm and cope with daily stressors. It's activated when we are connected. You need to be connected with yourself, the environment and others for this to work. The tips below will help stimulate the Ventral Vagal Nerve and help those physical responses we are having.

# Mind and Body Connection

by [Heather Ness](#) on April 20, 2020

## Mind and Body Connection

**Know How Your Body Feels;** *we become so caught up in our own surroundings we often forget how we feel until we don't like that feeling.* Sit back and start to recognize the small warning signs of

both good and uncomfortable feelings. When you start to recognize how your body feels when it is comfortable, a little uncomfortable, more uncomfortable and extremely uncomfortable, you will be better equipped to manage it. Notice if your shoulders get tight, or if you clench your jaw when you are on social media. Recognize if your nagging headache gets worse when you go to the store or notice your breathing when you are sitting solo drinking a glass of your choosing. If you don't notice your own warning signs, it is hard to know when you need that minute to rest and digest what is going on both internally and externally. When you notice what helps your body feel comfortable you can access those activities when you are uncomfortable. Connecting with your body, understanding your body's responses and taking the time to connect with your body with activities that keep you feeling comfortable are key. So, recognize and connect with how your body feels. When your body feels uncomfortable, take a deep breath, go for a walk, stretch or grab a cool glass of water to reset the vagus nervous system and stay connected with your body.



**Use Deep Breathing;** *It sounds easy enough but we often overlook this tool....*



Practicing deep breathing connects your mind and body allowing air to flow deep into your body, passing your vocal cords, into your diaphragm and directly affecting that important Ventral vagal system. Deep breathing basically calms the nervous system, reduces stress and anxiety while helping to increase your attention span and focus. By connecting with deep breathing and practicing during a relaxed state, you can teach your body to take deep breaths when an uncomfortable situation arises or when your focus is needed. These deep breaths will help your body shift from that fight or flight response and move toward that connected calming state. Simply, breathe in 1, 2, 3, hold 1, 2, 3, out 1, 2, 3. Repeat for ten deep breaths allowing each exhale to last a little longer.

**Shift Stinking Thinking;** *Let's be real, we all have stinking thoughts that come into mind from time to time.*

Some of us have those thoughts sit around a little longer than others while others can shift those thoughts easily. These thoughts, these stinking thoughts, directly affect our nervous system and how our body feels. These thoughts are often derived from facts but we can shift and mold the thought so the impact of the thought is not as intense. We can not speed up the current situation with work, school, home or health. However, what we can do is look at it from a different perspective, relieving your sympathetic nervous system of that fight or flight mode. When you think "I'm stuck in this house" your body will respond as if it is in danger and you can't escape. If you shift that thought and focus on things you can control, you allow your body and the nervous system to rest and relax. Examples can be something as simple as "The family is stuck in this house". The shift can be "family time". Another example "this rain and wind is pounding on the window" can shift to "the raindrops are dancing down the window". Shifting the thought that affects the nervous system negatively is not always easy and does take practice. So take the time to look at life through a different perspective, see things from another view. Think and write about the positive things in life. Simply take notice and make time to have that gratitude list and remember the beauty that surrounds you. Connect with our thoughts and shift the ones that affect us negatively so our Ventral vagal nerve network feels a healthy connection



**Use Your Five Senses;** *As we get lost in our own mind we need to remind ourselves to connect with our five senses.*

Take a step back from the situation at hand and refocus on all of the input our body takes in. Take notice of the things you see, the sunset in the evening, the leaves blowing in the wind, the way the sun shines on your floor. Recognize the things you feel; the sun on your face, the dishwasher on your hands, the texture of your couch. Listen to those sounds you didn't notice before, the birds chirping, the creak on the floor, the sound of a child's laughter. Take notice of those scents; the smell of your coffee or juice in the morning, that fresh laundry on a clothesline or that smell of body soap hours after you showered. Taste your food, actually slow down and taste each ingredient independently. Taste how long that toothpaste or mouthwash lingers in your mouth or how your mouth tastes when you are hungry. Use this time you have now and explore your five senses. Connecting with your five senses allows us to connect to our environment and be in the present in the here and now. It helps us slow down and focus on what is right in front of us. This connection with the environment allows us to be mindful and grounded. We start to understand and harness our thoughts, emotions and how our body feels. Take time for yourself to truly utilize your five senses and don't just rely on them for those automatic reactions. Go for a walk and notice things. Sit on your couch and see life from a different view. Notice the movement of others, the way things taste, sound and feel. Really take the time to purposefully see life with your 5 senses. Stimulate the ventral vagal nerve network and connect with the world around you.

**Connect With Others;** *We have all seen the videos of drive-by birthday parties, those zoom mishaps and the videos that remind us that we need to be connected.*

Remember, the Ventral vagal nerve network needs those connections. Those connections not just with our mind and body, but connections with each other.

Making eye contact, even via zoom or facetime, actually cues your body to relax. We don't all have that

same network or accessibility to connect with others via the internet, phone or in person. Other activities you can do to stay connected with each other include; writing a letter, recording a message, or simply imagining someone you trust. Research is showing that even connection with pets fosters the same results of connection and stimulates the Ventral Vagal nerve network. These alternative forms of connection allows you to be present in your surroundings. This then sends signals to your nervous system that you are safe and connected. Remember, reaching out and staying connected allows us to focus on the here and now and relieve the nervous system of potential stressors of the future. So look into the eyes of a loved one, talk to friends, write to those who don't have support, help others and stay connected.



## Next Week Self-Care TIPS

Loss and Grief

by **Heather Ness** on April 27, 2020



---

Caesar Rodney School District  
Countywide Programs

Self-Care Tips: Mind and Body Connection

278 Sorghum Mill Rd,  
Camden-Wyoming, DE