

Introduction

While I was sitting in the back of my Weight Watchers meeting, my phone notifications started piling up. Something I said while conducting teacher training a few days prior had gone viral. (By *viral*, I mean within one day of the original post, a meme attributed to my name had 6,200 reactions. There were well over 400 comments and 7,300 shares on one site.) Oh boy.

I'll be perfectly honest with you; my first thought was *I hope I didn't screw this up*. I scrambled to the internet, typed in some key phrases, and was unbelievably relieved to see that yes—numerous articles, education blogs, and reports backed up what I had said. Thank goodness.

You see, during that teacher training, I said, "Teachers make more minute-by-minute decisions than brain surgeons, and that is why you're going home so exhausted each day." Now, we can certainly argue the merits of my wording. For instance, I believe brain surgeons are called *neurosurgeons*, and I'm not sure we want said neurosurgeons making a whole lot of decisions when they're operating on our brains. However, my point is the average teacher makes 1,500 educational decisions every school day. In an average six-hour day in front of students, teachers make more than four educational decisions per minute (BusyTeacher.org, n.d.), and that is exhausting.

Next, I made a fatal decision—I started to read the comments. I know it was foolish. I really do know better than to do this. I once heard someone say reading the comments is like eating a sandwich that might have broken glass in it, but I did it anyway. For every wonderful shout-out to a teacher, there were (grammatically incorrect and wildly misspelled) posts about how lazy teachers are (only

teaching half the year); how these data are stupid; how teachers are dumb; how my last name, Boogren, looks like *booger*; how teachers are overpaid; and on and on—and *I couldn't stop reading them*. I felt exposed and vulnerable. (Let me remind you that I was at a Weight Watchers meeting, stripped down to my tank top and shorts to get on the scale in front of a stranger—as if I didn't already feel vulnerable enough.)

I was devastated. These comments simply were not in line with my worldview. They didn't match my experience as a lifelong educator and an educational researcher, nor did they match the data regarding teacher retention. Those data claim that the profession loses 50 percent of new teachers within the first five years due to excruciating demands; 4 percent *more* professionals than other professions; and 15.7 percent of teachers every year, with fewer than 34 percent leaving for retirement (Riggs, 2013; Westervelt, 2016).

Finally, I thought, *I have something to say here. I deserve to respond to these comments for the sake of all the amazing educators I have the honor and privilege of working with, but I refuse to get into an online shouting match.*

So my response to the naysayers is that I've worked with a lot of teachers in my career. Do I fully admit there are some very bad ones in the mix? You bet I do. I've seen them. I've coached them. They've made me cry. Can I tell you story after story about the ridiculous things they do? I could go on and on—but I choose not to, because for every teacher who isn't enhancing the profession, ten others are working their tails off to be intentionally inviting to their students, often to the detriment of their own families, health, and sanity (Boogren, 2012; Novak & Purkey, 2001). These teachers need someone to acknowledge the incredible demands and pressures felt in schools and classrooms all over the country because the public often has a skewed view of the job's realities. And when the public thinks they understand a teacher's job, they feel like they have the right to comment, judge, evaluate, and criticize, and that is crushing to the hardworking educators I've had the pleasure of working with.

The reality is that teachers are public servants, and people have a right to share their opinions about teachers just as they do about police officers, doctors, and government officials. But criticism

hurts when you intimately know the other side. For teachers, that side includes the hours revising lesson plans to ensure challenging advanced students while simultaneously scaffolding students who need more time. It's the late nights at school coaching, grading, planning, sponsoring, cheering, meeting, and fretting. It's having trouble feeling fully present with your family because students also feel like family and, when you're not with them, you're not sure how much love they're getting. It's having trouble feeling fully present with students because you're carrying guilt about spending the evening at home grading papers, creating lesson plans, and responding to emails and texts from students and parents. It's paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. It's figuring out how to provide feedback that strikes the precarious balance between loving and pushing—between pointing out what's correct and being honest about what's off the mark. It's the hours spent with colleagues focused on one student, when ten more need that same attention. It's presenting a lesson while also being aware of each student's behavior in your classroom so you can direct the appropriate attention, support, love, and discipline each student needs. It's testing and assessing, and knowing that both the students and their teachers will face unfair consequences because of one test. It's having a perfect day when no one visits your classroom, and having everything fall apart when twelve visitors arrive for instructional rounds. It's setting up field trips, guest speakers, and parent volunteers—tasks so monumental that planning a wedding feels like a piece of cake in comparison. And that's only some of it.

I continually contemplate the question, "How else can I help ease the burden, lighten the load, honor the work, and sing the praises of hardworking, dedicated, and passionate educators beyond what I provide during my professional development training?"

I now have the answer.

What Self-Care Is

I believe, in my heart of hearts, that the key to thriving—as both a human being and an educator—rests in self-care. To be clear, that is *daily* self-care, not the kind we promise to do during the summer or on the weekends, or when our own children are older, or when we retire. Yes, *daily*. Psychologist Catherine

P. Cook-Cottone (2015) defines *self-care* as the “daily process of being aware of and attending to one’s basic physiological and emotional needs including the shaping of one’s daily routine, relationships, and environment” (p. 297). These include small tweaks, reminders, and (perhaps most important) *permission* for educators to take care of themselves.

Educators read lots of books and engage in lots of professional development for the sake of student achievement, and they should continue doing so. However, I propose a radical shift in thinking. What if teachers learn to take care of themselves *while* taking care of their students? What if it weren’t an either-or situation? What if you split your time between your own and students’ needs in a new way? What if, for every move you make for the sake of your students, you also make a move for your own sake? What if you not only engaged in professional development on pedagogy and content, but also spent time learning how to best support yourself?

On average, I travel by airplane at least twice a week to work with educators all over the United States and I hear this line during the safety demonstration on every single flight, no matter the airline: “Secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others.” This is the essence of what I’m talking about. All human beings—particularly parents, public servants, and caregivers—must take care of themselves before they can take care of others. In this incredibly demanding, often thankless, vocation, how can we expect educators to take care of students if they are not caring for themselves first? Here’s what I know to be true above all else for educators: *research-based educational strategies and pedagogy are only as good as the person providing them*. And if the human providing the strategies is so depleted, worn out, and burned out that he or she can hardly breathe, then the expectation that he or she can provide oxygen to students is unrealistic. And yet this is what we are asking educators to do, day in and day out. So many are struggling to stay afloat, without the tools to learn how to properly thrive.

My goal is to help you create rituals, routines, procedures, habits, and mind shifts. This book presents *reminders* of ways to take care of yourself—about how getting enough sleep is an essential part of being an effective educator, as is pausing to take three deep breaths at various points throughout the day. It’s about giving

yourself permission to *be imperfect*. Educators know these things, but along your teaching (and life) journeys, you might have chosen students over yourself so many times that you’ve forgotten what it means to engage in consistent self-care without guilt. It’s time to ditch the guilt.

You’re overdue to take time for you.

What You Can Find in This Book

To begin, you’ll gather some baseline data using two essential forms in chapter 1: a “Self-Care Survey: Starting Point” and a “Daily Time Audit: Starting Point.” It’s important to complete both so you know where you currently are. No matter what your initial results reveal, if you’re willing to commit to this book’s self-care practices, I promise you’ll recognize a substantial improvement in well-being when you return to these same forms in the epilogue.

For the framework, I use Abraham H. Maslow’s (1943, 1971) easily recognized and well-established theory of motivation. I present the framework as a ladder (instead of the more common pyramid), so you can visualize yourself climbing as you learn how to take exquisite care of yourself. As poet Jalaluddin Rumi (n.d.) suggests, “Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder.” Let this book be your ladder.

In each chapter, I’ll help you become aware of when your needs aren’t met and share specific strategies to help put you solidly on that particular level. After fully understanding the framework itself (chapter 1), you’ll start at the ladder’s first rung, where you’ll get back to your body’s basics—your physiological needs (chapter 2). You will write a personalized action plan for this first level and, after trying it for one week, reflect on how things went. From there you’ll follow the same process and move up the ladder to safety needs (chapter 3), belonging needs (chapter 4), and esteem needs (chapter 5). After you stabilize the first four rungs, you’ll move to the top two levels—self-actualization (chapter 6) and transcendence (chapter 7)—where personal growth occurs so you can move from merely surviving to truly thriving. Last, as stated in “Epilogue: Final Thoughts,” you’ll revisit the “Self-Care Survey” and “Daily Time Audit” so you can celebrate your growth and reflect on your progress.

Who Can Use This Book

This book is truly for *all* educators, not just teachers. That being said, it’s important to note that this book also works for *everyone*, not just educators. Consider whether your noneducator family and friends could benefit from a dedicated focus on self-care. (I’m guessing they can.) While I provide examples that will appeal to educators, the framework and the action plans work for everyone.

You may choose to work with an accountability group or partner if that’s helpful to you. The options are endless here. Perhaps your professional learning community, department, or grade-level team wants to do this work together; maybe you and a colleague decide to support each other; or perhaps you and your mentor or instructional coach want to work side by side. I’ve included guidance for groups and pairs in each chapter.

How You Can Use This Book

This isn’t a traditional book that you will sit down and barrel through. Instead, this text is for savoring; it serves as both your guide and your anchor. It should start to look rugged from the time you spend reading and writing in it. You’ll take it to school, then home, and then back to school.

Work through the chapters consecutively. You may end up spending more time with some chapters than others, depending on your starting results. For example, if your level one needs are fairly solid, you may spend less time there than you will on the following chapters. On the other hand, “a person who is lacking food, safety, love [belonging], and esteem”—consecutive crucial elements of the first four need levels—“would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else” (Maslow, 2000, p. 254).

Don’t skip chapters, as each level builds on the previous one. Commit to following your action plan for one week, and then return to the book for reflection and next steps. You might need an additional week with the same action plan, or you might want to stay at the same level but create a different plan, or you might be ready to move on to the next level. This is *your* guide, so you are free (and encouraged) to move at your own pace. There is space for you to write directly in the book so it is easy to dig into the work

without the added distraction of a separate notebook. (Of course, you may use your own journal or digital space for action planning and reflections if that is your preference.)

It is essential that you do the work. Simply reading about the levels and strategies will *not* improve your life. Set a clear intention and commit to this journey. It may take you a few weeks or a few months to complete the book. Either way, doing the work is the most important part. This work is messy. There will be weeks you won’t engage as much as you’d like, and that’s OK. Don’t let a desire to be perfect stop you from picking yourself back up and jumping back in at any point.

Your Pre-Engagement

Congratulations—your journey to your improved life begins today! Thank you for joining me in this work and for giving yourself this gift. Rather than trying to engage with this content perfectly, plan for possible failure so you can *avoid* it. To help do that, respond to the following questions.

Why do you have this book in your hands right now? What is your greatest hope for doing this work?

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What will prevent you from engaging in this work? (Examples include getting sick, your children getting sick, feeling too overwhelmed to spend time on it, and comparing yourself to others and feeling you’re not doing it right.)

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Now that you’ve identified why you might struggle, how can you overcome these obstacles? Why will this time be different? What is your plan for sidestepping your usual challenges and frustrations?

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Congratulations! By responding to these initial questions, you just identified possible snags that kept you from doing work like this in the past. This time, however, will be different. Now you are prepared to tackle these obstacles head-on, knowing that life—especially as an educator—is never perfect and our time can easily be consumed by other projects, lists, and people. As you begin this journey, keep your responses to these questions close by (maybe put a sticky note on the pages) so you can return to them when life feels like it’s getting in the way of this work.

CHAPTER 1

The Foundation

And so it begins. Today is when you begin moving from surviving to thriving, both inside and outside of your school or classroom. Congratulate yourself for choosing you. You deserve this. You are worthy. Remind yourself of this when you feel like going back to your old life. We are going to take this incredible journey together and all the hard work you put into yourself will be worth it. Now take a deep breath; let’s get started.

Before you work on improving your own life, you’ll need to get an unbiased sense of where you currently are, which we’ll do in this chapter. From there, we’ll dig more deeply into humanist psychologist Abraham H. Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs and how this framework applies to humanity as a whole, as well as to you, an educator.

Foundation Strategies

Buddha says that, “if you want to know your past life, look at your present condition. If you want to know your future life, look at your present actions” (Good Reads, n.d.). So here we are, taking a look—an honest look—at your present actions. Don’t skip this part. Instead, honor it. Give yourself the grace of alone time to give your undivided attention to the following tasks, without judgment. Know that whatever you discover from the following exercises is fine. You are enough, exactly as you are, in this current moment. Even if you’re working with an accountability partner or group, gathering your own starting data is solo, private work.

When I started my own self-care journey, I reflected on my current situation, just as I’m asking you to do. This proved vital in understanding and identifying exact places where I needed to make

some changes. For example, I’ve always been a pretty good sleeper and thought I did a fairly good job of getting my seven hours of sleep each night. Only when I started monitoring my sleep habits (with my Fitbit device) did I discover that most nights I was getting six or fewer hours. When I learned this, I made sleep a physiological priority in my action plan. I also discovered that I wasn’t speaking very kindly to myself (an esteem need). In fact, that inner voice was more vicious than kind, and I learned that I needed to change that self-talk if I wanted to stabilize my own ladder.

Carve out some quiet time for yourself before continuing.

Your Starting Place

In this section, using two forms, you’ll identify—and celebrate—areas where you’re currently thriving and areas where you can grow. Complete both forms before moving to the other chapters.

Try not to judge your responses, as they are simply a means to see where you’re starting so you can celebrate your growth as you move along your self-care journey. Remember that you are enough, no matter the results. You’ll revisit these tools in “Final Thoughts” (page 117).

Self-Care Survey: Starting Point

For each statement in figure 1.1, check the box that reflects the frequency of your behavior within the past seven days. Don’t get too hung up on the exact frequency, knowing that each week can be a bit different from the last. Instead, think about a typical week and give your best estimate as to how many times you engaged in the identified behavior within that seven-day period.

You’ll notice that some statements mention *at home or school*. In those cases, think about both your work and your home environments. If you feel strong in one area (home, for example) but weaker in another (school, for example), you probably won’t want to check a box that’s higher than *Sometimes*. That helps give an accurate overall picture of *both* your work and your home life, because you know that one impacts the other in sometimes profound ways. For example, if you always feel safe at home but most days you feel unsafe at school due to an intimidating student or colleague, you will check a box on the lower (left) side of the scale. If, on the other hand, you feel extremely safe at home and fairly

safe at school, you will check a box on the upper (right) side of the scale. After completing the survey, you’ll respond to some reflection questions that help you make sense of your findings—both the celebrations and the opportunities for growth.

In the past week, how many days did you do the following?	Never (zero days)	Rarely (one day)	Sometimes (two to three days)	Often (four to five days)	Always (six to seven days)
Physiology					
I drank at least six glasses of water.					
I got at least seven hours of sleep.					
I ate a variety of nutritious foods from a range of food groups.					
I engaged in physical activity.					
Safety					
I felt safe at school.					
I felt safe at home or away from school.					
I felt a sense of order or consistency at school.					
I felt a sense of order or consistency at home or away from school.					
Belonging					
I felt included and respected at school.					
I felt included and respected at home or away from school.					
I felt like a coworker truly cared about my well-being.					
I felt like a family member or friend truly cared about my well-being.					

FIGURE 1.1: SELF-CARE SURVEY: STARTING POINT.

continued ⇨

Esteem					
I spoke kindly to myself.					
I felt competent in my job.					
I felt important at home or school.					
Someone recognized the work I do at school or elsewhere.					
Self-Actualization					
I set personal goals at home or school.					
I believed I could accomplish what I set out to do.					
I had a positive outlook on the future at home or school.					
I had a moment of flow or a peak experience (where I felt totally, completely happy and at peace) at home or school.					
Transcendence					
I felt inspired at home or at school.					
I did something at home or at school for someone else without anyone asking me to.					
I felt empathy toward someone else or I forgave someone at home or at school.					
I felt a sense of gratitude or engaged in mindfulness.					

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How did it feel to take this survey?

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Were you surprised by the results? In what way?

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In what area or areas are you thriving the most? How does this make you feel?

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In what area or areas are you the most challenged? How does this make you feel?

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Would the results have been different during other times of your life (for better or for worse)?

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What areas do you want to focus on the most? Why?

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Add any other reflections that you have here.

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Daily Time Audit: Starting Point

When you begin making changes in your life, it is possible to get stuck on the issue of limited time. Similar to the way you did for the self-care survey, you’re going to take a closer look at how you’re actually spending time throughout a typical workday and weekend day. This helps you identify activities and obligations that satisfy you, as well as identify opportunities to engage your action plans (which we’ll begin creating very soon).

When I did my own daily time audit, I was horrified to discover the amount of time I spent cruising the internet. I was spending hours (yes, multiple hours) each day mindlessly scrolling through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. While I appreciate the need to zone out, I did not want to lose ten hours a week to social media. You may discover that, like me, you are a bit addicted to social media. Perhaps TV shows, Netflix movies, or Candy Crush games consume much of your day. And you may decide that is time well spent. If you would rather spend some of that time doing something else, that discovery is a warning to make a change.

During one entire day, record the start and end times of every activity that you partake in. I know this feels tedious, but it is essential information to gather for stabilizing your ladder. Include a brief description of what you’re doing (getting ready for work, meditating, exercising, driving to work, teaching, attending a team meeting, sleeping, reading, scrolling through your Facebook news feed, or eating lunch, for example). Also note how you feel while you’re engaged in each activity (happy, bored, energized, or irritated, for example), and what value you place on each activity (high, medium, low, or neutral). For example, eating dinner with your family might be of high value to you, while attending a staff meeting after school might be of medium or low value to you depending on the content and delivery of those meetings. Once you’ve recorded at least one typical workday and one typical weekend day, spend some time reflecting on the questions for the “Daily Time Audit: Starting Point” (figure 1.2).

How much time are you spending on low-value activities versus high-value activities? Do your values reflect the amount of time spent?

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Start and End Times	Activity Description	How I Feel	Value (High, Medium, Low, Neutral)

Source: Adapted from Mind Tools Content Team, n.d.b.

FIGURE 1.2: DAILY TIME AUDIT: STARTING POINT.

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When are you most energized? When are you most sapped of energy?

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What activities contribute to your positive emotions? What activities make you feel negative emotions?

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How do your feelings relate to your values? (For example, when you’re doing something that feels good, do you also place a high value on that activity? Perhaps you feel good when you’re pinning beautiful quotes on Pinterest but don’t highly value this activity.)

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How does your weekday audit differ from your weekend day audit?

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Add any other reflections that you have here.

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The Framework: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Now that you've done the hard work of reflecting on your current status, let's focus on the framework that serves as your self-care guide. You may be familiar with this model, which is grounded in research and decades of study (Maslow, 1943, 1954). These needs are usually presented as a pyramid, with the most basic needs on the bottom. Maslow chose this hierarchical shape for the concepts because each level is generally unavailable until someone fulfills the needs related to the levels below it. The first four levels—(1) physiological, (2) safety, (3) belonging, and (4) esteem—define needs an individual must meet in order to avoid negative physical or psychological sensations. The next two levels—(5) self-actualization and (6) transcendence—both articulate a desire for personal growth. Rather than a pyramid, however, let's embrace the visual of a ladder to emphasize how each level builds on the previous one and helps you reach new heights (see figure 1.3).

Maslow (1943, 1971) defines each need level's requirements. *Physiological needs* include the most basic—food, water, sleep, and shelter, for instance. *Safety needs* include physical safety and financial stability. *Belonging needs* include friendships, group acceptance, and intimacy. *Esteem needs* include feelings about oneself, respect of others, and respect by others. *Self-actualization* includes realizing your full potential and personal growth in general, while *transcendence* includes connecting with something outside of yourself or, as Maslow (1971) puts it, “behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos” (p. 269).



Source: Adapted from Maslow, 1943, 1971.

FIGURE 1.3: MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS.

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To understand the framework even further, know that levels one and two are associated with attention. In other words, if your first two need levels are unmet, your thoughts focus on your basic physiological needs rather than what is occurring around you. Think about that slang term *hangry* (Francis, 2005). If you are so hungry that your blood glucose drops below healthy levels, you become angry—*hangry*—and more likely to lash out (Bushman, DeWall, Pond, & Hanus, 2014). That's the perfect example of what happens when your level one needs are unmet *quickly*—it is incredibly difficult to think about anything else besides finding food. Or imagine the fire alarm starts going off as you're reading this sentence. Suddenly, your level two safety needs are threatened, and it is impossible for you to pay attention to this text. Think about the results of your self-care survey. If you had lower scores associated with the first two levels, you're probably having a difficult time just paying attention to your job or your life outside school. If your levels three and four needs are unmet, but levels one and two are solid, you might be able to attend to what is occurring around you, but you probably are significantly disengaged. For instance, if you are at a party where you don't know anyone but everyone else is part of the same friends group, you might not feel like you

belong or like your expertise is valued. Again, consider the results of your self-care survey. If levels one and two were fairly solid but you scored lower for the second and third levels, determine if you're not fully engaged at school or at home as a result.

If your first four levels are solidly met, you can pull yourself up to the ladder's fifth and sixth rungs, where you can experience self-actualization and, eventually, transcendence. At these levels, you're not only attentive and engaged but also motivated and inspired. At levels five and six, you are truly thriving. If your self-care survey revealed high scores for every level, you are living a fulfilled life committed to helping others. That is something to be incredibly proud of.

It is important to note that at times you *can* engage in a higher level even though you have some unmet needs. This is really good news. For example, you can probably manage to have a good time while out with friends even though you might be really tired—thank goodness. If you have an occasional unmet need, the corresponding rung may weaken, but you can still stand on it to reach for the next-higher rung. However, if you have a consistently unmet need, the corresponding rung will eventually break completely. That makes the next level unreachable until you repair the rung.

Before getting into the strategies, spend some time answering the following questions. They will help you reflect on your current ability to turn inward and check in with yourself.

How do you currently check in with yourself, and how often are you able to do this throughout your day?

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How does understanding the needs levels help you understand yourself better?

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Needs Identification Strategies

Metaphorically, you might say human beings in any given situation are constantly asking themselves the questions in figure 1.4.

If you come upon a question you cannot affirm, you get stuck at that level. For example, if you ask yourself, “Are my basic needs met?” and respond with *Yes*, you’ll move to the next question: “Do I feel safe?” If you respond with *No*, your brain will try to change that unsafe feeling rather than move on to the next question: “Do I feel like I belong?”



Source: Adapted from Maslow, 1943.

FIGURE 1.4: IDENTIFYING NEEDS.
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The framework (figure 1.3, page 17) and these questions (figure 1.4), which you’ll refer to throughout this book—and, ideally, in the future—become your guide to self-care. You may have to learn to check in with yourself on a regular basis to recognize when you’re feeling off—angry, irritated, frustrated, uncomfortable, or anxious, for example. From there, run through these questions, starting at the bottom, and move your way up. When you know exactly where you’re stuck, you can respond with targeted strategies.

Here’s an example from my life. While in the grocery store, I felt tense and frustrated because the woman in aisle three wouldn’t move her cart to the side, the man in aisle six was hollering on his phone, and the shelves in aisle seven didn’t have the LaCroix sparkling water I craved. As an overblown result of these minor annoyances, I basically hated everyone and everything. I huffed

and puffed audibly, threw my arms around in a dramatic and ridiculous way, and felt my heart rate steadily rising.

But I caught myself. I felt my negative emotions and paused just long enough to see myself from the outside. I recognized that I was unpleasant to be around right then. I ticked through the framework's questions and discovered that my negative feelings didn't stem from these minor grocery store setbacks. The true problem was my level one needs were unmet; I was struggling on four hours of sleep, no food, and too many cups of coffee. When all my needs are met and I can positively answer each framework question, those small grievances bounce off much more easily. But when something is off, I'm more likely to respond negatively.

How did I engage in self-care then, in aisle eight of my local Safeway? I took three deep belly breaths, chugged the water I had in my cart (paying for it at checkout, of course), and made a plan to eat before moving on to my next errand. It worked. My mood began to lift almost immediately.

What does all of this mean to you as an educator? Picture this: it's passing period and you have a chance to check in with yourself. When you do, you realize you do not feel awesome at all. In fact, you feel tense, annoyed, and ready to snap at the next person who asks you a question. Now that you know there's something amiss, you ask yourself the questions, starting with level one: "Are my basic needs met?" You answer *Yes*. You move to the next question: "Do I feel safe?" When you determine the answer is *Yes*, you ask, "Do I feel like I belong?" Here's where you stop, because you answer with a resounding *No*. Your teammates got together over the weekend but didn't invite you. You're actually hurt and sad and, as a result, in an incredibly foul mood.

You have a number of options that can help you answer this question more positively. You think about the people you care about most in life and text them to see if they're available to meet for coffee after school. Now you feel a slight shift. Rather than getting stuck on your feelings of not belonging to a certain group, you move your thoughts to people you truly belong with and plan to see one of them soon. You start your next class feeling better.

Or consider this scenario: you check in with yourself after pulling into the school parking lot but before getting out of the car. You realize that you feel amazing. You roll through the questions and get to answer *Yes* all the way up the ladder. Now you feel even

more amazing because there's something beautiful about recognizing when things are going well *when they're actually going well*.

Knowing that you're the best version of yourself when the majority of your rungs are solid, pause to consider how exactly you will engage in self-care during your day. How and when will you check in with yourself and your body? Perhaps you want to start a habit of pausing when you pull into the school parking lot, before getting out of your car, and eventually you'll also commit to checking in with yourself during passing periods, at lunch, or every time the bell rings.

As you saw in figure 1.3 (page 17), an educator who is thriving feels good enough to help others—including students—move up their own ladders (level six). Thriving teachers are likelier to stay in the profession rather than become part of the 50 percent who leave within the first five years of teaching (Riggs, 2013). Beyond this claim, also consider the important implications for students. If a teacher has consistently unmet needs that force him or her to merely go through the motions, the classroom environment doesn't foster engagement, which affects student achievement and learning (Cardwell, 2011). High academic achievement is directly related to high classroom engagement (Gunuc, 2014), and teachers' engagement is directly related to students' (Cardwell, 2011). Plus, high student engagement increases a student's own sense of belonging at school (Gunuc, 2014). More than one person's needs are being met in a wave of engagement, which is what level six is ultimately all about.

And now, let's take time for you.

My Action Plan: Turn Inward

This chapter's prompts help you get in the habit of checking in with yourself to ensure your needs are met. Because our days are so busy, we sometimes forget to check in with ourselves. We're going to change that, starting now. You don't even need to do anything else at this point except learn to turn inward so you know when you're feeling good and when you're not. So many educators live in their heads for much of the day and have forgotten what it feels like to also live in their bodies. Print multiple copies of the framework (figure 1.3, page 17) or framework questions (figure 1.4, page 19) that resonate most with you, and place them around your home and classroom or office—maybe even in your car. Seeing them often will remind you to pause.

Pairing behaviors that you already have with behaviors you want to make habits—like checking in with yourself—will help you effectively make those actions habitual. As you know, our best intentions don't always result in lasting efforts. When you pair behaviors with established habits, the odds of the new actions becoming long term increase; research shows that it takes about sixty-six days to establish the new habit (Gardner, Lally, & Wardle, 2012). Researchers actually define habits as automatically triggered actions that we do when a particular contextual cue is associated—for example, “automatically washing hands (action) after using the toilet (contextual cue), or putting on a seatbelt (action) after getting into the car (contextual cue)” (Gardner et al., 2012). That means that eventually, if you ask the framework questions when you're doing something like checking your messages or going to the bathroom, you won't even have to consciously think about checking in with yourself.

For further help establishing this new habit, answer the following. Visit go.SolutionTree.com/instruction to download a free reproducible version of these prompts.

- I will notice how I feel at least _____ (*three, five, ten*) times per day.
- To remember to check in on how I feel, I will _____
 - Set a reminder on my phone.
 - Download and use a phone app such as Chime (<https://apple.co/2q91FHs>).
 - Make a note in my calendar.
 - Stick a note to my mirror.
 - Pair events (such as going to the bathroom or eating) to my check-in.
- When I check in with myself, I will get in the habit of asking myself the following questions, in this order.
 - “Are my basic needs met?”
 - “Do I feel safe?”
 - “Do I feel like I belong?”
 - “Do I feel confident?”

- “Am I living my best life?”
- “Do I feel connected to something greater than myself?”

When I answer *Yes* to a particular framework question, I will record here how that makes me feel (*energized and calm, connected to those around me, as if I'm making a difference*).

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When I answer *No* to a particular framework question, I will pay attention to how it makes me feel *and* how this unmet need manifests itself in me (*I get crabby, I make poor decisions, I am irritable, I feel restless and distracted, I'm bored, I feel angry*). I will record my thinking here.

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When I forget to check in with myself, I will frame my thoughts about that positively (such as, “Tomorrow is another day” or “Progress, not perfection”). I will refer to the positive reframing I write here if I need a reminder.

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When I can answer *Yes* to all (or nearly all) the framework questions, I am willing to express gratitude and celebrate (“I am grateful for this moment,” “I feel amazing right now and recognize how wonderful life is,” or “I want to remember this feeling so I can return to it”). My celebration may sound like the thoughts I record here.

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At week's end, answer the reflection questions on page 24 or 26.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

When you can affirm most of the needs (framework) questions, reflect on your behavior and mood. What circumstances help you get there? Is there a particular day of the week or time of day you feel best?



When you *cannot* affirm most of the needs questions, reflect on your behavior and mood. What circumstances seem to hinder moving up the ladder? Is there a particular day of the week or time of day when you feel most challenged?



Which needs questions do you seem to struggle with the most? Which questions elicit a more positive response? Does this feel typical, or do you think this might change given different times of the year or other conditions?



Reflect on different stages in your life and how your own level of happiness connects with the framework. When have you been the most fulfilled? How far up the ladder have you gotten? Where would you like to be?

— NOTES —

[illegible]

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

FOR ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNERS AND GROUPS

Before meeting with your accountability partner or group, reflect on the following questions alone. When you meet with your accountability partner or group, have each person share his or her completed action plan, notes, and responses to the individual and group reflection questions.

How did working with a partner or a group help you this week?

What could your partner or group have done to help you in areas you struggled?

What kind of support would you like from your partner or the group in the coming weeks, and how can you ensure that happens?

What did you do to help your partner or others in your group?

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What can you do to help your partner or others in your group that you didn't do this week?

— NOTES —

[illegible]