We are all in this together!

As educators, we work hard to model positivity and reduce the anxieties of our students and colleagues. We must remember that we also need to give ourselves room to acknowledge our own sense of imbalance during this challenging time. Resilience is something we want for our students, our colleagues and ourselves. Working, teaching and leading through a pandemic taxes our reserve of resilience and we must dig deep at times to find our inner reserve.

One of the antidotes to working in a physically distant manner is to stay socially connected with family, friends and colleagues. Reaching out and networking is also an opportunity to compare notes, consider our experiences during this time and learn together. We invite you to join us in a supportive “Kitchen Table Conversation” where you can help us decide what would be of interest to talk about and to share. In the format of a circle discussion or un-conference, we will decide on what is important to talk about and structure some conversations around these areas through the wonders of technology.

See our website www.learningforwardontario.ca for registration details or click on the following link https://bit.ly/LFO-KitchenConversations Please note there is no charge for this opportunity. We hope that you can join us!
Self-regulation in education during COVID
Lisa Cranston, EdD

Bio: Lisa Cranston is a Self-Regulation Facilitator for the MEHRIT Centre and a retired education consultant from the Greater Essex County DSB.

We know that educators and educational leaders cannot help students to be calm and regulated if they are dysregulated themselves, so during these unprecedented times it is important to focus on our own self-regulation, stress and tension levels (Farag, Becker, Orlowski, Cranston & Mahfouz, 2019; Hurley, 2018). Just like when you are on a plane (remember when we used to go on planes?) and they tell you that in the event of an emergency you need to put on your own face mask first before assisting others, you must reduce your own stress before you can assist others in reducing theirs. The same self-regulation skills that are a strong predictor of children’s later school achievement (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007) are essential for adult mental health and resilience. We need self-regulation now more than ever.

Self-regulation is a term used widely in education and popular media, yet there is some confusion about what exactly self-regulation means. This article uses Shanker’s (2016a) definition: self-regulation refers to “how people manage stress, how much energy we expend and how well we recover.” Shanker (2016b) provides a five-step model for self-regulation, however the steps are not linear or sequential. One can enter the process at any point and complete the steps in any order.

Step 1 - Reframing Behaviour

Many educators and educational leaders, consciously or not, use the self-control paradigm when reflecting on their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. The belief is that if they just try harder, exercise more willpower, they can master their behaviour. With self-regulation, we dig deeper to explore what stressors might be at the root of the behaviour. Self-regulation encourages us to ask “why this behaviour and why now?” Self-regulation allows us to look at behaviour, both our own and others, through the lens of compassion. When I read about people hoarding toilet paper at the beginning of this crisis, I could reframe that as stress behaviour.
Step 2 - Recognizing the stressors

A stressor is anything that disrupts our homeostasis; this causes us to burn energy as our body works to restore our internal balance. Stressors can fall into five domains:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Possible Stressors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological</td>
<td>Level of energy in the human nervous system</td>
<td>Poor Nutrition</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Quality Sleep</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visual and/or auditory over-stimulation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overall health and wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>Feelings and moods</td>
<td>Strong emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive – Joy, excitement, curiosity - can create energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative – anger, frustration, fear, anxiety - burn energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Mental processes such as memory, attention, problem-solving, learning new information</td>
<td>Difficulty processing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Too much information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information in a modality that isn’t your best fit (online learning; Zoom meetings)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stressors are different for everyone, and what is a stressor for one person might not be a stressor for others, which means that reducing stressors is uniquely personal. To make things even more complicated, something can be a stressor one day and not a stressor another day. One day I may find an online meeting a positive experience and another day it can be a stressor. Just like the children we teach, our needs can change from day to day, and even from morning to afternoon. As educational leaders, we need to identify our own stressors, and understand that these may or may not be stressors for others.

**Step 3 - Reducing Stressors**

The goal of reducing stressors is not to eliminate all stress from our lives. Some stress is necessary for us to be engaged and productive. Reducing the stressors that we can control means that the energy we would have expended on those stressors is now available to us for coping with other stressors that we encounter throughout our day. By staying hydrated, eating healthy foods, not watching too much TV news, and reducing stressors I can control, I reduce the energy I’m spending on those stressors, and can focus my remaining energy on other stressors.
Step 4 - Reflect: Enhance Stress Awareness

Calm is a feeling of being relaxed while being aware of what is going on inside and outside of you, and enjoying that feeling of being relaxed. Unfortunately, in today’s hyperkinetic society, many people no longer know what calm feels like, or they confuse the mindlessness of screen time with being calm. Take breaks during the day to check in on your own level of calmness. Sit up straighter, take a few deep breaths, and release some of the tension in your muscles – starting with your jaw, your face, your neck, your shoulders and working your way down your body. You may not even realize how tense your muscles are until you pause for a moment and release them.

Step 5 - Respond: Develop Personal Strategies to Promote Restoration and Resilience

Each person needs to develop their own personal toolbox of self-regulation strategies that helps them to feel calm and alert. What works for one person may not work for another. Some people find it relaxing to soak in the tub while others don’t like baths at all. Start by creating a list of your current personal strategies for restoring energy that are still available to you with the current social distancing requirements. How do you refill your tank when it is empty? My personal list would include gardening, sitting by a campfire, reading, going for a walk, spending time with pets, and having a cup of tea. After you have compiled your own list, review your list and note – do you have strategies that you can use at different times? If all your restoration strategies are outdoors, what do you do when it rains? People have lost their restoration strategies that involved being with others outside the home. It is important to find new strategies – baking sourdough bread seems to be very popular!

As you develop and refine your self-regulation skills, it is important to remember that self-regulation is a never-ending process of learning to identify our stressors, of learning why we are reacting certain ways to certain stressors, and of learning to restore our energy when we feel depleted. Once we begin the self-reg journey ourselves, we begin to look at not only ourselves but others and their behaviour through the compassionate lens of self-regulation.
References:


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**The Domains of Self-Reg**

Self-Reg looks at the stresses that arise in 5 core domains of experience:

- Biological
- Emotion
- Cognitive
- Social
- Prosocial

Each of these domains has its own unique stressors, but they are all interlocked in such a way that stress in any one domain can exacerbate stress-reactivity in another.

When one is caught in a **stress-cycle**, stressors have a **multiplying effect** on each other. This can lead to problems in behaviour, mood, attention, and health.
Food for Thought:

What leaders and teachers can do to make a difference for their students and colleagues right now:

- Demonstrate compassion – Everyone is doing the best they can and we need to celebrate this.
- Being fully present with people online and in person
- Model optimism and trust in your students and your colleagues
- Prioritize your own well-being.
- Be patient with yourself and others
- Find something to laugh about with your students and your family every day
- Get some exercise and fresh air at least once a day.

Opportunities to Consider:

Some Important questions for us to consider when we go back to our school buildings......and we will someday!

- What have we learned?
- What really matters in the way I teach today?
- What really matters in the way I lead today?
- What is this experience teaching us that will help us build a better learning environment?
- What do I feel I have learned that I will integrate in any new normal?

We would love to hear about your experiences and invite you to submit pieces of writing or blog pieces to Learning Forward Ontario at

Newsletter Submissions  editor@learningforwardontario

“Leaders don’t create followers, they create more leaders.”

~ Author Unknown
Introducing SOAR

SOAR is an educational organization with a mission of fostering a passion for entrepreneurship and innovation in 21st-century learners. SOAR is proud to provide schools and educators with quality workshops and project-based learning experiences on topics including entrepreneurship, innovation, creativity, and design thinking. During these times of uncertainty, SOAR is excited to support educators navigating distance learning by assisting in the facilitation of online project-based learning and design thinking challenges. To learn more about SOAR, please visit www.soaredu.ca or @SOARedu on Twitter.

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Click on the image above to access the article.

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Kitchen Table Conversations

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7:30 PM- 8:30 pm E.S.T.
from the Comfort of your own home

Cost: FREE

Registration on our website.
We will be using Zoom for this event.

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