

How can I reduce stress for myself and my employees?



DECAL
Thriving Child Care
Business Academy

This resource provides information and tips for reducing workplace stress for yourself and your employees.

Working with young children and their families can be joyful, invigorating work, and it can be demanding and stressful. This resource will explore strategies that you can use to manage your own stress levels as well as ideas to support the other adults with whom you work.

Before exploring some of these stress-reducing ideas, please know that this guide is not intended to replace counseling or immediate interventions. If you, or a staff member, are experiencing extreme stress and indicating or displaying the need for stronger support, please reach out to your local 211 support to connect with services in your community. [Dial 211 for Essential Community Services](#) is available to help navigate various services and supports for anyone in need. The ideas presented in this guide are meant to lessen stress in your business, and they do not supersede the need for professional or intensive support, if applicable.

How do I recognize stress in myself and my employees?

Stressful days are to be expected when working with children and families, however, how you manage that stress is important to your health. Stress can appear in different ways in yourself and your employees. According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#) here are some ways that stress can appear in a person:

- Displays irritation, anger, or denial that they're even upset.
- Appears uncertain, anxious, worried, or nervous.
- Expresses feeling tired, overwhelmed, and that they aren't motivated.
- Communicates that they are "burnt out".
- Reports of trouble with sleeping or focusing.
- Appears sad or depressed.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Reports of changes in appetite, energy, and interests.

What are some ways I can offset work stress?

As a family child care provider or as a child care center program leader, you carry stress

about your business, the children in your care, your families, and your employees. While that stress is understandable, finding ways to manage and recover from the day-to-day stress you experience is critical to your health. Here are some things you can do that will help you:

- **Disconnect from work** – Engage in an activity that doesn't allow you to think about work. It could be reading a novel, watching a movie, playing a game with friends, following a new recipe, or something that pulls your attention away from work and on to a different task. Giving your mind a break from thinking about work allows your stress system to “reset” and allows you to think more clearly when you do turn your attention back to your work.
- **Take mini-breaks throughout the day** – Sometimes in this work, you are so busy tending to everyone else's needs that you forget your own. Set an alarm for yourself every couple of hours, or as it makes sense for you, to remind yourself to take a mini-break. You can use that time to drink a glass of water, take 2-3 minutes to stretch, look out the window and take 3 deep breaths, or maybe even walk around your building. Mini-breaks don't have to be a large chunk of time, just a brief moment where you can shift your attention to something else can make a big difference.
- **Keep a consistent home schedule** – Routines are essential for spending your days with young children, and the same goes for adults too. Try to keep a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. Incorporate regular exercise, ideally outdoors, to help reduce stress and improve sleeping as well. The predictability that comes from maintaining a routine lessens stress and anxiety.
- **Use your paid time off** – With so many demands facing you as a family child care provider or a program leader, taking a day off can seem impossible. However, the sentiment “you can't pour from an empty cup” rings true in this work. If you are exhausted, overworked, and stressed therefore with an empty cup, you are unable to pour into the children, families, and employees that you care for. Taking a day off to take care of yourself, to “refill your cup”, will allow you to maintain that much-needed balance. If you are a family child care provider with no one to replace you, consider scheduling days off months in advance. Tell your families upon enrollment which days you will be closed so they can make other arrangements. Intentionally scheduling pauses in your work can go a long way in reducing your stress levels.

What can I do to help my employees manage their stress?

Just as you take on stress from working with children and families, your employees do as well. Caring for children, while rewarding and heartwarming, can be exhausting and overwhelming work. As the business leader, there are some things you can do to help your staff manage the stress load of this work. Here are four questions that can help you think about how you can help staff manage their stress:

- Have I checked in with my staff recently?
- Are there changes I can make during the workday?
- What incentives and rewards can I provide?
- How can I encourage staff to enjoy time outside of work?

Checking in with staff members

One of the best and easiest ways to lower stress in the workplace is to encourage your staff to talk to you and to each other. Checking in regularly with each staff member allows you to learn of issues quickly. Checking in doesn't have to be lengthy or formal; however, brief, regular interactions communicate to your staff that you care about their well-being and are invested in their success. Be sure to ask them how they are feeling and doing as well as inquire about what's causing them stress in their day. Staying open and genuinely curious will allow them to share with you their stressors, creating an opportunity for you to find solutions together.

Staying connected with co-workers and even friends outside of work can reduce workplace stress also. Encourage your staff to work together and create space where they can get to know one another. When people feel as if they have others who they can rely on at work, they feel more connected to their work and are more likely to stay engaged. Friendships and laughter are natural stress relievers, so encourage them in your business!

Changes to the workday

As a business leader, there are small adjustments that you can make to the workday that can have a huge impact on your employee's well-being. Here are a couple of ideas to consider:

- **Establish a regular schedule.** Routines and predictability are beneficial to everyone – your staff members, families, and children. By setting a regular schedule, staff members can plan. Talk with your staff members to make sure that the work schedule they've been assigned works for them as well. You could have one staff member struggling to arrive early and another challenged with staying later in the day. By swapping their schedules, both staff members have less stress and are content with schedules that better meet their needs.
- **Encourage everyone to take a break.** This is sometimes hard to do, especially when you are understaffed. Staff members need a moment to step out of the space they share with children to make a phone call, walk outside, or check out silly memes on their phones just to disconnect for a moment from the demanding work of caring for children. Make this a priority for your program. Your staff members will benefit, and the children will benefit from rested staff members.
- **Include time for group relaxation.** You may find a brief time either before or after work where you can gather a group of your staff together for some group stretching activities, breathing exercises, or even a brief exercise session. You may even have a group that wants to walk around the playground together. This time together

doesn't have to be expensive or led by a paid instructor. There are free-of-charge yoga and stretching videos on YouTube and low-cost apps like Headspace or Calm that can lead your group through a 10 or 15 guided meditation. The benefit of these experiences is the togetherness around a shared calming activity. By connecting with each other and moving or breathing together, your staff is reducing their overall stress levels.

- **Promote using paid time off.** Although having enough staff can be challenging some days, encourage and support your staff in using their paid time off. They need time away from work to take care of themselves. Sometimes your most dedicated employees won't take time off from work, often to their detriment. You want well-rested healthy staff members to care for the children and families in your business, so take care of them by insisting they take care of themselves.

Offering incentives and rewards

Traditionally as a child care provider, you have an extremely tight budget, making it difficult to provide extra incentives or rewards to your staff members. Here are a couple of less expensive options that can motivate your staff and ease stress.

- **Simple, cost-effective gestures.** Providing incentives and rewards doesn't have to be large expensive productions. Perhaps you can have a monthly potluck where you provide the main dish and invite your employees to provide side dishes or buy pizza for the staff one day at lunch. Another idea could be to raffle off a DoorDash certificate or a local restaurant gift card once a week or month, so your staff member gets a break from cooking at home. Even a candy bar on payday can be a sweet treat to show that you notice and appreciate them.
- **Learning through professional development.** A way to ward off stress is by learning something new. Connecting your staff members with high-quality professional development experiences can encourage them and communicate to them that you are invested in their success.

Suggestions for time outside of work

As you look closer at ways to reduce stress within your workday, another consideration is how you spend your time outside of work. Perhaps sharing these tidbits through a staff email, newsletter, bulletin board, or sharing at a staff meeting will help your staff think of ways they can lessen their work-related stress levels.

- **Limit your consumption of news and social media.** Study after study has shown how social media and negative news consumption can affect your mental health. Perhaps encourage your staff to reexamine their social media usage and reconsider the reason why they are engaging so frequently.
- **Highlight the power of routines.** Just like children find comfort in the regularity of a well-thought-out schedule, adults, too, find comfort in routine. Invite your staff to reflect on ways they can establish routines at home to lessen their stress levels. By

providing an opportunity for staff members to share their experiences with home routines, **you invite them to** glean valuable information from each other which leads to reduced stress levels.

- **Encourage hobbies and other recreational activities.** Stress relief comes in all shapes and sizes and by encouraging your staff to reconnect with a beloved hobby or other recreational activity you are assisting them to find a pathway to stress relief.

Getting support

If you try some stress-reducing activities and you notice that you still feel stressed, please seek help by connecting with a trusted friend, a mental health professional, or your medical provider. Likewise, if you notice a staff member who is struggling, reach out with understanding and support. While this resource has focused on you and your staff, your families and children can also exhibit some of these same indicators of stress. And they can often benefit from similar stress-reducing strategies as well.

If you notice the need for stronger support, for you or your staff members, please call 211 to connect with a professional who can help.

Additional Resources

If you have questions or need help, assistance is available.

[GaPDS Website](#)

[DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy Website](#)

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