

Tips, Resources and
Recommendations
during **COVID-19**

Aga Khan Development Network
***Supporting Educators'
Wellbeing and Professional
Development***



Aga Khan Education Services



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Challenge: Our New Reality

With the movement restrictions and school closures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have had to rapidly change their way of working to manage remote teaching and learning, often with little lead-time. Whilst some educators have been positive, responsive and solution focused, for many this transition has not been easy, particularly in areas where there is limited connectivity. Trying to sort through resources and align the most relevant to the curriculum can feel overwhelming. Teachers may feel confused about how to make remote learning enjoyable and fun for students. Many will feel worried about their students being on track with their learning. They may think: Will their students receive adequate parental support? Will their students and their families have access to the knowledge and resources to manage their wellbeing, safety and security during this time of crisis?

This can be a stressful time for teachers. Balancing work and personal demands (caring for children and elderly relatives, household chores) is challenging. In addition, many people feel isolated, as they are not being able to attend collective worship and/or community gatherings and events. Some teachers may lose confidence and feel isolated from their peers and their school community. They may worry that they do not have the right skills and knowledge to manage learning remotely. They may feel frustrated and tired.

Support for Educators' Wellbeing and Professional Development

We thank and applaud all teachers for what they are already doing during this difficult period. This resource, prepared by the *Aga Khan Development Network* provides tips and activities for teachers' wellbeing and online and offline resources for professional development opportunities. It also includes suggested recommendations for programming.

I. General Tips to Stay Resilient

We want you to feel supported as you begin to navigate the uncharted pathways ahead. We have gathered 11 tips to help you think about ways to support your personal wellbeing and to continue to learn and develop over the coming weeks ahead.

1. **Maintain professional and social connection:** Reach out to your colleagues using phone, video calls, and text messages. Share your feelings and worries, as well as your strategies and tips to support remote teaching and learning. Ask for help when needed. Staying in touch with your school community will not only help you feel connected, it will also support your professional growth. Make it a habit to communicate regularly with people who have a calming or grounding effect on you.
2. **Create a work routine:** We know how important routine is. Structure your day in order to balance and manage the various demands on your time. Include regular breaks, self-care, and time for healthy habits (such as calls with family/friends, or exercise). If you are keen to improve your professional skills and knowledge, set some realistic objectives for the day or week and allocate your time accordingly.
3. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle:** Depending on the situation in your country, as long as you are permitted to spend time outdoors and can maintain a safe physical distance from others (>1 meter), fresh air and sunshine can clear the mind and help you de-stress and relax. If you are not permitted and/or unable to leave your home, open doors and windows to let the fresh air inside. Take at least 30 minutes a day to get some sort of exercise (even if in your home). It allows for a complete break from electronics, the news, pressures of the day, and allows you to de-stress, gain a renewed positive spirit and feel accomplished for the day. Additionally, eat well and get enough sleep.
4. **Be kind to yourself:** This is a difficult time for everyone. Remember to be compassionate towards yourself – be kind and exercise patience. Value the efforts you are making to navigate this new way of working and celebrate your achievements, however small. Not every day will feel like a success, some days may feel like struggle. Let go of expectations that you need to strive for perfection. Accept the limitations of your current circumstances and be forgiving with yourself and others.
5. **Focus on what is going well:** Reflect on what went well each day. Celebrate successes for you or your students (no matter how small).
6. **Teach with presence and purpose:** Remember to breathe. Controlled breathing has been used for millennia to calm the mind. Settle your thoughts and your body before you begin to teach or prepare a lesson/assignment.
7. **Reach out for support:** Reach out to your peers, colleagues, and work together to create, curate or adapt resources and design lesson plans. Seek advice from your peers on how to manage remote teaching and learning. If you are struggling with managing the demands on your time or navigating this period of uncertainty, reach out to friends, family and colleagues to get support. Don't be afraid to ask for advice on where to receive professional help. These are not normal times, and it's not a sign of weakness to need help with things like anxiety.
8. **Try journaling:** Find time, even if for 5 minutes, to write about how your day went, your thoughts and feelings. This may help you process and understand your emotions. Remember to write using empathy for yourself rather than a judgmental tone. You could also write 3-5 positive statements every day about yourself. For example, I am doing the best I can; I am confident that I am helping my students.

- 9. Practice gratitude:** When people are going through hard times, one thing that can help them feel better is learning to be grateful for what they have rather than fixating on what they do not have. So even though it might be a challenge right now, write down some of the things you are grateful for. You can make this part of your teaching. If you are teaching online, you can tell your students what you are grateful for and ask each of them to say what they are grateful for at the beginning or at the end of the online class. If you can only reach your students by phone, ask them to write and/or draw what they are grateful for. These moments can help remind us to celebrate, love, and enjoy one another during this difficult time.
- 10. Help others in need:** Being of service has strong and immediate mental health benefits. In addition, feeling a sense of purpose helps people recover from negative events and build resilience. While maintaining physical distancing, you can check on your colleagues or your students and their families to show them that you care for them, using phone calls or emails and other forms of social media. Remember though that 'charity begins at home,' so help others as well as your own immediate and extended family.
- 11. Invest in your professional development:** With the focus, now on remote teaching and learning, there may be new skills you feel you need to navigate the new demands on you as an educator. Alternatively, you may want to take out some time to refresh your skills and knowledge. If you have the time, create a routine for taking online courses, participating in education forums, or even reading educational articles. You may want to pair-up with a fellow teacher and connect remotely as well.

II. Offline and Online Resources

This section includes a list **32 suggested online and offline resources and activities** to help maintain educators' wellbeing and provide professional development. While there are many online resources available, it can be difficult to sift through and access those that are free, of high quality and appropriate. Furthermore, many educators do not have reliable internet access, computers, etc. Therefore, the resources provide some ideas of how educators can practice personal wellbeing and professional development that don't all depend on technology.

- a. 5 Offline Activities for Educators' Wellbeing
- b. 5 Online Resources for Educators' Wellbeing
- c. 7 Offline Ideas for Educators' Professional Development
- d. 15 Online Resources for Educators' Professional Development

Five Offline Activities for Educators' Wellbeing

- 1. Bucket of Moments:** Take a jar or a bucket. Make a note of all the small things that happen in your day/life and all the small memories that make you happy. Place these notes in the bucket. This may include adding notes you have received from your students or your family members. It may be pictures of your loved ones or a funny joke you received from a friend. It may also just be a short write-up of a fond memory you have. When you feel low or alone, take out any one memory (or more!) to help you feel better.
- 2. Sphere of Influence:** Often, we become overwhelmed with worries about our future, our family, our students, our friends or even our work. These worries often stem from a loss of control on what we can influence. By recognizing and acknowledging what we can or cannot influence, we can invest our energy wisely and productively. To enable this, on a blank piece of paper, draw a circle and write in it, "within my control". In this circle, list all problems, issues or matters you can control. Now draw a bigger circle around this and write in it, "I can influence". In this bigger circle, list all the things you could possibly influence. On the outside of this circle, write the words. "Letting Go" and list all the problems that are beyond your control or influence. Keep this visualization and remember to focus your energy on the two circles only – on the matters, you can control and on those, you have influence. Practice reminding yourself to let go of everything else.
- 3. Drawing Activity:** Draw a picture of everyone in your classroom with each student doing something they love to do. Keep these portraits in a special place as it helps you feel connected with your students. You can do this for other groups as well, such as family members, friends at school, teachers, neighbours and/or other community groups.
- 4. Muscle Relaxation Exercise:** This exercise allows your mind to be cleared of random thoughts and helps the relaxed state of your body's muscles. Take 5 minutes do a 'tense-relax' sequence for each muscle group – from head to toe. It is best to do so while lying down on a bed or the floor. For each muscle group, simply tense it for 5 seconds and then release it before moving onto the next muscle group. Some examples include: for the forehead, one should lift the eyebrows as if to touch the hairline - then relax; for the eyes, squint tightly—then relax; for the mouth, give an exaggerated smile as if touching the corners of the mouth and touching the ears – then relax. Move through each muscle in the same way from your head to your toes. Soft instrumental music will enhance the relaxation experience. Repeat as many times as you wish.
- 5. Appreciation Activity:** Make an "I appreciate you card" with text and a hand-drawn picture to your colleague or family relative that does not live with you. The occasion is not for a holiday or birthday, rather "just thinking of you and wanted you to know" moment. If this is possible to draw and then send via a WhatsApp photo, text message or e-mail; it can really help promote positive mental health for your colleagues and/or relatives who may be alone and disconnected at this time.

Five Online Resources for Educators' Wellbeing

1. **Breathing Exercises:** A 7-minute video taking you through a breathing exercise to reduce anxiety. [Click here.](#)
2. **Meditation:** A 5-minute video that teaches meditation to reduce stress. [Click here.](#)
3. **Guided Imagery:** A 15-minute video taking you through a guided imagery exercise to promote relaxation. [Click here.](#)
4. **Progressive Relaxation:** A 6.5-minute video that guides you through a relaxation technique that reduces stress and anxiety in your body by having you slowly tense and then relax each muscle. [Click here.](#)
5. **Self-care and Coping Tips:** 5 tips from Save the Children. [Click here.](#)

Seven Offline Activities for Educators' Professional Development

1. **Teacher Collage:** Create a collage that represents your thoughts and feelings as an educator – how do you see your purpose in the classroom and as an educator? How do you visualise your relationship with your students and peers? How do you view yourself as a teacher? This activity will help you reflect on how you want to be as a teacher and what has potentially prevented you from achieving that. It will help you reconnect with your vision and purpose and define what further improvements you would like to make.
2. **Lesson Planning Skills:** If you struggle to design lesson plans for a certain subject, consider drafting a lesson plan and sharing an image of this with your supervisor. You could also talk through the lesson plan with them. Solicit feedback to determine areas of improvement. Do this regularly until you become more confident of yourself. As an alternative, consider partnering with a peer and providing each other lesson objectives for which each of you can design a lesson plan. Perhaps add in some additional instructions for an added challenge, such as the list of materials available or that the lesson has to be conducted outdoors.
3. **Subject Knowledge Development:** If you have access to the curriculum map, familiarise yourself with how learning develops in a subject or topic. Focus on an area of the curriculum by starting with one topic. For example, shape and space (maths) - now write 5 bullet points on the key learning that students need before entering the grade/class/year group you teach. Now do the same for what do they need to know before moving up into the next year.
4. **Classroom Management Skills:** Make a list of potential areas that you find challenging with classroom management. For example, you may struggle with facilitating group work or enforcing classroom rules. If you have access to phone, reach out to your peers and/or supervisor and elicit advice on how they manage these specific challenges. Consider reading relevant articles, if you can access them as well. Write up a plan of how you will apply these techniques when schooling resumes.

5. **Read and Reflect:** If you have access to phone, collaborate (remotely) with a colleague to read education articles containing advice or reflections on pedagogy. These might be articles or written materials you have from attending trainings in the past. Schedule a time to discuss your reactions and learnings with your peer. Make notes in a journal and highlight any key messages you would like to keep in mind for the future.
6. **Social Emotional Learning Strategies:** If you have access to phone, collaborate (remotely) with a colleague, provide each other with conflict-based scenarios that may come up in a classroom and discuss how, as a teacher, you would facilitate and manage that situation, as well as support the relevant students individually.
7. **Project Based Learning:** This could be a good time for you to learn and improve designing project-based learning resources for your class that is aligned with the curriculum. You can do it on your own or partner up with a colleague to brainstorm and develop the project-based learning resources. You can use the resources to teach your children remotely or prepare them for the next term when schools are open.

Fifteen Online Activities for Educators' Professional Development

1. **Aga Khan Foundation's Video Based Courses:** Three newly launched online courses for educators, mentors and facilitators on Inclusive Classroom Environment. Free. [Click here](#) to register.
2. **Coursera:** 16 free courses on pedagogy & teaching approaches for educators. [Click here.](#)
3. **Open Learn:** A series of free short courses supporting initial teacher education, teacher professional development and classroom practice. [Click here.](#)
4. **Future Learn:** 54 free online courses covering a wide range of topics. [Click here.](#)
5. **VLACS:** An online virtual school offering webinars to help educators implement remote learning. [Click here.](#)
6. **Intel® Teach:** Free curated courses for educators to integrate technology effectively into their teaching. [Click here.](#)
7. **Edutopia:** Free videos and articles for teaching project-based learning. [Click here.](#)
8. **Education World:** An online resource covering articles, strategies and tips to improve school climate and classroom management. [Click here.](#)
9. **Udemy:** An online learning platform aimed at professional adults and students. Courses in over 65 languages. Udemy also has over 5,000 enterprise customers and 80% of Fortune 100 companies use Udemy for employee upskilling. As of 2020, there are more than 150,000 courses on the website. Free & Pay. [Click here.](#)
10. **Teach2030:** A digital professional learning programme that provides teachers with learning opportunities. [Click here.](#)

11. **Khan Academy:** Offers practice exercises, instructional videos, and a personalized learning dashboard that empower learners to study at their own pace in and outside of the classroom. Math, science, computer programming, history, art history, economics, and more. This can be a great resource for teachers to improve their instructional and knowledge skills in specific subjects. Free. [Click here.](#)
12. **EdeX:** Access 2000 free online courses from 140 leading institutions worldwide. Free & Pay (Certification). [Click here.](#)
13. **Ted Ed:** Engaging educational videos. Free. [Click here.](#)
14. **British Council:** Resources for English language learning. Free. [Click here.](#)
15. **Duolingo:** Learn languages for free. Web or app. Free. [Click here.](#)

Recommendations: Support to Programmes

This section includes a set of recommendations for organisations, school systems and programmes working with and supporting educators:

1. **Align with Government Priorities:** If your country's Ministry of Education has issued guidance or resources to support educators' wellbeing and professional development, follow that guidance and only use the ideas and resources from this resource packet that you think will complement the government and other partners' efforts in your context.
2. **Identify remote psychosocial support in your country:** Many countries are providing increased remote support for adults to reach out when they have anxieties or psychological needs. Identify what is available and advise educators how these services can be accessed. Government or non-government providers may provide these.
3. **Translate Available Resources:** Adapt and translate the above recommendations for educators to ensure that the language is culturally and contextually appropriate and relevant for the educators in your context.
4. **Context Matters:** Review the recommended synthesis of available resources and only include the resources that are contextually relevant and appropriate for your context, being aware that some of the available resources require reliable Internet.
5. **Identify Local Strategies that Work:** Include any other educators' resources that are already available and working in your country's context. Collect local strategies from local AKDN agencies, government partners or other reliable sources.
6. **Disseminate in Your Context:** Consider conducting webinars that can be recorded to disseminate these tips, recommendations and resources, especially in the languages that are mostly used by the educators in your context. The recorded webinar (or parts of it) could then be distributed via WhatsApp, Facebook or other low-cost media channels.

- 7. Use Radio and TV for Sharing Messages:** If the Internet is not reliable in your country for educators in your context, consider disseminating some of these tips or resources through local radio or TV stations. Collaborating with the government in disseminating these resources via radio and/or TV can also be a good way to show the government our commitment to responding to the COVID-19 crisis and supporting their strategic response.
- 8. Leverage Existing Social Networks:** Connect with your local education departments to disseminate resources to remote areas. If your programmes have existing education communities of practice among educators that use texting, WhatsApp or other social media, these networks can be great ways to disseminate tips and resources for them.