



Teacher, Take Care

A Guide to Well-Being and
Workplace Wellness for Educators

Edited by Jennifer E. Lawson

with Shannon Gander, Richelle North Star Scott, and Stanley Kipling



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PORTAGE &
MAIN PRESS

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*This book is dedicated to teachers everywhere—
those who taught us, those who are friends and colleagues,
and those who have collectively changed the world.
May you always take care.*

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From my heart, I want to deeply acknowledge all my spiritual teachers (human and non-human alike), the ones in the past (my Ancestors), the present, and the future (the children). Whether you were aware of the impact you made or not, I have been blessed learning from you.—*Richelle North Star Scott*

Thank you, teachers, for holding our future in your hands. This work that you do is more important than you can ever know.—*Laura Doney*

I am forever grateful to be part of the teaching profession and want to thank my colleagues and fellow educators for their dedication and heart. You matter, your well-being matters, and you are appreciated. And thank you to all our family and friends who unconditionally uplift us along the journey.—*Dana Fulwiler Volk*

I would like to thank all my friends, family, and the many teachers who have inspired and encouraged me along the way. May this book arrive for you perfectly on time!—*Keith Macpherson*

I would like to honour and acknowledge my Creator, my family (especially my son, Luke), and all the mentors, helpers, healers, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders who have guided me on this journey. I am forever grateful.—*Lisa Dumas Neufeld*

I would like to acknowledge the land I was born on, Treaty 6 territory. Its nature is a gift that has shaped me and is why I began working in the field of health. A most heartfelt thank you to the brilliant humans who have been my guiding lights: Jenn Carson, the Health Advisors Huddle, the Joyful Collective, and my Mum.
—*Megan Hunter*

How wonderful it's been to be part of this collaboration! The wellness of our educators is precious and important.—*Cher Brasok*

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To my family, friends, staff, and colleagues, who remind me to take care of my mind, body, and spirit. I am grateful for you.—*Sandra Pacheco Melo*

Blessing

Elder Stanley Kipling



Elder Stanley Kipling, Dip FNCW, BSW, MSW, RSW, is a proud Peguis First Nation individual. Stan has extensive experience in areas related to Indigenous diversity, health-care issues in Indigenous populations, improving Indigenous cultural awareness, spiritual care, suicide prevention, addictions, anger management, family violence prevention, life skills, and personal development. Stan was raised on the trap line, hunting, commercial fishing, and living on the land. Stan is a Sundancer and Pipe Carrier, as well as a traditional harvester of animals and plants, and he has held Sweat Lodges.

I want to call on the Great Spirit, Gitchee Manitou, to bring blessings to this book and to the people who have contributed to the writings. It is with a warm heart and an open mind that I ask Creator to help each and every person who reads these writings for comfort and guidance in some way. Creator knows our hearts and struggles, and I ask for guidance for us all, in a good way, to the parts of the book that will speak to us.

Indigenous People are told that when we work with people who are struggling, we must speak from the heart. I believe that this book will speak to the hearts of many.

Introduction

Shannon Gander and Richelle North Star Scott



Project consultant **Shannon Gander**, BPE, CAC, CM, is the founder and director of Life Work Wellness, a company committed to individual and organizational well-being. Shannon has an academic background in corporate wellness, mental health, and conflict resolution, and has worked in the mental health community as a therapist and trainer since the early 1990s. For many years, she travelled Manitoba as part of the Balance team, bringing mental health program resources to educators. Shannon advocates for leaders to create systems for psychological health and safety for employees at all organizational levels. Her bliss is her family, nature, and a hot cup of coffee on a Saturday morning.



Knowledge Keeper and writer **Richelle North Star Scott** (Giwedining Anong) says Aniin! I am of Anishinaabe and Métis descent, and my Ancestors are from St Peter's Reserve. I am the mother of three beautiful daughters: Amanda, Tehya, and Riel. I am a KooKoo of a fabulous grandson named Darius, but I call him Noozhis (which means grandchild). I am the Coordinator of Indigenous Inclusion Education for the St James-Assiniboia School Division. I am a Mide woman, Pipe Carrier, Water Carrier, and Sundancer. I have completed my mystery* in land-based education. (*I don't use "master" as it is a gender-binary word.)

Welcome! You may have picked up this book because you want to know more about how to care for yourself. Or you may be wondering about someone else in your life. Perhaps you have concerns about educator burnout in your school. Regardless of why you chose this book, we are glad that you did.

Teacher, Take Care is an invitation to explore self-awareness and self-care for teachers, while also exploring workplace wellness on a larger scale. It invites us to consider how we can contribute to a culture that promotes and prioritizes the health and well-being of educators. When we engage in our self-care, we permit others to do the same. However, self-care alone will not prevent teacher burnout. We must look beyond the individual and focus on a systems-level approach to well-being at work.

Across the globe, organizations are exploring ways to embed psychological health and safety into their workplaces to protect employee mental health. There has been extensive research on the psychosocial factors that contribute to workplace well-being, including work-life balance, psychological support, and organizational culture. By taking actions to bolster these psychosocial factors in our schools, not only do we support the health of teachers but we also create healthier learning environments for students. Expanding workplace health and safety to include protection of mental wellness has been a long time coming. In chapter 13, “An Invitation for Leaders in Education,” we look at the research and describe a systems-level approach to well-being for school leaders who want to take intentional actions to create healthy workplace environments. We encourage leaders at all levels to build systems that support our educators.

How to Use This Book

Teacher, Take Care is an interactive guide to help educators promote their personal well-being and workplace wellness. Within these pages, you will find opportunities to reflect and respond to questions. You may choose to simply think about the reflection questions, or you may record your journey. For example, you might keep a notebook-style journal or a sketchbook for visual journaling. Digital tools, such as audio journals and photos, can be helpful, as can conversations with trusted people. The subjects we explore will hopefully inspire you to try a variety of ways of reflecting and responding. Whatever method(s) you use will be a part of your wellness toolkit.

You will also find invitations to try strategies, explore varying perspectives, and consider new ideas aimed at well-being. Take your time with these invitations. Give

yourself permission to explore. Keep in mind that you may choose to skip them at any time, depending on your personal needs. You determine your path through this book—it doesn't have to be linear. Please choose what works for you!

You might choose to read this book independently and record personal reflections. You may also want to experience the process with a colleague or small group of educators to share your learning and insights. Or this could be an opportunity for a professional learning community, shared as a grade, department, school, or even your entire school division or district. Each approach has its merits.

This book is meant to be supportive and not prescriptive. Please use it, and the ideas within it, as a resource on your journey of well-being!

Content warning: Throughout the book, our writers have shared personal stories of their struggles and learnings on their wellness journeys. Some of the stories might be difficult for some readers. We hope that you read only what feels comfortable to you.

Messages from Knowledge Keeper North Star and Elder Stan Kipling

Teaching is a highly satisfying but sometimes overwhelming profession. The stories in this book offer strategies for teachers to use for their personal wellness. These have been shared by fellow educators in the hope that other teachers can learn from their wellness journeys and perhaps apply the thinking and techniques to their own lives.

Additionally, each chapter offers valuable concepts that originate from an Indigenous worldview. These come from Elder Stanley Kipling and Knowledge Keeper North Star, who are members of Anishinaabe communities that reside in the Treaty 1 territory in what is now Manitoba. In each chapter, Elder Stan and Knowledge Keeper North Star share messages connecting Indigenous perspectives of wellness with the ideas explored in that chapter. These passages are identified by a Sacred Hoop icon. 

The concepts they share suggest ways in which teachers can make deeper connections for a healthy life. In Anishinaabemowin, they call this Mino Pimatisiwin, which means “living a good life.”



“Living a good life” can mean different things to each individual. As Indigenous People, we understand each person has the right to direct their own life without interference. When we gather for healing ceremonies, we are told stories shared by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, which we call teachings.

Yet it is understood that everyone will take a different personal meaning from each teaching and that we can only take that which we are ready for. Each time we hear a story, even if it is the same story, we may have a different understanding of the teaching than we did before.—*North Star*

It is our hope that, as you read on and each story unfolds before you, you receive what you are ready to receive and you practise what you are ready to practise. This is the approach of Mino Pimatisiwin, living a good life.

A Holistic View of Wellness

We each have our own definition of wellness, whether we have articulated it or not. One understanding of holistic health and harmony is reflected in the Sacred Hoop.

The Sacred Hoop

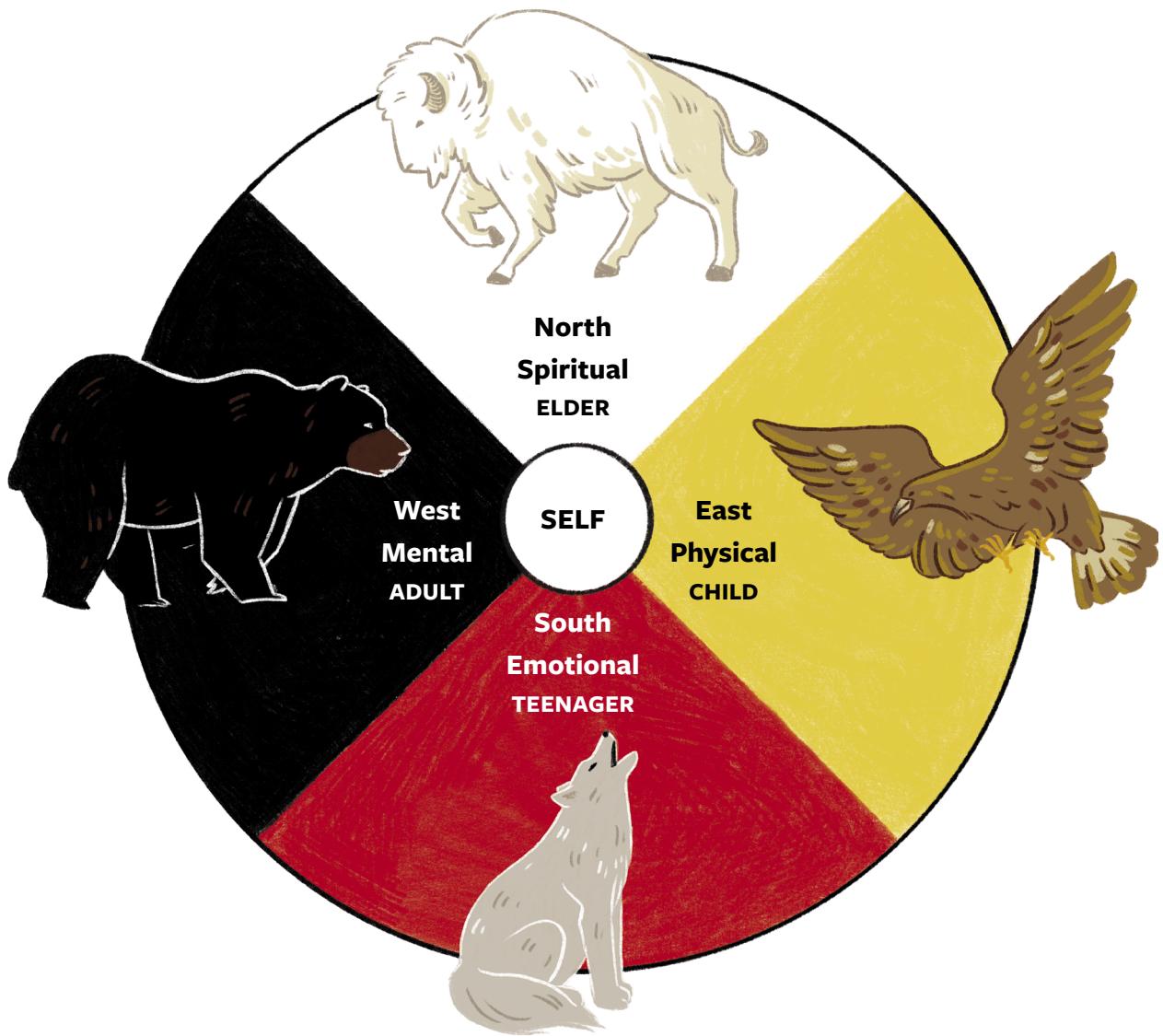
The Sacred Hoop is a representation of how some Indigenous Peoples view the world. It is also known by other names, such as Cosmological Circle, Circle Teachings, Hoop Teachings, Medicine Wheel, or Wheel Teachings. (Many Indigenous communities are trying to break free from using references to the Medicine Wheel and Wheel Teachings, as these are colonial terms.)

There are many different perspectives on the Sacred Hoop, depending on Nation, territory, and personal interpretations. A common theme, as represented in the Sacred Hoop by the Four Directions, is that wellness involves the whole person—their Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual selves.

When we began planning this book, Leah Fontaine shared her idea of structuring it around the Sacred Hoop teachings as a means of infusing Indigenous Knowledge throughout the book. The Sacred Hoop shown here is the one that Elder Kipling and North Star were most familiar with. It supports their thoughts and ideas and has shaped the teachings they have received throughout their lives.



In the Sacred Hoop, the *Physical dimension* is represented by babies and children, as their physical bodies do much growing and learning when they are new to this world. The Golden Eagle sits in the East as a teacher of unconditional love for our children. The colour yellow represents the rising sun and the gift of a brand-new day. Nourishing a healthy body through exercise, nutrition, and sleep are ways to promote physical wellness.



Source: The Sacred Hoop, as shown here, is inspired by Traditional Land-Based Knowledge, which is a deep understanding of Earth and Territorial cycles that connect us to ourselves.

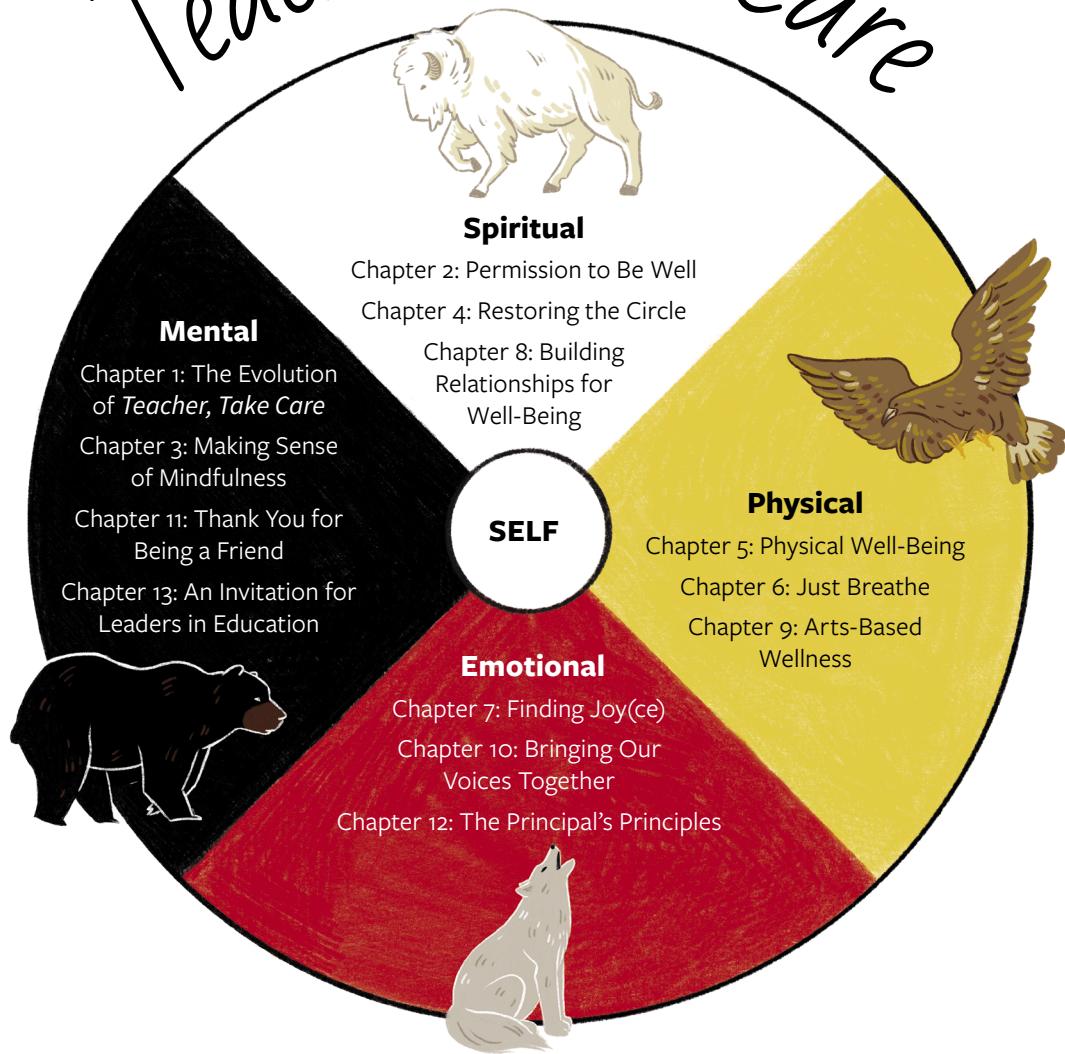
The *Emotional dimension* is represented by teenagers, who experience a wide range of emotions during a time of hormone changes in their lives. The Wolf sits in the South as a teacher of humility. As true leaders, wolves are humble. Although often misrepresented as wild and dangerous animals by settlers, they care for the pack even if it means their needs are not met. The colour red represents the red-hot emotions we may have during this life stage. We are teaching emotional wellness when we allow ourselves and others to experience feelings in a safe environment. Expressing emotions is a natural way to bring ourselves back into balance.

The *Mental dimension* is represented by adults, who often overthink and then worry about the decisions they have to make or the consequences of the decisions they have already made. The Black Bear sits in the West as a teacher of courage, as it takes courage to go deep within our minds and learn about patterns that no longer serve us. The colour black represents our minds and the introspection it takes to journey through our lives. Being engaged in the world through learning, problem-solving, and creativity can improve our mental wellness. Learning is an ongoing, ever-evolving, lifelong process. It keeps us forever moving and growing and prevents us from getting stuck or becoming stagnant.

The *Spiritual dimension* is represented by Elders because they have great knowledge, having travelled the path around the entire Sacred Hoop. The White Buffalo sits in the North as a teacher who teaches us about facing the toughest of challenges head-on. Because of this, both the Elders and the White Buffalo deserve much respect. The colour white represents the harsh weather we must face and the wisdom our Elders have gained, often turning their hair white in the process.

The Spiritual is that which fills us up. For some, Spirituality means connecting to our higher power, whether we call it Creator, God, Buddha, or Allah. For others, it means something different. The Spiritual also means the fire within us—our pursuits that fill us up when we feel empty. These can be dancing, singing, attending ceremonies, or painting—things that make us feel whole again. As we go deeper within ourselves, committing to another walk around the Sacred Hoop, spirituality keeps us grounded, creative, and inspired.—*North Star*

Teacher, Take Care





Spiritual work is essential to healing. It means being on the land, talking to Mother Earth, and harvesting the gifts from the land, as when preparing hides, feathers, bones, and plants. This is spiritual medicine.—*Elder Kipling*

The framework of this book is based on the Sacred Hoop in recognition of Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives. So how does the Sacred Hoop relate to educator well-being? Taken together, the topics explored in *Teacher, Take Care* address all Four Directions. In the graphic model shown here, we have indicated where in this book you will find related materials by including the relevant chapter titles. For example, chapter 6, “Just Breathe,” is linked to the Physical dimension, or East Direction. Of course, each chapter connects to the other Directions as well. Use this graphic to help you explore wellness from a holistic perspective, considering your own Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual Directions.

In using the Sacred Hoop as a framework for *Teacher, Take Care*, our purpose is also to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action, by celebrating and prioritizing Indigenous voices in the connection and transfer of knowledge, history, the legacy of Indigenous Peoples, and issues related to intercultural competency (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

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Chapter 1

The Evolution of Teacher, Take Care

Jennifer E. Lawson



Senior author Jennifer E. Lawson, PhD, is the originator and program editor of the Hands-On series published by Portage & Main Press. Jennifer writes, teaches in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, and is a local school board trustee. She is also one of the founders of Mission to Mexico, an organization that supports schools in some of the most impoverished communities in Puerto Vallarta. Jennifer is a former classroom teacher, resource and special education teacher, consultant, and principal. She lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with her husband, Barry, and sons, Devon and Jeremy.

The year 2020 was like no other. It may have started in the usual way, at least for people living in Canada, but we were soon embroiled in a global pandemic that changed everything about our lives. This was the time that inspired the writing of *Teacher, Take Care*. However, concerns about educator wellness, or well-being (we use both terms in this book), existed long before COVID-19 and will continue to be a challenge far into the future.

Inspiration for this book came from my roles as a school trustee in Winnipeg and as an instructor in the Faculty of Education at the

University of Manitoba. In both environments, I observed first-hand the stressors affecting pre-service and practising educators. In both roles, I organized initiatives to address educator wellness, including professional development opportunities aimed at promoting resilience and fostering positive mental health. These were well received, but it was evident that much more needed to be done to support educators at the systems level to foster workplace wellness and individual well-being.

Throughout 2020, I began working with a variety of professionals in education and mental health, all of whom were passionate about supporting educators. It was during this time that the idea of a handbook on educator well-being began to evolve. Meanwhile, I was also facing my own mental health challenges. My mom, who had lived with our family, passed away at the beginning of the lockdown. Not being able to grieve together, celebrate her life with a funeral, or be supported by friends was a very difficult experience that led to a period of depression and darkness. However, this experience offered me the opportunity to re-examine my views about mental health, seek support, and begin to practise self-care.

Through my professional and personal experiences over the past few years, it has become clear that all of us, teachers included, need to take this challenging time and grow from it. And so *Teacher, Take Care: A Guide to Well-Being and Workplace Wellness for Educators* was born, offering a variety of approaches to educator self-care and well-being.

I explored many of the ideas presented in this book when addressing my own self-care. Some worked well for me, such as using the arts to foster wellness. Other approaches were more challenging. For example, mindfulness is a trial for me. What I have learned from my journey is that we need to approach self-care as individuals, respecting our sense of what helps and what doesn't.

I hope you will find something that works for you as you read through these pages.

Reflect and Respond

- In what ways was your mental health affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? What other times in your life have you found challenging?
- What strategies did you use to address your well-being?

Remember that you may respond in different ways to the prompts throughout this book. For example, you may choose to write down your thoughts, simply contemplate your responses, discuss them with a trusted friend, or express them through art or other forms of journaling.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is a philosophy of leading by serving based on the work of Robert Greenleaf (1991). As an educational leader, I have always been inspired by this approach and I see it as the foundation for this book. All the contributors have been practising servant leadership, as seen in their passionate commitment to the personal growth of others.

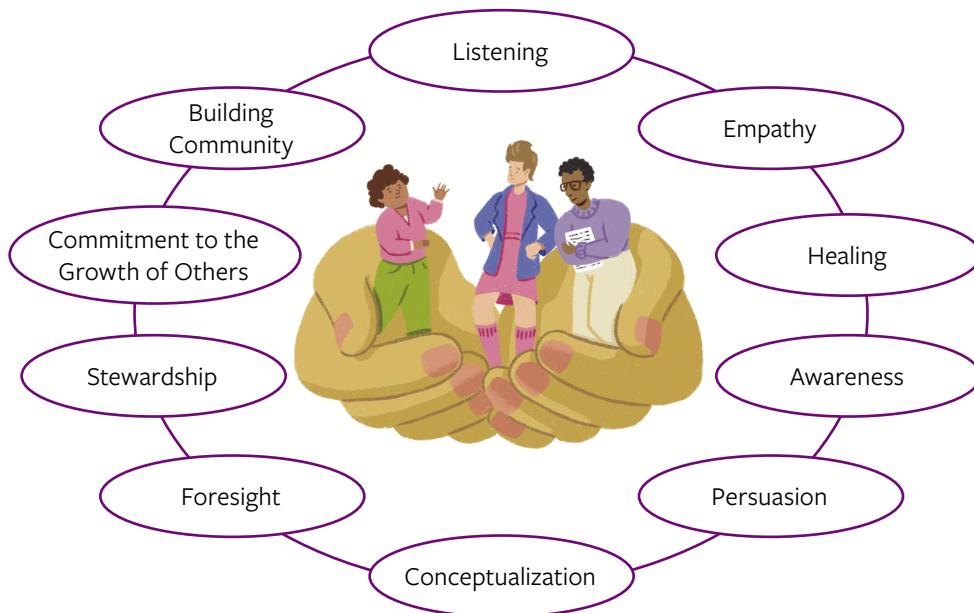
What are the characteristics of a servant-leader?

A servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first, to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (Greenleaf, 1991, p. 7)

In essence, the servant-leader's role is to support others in a way that allows themselves and others to thrive.

As a school trustee, university instructor, and former principal, I feel that I have come closest to embodying the role of servant-leader when empowering my staff and students to succeed. Similarly, classroom teachers are servant-leaders when they are supporting students in meeting their potential. Senior school administrators can serve principals by helping to create a culture in which they can succeed and grow in their work. Principals can, in turn, create healthy environments for the staff they support. The contributors to this book, as teachers, therapists, and leaders, are together helping educators so that they can be their best physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Even within our families, we can be servant-leaders when we offer guidance and care that encourages family members to thrive.

When we support others so that they can flourish intellectually and personally, we are setting the groundwork for workplace wellness, from the individual, to the school, to the larger educational system. The visual below presents 10 characteristics of servant-leaders. These are explored in greater depth in chapter 12, “The Principal’s Principles.”



In an Anishinaabe worldview, there is something similar to the idea of a servant-leader. In our ceremonies, we have those people who help others. They prepare for ceremonies, gather wood, prepare and watch over the fire, and help our Elders do whatever needs doing. In Anishinaabemowin, this is Oshkaabewis. It is part of our Spiritual life to be of service to others. When we give back to others, we are also learning how to heal ourselves. In being of service to others, we give the best parts of ourselves.—*North Star*

Current research confirms that servant leadership can effectively support educators. It can encourage self-compassion, self-care, well-being, and well-becoming (that is, being on the journey toward wellness). Servant leadership prioritizes and promotes

the needs of others, addresses emotional stress, and encourages empowerment, all of which can increase job engagement and reduce anxiety related to the workplace (Hu et al., 2020). Further, servant leadership has a positive effect on the person being served, helping to reduce emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and burnout (Rivkin et al., 2014). Educators at all levels who embrace the role of servant-leader can help to promote psychological health and workplace wellness.

Reflect and Respond

- Consider the servant-leader traits presented on the graphic.
Reflect on these traits.
- Who in your life is a servant-leader?
- How does this person foster wellness in others?

Inclusion

Diversity is a fact.

Equity is a choice.

Inclusion is an action.

Belonging is an outcome.

—Arthur Chan

Our team of writers understands the importance of celebrating the diversity that is reflected in our teaching and student populations. We hope that the messages we share and the approaches we take to wellness are inclusive and respectful of all. People differ in race, religion, gender, ability and disability, socioeconomic background, and more. There are differences in “how health and illness are perceived, coping styles, treatment-seeking patterns, impacts of history, racism, bias, and stereotyping, gender, family, stigma, and discrimination” (Gopalkrishnan and Babacan, 2015).

Every teacher’s story is different. In sharing individual stories and exploring personal views on mental health and well-being, we have tried to reflect that diversity. Moreover, the topics in this book address equity, diversity, and inclusion issues.

When we grow to understand, appreciate, and respect the diversity around us ... we gain a positive and accepting community, which benefits everyone.

This benefits individuals because when people feel accepted, respected and included, they have better mental health. When we develop the skills and attitudes that will assist us in our relationships and working life, it contributes to our collective social and emotional well-being. It also benefits organizations and communities, as environments where people enjoy positive mental health are more pro-social and more productive. (Be You, n.d.)

Understanding the issues that link equity, diversity, and mental health is a way of fostering inclusion. With this understanding, we can build a culture of well-being for all, both at the individual and the systemic level. This can have a direct, positive impact on workplace wellness.

Reflect and Respond

- Have you experienced inclusion? How did this affect your mental health?
- In what ways have you experienced exclusion? How did this affect your mental health?
- In your experience, what benefits does inclusion have on overall workplace wellness?
- What are some examples of how you foster inclusion in your workplace?



Wellness, to me, means that I am trying to achieve balance in all aspects of my life. I practise wellness from an Indigenous perspective. By “all aspects of life,” I am referring to the Sacred Hoop and what it means to me as an Indigenous person. I try to balance the Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual aspects.

I encourage all people to intentionally practise an open, supportive, and caring approach when interacting with others. Try to understand where people are coming from, and work to be part of a respectful and compassionate society.—*Elder Kipling*

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Written by teachers for teachers, this comprehensive resource provides strategies to improve educator wellness and foster positive mental health in the workplace.

Teacher, Take Care creates a library of healing tools. The diversity and focus on self-care is impressive, and the stories shared are relatable and heartwarming. I am optimistic that mental health is taking an equal footing with other teacher objectives, and I'm thrilled for teachers everywhere to get their hands on this exciting book!

COLLEEN O'NEILL, RETIRED RPN AND THERAPIST

With compassion and clarity, this book provides both the insights and tools that will help to meaningfully improve teacher well-being. Always encouraging and grounded in a deep awareness of our connections to one another, this book's wisdom is valuable and important.

**STEPHANIE HARRISON, WELL-BEING EXPERT
AND FOUNDER OF THE NEW HAPPY**

Easy to read and hard to put down! In a time when we seem perpetually stressed, we are too often offered one-size-fits-all quick fixes, when what we really need are thoughtful, engaging, diverse, and easy-to-use toolkits, giving us the freedom to choose what works for us. Teacher, Take Care is just that kind of toolkit, and has quickly become a personal and professional mental health go-to resource!

SHARON BLADY, PHD, CEO OF SPEAK UP: MENTAL HEALTH & NEURODIVERSITY, FORMER MINISTER OF HEALTH IN MANITOBA

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