

Strengthening a Culture of Caring through Collective Well-being

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All adults deserve to feel well and be well. When adults learn how to notice and manage their stress, they feel better, and the children they care for also feel and do better.

Increasingly, workplaces are recognizing wellness as a vital component of a healthy work environment. However, many wellness efforts focus only on self-care. Self-care can help a person manage stress, but it sometimes feels like one more thing to do. Self-care doesn't address the larger issues at work that might cause stress. It puts the full responsibility for feeling well on each person, instead of looking at what the workplace can do to help.

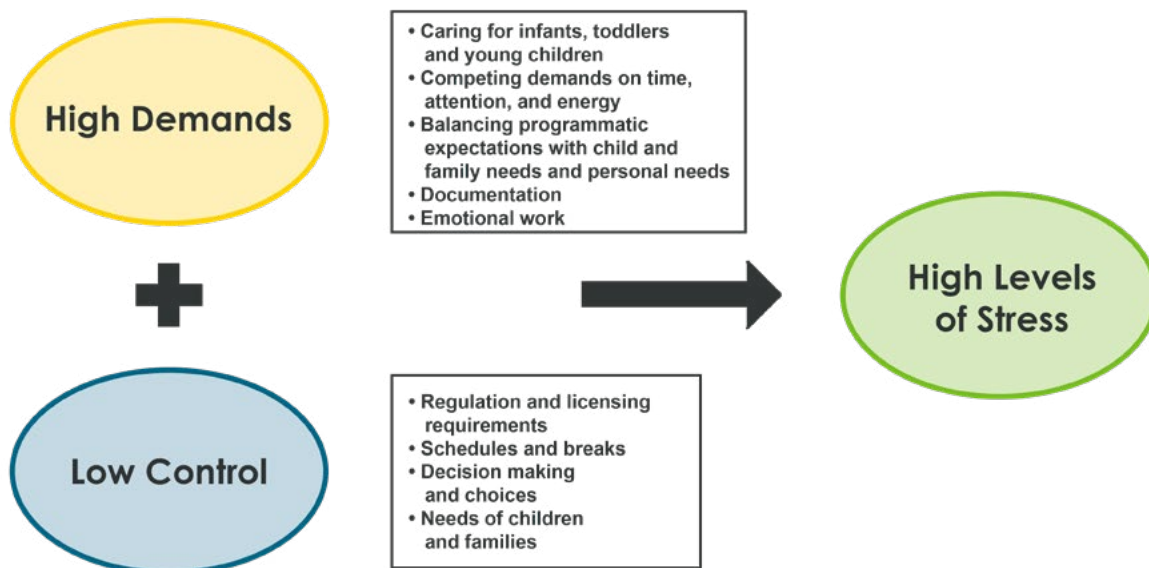
Creating a culture of collective wellness shifts the focus from individual responsibility to shared care.

It recognizes that changes to workplace policies and practices—like ensuring reasonable workloads, providing supportive leadership, and fostering a culture where people feel safe to speak up—can reduce stress and create a more supportive environment.

Community care builds wellness into the everyday work environment.

Even small changes can strengthen collective well-being, helping everyone feel supported and cared for at work.

Early Childhood Practitioners Often Experience:



Collective wellness supports the idea that we are stronger together. The goal is to create a community of social support that is available and accessible to all adults within the program.

Creating a community of well-being increases the possibility that:

- ▶ A collective group of people works together to ensure each individual has what they need to be well, thus strengthening the group.
- ▶ Redistribute resources to those in higher need. For example, a classroom supporting children with unsafe behaviors may receive more of a floating teacher's time each week or more breaks across the day.

Small shifts can help create a culture of collective well-being:

Check in regularly: create formal and informal opportunities for honest conversations about how people are feeling and how they are doing. Consider various ways to create safe opportunities for sharing, such as large group, small group, one-on-one, verbally, in writing, or through activities like art, music, or play.

At Happy Valley Child Care Center, teachers can anonymously write notes about their well-being in a "feelings box" that the director checks weekly. There is also a whiteboard in the break room where teachers can express themselves by drawing images, jotting down words, and circling specific feeling faces.

- ▶ **Empathize:** Offer opportunities for reflection and curiosity. Shift from using judgment to a stance of wondering or curiosity. For example, instead of thinking, "My co-teacher is always out; she doesn't care how this impacts the kids and me," try thinking, "My co-teacher is going through something that makes it hard for her to be here right now." If she could be here, she would be here. What can I do to make the day run smoothly?"
- ▶ **Socialize with one another:** Create opportunities to get to know one another. When secure relationships are in place, it is easier to empathize, accept, or offer help, take accountability when necessary, and communicate needs. Think about existing meetings or times across the day or week where people can have time to socialize with one another. Consider sharing a meal, having a game night, sharing a hobby or passion with the group, creating time and space for informal conversation, connection, and celebration. Ask staff what kinds of social opportunities would be most appealing.
- ▶ **Find ways to increase a sense of control:** Explore ways to offer an increased sense of control. Staff may be unable to change regulations, paperwork requirements, work hours, or the needs of children and families. However, they may have control over how they do their work. Find opportunities for staff to be involved in decision-making. Promote a culture of trust and offer opportunities to take ownership of various tasks and projects.
- ▶ **Make specific offers to help:** Model the way! We often offer help in broad, general ways. Get specific. Instead, "Let me know if I can help you with anything." Try: "I can help during the transition outside. I know getting snow gear on is a lot!"

- ▶ **Assess what others need**, including basic, social, emotional, and collective community needs. Understanding what each individual needs and how this impacts the overall well-being of the group is important. Consider each individual's health and safety, sense of belonging and social connection, mental health, and purpose and meaning. How can the collective group support access to resources (e.g., a resource binder specifically for staff, creating systems for sharing information about continuing education, transportation, assistance programs, opportunities for community connection and engagement creating an announcement portion of staff meetings for resources people may be familiar with or anonymous ways of asking and receiving support related to resources.
- ▶ **Create a space where people feel safe owning their mistakes when needed.** Ruptures in relationships happen all the time. It is essential to have a process where people feel safe to take responsibility for their mistakes or missteps and have the skills to repair the relationship. Creating relational safety in the context of the group is important. Offering strategies and opportunities to practice taking accountability or offering feedback when missteps occur is essential. Many adults lack models of what it looks like to take responsibility in adult relationships or apologize after making mistakes. These skills can be strengthened with practice and supported by training, coaching, and other types of guidance. Creating spaces where group members feel comfortable taking ownership and admitting mistakes can enhance relationships and reduce stress.