Self-Affirmation

Intervention Overview

Self-affirmation theory suggests that when our self-image or self-esteem is threatened in some way, we can better tolerate these threats and ensuing distress by affirming other important aspects of our self-esteem(Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Self-affirmation has also been defined as any act that "demonstrates one's adequacy" (Cohen & Sherman, 2014, p.337). Self-affirmation strategies can include reaffirming one's most important values and creating if/then statements that encourage self-affirmation during times of stress and anxiety. Self-affirmation strategies have been shown to increase educator's positive emotions and emotional regulation (Morgan & Atkin, 2016).

Intervention Guide

Materials:	Paper, pencil
Duration:	As needed

Implementation: 1. Create *if/then* responses during or before stressful events to allow yourself to cope. Examples include: "If I feel threatened or anxious about teaching, *then I will. . . 1) think about the things I value about myself. 2)remember the things I have succeeded in. 3)think about what I stand for. 4) think about things that are important to me*" (Morgan & Atkin, 2016, p.3).

2. Create a list of your most important values and rank them in order of importance. Then, write a brief reflection on your top value, addressing why it is important to you and a time when it played an important role in your life.

Possible values list: (Greater Good Science Center,n.d)

• artistic skills/aesthetic appreciation
• sense of humor
• relations with friends/family
• spontaneity/living life in the moment
• social skills
• athletics
• musical ability/appreciation
• physical attractiveness
• creativity
• business/managerial skills
• romantic values

Does it work?

One study in the U.K. evaluated the impact of an implementation-intention style self-affirmation intervention on teacher wellbeing(Morgan & Atkin, 2016). 90 teachers participated, being randomly assigned to the implementation-intention intervention, involving creating a series of if/then statements to cope with potential mental and emotional threats, or a control group.Those in the intervention group were given implementation intention prompts related to teaching stress and asked to complete the action portion of the sentence with a specific set of responses related to self-

affirmation. For example, "If I feel anxious, then I will. . .(remember the things I succeed in)." (p.3). Those in the control group had similar prompts but responses that were not self- affirming such as "If I feel stressed at work, then I will think about the best flavor of ice cream" (p.5). Participants in the self-affirming group reported decreased anxiety, higher positive emotions, and greater emotional regulation(Morgan & Atkin, 2016).

While the value affirmation activity has not been specifically evaluated with educators and school staff, it has been tested among other adults and employees in other high-stress fields. In a literature review of values affirmation interventions, Sherman (2013) found that affirming core values can help boost psychological resources to cope with stressors, expand one's perspective, and reduce the impact of threats and stressors on one's self-identity and self-esteem. In one study of the value affirmation intervention, 85 undergraduate students of mixed-races were randomly assigned to either the intervention or control group (Creswell et al., 2005). The intervention group was given a questionnaire and were asked to rank religion, social issues, politics, theory and aesthetics according to personal importance. Then, while undergoing a stressful activity, the students in the intervention group were asked to reflect on one of the values they had rated and answered questions related to their top value. The intervention group showed significantly lower cortisol responses to stress following the intervention than the control group(Creswell et al., 2005).

References:

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