

Nurturing Summer Wellness

Strategies for Youth Services Librarians and Managers

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Summer brings an influx of visitors and activity to libraries. Librarians face increased programs, outreach, and extra desk duties, while maintaining a high energy and friendly public persona and managing a vibrant and safe library atmosphere.

The intensity of summer programs, extra emotional and physical labor, and increased foot traffic can lead to burnout, heightened stress levels, and exhaustion before June is even over. Summer is the most important time of year for librarians to practice self-care, both in the library and at home. Try some of the wellness tips below and find more from ALA-APA's Importance of Wellness in the Workplace website (<https://ala-apa.org/wellness/>).

Disconnect and sleep well. At home, make sure to get plenty of quality sleep. Unplug and disconnect from screens and technology, especially before bedtime to improve your sleep quality. Create your perfect sleep environment—use light blocking curtains, play white noise, set a comfortable sleep temperature, do anything that makes falling asleep and staying asleep easy for you.

Recharge! Connect socially in person—with friends, family, or a community with similar interests. Take time to do what you love—and if you don't have a hobby, explore and find one. Do what works best for you, such as meditation or exercise. Learn something new or organize something old. Focusing on something novel when you're not at work will give your brain the break it needs to handle the demands of summer reading.

Prioritize yourself by setting clear boundaries. Don't be afraid to say no, so you don't feel overwhelmed at home and at work. Don't take work home with you. One of the ways that librarians motivate themselves is vocational awe—but this also means that librarians tend to feel guilty for taking time off. Put your self-care needs first. For more information on vocational awe, visit the Califa Group Library Consortium's website on Self-Care for Library Workers (califa.org/self-care).

Eat well, stay hydrated, and exercise. The better you care for your body, the better you can manage stressful and high energy situations. Take a day off if you need to, even during Summer Reading. One of the lessons that came out of the pandemic is that it is okay to take a mental health day. Rest if you need to and go back to work stronger.

Take breaks, eat, and stay hydrated. At work, take short breaks throughout the day to stretch and breathe. Make sure to take your allotted breaks and lunch. During these breaks, take a walk to rejuvenate, eat a nutritious meal, and stay hydrated.

Delegate, prioritize, and collaborate. Collaborate with your colleagues both in youth services and library wide. They can be a support network and help foster innovation, problem-solving, camaraderie, and positive morale. Prioritize work, and delegate tasks to volunteers, other departments, or other team

members to share the workload and allow youth services staff to focus on the most essential tasks.

Set small, achievable goals, and celebrate them. Break down big tasks into smaller chunks and celebrate when you complete each chunk. Recognize small registration milestones, the end of the first week, the halfway point, staff birthdays, Fridays, anything that will keep your team motivated and energized.

Seek support if you are feeling burnt-out. Talk to a trusted friend, colleague, or mentor. At work, talk to your supervisor, human resources, or an employee assistance program.

Be kind to yourself. If you make a mistake during an overly stressful time, it's okay. Avoid harsh self-criticism. Know that while summer is stressful, it will end. Focus on what you can control, and prioritize caring for yourself. &

Tips for Managers to Prevent Burnout

Encourage communication and provide support.

Foster a supportive culture where youth services librarians can openly discuss stress, workloads, and well-being, as well as concerns and experiences. Ensure that resources are available to support self-care initiatives. Provide access to wellness programs, counseling services, or flexible scheduling where possible. Lead by example by displaying self-care practices and communicating their importance to the team. Model self-care behaviors to encourage staff to follow suit. Tips and examples can be found in ALA-APA's *Library Worklife* newsletter or by following the example of libraries that won the ALA's Sustainability Roundtable Citation for Wellness in the Workplace.

Value your librarians and make sure they have what they need.

Acknowledge their hard work and contributions and provide positive reinforcement. Celebrate their accomplishments, big and small. Make sure they have adequate resources and help for summer, and if they don't, find support or alternatives. Don't do more with less, or you may end up with less youth services librarians. Start holding conversations well before summer about ideas for restructuring or innovating Summer Reading, especially if your library is experiencing staffing shortages.

Let staff take time off. Ensure librarians have adequate time off and breaks to recharge. Encourage a healthy work-life balance. Encourage staff to take time off to recharge, even during the summer. Allow staff to take vacations with their families during the summer. Consider flexible work schedules or remote work options

when feasible. This can promote work-life balance and increase motivation. Find time to give youth services librarians an "office day" each month during the summer where they can spend the entire day away from the public eye to complete administrative tasks, prepare for upcoming programs, take classes, or just recharge.

Let staff learn and grow. Offer opportunities for learning and career growth. Training, workshops, and educational programs can keep librarians engaged and motivated. Offer professional development programs that focus on stress management, self-care, and mental health. Equip staff with tools to navigate stressful periods. Public Awareness and Advocacy (PAA) member Kimberly White and Broward County Library Community Engagement, for example, host a free Conference on Children's Literature for librarians every September as a way for youth librarians to recharge and reconnect after Summer Reading. The Wellness in the Workplace online class taught by author Bobbi L. Foster through the National Library of Medicine teaches workplace wellness for library staff and managers.

Foster a supportive, flexible, and inclusive work environment that promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Micromanaging is associated with the highest risk of burnout in the workplace. Instead, create a culture that values their contributions, promotes teamwork and collaboration, and provides support when needed. Encourage librarians to bring in new ideas, efficiency, and innovation to Summer Reading. Feeling empowered can increase their sense of ownership and motivation and decrease burnout.