

MY HOPE STORY



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The loss of connection and the politicization of public health during the pandemic were hugely challenging as a school nurse. I faced a lack of support and recognition on top of the difficulties of providing essential care during this time. During COVID, 45% of us school nurses felt abused or threatened and 4% had suicidal ideations, issues that were often left unaddressed because we needed to prioritize students and are rarely taught about self-care. In response, I worked to create spaces for school nurses to receive support and advocacy, to improve not just their mental health, but my own.



I intentionally practiced Stress Skills to manage stressors I experience at work. As a nurse, I'm often working alone and can feel isolated and overwhelmed while addressing urgent issues. I have learned that taking rest and practicing self-care don't have to be earned, and that proactively incorporating restful practices like napping into my life gives me more capacity for my job. I try to recognize when things aren't urgent and can be dealt with when I have sufficient resources, which sometimes requires maintaining strong boundaries.



When considering which Happiness Habits are best for me, I like to think about what I enjoyed when I was younger. During the pandemic I started to do art after not having done so for decades, and I continued to post on my blog, "The Relentless School Nurse," which is an important creative outlet for me. I also activated purpose through orchestrating workshops with other school nurses where we engaged in creative activities and learned skills that help us practice self-care and compassion. I'd often get out for walks, even just briefly.



I took Inspired Actions that connected me with others during the pandemic. I started support groups for school nurses and joined as many groups as I could find that advocate for our needs. I consistently posted on my blog and asked others to share their stories that I posted as well. I took as many avenues as I could to pursue my goals of sharing what school nurses do, what we need, and why we're so important. When I felt overwhelmed, I just took the next step. My successes are easier to see in retrospect, but in the moment, my passion kept me active and involved.



Building Nourishing Networks with other school nurses so that we can share our stories and support one another has been life changing. The support group I started during the pandemic still meets, and sharing our needs helps us feel recognized and heard by our larger community which is what allows us to provide our schools with the care they need. I was virtually creative during isolation, posting YouTube videos of me reading children's books and sharing public health information with families to connect with my community. As we are all alone in our buildings without a team, it is so important to intentionally make time for others in our region.



School nurses were not treated well during COVID. Many were threatened and intimidated for sending students with COVID at home, and it was difficult to do our jobs in a virtual environment. To address the limiting beliefs and rumination, I had to work intentionally to build a positive self-image and mindset. When I was having challenges, I'd pick up the phone and connect with another nurse, and find ways to solve it. We practiced self-compassion and grace as a group and affirmed our contributions to our communities. I practiced controlling what I could and letting go of what I could not, which was a lot during the challenging time of the pandemic.

It's taken work to celebrate my humanity and personal needs as a school nurse during COVID, and I'm proud of what I've accomplished. Offering families resources about mental health and safety during the pandemic and creating Nourishing Networks that are still active today kept me going. I encourage us all to focus on our common interest in keeping kids safe and healthy and to recognize the impact that school nurses have in achieving this aim. Taking initiative during COVID and pouring myself into my passions allowed me to stay inspired during a trying time and continue to contribute to my community through isolation. I believe school nurses are the unsung heroes during the pandemic, and the ones responsible for getting our children healthy. In my world, they are our school's Chief Wellness Officers in schools and are critical components of our communities.

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