

Stress Management: In the Moment

NEWS YOU CAN USE!

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When is the Stress Too Much?

Everyone experiences stress, teachers included. Stress is not necessarily bad and can sometimes even be motivating. However, stress that lasts a long time or is more intense than typical can have negative consequences. Unmanaged stress can also lead to burnout. Burnout consists of three components:

- Emotional Exhaustion: feeling drained and/or fatigued
- Depersonalization: Cynical attitudes towards students, parents, and the workplace
- Reduced Personal Accomplishment: Feelings of not helping students, not worth the battle

When you start to experience symptoms of burnout, it may be a sign that you should take extra care to manage your stress level.

You're Not Alone!

Teachers are especially vulnerable to experiencing high levels of stress and burnout due to having to cope with challenging student behavior, high workload, low pay, frequent changes to the curriculum, turnover in administration and other school staff, and stressful parent and community relationships. That stress and burnout can lead to low patience with students, including sometimes saying or doing something you may regret. Remember: just as you likely tell your students, mistakes happen and nobody is perfect. The goal of this handout is to share strategies you can use in the moment to make the best of a challenging situation.

Putting the News to Use

- More detailed description of Progressive Muscle Relaxation-
<https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/uz2225>
- Short mindfulness exercises-
<https://psychcentral.com/blog/1-minute-mindfulness-exercises/>
- Other sayings or mantras you could try-
<https://www.alwayswellwithin.com/blog/2014/10/12/calm-stress-response>

Resources

- Some other stress relieving techniques from teachers-
<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/15-stress-busting-tips-teachers/>
- A great article about teaching taking an emotional toll as well as some tips for dealing with that toll-
<https://www.weareteachers.com/emotional-stress-management-for-teachers/>

Strategies for In the Moment Stress Management

Body Focused

1. Deep breathing. Count the time you are breathing in and out. Focus on breathing out for longer than you are breathing in (e.g. breathe in for 3 counts and out for 6 counts).
2. Progressive muscle relaxation. Think about the parts of your body that you carry the most tension and stress in (common examples are shoulders, jaw, and back). Pick one of those muscle groups and consciously tense for a count of 3 and then relax that same muscle group for a count of 3.
3. Fake it 'til you make it. Consciously do something small you would only do if you were calm (e.g. smile, talk softly, have an open body posture, breathe deeply). Even though you might not actually feel calm, you can "trick" your body into thinking you are more calm.

Mind Focused

1. Grounding through senses. Pick any sense (e.g. sight, taste, touch, smell) and focus on what you notice from that sense. The goal is to give your mind something else to focus on to regain your calm.
2. Mindfulness exercises. Take the index finger of your right hand and slowly move it up and down on the outside of your fingers. Swap hands. Focus on the feeling and sensation of this until you feel calmer. Alternatively, try mindful eating where you eat a small snack slowly, taking extra care to focus on the sensation of eating.
3. STOP. Stand up and breathe. Tune into your body by noticing sensations and emotions. Release negative sensations/emotions with every exhale. Observe something pleasant in your environment and be grateful for it. Ask yourself what is Possible, a step forward, or new.
4. Repeat a mantra or saying. Pick a saying, also called a mantra, that is calming and repeat it to yourself. Examples include: "I am patient (or whatever adjective you would like)" and "This too will pass."
5. Focus on how feelings will change. Feelings shift quickly and frequently. When feeling overwhelmed, focus on what you expect your feelings to be when they do change or what they might be on a good student behavior day.

When Nothing Else Works

If you have tried other strategies but you still feel overwhelmed, take the next opportunity (lunch break, bathroom break, when students go to specials) to take 5 minutes to do something stress relieving (e.g. get some fresh air outside, listen to a happy song, talk to a friend).