

Self-Care For Teachers

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Caring For Yourself So You Can Care For Others

You became a teacher because you want to make a difference; because you love children; because you enjoy seeing the expression on a child's face when he or she finally understands a new concept. It is that passion that makes you a great teacher—the same passion that can also lead to burn-out.

Avoiding burn-out is one reason self-care is important. You cannot care for others if you do not take care of yourself. Another reason self-care is important is to enable you to be an effective teacher. If you are tired, either emotionally or physically, you cannot do your job well. Finally and possibly most important, self-care is important so you can model good balance and healthy boundaries to your students and co-workers. Following are several strategies to help you care for yourself more effectively:

Set healthy boundaries. Say yes when you mean yes and no when you mean no. Recognize your limits, and do what is most important. Trying to be *super-teacher* has consequences (mostly negative ones). No, you cannot leap tall buildings in a single bound!

Take breaks often. You will be amazed at what a five minute break will do. Whether it's spent just relaxing your brain and body, eating a healthy snack, or meditating, you will be rejuvenated so the work you do is more efficient. Set a goal to take a five minute break at least every hour.

Exercise. Research shows that exercise can help increase energy, improve concentration, and decrease stress and depression. It also allows you to focus on yourself and take care of your body. Both are important for reducing burn-out.

Know your own threshold for stress. Recognize the first signs of stress. These may include increased heart rate, change in appetite, fatigue and irritability. Pay attention to what triggers stress for you and either avoid those situations or learn relaxation techniques so you can manage your stress effectively. Modeling these skills for your students will teach them how they can handle their own stress. Focused breathing and deep muscle relaxation have been proven to work.

Find at least three activities that relieve stress for you. Do these things consistently. Planning ahead of time to prevent stress or becoming aware of what you can do when you become stressed will help decrease burn-out.

Start your day on a positive note. Begin your day by doing something that lifts you up and makes you feel good. It may be enjoying quiet time in meditation or prayer, thinking about the positive things that are in store for you that day, taking a walk or conversing with your spouse about positive things. What you do first can set the tone for how you manage your entire day.

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