

15 stress-reduction techniques for teachers

As a helper, you're used to putting yourself last. However, taking care of your own well-being will allow you to better take care of others around you and ensure you are able to show up for others when needed.

Make a habit of practicing two or more of these stress-reduction techniques every day to help relieve some of the pressures you're facing.

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5- to 10-minute techniques

1 Repeat the loving kindness meditation

1. Settle into a quiet place. Breathe slowly and soften your gaze.
2. Repeat the following cycle two times each:
 - May I be happy
 - May I be well
 - May I be healthy
 - May I be safe
 - May I be loved
3. Then repeat the exercise with the name of a loved one, someone you're having difficulty with, or a group of people in your school.
 - May (insert name) be happy
 - May (insert name) be well
 - May (insert name) be healthy
 - May (insert name) be safe
 - May (insert name) be loved

2 Practice the square breathing technique

- Inhale for the count of four and hold it.
- Exhale for the count of four and hold it.
- Inhale for the count of four and hold it.
- Exhale for the count of four and hold it.
- Continue for one minute.

3 Just breathe

1. Set a timer.
2. Determine if you'll do square breathing, counting breathing (up to 10), awareness of breath, or something else.
3. Focus on your breath.
4. If you lose focus, bring it back (training our brains is like training a puppy to stay).

4 Set your intentions

1. Take five minutes to set your intentions for the day (or week).
2. Write them down and keep them posted as a reminder.
3. Rather than a to-do list, consider a list of values or ideals that you would like to work toward during the day (or week), e.g., approach with optimism, seek opportunities where there doesn't seem to be any, be open to others' opinions, listen with compassion, and mindfully participate with friends and family.

5 Practice gratitude

1. Take time daily to write a gratitude list of three things you are grateful for. These could be big things or small things.
2. You can also take a few minutes to write a gratitude note to a friend, colleague, mentor, or student.

6 Focus on your senses with 5-4-3-2-1

Ground yourself by thinking of the following:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can hear
- 3 things you can feel
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

7 Follow your "why"

1. Think back about why you became a teacher.
2. Share this with a colleague or group of colleagues.
3. Ask them their "why."
4. Use your "why" as your compass or guiding force when you are stressed about a decision, task, or interaction at work.

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Allow yourself to take on one task at a time

We all multi-task every day, but sometimes it helps to slow down and just focus on one task at a time to help you focus better. If a grocery list or a call you need to make for an appointment is distracting you, give yourself 10 minutes to tackle the task.

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Tackle a task with a clear beginning, middle, and end

1. Find a task that is very clear-cut with a beginning, middle, and end, such as crafting, cleaning a cupboard, laundry, or taking a walk.
2. Allow yourself the satisfaction of seeing your progress.
3. Reinforce yourself with positive praise for accomplishing the task.

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Exercise

Increase endorphins by doing something physical, such as the following:

1. Take a walk.
2. Ride a bike.
3. Practice yoga or stretching.
4. Have a dance party with friends or family (or by yourself!).

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Take 10 minutes to do something mindful

1. Take 10 minutes to do one of these three things: observe, describe, or participate.
2. Do these things nonjudgmentally, mindfully, and effectively.
3. This could be any of the following: eating, walking, doing a body scan, using guided imagery, watching nature, counting breaths, coloring, or playing with children without any interruptions.

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Make the transition from school me easier

1. Take a different driving route home after a stressful day.
2. Change your clothes right away.
3. Take a moment before you get out of the car.
4. Take the dog (or yourself) for a walk.
5. Create a mantra. For example: Today is for today. Tomorrow is for tomorrow.
6. Leave your work bag in the car. If you have more work to do, do your best to disconnect from school first, then do what you need to do and put your work bag in the car or a room with the door closed when you're done.
7. Take off your invisible backpack (all the worries or responsibilities you are carrying with you from school).

Tips for setting boundaries and limits

13 Decide whether you need to step up or step back

1. Take a moment to decide whether you need to step up and contribute something or step back and allow others to participate.
2. Try this team activity: Make a list of roles on your team and have the leader stand up and read them aloud. You and your colleagues can “step up” or “step back” to learn others’ likes, dislikes, strengths, and areas for growth.

14 Be just one of the ones

1. You’ve probably heard that it takes just one person to change a child’s life. While often true and inspiring, it can feel like a tremendous amount of pressure to be “the one” for everyone around you.
2. Take a step back and know that you are “one of the ones” who is having an impact on a child’s life. You are one piece of the puzzle that creates an outcome, and it is not selfish to take care of yourself as well.

15 Practice FAST

1. Be **fair**. (Is it your turn to do something or have you given more than others already?)
2. Don’t **apologize** for putting your well-being first.
3. **Stick** to your values. (Does this follow your “why” or the value you are placing on your wellness?)
4. Be **truthful**. (You can say no and add that you need to respect your own mental health right now.)

