

How to Avoid Teacher Burnout

Teaching is an emotionally taxing profession. Not just because of the hours and the workload, but also because of pressures for academic success and maintaining student mental health and wellbeing.

To do all of this, teachers are expected to be able to keep on top of their own mental health and wellbeing, often with little guidance and or support as to how. And so, when confronted with disrespectful comments, outright disobedience and cheek that comes with developmental transitions in young people, and paired with the day-to-day work demands, it is no wonder that a lot of teachers experience burnout. The emotional labour of their job is often overlooked by themselves and those supporting them.

Therefore, we thought it would be beneficial to look at some of the ways teachers can avoid experiencing burnout when they are constantly faced with burnout - inducing factors that are outside of their control.

But first, what is burnout?

According to helpguide.org, burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. They go on to say that, "It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands."

Because of its nature, burnout is often associated with work; however, it can affect people who do not work, too.

As we mentioned before, teachers are seen to have high levels of emotional labour in their jobs, causing them to suppress and screen how they feel to enable them to meet the requirements of their role. This is said to be one of the biggest influences on teacher burnout.

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So, what can you do to avoid it?

This may come as a surprise, but one of the most important things you can do is to try to reduce your emotional labour by finding ways to portray your true emotional experiences, rather than screening them and holding them in.

Now, this is easier said than done. And there are obvious exceptions to this. For example, it would be unethical to expose people at work to danger, because you were trying to lessen your emotional labour!

However, there are ways around this. For example:

Take a moment to pause

Taking a moment to pause before explaining how someone's behaviour or the demands of your job make you feel can allow you the emotional distance it takes to express your true emotional self in a way that is appropriate for the workplace. It can also give you time to calm and gather your thoughts.

Encourage expression in the classroom

Oftentimes, difficult behaviour is linked to difficult emotions, and creating a culture where your students feel safe and comfortable enough to talk about how they feel can help mitigate against disruptive behaviour that puts pressure on your emotional wellbeing. You can do this by mirroring the behaviour you expect to see from your students. Calmly explaining the impact of their behaviour on others, or even incorporating this into lesson plans (where possible).



Schedule in catch ups with your peers

Peer support is a crucial part of coping with high pressures, high demands, and emotional strain. Setting aside time to regularly touch base with your peers can help reduce some of the pressure. This might feel time consuming at first, but if you can stick with it and make it a regular practice, it can massively improve your mental health and wellbeing. This is not only because of the therapeutic benefits of sharing how you feel with others, but also because of the supportive benefits of talking to others who have lived experience of your situation.

Create boundaries around your work

Now, we know this can be difficult with the after hours expectations of marking and lesson planning, but try to find a reasonable hour to stop and take yourself away from all work activities. If you need to, discuss this with your line manager and see what you can come up with together. You can also try to set boundaries around your break times - for example, by having some lunches away from work at a local park, or ensuring that you don't fall into the trap of a "working lunch".

The above are just some examples of things you can do to help you avoid teacher burnout. As always, we would love to hear from you. After all, you are the experts on things that have helped you!

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