

# DEVELOPING STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A tool that every educator must have.

Curated by



Schools and teachers are usually very good at thinking about the well-being of their pupils. Consider yourselves to have a duty of care to our pupils. We do not usually think about our well-being until it is too late and we are sick. People who take on caring roles often need to improve at looking after themselves.

It is vital that you manage your well-being, as you cannot manage pupils and learning if you cannot manage yourself. Children come in every day to school and more or less do the same thing, sometimes having slightly better or worse days. What makes the difference is the reaction of the adults around them. Taking time to manage your stress is essential to teach effectively and helping students with their stress around learning.

## **Teachers' feelings are important**

Take a moment and think about all the feelings you had yesterday, from the time you got up in the morning to the time you went to bed. What do you notice? Probably a roller-coaster of powerful, overwhelming feelings which can change dramatically in a second. You can be in the depths of despair one minute and then elated the next. Why is this? You were probably dealing with students all day who were experiencing wildly fluctuating emotions and trying to help everyone. Teaching is about managing relationships in an intense public arena all day. Some emotions will be overwhelming and challenging to manage. They will not be helpful for teaching and learning.

## **What are the triggers for the unhelpful feelings?**

What were the triggers for those feelings which impeded teaching and learning? Some of the common causes are :

1. *We try to be perfect.* Teachers tell their students that mistakes are good we learn from them. And yet, I meet many teachers who strive for perfection in their work and life. They get frustrated when a lesson plan does not work perfectly or when pupils do not understand enough. It is suitable for us to have high standards, but we must remember that pursuing perfection is dangerous. It does not model what we know about learning, that learning occurs when we make mistakes.
2. *We always want to try harder.* Teachers are often very hard workers, always trying to do things better. If our students need help understanding, we spend longer planning our lessons. If we cannot finish our to-do list, we stay up longer to get through it. Sometimes we spend a lot of time trying harder in the wrong direction. We find things which blatantly do not work, such as staying up late into

the night to plan a lesson, which we are then too tired to teach properly, and then we do more of what does not work.

3. *We always want to stay strong.* Teachers hate to let people down, which often means we go to work when we are sick, we don't admit we are struggling with a class, and we push our personal and family problems to the back of our minds. Again, this can be useful, we need to be reliable. However, when you insist on always being strong, you ignore your needs, and the pressures build up inside us. That is why so many teachers get sick in the holidays. We need to know when to stop.

### **So, how about if**

- Instead of trying to be perfect, acknowledge that mistakes can be good.
- Instead of trying harder, try something different.
- Instead of trying to be strong, decide to be human.

### **Developing our strategies to manage the stress**

When you are stressed and tired, you are not thinking or teaching at your best. You need practical strategies for acknowledging and managing your well-being.

### **Some practical strategies**

- Focus on what is in your control

We like to be in control of our day, we spend a lot of time planning to ensure that our classes go smoothly. However, you cannot control everything as schools are full of people and unexpected events. We often get stressed about the things which are outside our control.

Take a moment and make a list of those things which are causing your stress.

Now divide these things into two lists, things which are within your control at the moment and things which are not in your control at the moment. Decide to focus on the things which are in your control and do something about them. Put the others aside. We tend to obsess about those things which are outside our control.

- Be your own best friend

Positive self-talk is vital. What would you say to your best friend if they had a bad day? Would you tell them they were a useless, outdated teacher who couldn't cope? Probably not. And yet we often say these things to ourselves. Decide to talk to yourself as you would talk to your best friend.

- Write down six highlights of the day

Our minds tend to dwell on the day's negatives - the classes we had problems with, the colleagues who disagreed with us.

Decide to train yourself to see the positives. At the end of each day, write down six highlights. A highlight can be quite a small thing. Get into the habit of noticing what is working and do more.

- Offload in a safe way

Supportive friends and colleagues are very important. Sometimes we just need to talk to someone. Be careful that you choose someone who is a good listener and make it clear what you need from this person. If we just want to rant and someone tries to give advice, it can be counter-productive. We are left feeling more stressed!

- Notice energisers and drainers

We all know people who drain our energy. We feel worse after being with them. We also know people who energise and inspire us. We have activities which energise and activities which drain us. We need to more spend time with people and on the tasks which energise us and less time with the people and tasks which drain our energy.

- Learn to say no

Teachers are often terrible at saying 'no' to jobs and tasks. It is of course, essential to be cooperative and helpful, but if you are always overloaded, think about how this is contributing to your stress. If you are taking on too much, learn to say 'no' politely!

And finally....

We all remember an inspiring, positive teacher and those teachers who were stressed and not enjoying their teaching. Keep yourself motivated if you want to keep your pupils motivated!

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