

Self-Care Strategies For New Teachers

Jeanne shares three things for new teachers to focus on to make teaching more sustainable. She shares from her own experience and provides specific strategies and tips for how to take care of yourself.



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As a new teacher, the pressure to work ridiculous hours is probably the highest in your career. So many of us judge ourselves against everyone around us, and new teachers are doing this on top of learning to do one of the hardest jobs in the world.

"It is no surprise that so many teachers feel like they're failing."

And when we feel like we're failing at a job we care so deeply about, many of us have a similar response...we work our tails off, all the while berating ourselves for not getting enough done, not adding enough to that lesson, not dealing with behavior the right way.

It should come as no surprise that this is not sustainable.

It also might actually be doing more damage than good--on both your work and your health. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Let's talk about three things to focus on in your first years to help make this career more sustainable. I wish someone had talked about these three areas of focus to take care of myself when I was a workaholic new teacher. Use them to build sustainability and joy into the foundation of your new career.

3 Focus Areas for Self-Care as a New Teacher

Streamline Your Practice

Here are some ideas for streamlining your practice as a new teacher:

Remember That Simple Is Usually Best

In my online courses for new teachers, I talk about when I was student teaching, I would spend hours on each lesson plan, agonizing over finding the most creative way to teach every skill. After weeks of this and a complete (and inevitable) breakdown, a mentor teacher sat me down and asked me two questions about the current lesson I was agonizing over:

- What do the kids need to understand by the end of this period/week/unit?
- What would be the easiest way to teach that?

It took me a second to answer, and then boom, I was shocked to have my lesson plan. Was it show-stopping? No, really. Did the kids learn? Yup! Did it give me ideas for next time? Absolutely.

"Remember: you don't need to reach your dream standard this year (or any year). You only need to teach to the best of your ability, while still taking care of your best resource: you

Create A Work Cut-Off time And Stick To It

You will always be cut off from work at some point. Many of us just allow that point to be determined by our physical limit. So I'm going to propose something to you: decide that cut-off point for yourself.

Decide how many hours you want and need doing other things besides teaching to help you decide what times every day work is off-limits. Then stick to it.

"Deciding a cut-off time will force you to get realistic about what you can accomplish and what you can't; what to prioritize and what to let go."

"Will that cut-off time force you to not finish something you feel you need to do? Yup. ...But will the world end? No. And it's important for you to witness that. It will help you reinforce your boundaries and continue to leave space for yourself to breathe."

Nurture Your Mindset

Adopt a growth mindset for yourself. While growth mindset is hot concept in the education world right now, many teachers (do you see my hand raised?) forget to adopt it for themselves.

So some reminders for you:

- You are allowed to grow.
- You are allowed to make mistakes.
- You are already improving.

Take time regularly to check in and celebrate how far you've come in planning, grading, relationship-building, classroom management, and every other skill this profession requires of us.

Channel Disappointments Into Reflection.

Here's a simple strategy for this: Each time you find yourself disappointed about something--from a lesson plan to a class's behavior--take a couple minutes to sit and reflect.

I like to make a 3-column chart with disappointments or problems on the left, possible causes in the middle, and proposed solutions on the right.

Doing this exercise helped me to reframe my disappointments from "proof of failure" to a game plan for the future, and helped me feel competent and energized at the potential for tomorrow.

Increase Your Self-Care

One of the wisest things I've ever heard about self-care is that as your stress increases, so does your need for self care.

Since all the stress and pressure new teachers face pushes self-care off the to-do list, it's important to have a plan.

Here are some ideas for adding rejuvenation activities to your day:

- Build a calm morning and evening routine. Try getting up 20 or 30 minutes earlier to do something for you like meditating, drinking coffee in peace, reading, yoga, journaling--anything that gets you calm and centered in the day. Practice winding down every evening with the same, calming activity to signal your body to let go of the day and rejuvenate.
- Add something non-teaching-related to your life. Doing something not related to teaching helps you take step back and gain perspective about what's really important, while rejuvenating your energy and passion. Join an intramural team, take a pottery class, go to trivia every Wednesday with friends--anything to get you out of your teaching brain and into something enjoyable.
- Exercise. You don't have to train for a marathon or join a team, but just a 20 minutes of walking every day can help decrease anxiety and increase your energy. Find something that you'd be comfortable doing, and commit to doing it at least 4 times a week. Grab a buddy if you need to.

Remember, new teachers: we need you. We need your energy, your vision, and your skills. We want you to stay in this profession and be happy. You deserve to be happy. So let's work together to make that a priority.

What makes your classroom student-centered? Share with us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Pinterest](#).

Author Bio

Jeanne taught middle school Writing and AVID in Illinois for four years in addition to serving as the English Department Chair. She holds a bachelor's in English and Secondary Education and a master's in Curriculum and Instruction. Currently, she teaches ESL, develops curriculum, and coaches new teachers. You can find more of her resources at www.teacheroffduty.com and follow her on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest.

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