

# RELAXATION TIPS

A guide for educators.

Curated by



## **Breathe**

The classroom can cause sensory overload. Before you know it, your heart rate starts to climb, you break out sweat, and your mind races. In these situations, the most effective first step you can take is to breathe deeply. Ok, so it's not exactly the newest technique, and it sounds like it might be too simple, right? The navy is trained in the "4 x 4 breathing" technique, which helps them lower their physical stress response and regain control. When you're experiencing intense levels of stress, breathe in deeply (put your hands on your stomach and feel it expand out) for four seconds, then exhale evenly for four seconds. Keep this up for 2-3 minutes for maximum effect.

## **Be imperfect**

Throughout a decades-long career in which she has interviewed thousands of people as an academic researcher, Brené Brown has discovered that those who are overly stressed and unhappy often share the same trait: they believe that they need to be someone better than who they currently are. As a result, the current cohort of working adults is the most overweight, addicted, and indebted in history. Teachers are often prone to perfectionism and its ill effects: they often feel that they aren't doing enough or that their mistakes are magnified because of the importance of their job. If you find yourself feeling this way, fight back. The fact is, you're already "enough", and you deserve love and credit. Don't forget that.

## **Embrace the stress**

To modify Henry Ford's famous phrase: whether you think stress is positive or you think it's negative, you're right. According to health psychologist Kelly McGonigal, viewing your stress constructively will cause your body to respond to it differently and prevent long-lasting physical damage. By contrast, those who express negative attitudes toward stress face a range of negative health outcomes similar to those caused by smoking. So how do you change your outlook on stress? McGonigal suggests reframing changes in heart rate and other stress-induced physical symptoms with phrases like, "This is my body helping me rise to this challenge."

### **Practice emotional first aid**

Do you beat yourself up when you experience failure or make a mistake? Psychologist Guy Winch has an analogy for this: it would be like getting a cut and finding ways to make the wound worse. We don't do that when we experience physical pain, so why do we ruminate on mistakes and deepen the wound when the pain is emotional? If you find yourself taking your classroom work home with you, Winch advises finding ways to break the negative patterns of thought. A two-minute distraction is sometimes all that is needed to avoid digging yourself into an emotional rut.

### **Be grateful**

This isn't about delusion or forcing yourself to be grateful for clearly negative things, but rather a determination to see the opportunity present in each moment to move in a new direction. Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast, in his TED Talk on how to cultivate gratitude, offers a simple formula: "Stop, look, go." We have to stop, quiet our minds, and create "stop signs", little reminders of things that we should be grateful for every day. By "look," he means open all of your senses and enjoys life simply. "Go" means moving forward and taking advantage of what life offers you moment by moment.

### **Limit "grass is greener" thinking**

In the words of Robert Fulghum, author of "All I need to know I learned in kindergarten," "The grass is greenest where it is watered." It's not always what you want to hear when you're having a tough day, but the reality is that you will have challenges anywhere you go.

### **Make a connection**

According to Kelly McGonigal's research, when you connect with another person, your body produces oxytocin, a chemical that helps repair the heart. And you don't even have to be on the receiving end reaching out to help someone else produces the same effect. Teachers already devote much of their time to this, but it's important to cultivate relationships with colleagues, neighbours, and friends. Research shows that major stressful life events are generally strongly linked with negative health outcomes, except

for those who reported caring for others, who experienced NO such effects. If you help your neighbours, family, etc., you're much less likely to experience the negative effects of stress.

Source:

