

# 10 ideas to help teachers beat stress

Top tips from education experts on how you can tackle stress and help colleagues under pressure

Top tip: sit for a minute or two before your pupils arrive in the morning and visualise the day ahead going as well as possible. Photograph: Alamy

## Amanda Bailey, associate principal of the [Bright Futures Educational Trust](#)

**Practise mindfulness:** We offer all staff mindfulness training at our schools, as an eight week twilight course.

There is a strong scientific evidence backing mindfulness as an effective tool to support wellbeing. It affects the brain patterns underlying day to day anxiety, stress and irritability. It's about seeing our thoughts as events – a bit like clouds in the sky – and observing them with a friendly curiosity as they drift by.

One technique we teach is 7/11, which is simply breathing in for seven counts and out for 11. It doesn't matter how you count, but it tends to lengthen the exhalation. This can shift us to calmer modes of mind and allow us space to respond, rather than react to a situation.

## Karen Edge, senior lecturer at the [Institute of Education](#)

**Force people to go home:** At my partner's school, the head started locking up the school at an earlier time and forcing people to go home. Like with any change, it was not popular at first, but it does make a statement: go home. Or, at least: leave school. I have seen this in quite a few schools.

Does it help with [work-life balance](#)? In my partner's case, he just brings home his marking, but he does get home earlier than before.

## Sandra Taylor, development manager for the [Teacher Support Network](#)

**Identify what's making you stressed:** Before you can tackle stress you need to know what is stressing you out. Write a list detailing all the things that are causing you stress right now. Divide your list into two columns: things you can control and things you can't.

Now focus on finding solutions for the things you can control. From your list, pick the one that will have the biggest impact on your stress levels. What can you do to tackle this issue?

Set yourself a goal to manage it and write it down using positive language.

## **Susan Davis, senior lecturer at [Cardiff Metropolitan University](#)**

**Don't get bogged down by the small stuff:** I'd like to share some words of wisdom that one of my PGCE students said to me recently. When I asked the student if she would have changed anything on completing her training year, she told me that her only regret was that she hadn't enjoyed it more.

I think we sometimes get bogged down by the workload and forget the joy of teaching. Try to take one day at a time. It might sound corny, but it's very true – don't sweat the small stuff. I think a large number of teachers (myself included) are complete control freaks. So, if this applies to you: remember that many things will happen in the classroom that are out of your control and don't be afraid to ask for help.

## **Jill Berry, former headteacher and education consultant**

**Talk about stress with colleagues:** Schools need to encourage a dialogue about workload and stress management. We carried out a couple of surveys into well-being and stress and discussed the results at my school. We considered what new initiatives we were introducing and discussed taking out other activities, so we weren't constantly adding to the school calendar. We talked about what was a reasonable amount of work to do over a holiday.

But the main thing was trying to get people to see that actually we decide, ourselves, how hard we work. We do need to take control and accept responsibility for how we work.

## **Jayne Morris, professional stress and well-being expert**

**Begin your day calmly:** Sit for two minutes before your pupils arrive in the morning and play some relaxation music. Take full deep breaths. Visualise the day ahead going as well as possible and see yourself choosing to respond with calm to each child, teacher and situation that you are faced with throughout the day.

## **Sarahegg88, contributor**

**Set realistic targets:** I used to go into work at the start of the day and think 'right, i'm going to mark a set of books, plan five lessons for year 8 and organise this theatre trip. In reality I'd get five books marked, one lesson planned and not even think about the theatre trip. The result was I'd go home feeling like I'd failed.

Now I have a pad on my desk and write a to do list for each day. I feel much more in control, because I can physically see my work load and I work more systematically. I make realistic targets and at the end of the day, if I haven't achieved them, I think carefully about why not. For example, I didn't mark all my books because instead I spent half an hour chatting to a student who needed

support. That way you take notice of everything you have achieved, realise it is not your fault that you haven't got through your workload and recognise that you've done some great things instead.

### **Stressinteaching, contributor**

**Prioritise:** Make a list of the things that are important to you and decide when you are going to give them some time. This is not just a work list, your family life and interests are also part of your priorities. This will help you to decide if it is more important to take your children to the cinema, or to prepare a lesson in more detail because you are being monitored.

**Say no:** Tell people firmly and politely that you won't have time or be able to do something at work. This could be your line manager, or it could even be your class. Both of them will respect you for telling the truth. Headteachers are not impressed by someone who says yes all of the time, they are just grateful that someone is willing to over-work.

**Take a step back:** Remember, you may enjoy it, but school is work. It's great to enjoy your job, which means that at first you won't resent all the extra time you put into it. But if you keep on putting that extra effort in, you will start to resent it, and so will the people around you.

Taken from The Guardian Teacher Network.