

# Teacher Wellness Guide – Sustainable Strategies for Managing Stress and Burnout

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## Teacher Wellness Guide: Sustaining Your Passion for Teaching

*Sustainable strategies for managing stress, preventing burnout, and maintaining your passion for teaching.*

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### Quick Start Guide

#### How to use this guide

1. **Find your challenge** in the contents below.
2. **Try the Quick Wins** first (usually take under 5 minutes).
3. **Explore the Detailed Strategies** for long-term success.
4. **Prevention Tips** help you avoid stress traps in the future.
5. **Keep this handy** – use it as a reminder and motivator.

#### Before you shift into stress mode

- ☐ Have you taken a deep breath and paused briefly today? (A mini-reset works wonders.)
- ☐ Is this task genuinely urgent NOW? Or just important?
- ☐ Can you delegate or simplify this task?
- ☐ Have you met your own basic needs (food, drink, break)?

**Emergency backup plan for the soul:** Always have a non-work activity ready that brings you immediate joy (a song, a short walk, a quick call to a friend).

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## A. Reducing Mental Load

**Problem: Mind is full – constantly brooding over tasks**

**Quick Win (3 minutes):** 1. Do a **Brain Dump**: Write down everything running through your head (marking, parents' evening admin, resources). 2. Triage the list: Decide what needs to be tackled **today** and what can wait. 3. Put the list away – your brain knows the information is safe.

**Detailed Strategies:**

- **Batching:** Group similar tasks together (e.g., all emails only once a day, all marking in one dedicated block).
- **The 'Entry Rule':** Any new task that pops into your head is immediately written onto your brain dump list or calendar, not stored in your memory.
- **Weekly Review:** Schedule a short session (15 mins) on Friday to overview the coming week and set priorities, allowing you a clear weekend.

**Common Causes of Mental Load:** - Lack of structure and fixed routines - Attempting to remember every single task - Unclear boundaries between work and private life

**Prevention:** - Use a single, reliable system for all tasks (*To-Do app, notebook*). - Start the day with the most important, difficult task (*Eat the Frog*). - Delegate small tasks to *student helpers* (e.g., handing out, cleaning the board).

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**Problem: Perfectionism consumes time and energy**

**Quick Win (1 minute):** 1. Define the point of '**Good Enough**' for your next task (e.g., lesson planning). 2. Stick to it.

**Detailed Strategies:** - **Prioritise: Less is More:** Reduce the complexity of your resources. *Does the worksheet really need to be in colour? Do all slides need to be perfectly designed?* - **Recycling:** Reuse your materials from last year – without over-analysing them! Save your perfection for emergencies. - **The 80/20 Rule (Pareto Principle):** 80% of the results come from 20% of your effort. Identify the 20% (core message, clear structure) and stop when reached.

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## B. Embedding Self-Care into the School Day

**Problem: No time for breaks – constantly working through**

**Quick Win (5 minutes):** 1. Set a timer to remind you to **stand up** every 60–90 minutes. 2. Step outside briefly or stretch.

**Detailed Strategies:** - **Lunch Break Rule:** Leave the staffroom if it is too loud or stressful. Go for a short walk, listen to a podcast, or eat alone. **No marking** during the lunch break! - **The 'Buffer Principle':** Consciously schedule a 15-minute buffer between the last lesson

and the start of afternoon tasks. This is for recovery, not for work. - **Micro-Recovery:** Practice short mindfulness exercises during lessons, e.g., while students are working independently (2 minutes of breathing exercises).

**Prevention:** - Commit to only two cups of coffee and drink water instead – dehydration exacerbates exhaustion. - Book firm **Self-Care appointments** in your diary (e.g., exercise, reading) and treat them like a staff meeting.

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#### Problem: Lack of sleep and chronic exhaustion

**Quick Win:** - Switch off all screens (laptop, phone) two hours before bedtime.

**Detailed Strategies:** - **Sleep Routine:** Maintain a fixed bedtime, even at weekends. -

**Winding Down:** Find a ritual (tea, book, bath) that signals to your body that the working day is over. - **No School Thoughts after 9 p.m.:** Write down anything that comes to mind on a sticky note for the next morning and consciously dedicate yourself to something else.

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### C. Effective Time and Energy Management

#### Problem: Tasks always take longer than planned

**Quick Win (2 minutes):** 1. Take on the most difficult marking task. 2. Mark for **only 20 minutes** (use the Pomodoro technique). 3. Take a 5-minute break. Repeat.

**Detailed Strategies:** - **Fixed Time Slots:** Define blocks for tasks instead of defining tasks (e.g., *1 hour of marking* instead of *Mark all books*). When the time is up, stop. - **Simplifying Marking:** Develop standardised comments or abbreviations for marking **assessments** or **exams**. Use sample marking where pedagogically justifiable. - **Themed Days:** Reserve days for specific tasks (e.g., Tuesday = Planning, Thursday = Parent Communication).

**Prevention:** - Estimate the time required for tasks honestly and always add 20% more time. - Keep a **Time Log** for one week to see where your hours are actually disappearing.

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### D. Healthy Boundaries and Communication

#### Problem: Constant availability via emails or school messengers

**Quick Win (30 seconds):** - Disable all school notifications on your personal mobile phone.

**Detailed Strategies:** - **Communicate Your Availability:** Clearly inform parents and students when you read and reply to emails (e.g., *I read and reply to emails on weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. No processing takes place at weekends or on public holidays.*). - **The 24/48-Hour Rule:** Do not reply immediately. Aim to reply to emails within 24 or 48 hours, not within 5 minutes. - **Automated Out-of-Office Reply:** Use the auto-reply to refer to your communication rules, especially during holidays.

**Prevention:** - Set up a **Time Block** in your timetable (or at the end of the day) exclusively for emails and admin. - Be friendly but firm in enforcing your boundaries. You are a teacher, not a 24/7 customer service.

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## E. Preserving the Joy of Teaching

**Problem:** Motivation wanes, routine is overwhelming

**Quick Win (1 minute):** - Think about the biggest success of the past week – a student ‘Aha!’ moment, a successful lesson. Write it down.

**Detailed Strategies:** - **What am I here for?** Write down your **three core values** that motivated you to teach (e.g., *Imparting knowledge, building relationships, fostering creativity*). Review weekly whether your work reflects these values. - **Small Experiments:** Incorporate a new, small element into the lesson (a new method, a game, a short story) that you enjoy. - **Networking:** Regularly exchange ideas with positive, supportive colleagues (Seek out **motivators** instead of **complainers**). - **Celebrate Successes:** Acknowledge your own efforts. The end of every **unit of work** or **grade submission** is a success – celebrate it, even alone.

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## F. Prevention & Sustainability

**Daily Routines (5 minutes)**

**At the end of the school day:** - ☐ Close all school-related apps on your mobile phone. - ☐ Write down the most important task for tomorrow (the *Frog*). - ☐ Pack your bag only with things you **actually** need at home (e.g., no marking that can wait). - ☐ Tidy your desk to start the next day calmly.

**Weekly Maintenance (10 minutes)**

- ☐ **Weekly Review** on Friday: What went well? What can be dropped next week?
- ☐ Check if you have kept your planned **Self-Care appointments**.
- ☐ Block out an hour for preparing meals (*Meal Prep*) to save time during the week.
- ☐ Check your boundaries: Where did you say *Yes* when you meant *No*?

**Monthly Tasks**

- ☐ **Establish Cover Lesson Boxes:** Create ready-made, simple materials for a cover lesson (e.g., films with questions, puzzles, reading tasks) to avoid acute stress during illness.
- ☐ **Seek Support:** Do not hesitate to consider **supervision** or a coach if the workload becomes chronic.
- ☐ **Remember the ‘Why’ Moment:** Your profession is important, but it is not everything. The greatest commitment is only sustainable if you protect yourself.

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## Quick Strategy Finder

**Mind is full → Section A (Brain Dump) No time for a break → Section B (Micro-Recovery) Emails never stop → Section D (Communicate Availability) Marking takes too long → Section C (Pomodoro/Batching) Passion has gone → Section E (Small Experiments)**

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*Remember: You can only pour from a full cup. Your health and wellbeing are the foundation of your teaching. Protect them.*

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