How can we reduce stress and increase support for teachers?

Well-being happens by making our physical, emotional, social, and mental health a priority. When this isn’t a priority in the workplace, staff can develop chronic stress that impacts their lives both at work and at home. As teaching is considered one of the most stressful professions, teachers who support the well-being and learning of students are more likely to experience the following types of chronic stress:

**BURNOUT**: High work-related stress piled up over months or years including mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion that leads to not being able to cope with demands (e.g. from parents, students, policies, curriculum)

**COMPASSION FATIGUE**: Feeling helpless when constantly exposed to students who you can’t help and who are suffering (e.g. from poverty, homelessness, racism, violence)

**EMOTIONAL LABOUR**: Feeling you must suppress your emotions daily (e.g. by keeping a smile on) when your personal values don’t match up with work expectations (e.g. wanting more time to support every student but needing to meet curriculum demands)

School communities that promote well-being are supportive, allow teachers autonomy, and promote healthy relationships. Part of achieving this means identifying the root causes of teacher stress.

**TIPS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT LEADERS**

- Ensure long-term, well-resourced PD that allows teachers to continuously learn and be supported in their roles
- Provide autonomy in pedagogy and curriculum decisions to allow teachers to feel respected and in control
- Develop policies and plans to increase self-efficacy and reduce job stress (e.g. shared decision-making, employee benefits, mental health toolkits)

**TIPS FOR TEACHERS**

- Develop time management strategies that meet your needs
- Prioritize your own well-being and learn about healthy strategies to cope with stress
- Share with and learn from colleagues and supervisors who can help you cope
- Find ways to live out the values that brought you to teaching (e.g. taking time to get to know your students)

**TIPS FOR PRINCIPALS**

- Lead activities that model healthy habits at work (e.g. healthy eating, fitness challenges)
- Promote working “smart,” not working “long,” and limit after hours work
- Ask teachers what they need help with – don’t wait for them to come to you
- Create and share resources to streamline administrative tasks at busy times of the year

While stress is a normal part of everyday life, stress over a long-term period negatively impacts the health and well-being of teachers. Research demonstrates that teacher well-being has a direct impact on student learning; therefore, investing in supports and resources to prevent teachers from burning out creates a healthy and supportive environment where both teachers and students can flourish.

For online resources and references, please visit: edcan.ca/wellatwork

*By Dr. Susan Rodger, C. Psych.*
*Associate Professor, Western University*

*Copyright information*: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material in any form provided that you reproduce the entire commentary and credit it to the EdCan Network and the Centre for School Mental Health at Western University.