

Another Look at . . .

# Teacher Burnout

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**T**eaching can be a very rewarding and wonderful job. It can also be demanding, stressful, and sometimes thankless. Teachers by nature tend to be very caring, giving, conscientious, and highly committed to their jobs. These are wonderful qualities. Unfortunately, when time gets squeezed, self-care may get pushed off your list. Over time, this can lead to burnout, which affects not only your ability to enjoy your job, but your life outside of school as well.

## What is teacher burnout?

Teacher burnout is both physical and emotional. It begins with a feeling of mild dissatisfaction and increases until the joy of teaching begins to slip away.

Individual symptoms are very personal, but the following may point to burnout:

- Low energy and lack of enthusiasm
- Little or no personal satisfaction
- Low motivation and lack of interest in job
- Negative attitude, no laughter
- No dreams or thoughts of the future
- Difficulty concentrating or being creative
- No self-permission to play
- Low self-confidence in work setting

## Tips to help you avoid or move through teacher burnout:

The following lists may help you get started on the journey to overcome burnout. A Far West Counselor can help you customize a plan that works especially for you and your specific work situation.

## Expectations

As a teacher, you have your own expectations, plus the expectations of students, other teachers, administration, and parents. This can feel overwhelming. Remember, you can't please everyone all the time. It helps to:

- Set firm boundaries and expectations with parents and students.
- Use "No" as a complete sentence.



- Remember, it is your classroom.
- Don't expect every day to go smoothly.
- Ask for clarification from administration if you are not sure what is expected of you.
- Be flexible: In spite of your best plans, some days have a mind of their own.
- Be patient with yourself!

## Time Management

- Use planning period for working, not socializing.
- Consider checking papers in class. This can be helpful for students and eliminate huge stacks of work for you. Some options:

(1) Check papers orally with the whole class, or (2) have students check their own papers in a group, or (3) have students bring papers up for correction as they finish, mark incorrect answers and have them make corrections. If it is still wrong, re-teach or help them find the mistake.

- Don't work through lunch. Use this time to socialize with peers and unwind.
- For new teachers, participating in school activities helps you to gain a sense of connection, *but* be aware of not spreading yourself too thin.
- If you are already overwhelmed, avoid being the committee chair or taking on team assignments that you can't realistically handle.

## Support

Choose a mentor. Studies indicate this is a number one factor for avoiding new teacher burnout.

- Find someone whose style you admire.
- Meet regularly.
- Ask questions.
- Role-play discipline situations.
- Don't isolate. Find time to connect with colleagues.
- Utilize the support of school administrators.

## Discipline Issues

- Have realistic expectations and be consistent with your responses.

- Children like a structured, predictable environment. For some, it will be the only stable environment in their lives. It will also be less stressful for you.
- Don't be afraid to ask another teacher or administrator for help with discipline problems. You are not expected to handle everything alone.
- Remember, every student comes to you with a history that impacts how they behave in the classroom.

## Balance

- Teaching is your career, not your life.
- Pursue interests and relationships outside of work.
- Do not give so much of yourself at school that you have nothing left for your loved ones at home.
- Try to avoid taking work home. When you feel that you have to, be sure to set aside time for regular home activities.

## Self-care

- Stay away from people with a negative attitude. It can be catching.
- Give yourself permission to be less than perfect.
- Remember – you can't be all things to all students.
- Find time in your day for physical exercise.
- Be sure to connect with adults on a regular basis.
- Eat a healthy breakfast.
- Humor is a valuable tool. Use it!
- Don't take yourself too seriously.
- It's okay to make a mistake – even in front of the students.
- Be patient with yourself!

Before you decide that you have chosen the wrong career, consider talking to a counselor at Far West Family Services. A counselor can help you look at your situation and develop creative coping strategies and self-care tools. Get help overcoming burnout so that you can bring excitement and energy back to your career.

