



Your Teacher Self-Care Workbook

6 WAYS TO ALLEVIATE THE DAY-TO-DAY STRESS OF TEACHING

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Table of Contents

→ BRING YOURSELF BACK TO THE PRESENT	3
→ PRIORITIZE YOUR TO-DO LIST	5
→ JUST BECAUSE YOU THINK IT DOESN'T MAKE IT TRUE	7
→ FOCUS ON CREATING HABITS RATHER THAN SETTING GOALS	9
→ IDENTIFY YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES AND STICK TO THEM	12
→ TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST	15

About Julie Mason

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TIP:
**BRING YOURSELF
BACK TO THE PRESENT**

You are in the middle of teaching your lesson, and several students are having a side-conversation. When you stop to redirect them, you notice that the stack of handouts you passed out are all over the floor. Then, there is a knock on the door at the same moment a student gets up to sharpen her pencil. You glance at the clock and realize there is no way you will finish your lesson before the bell rings. Did you remember to go over the homework?

Does this mindset sound familiar? I call it swirling. There are so many moments in the classroom where too much is happening at once. This sensory overwhelm can leave us feeling panicked and worried.

It's easy to lose your center when you are teaching because of the unpredictable nature of our work: no two days are the same.

When this happens, you can use the Look, Listen, Feel Strategy to bring yourself back into the present moment.

Look: Glance around your classroom and name some of the objects, colors, and shapes you see.

Listen: Actively listen to the classroom around you, and name some of the things that you hear. Students talking? A pencil being sharpened? A desk chair being pulled out?

Feel: Notice how your body connects to the ground beneath you. Whether you are sitting in a chair or on your feet, feel what grounds you in this present moment.

Look:

Listen:

Feel:



TIP:
USE "MUST DO'S" AND
"MAY DO'S" TO PRIORITIZE
YOUR TO-DO LIST

When I first started teaching, I bought a Moleskin notebook and a fancy pen. I planned to take notes during the school day, and keep a journal of my experiences in the evenings.

This didn't happen.

I ended up taking notes on Post-Its and they often ended up on my classroom floor or on my desk buried under a stack of ungraded papers. I would think of something during a class, and then jot it down, only to lose it later.

At the end of the school day, I searched my classroom for Post-Its like an Easter Egg hunt, and then tried to make sense of my scribbles.

Needless to say this system wasn't sustainable. Let's be honest, it wasn't really a system at all.

The challenge of to-do lists in the classroom is that you don't have time to stop your teaching and add an item to your list: you are busy teaching. When you do find a minute to jot something down, you will find yourself with a list about thirty items long by the end of the day.

Something that helped me was to make a to-do list at the end of the school day rather than the beginning. I would then read over my list and I would categorize the items as a "must do" or a "may do."

This process helped me prioritize and made me feel less stressed as I tried to manage what needed to be done before I left my classroom for the night.

TO-DO LIST

MUST DO

MAY DO



TIP:
*JUST BECAUSE YOU
THINK IT DOESN'T MAKE IT TRUE*

Right away it didn't go well. My administrator was observing my lesson and several of my students walked into class late, and didn't stop chatting. From there, it got worse. No one was responding well to my lesson. Several students weren't doing the activity and others kept raising their hands to ask questions: I could barely get a word out. I ran out of time, and never even passed out the Exit Tickets.

These are the types of thoughts that ran through my head after lesson observations. If everything didn't go as planned, I immediately beat myself up, even though so many contributing factors were outside my control.

A colleague of mine once gave me a valuable piece of advice that I have held onto, "just because you think something doesn't mean it's a fact."

My version of how the observation went was just that, my version. My students' version and my administrator's version would be different based on their experiences.

Ironically, when I received feedback from my administrator most of it was positive. He acknowledged the factors that were outside my control, the students coming in late, and the side-conversations. He praised me for using best practices like proximity and naming positive behaviors to try to redirect my students. His summary of my observation looked nothing like mine.

As teachers we are extremely hard on ourselves. We want to do the best that we can, but we work in an environment that is often out of our control. Rather than tell ourselves the worst, what if we rewrite the story and focus on what went well rather than what didn't?

When you find yourself feeling defeated, rewrite the story because chances are it went better than you thought it did, and your thoughts were really just one version, an opinion, rather than a fact.

What I Told Myself:

Rewrite the Story:



TIP:
**FOCUS ON CREATING
HABITS RATHER THAN SETTING GOALS**

At one of the schools I worked at, we used our professional development time before school started to write SMART goals that we would work towards and report to our administrator on. There was no limit to the number of goals that we could set.

I always ended up leaving the meeting with a lengthy list of goals, which I was excited and energized about.

Fast forward to a month later, and school is in full swing.

I can't remember where the notebook I wrote my goals is, and when I do find it, coffee stained and missing several pages, I realize that I am nowhere close to meeting my goals.

Here is one of my goals from that school year: I will use new teaching strategies for the next month to check my students understanding and collect data daily so that my lesson planning is informed directly by self-assessments.

Was I using new teaching strategies? Maybe one or two...

Was I collecting data daily? More like once a week, if even...

Was my planning driven by my Exit Tickets? Some of it was...

I immediately felt stressed, and frustrated. I was failing.

Or was I? What if instead of my goal, I had identified a teaching habit I wanted to develop?

Teaching Habit: Consistently use Exit Tickets to check for students' understanding and inform my next instructional move.

I lowered the stakes. Daily became consistently.

Lesson planning was replaced with my next instructional move.

It takes at least 70 days to develop a habit, so I was kinder to myself in recognizing that to do this consistently, it would likely take time.

Be kind to yourself. It is great that you want to learn new things and become a better teacher, but don't set the bar so high that it is impossible to see, let alone reach. Aim to create routines and systems that will become habits, rather than lofty and overly specific goals.

Habits I want to build:

My Next Steps:



TIP:
IDENTIFY YOUR
NON-NEGOTIABLES
AND STICK TO THEM

I used to say with pride, "I am a teacher. I wear many hats."

When asked, "what do you teach?"

I would answer, "four sections of seventh grade English Language Arts, a modern dance elective, a writing monologues elective, yoga, an after school Writing Lab, and oh, I also coach cross-country."

I left out that I was on the curriculum committee, on the faculty book club, and in charge of both the literary magazine and the yearbook.

Just typing that made me exhausted.

Doing everything meant, for me, that I felt like I did nothing well.

We are often asked to do more as teachers, and many of the things we take on are outside of our job description.

Sure, I'll bake a hundred cupcakes for the bake sale.

Sure, I'll stay after school and tutor students.

Sure, I'll chaperone the middle school dance.

Sure, I'll write a school song.

Here's the problem: There are only so many hours in the day, and if we take on too much, we leave no time for ourselves, and the things that matter most: sleep, family, friends, good nutrition, exercise, and fun.

When you are a teacher you don't own your calendar. You are told when to teach and where, and when your son has a concert during your last period, you often don't get to go. Or, if you need to make an eye appointment before your contact prescription runs out, you have to go on a Saturday.

I became resentful that I was doing so much for everyone else, but couldn't do anything for myself.

I wish saying no was enough, but it isn't. That's a good place to start.

However, in order to set boundaries and ensure that you are centered, you need to determine what your non-negotiables are, and communicate them right away.

I'll give you an example. Facilitating the after school Writing Club meant that I was at school until 5:00, and didn't allow me to pick my son up from preschool. It was emotionally and financially important to me that I was able to leave school and pick him up. When I received my schedule, I immediately went to my administrator and explained the conflict.

Guess what. She didn't fire me.

She didn't think less of me.

She moved the Writing Lab to Wednesdays instead.

It is important to advocate for yourself. Even if she was unable to move the Writing Lab, I had made it clear to her that I had obligations as a parent that were important to me, and expected that those obligations be respected.

Your non-negotiables matter because they reflect your values and who you are. Don't be afraid to identify them and communicate them.

List Your Non-Negotiables:

Why These Matter To Me:



TIP:
TAKE CARE
OF YOURSELF FIRST

Teaching is hard, and it is rewarding.

Teaching is time consuming, and it is time well spent.

Teaching is giving all you've got, and it is getting back more than you imagined.

Teaching is the most important work you will ever do.

Most education websites focus on teaching resources, but at TV we are focused on you. It doesn't matter if you have the most exciting and innovative lesson plan on the planet or a brand new rubric for assessing your students' personal narratives, if you are burnt out and overwhelmed.

We know from experience that classroom routines and procedures, planning and grading systems, and setting and keeping boundaries is essential to teaching for the long haul.

On TeacherVision you will find content that is just for you from blog posts on how other teachers streamline their morning routines to time management tools and hacks to a list of teacher discounts and advice from an expert on managing finances.

You know the saying, you can't take care of anyone else, until you take care of yourself, and we are here to make taking care of yourself easier.

Take Care,

Julie



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