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What 'burnout' taught me about being a happy teacher

One teacher who had to be signed off with stress shares advice that has since helped him to become happy at work

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After becoming very ill with burnout and depression, I was signed off for two months.

It is surprisingly easy for this to happen, even to the most confident and happy teachers.

We hide it, as we spiral down. When people ask if you are alright, what you really want to say is, "No, of course I'm not alright, I've got reports to write, books to mark, lessons to mark, an incident from yesterday to sort out and, oh yeah, I have no idea what I'm teaching this morning!"

But instead you just smile and reply, "I'm good, thank you," hoping your line manager doesn't give you another task to do.

Wellbeing first

Teaching is an emotionally and physically draining job, and **YES we do need the holidays**.

I learned some lessons from my experience and now look after my personal wellbeing much better.

Here are my top tips to achieve a mentally healthier and happier life as a teacher.

1. Have your weekend and holiday off



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plan at weekends?

I used to want the senior staff to see that I was working hard as I thought this would put me in line for the next promotion. The senior staff are so busy, they don't really notice.

If you can't complete tasks for a deadline in contracted hours, that is not your fault. Just inform your line manager that you need more time for a deadline and plan this into your working week.

2. Plan your next week on a Friday afternoon

To ensure I have a totally stress-free weekend, I now ensure that on a Friday afternoon I plan my next week. I write in my diary what I'm doing before school, each teaching session and after school. If I need to leave early to pick up my daughter, that's in there, too. I make sure I know the main learning objectives for each lesson and prepare any resources I think I need.

The teaching, leadership or other tasks that are on my list I also write in my diary and allocate time in the week for when I will address them. This might seem obvious, but so many people add tasks to their 'to do list' but don't allocate time to complete them. This can easily lead to procrastination during non-teaching time and then a 7pm leave. I even plan in when I will read my emails, only two or three times per day; otherwise it can take over your day.

3. Mindfulness meditation

The skill of meditation is something that I began to learn when I was signed off from work. It has massively helped me to put life events in perspective, be kind to myself and control my emotions. I downloaded the app called "Headspace" and just followed the introductory pack that literally walked me through what meditation is and how to do it.

Recent studies have proved that there is actually evidence to show how just five minutes of meditation per day can seriously improve your mental wellbeing, as well as



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If we focus on what is going wrong in the classroom (and our personal life then we are likely to feel depressed, pessimistic and ungrateful (makes sense right?). For many of us, negative thinking seems to come more naturally than being positive.

How often do you hear a ranting teacher in the staffroom, as opposed to one who is being positive? Positive psychology research has uncovered a simple, obvious but groundbreaking discovery into how we can live happier lives. Science has repeatedly evidenced that by just writing down three *good things* that happened at the end of each day, you train your brain to be more positive. This simple exercise has been proved to reduce depression, improve optimism and increase levels of happiness. Simple and scientifically proven to improve your mental wellbeing, there is an app called "Three good things" and it's free to download.

5. The Stoic Fork of control

As teachers, we have so much to be concerned about. This can lead to negative thinking and poor wellbeing. However, the Ancient Greek Stoics understood what was and was not worth investing our time and emotions into. A famous Greek philosopher, Epictetus, suggested that there are only two things that we should be emotionally concerned with: our thoughts and our actions. Everything else is out of our control.

If a child forgets their PE kit or doesn't revise for a test, we can get annoyed or angry but this will not change the situation. How we feel is a choice (sometimes it is very difficult to control but it's a choice all the same). If you choose to feel negative, this will not lead to happiness. This concept is also discussed as "Choose your attitude" in the inspirational book *Fish Philosophy*.

Reflect whether a situation is actually within your control, if it is not, don't waste precious emotional energy in worrying about it. If your actions can support or improve the situation then try, but other than that there is nothing you can do.

I am a better teacher because of these things, but more importantly a better husband and father. I am happier now than I have ever been on this beautiful planet and I can



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