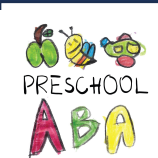


Stress Management

For Primary and Preschool Teachers



Contents

1. Why do we feel stress at work?
2. Burnout
3. Identifying Stress and Burnout
4. Identifying Sources of Stress and Burnout
5. Impacts of Stress and Burnout
6. Practical Strategies to Reduce Stress and Burnout
7. Stress is Relative
8. Why do we ignore our stress?
9. Supporting Colleagues
10. Look-back Questions
11. Identifying Stress and Burnout Worksheet
12. Conclusion

What is stress and why do we feel stress at work?

What is stress and why do we feel stress at work?

Stress is a physical, mental, or emotional reaction to a perceived threat or challenge. It activates the body's "fight-or-flight" response, releasing hormones like adrenaline and cortisol to prepare for action.

- We have too many demands at once.
- We don't have control over how and when we meet these demands.
- We don't have good support from managers or colleagues.
- We don't feel the work is meaningful or that we can make progress.

Preschool teachers are particularly vulnerable to stress and burnout as managing young children requires constant care and attention, especially those with ASD who often present additional challenges.

These challenging behaviours provokes higher demands thus intensifying stress levels.

Burnout

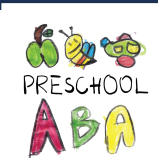
Burnout

Burnout is a result of chronic stress. Burnout occurs under continued exposure to prolonged stress and is often expressed in the workplace as:

- **Emotional Exhaustion** - lacking the ability to engage emotionally with their job as they may have before.
- **Depersonalisation** - becoming detached from things happening around us.
- **Reduced Personal Accomplishment** - a decline in workplace satisfaction.



Identifying Stress and Burnout



Identifying Stress

Stress is characterised by feelings of overload, strain, and pressure, often triggered by specific incidents or daily challenges.

Symptoms of workplace stress:

- Reluctance to go to work.
- Feeling overworked and disorganized
- Feeling that you don't know what you are doing,
- Feeling like you aren't making a difference anyway,
- Feeling irritable, whether with a child or with colleagues,
- A decrease in productivity – taking longer to complete a task, or often drifting off from a task



Other general symptoms of stress include:

Physical Symptoms

- Racing heartbeat
- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Digestive issues
- Trouble sleeping
- Rashes or skin breakouts
- Weight loss or gain

Psychological Symptoms

- Irritability
- Feeling more emotional than usual
- Turning to alcohol or other substances
- Low mood
- Anxiety

Identifying Sources of Stress



Individuals experience stress differently, and some are affected more by certain situations or occurrences than others. Teachers can experience stress in the classroom for multiple reasons, including:

- **Behavioural Challenges** - such as students demonstrating non-compliance and aggression
- **Environmental Factors** - such as large class sizes and lack of support
- **Personal Vulnerability** - inadequate training, lack of experience or personal circumstance.

Impact of Stress

Impact of Stress and Burnout

- For teachers, chronic stress leads to health issues such as anxiety and depression, affecting teachers' professional performance and personal lives.
- For students, stress and burnout in teachers can lead to a less supportive classroom environment, adversely affecting students' academic and emotional development.
- High employee turnover
- Poor efficiency
- Demotivated employees
- Lack of motivation to change the status quo
- Poor colleague relationships leading to further lack of support
- Bad decision making
- Overwhelm, potentially leading to dangerous situations

This has a ripple effect of causing further workplace stress, leading to further worsening the problems.

How to Reduce Stress and Burnout

- Seek supervision or mentoring.
- Communicate and brainstorm with colleagues on new ideas.
- Continue educating yourself through webinars, hands-on training, and courses.
- Find out what you're passionate about and continue to grow in that field.
- Don't create a toxic work environment. Find common interests and activities with colleagues outside of work.
- Organize your responsibilities well. Find ways to monitor your work and meet deadlines.
- Separate personal time from work time.
- Recognize triggers, or "warning signs," when you know you are one step away from burnout. Identify them and find ways to control them.

Practical Strategies to Reduce Stress and Burnout



Practical Strategies to Reduce Stress and Burnout

Reducing stress and preventing burnout among preschool teachers requires a combination of good organisational support and individual self-care strategies.

Structured Daily Reflection

Set aside 10-15 minutes at the end of each day to reflect on the day's events. Use a journal to document what went well and what was challenging. Focus on identifying moments where you felt most stressed and consider what might help improve these situations.

Mindfulness

Integrating mindfulness and breathing exercises into your day - even taking a few moments to breathe and refocus between classes, or utilising a mindfulness/meditation app.

Peer Support Sessions

Participate in or organise regular meetings with other teachers who work with similar age groups or challenges. Use these sessions to share experiences, offer support, and exchange coping strategies.

Practical Strategies to Reduce Stress and Burnout

Peer Support Sessions

Participate in or organise regular meetings with other teachers who work with similar age groups or challenges. Use these sessions to share experiences, offer support, and exchange coping strategies.

Physical Activity

Look for opportunities to integrate physical activity into your day, such as yoga, stretching or walking. This is proven to relieve stress and improve physical health.

Practical Strategies to Reduce Stress and Burnout

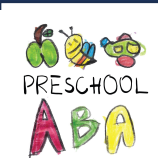
Scheduled Time for Creative Outlets

Dedicate time each week to engage in activities that you find relaxing and joyful, such as art, music, or gardening. These can be personal hobbies or integrated into classroom activities.

Emotional Exhaustion Checks

Use tools such as mood trackers to act as an indicator of stress levels. Recognising early signs of burnout can help you to mitigate its effects.

Remember...



Stress is Relative

We often compare ourselves to other people when experiencing negative emotions. You may think other people are in more difficult situations than you so you shouldn't feel stressed. You may think everyone around you is handling stress better than you are.

Everyone experiences and handles stress differently, and it's ok to admit when you are overwhelmed.



Why do we ignore our stress?

- For societal reasons (e.g. toxic masculinity)
- Because others 'have it worse'.
- Because if we acknowledge our stress we might break down and not be able to continue our responsibilities - it's easier to ignore it.
- To appear strong and supportive for others (family members, colleagues).
- Fear of judgement.

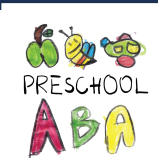


Supporting Colleagues

Work often has a big impact on stress levels (after all, we spend a large amount of our waking life at work). The work environment can help people feel address their stress, or help them to hide it and make it worse. A supportive and open working environment encourages conversations around mental health.

- A simple way to invite someone to share a little of their stress is to ask in a casual way, while making a tea 'how is your day from 1-10?'
- This shows that you are open to hearing any answer rather than an empty 'good!', and allows colleagues to share as much or little as they like.

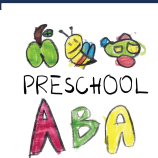
Look-back Questions



Look-back Questions

1. List some possible signs of burnout.
2. What might be some symptoms of emotional exhaustion?
3. How can peer support help to manage stress and burnout?

Identifying Stress and Burnout Worksheet



Identifying Stress and Burnout Worksheet

Practical exercise time.

15:00

PABA project

1. Description of Challenging Behaviours:
Time of Incident:
Behaviour Observed:

- ☐ Tantrum
- ☐ Aggression
- ☐ Noncompliance
- ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

Context/Trigger (if identifiable):

2. Teacher's Immediate Emotional Response:

- ☐ Frustrated
- ☐ Overwhelmed
- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Anxious
- ☐ Other (Please specify): _____

3. Emotional Exhaustion Indicators:
How did you feel at the end of the school day?

- ☐ Exhausted
- ☐ Slightly worn out
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Energised

Additional notes: _____

4. Depersonalisation Occurrences:
Did you feel detached or less caring towards students?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Additional notes: _____

PABA project

5. Sense of Accomplishment:
How successful do you feel in managing classroom behaviour today?

- ☐ Very successful
- ☐ Moderately successful
- ☐ Unsuccessful

Additional notes: _____

6. Physical, Emotional, and Cognitive Symptoms Checklist:

Physical Symptoms:

- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Changes in appetite
- ☐ Difficulty sleeping
- ☐ None of the above (I was unaffected)

Emotional Symptoms:

- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ None of the above (I was unaffected)

Cognitive Symptoms:

- ☐ Difficulty concentrating
- ☐ Making poor decisions
- ☐ Memory problems
- ☐ None of the above (I was unaffected)

7. Open Reflection:
Additional thoughts or feelings about today's classroom management or personal well-being:

80

Conclusion

- Stress is a response to immediate pressures leading to feelings of overload and strain, and burnout is an accumulation of stress leading to long-term energy and motivation depletion.
- Stress and burnout can originate from multiple different sources, especially from classroom behavioural issues.
- Both stress and burnout can be identified and managed in order to improve the education for both teachers and students

Thank you for listening!

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

