

## Taking Care of Teachers

## Tips for Balancing Work and Life While Teaching Remotely

By **Madeline Will**

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Even in the most normal of school years, teachers' work-life balance can be tenuous. It's no secret that teachers often bring piles of work home and spend their weekend hours answering emails or grading papers.

But when the coronavirus pandemic forced schools to close their doors and pivot to remote learning, things got a lot worse, many teachers say. As 8th grade English teacher Brendan Moseley **wrote on Twitter**, his work-life balance during remote learning "was eaten by a wolf, barfed out, put in a blender, then chucked into a ceiling fan."

The spring semester was **uniquely overwhelming**. Teachers say they had to scramble to retrofit their lessons to be delivered remotely, make sure they were meeting their students' emotional needs during an anxiety-inducing time, manage their own children's learning, and combat "**Zoom fatigue**."

At the same time, there was no barrier between the classroom and the living room anymore. Teachers found themselves trouble-shooting technology and answering messages from parents and students at all hours.

For many teachers across the country, working from home will likely continue to some extent in the fall. Many districts **are planning on a hybrid approach to the fall semester**, where students will come to school some days and stay home the rest of the time. Teachers might find themselves teaching the students who are learning remotely full-time, or they might be in school on and off. Even if school buildings do reopen for full-time in-person instruction, positive COVID-19 cases could send everyone back to remote learning for periods of time.

In Education Week's opinion blog "**Ask a Psychologist: Helping Students Thrive Now**," behavior-science psychologists have answered questions from teachers on navigating this new normal. Here are five of their tips on managing stress.

- **Have some self-compassion.** Kristin Neff, an associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, writes that when teachers are in the middle of a stressful workday and don't have time to practice self-care, **they can practice self-compassion**. First, become aware of your distress and acknowledge how tough the situation is. Then, remind yourself that you are not alone in feeling this way. Finally, be kind and tender to yourself—possibly even putting your hand on your heart to physically express your care.
- **Move your body.** Angela Duckworth, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, writes that sitting in front of a laptop all day can take a toll on your mental health. She suggests teachers make specific plans to be physically active, like scheduling an after-dinner walk, and then have a contingency plan if it rains, like doing an online yoga course. She also recommends doing the activity at the same time every day to develop a habit.

- **Regulate your emotions to avoid crankiness.** Trying to teach while your family members are in another room can get on anyone's nerves. Duckworth shares three tips from Stanford psychologist James Gross on **how to regulate your emotions**: Change the situation (move away from the annoyance), change where you pay attention (think of the good things), and change your emotion regulation goal (don't expect to not get cranky at all, just try to be a little less so).
- **Acknowledge your stress.** Instead of denying your stress or keeping it to yourself, **tell your family members and even your students what you're feeling**, Duckworth writes. Ask them to rank their own stress level on a scale from 0 to 10. And then work with them to pinpoint the ebbs and flows of stress in each of your days.
- **Remember you're not alone.** Duckworth **writes that research has found** that people's stress levels are higher when they're competing against each other rather than working together. "When you feel like nobody understands how you feel, remember that in the most fundamental sense, it's 'us against the pandemic,'" she writes. "Your suffering is in some ways unique but in other ways universal—and supporting each other is the foundation of resilience."

