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How Are You Handling Stress?

Here Are Some Routines That May Help

By Marian Brovero, retired teacher, Waldrick, New Jersey

Feel like you are slipping out of the educational loop? Stress and the way you handle it may be the culprit. Reduce all that additional tension by setting some routines in different areas of your day.

A mental pep talk puts you in the right frame of mind. Start feeling your inner strength return. Concentration will be easier to maintain. You are half way there.

New Daily Routines

Stop at that classroom door. Do not enter UNTIL:

- Your Mind Is Ready to Focus on What Is Ahead -- Get your house and family in order. Keep your errands and after-school activities out of school. Make a "to do" list for your time after dismissal and leave it in your car. Only make calls of importance at lunch time. Save the rest for later. Otherwise, please, turn off your cell phone. Problems will find you quickly enough.

Leave all family pictures in your wallet or your school closet. Your class is your family during the school day. They need to feel important in your eyes.

- You Take a Deep Breath -- You have set aside all external distractions. Good for you. Breathe in deeply one more time. You are almost ready for the day ahead.
- You Put a Smile on Your Face -- Start tomorrow and the rest of your educational life by arriving at school fit. Get a decent night's sleep, some breakfast, and a hug from each family member. (Pets are included.) Your face should be reflecting the new, improving you.

Remember you are a role model for your students. They may have left home this morning with no breakfast, no one seeing how they looked or checking their homework, and not a soul giving them a kiss good-bye. Put a smile on your face -- and that will put a smile on theirs.

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Ongoing Routines

Establish ongoing routines for areas of your day where stress may continue to strike a sneaky blow.

- Organize Your Classroom -- Make one day a week your stay-after day. Get your room in order and maintain it.
- Keep Centers Going -- Two or three are ample for now. If each center can accommodate three students, that's nine all set each day. Hopefully, you have a small library, a computer, and a listening station with books, and tapes or CDs. All you need is an art area. Centers keep your students happily involved while you are leading group or individual instruction.
- Plan Ahead -- Train yourself to be more of a forward planner. For example, as you start a science unit, start to think ahead. What lessons might be a good follow-up? Gather those materials also. Now you are well-prepared.
- End units on a Thursday. Let Friday be a-breath-of-fresh-air day. Allow learning to settle in. Remember, each unit is one more building block for your class. Start a new bulletin board as a teaser of what comes next. Curiosity is a great teacher's aid.
- Check Papers -- If you can manage it, review papers with each child a half hour before school ends. Kids really need to know how they are doing. They will be asked that dreaded question, "What did you do in school today?" Help them answer it.
- Plan for Tomorrow -- Take thirty minutes at night to plan for tomorrow. Then sit with your family. Before bed, walk around the house. Neat enough? Clothes for work set? Throw in a wash and call your mom or a best friend. Someone who always makes you feel better.
- Go for a Morning Walk -- As you are taking an early AM walk (please try), sort out the day's priorities. This puts in motion your positive mood for the day.
- Keep "The Summer Notebook" -- Set aside a special notebook to list those projects and ideas that require more time to consider. Writing things down will lift one more stressful burden off your shoulders. Develop your ideas in the summer, when you have more time to create.
- Use Stress as a Motivator -- Divert your urge to gripe and let it perk up your natural creativity.
- Be a Pal to Your Next Door Colleague -- Begin to develop a reputation as a cool, calm, resourceful person. See you feel better already. Nurturing a kindly attitude will keep you from placing blame on your class or the parents or the principal (most of the time).

Periodically, reactivate your stress barometer. Hit a little slump? You now have some tools to pull yourself right back up. You are able to laugh in the face of stress. Your family appreciates it and your class loves your relaxed demeanor.

Marian Brovero taught second grade in Waldwick, New Jersey, for 31 years. She now volunteers as a Learning Partner for United Way, working with first and second graders to encourage their love of

learning. Brovero has written several books, including her latest book, The Right Way Is the Only Way (Publish America, Inc. 2005) an interactive guide for promoting mutual respect.

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NEA or its affiliates.

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