

## 5 Tips for Avoiding Teacher Burnout



### School Leadership

Originally Published: May 20, 2014 | Updated: October 23, 2015

I've read a lot of articles about preventing teacher burnout, so a new list is probably not that unique. However, as I reflected on what causes burnout, on times when I came pretty close to feeling burnout, and on times when I watched my colleagues burn out around me, I realized that many internal and external factors can lead to teacher burnout -- some that teachers themselves can control and some that they can't. Here are five big factors that play a part in teacher burnout, along with tips on how to prevent these factors from burning you out.

### 1) Maintain Your "Other" Life

It's OK if teaching is your life as long as you have a life outside of your classroom. I see this a lot in new teachers, especially if they are in their early 20s and just starting out. You want to be the best teacher you can. You've been dreaming of this moment for years. Now you're here and determined to launch headfirst into an instantly successful career. You're figuring out lesson planning, grading, managing student behavior, and classroom procedures. You're up until midnight and up at 6:00 AM. Your weekends are spent grading and planning. This is an easy road to burnout. Go for a short weekend trip, get lunch with an old friend, go to the gym during the week, or go for a bike ride. (Exercise relieves stress!) Spend some time when you are *not* thinking about the classroom, and stay connected to your support group of friends and family.

### 2) Be a Stakeholder When Changes Are Made

Too much change stretches teachers thin and leads to burnout. Include teachers in conversations about changes, and

make changes transparent. I have seen the downside of change in the schools I've worked in over the years. It seems like the administration changes the discipline policy and procedures every week. The school started the year with a new reading program only to find out that they'll be using a different one next year. Lunch procedures are revised and changed with no explanation in what seems like a haphazard way throughout the year. Teachers are moved from grade to grade or subject to subject despite their experience with specific grade levels or subject areas. After enough of these hasty, frequent changes, teachers begin to feel as though they've lost all control over their day-to-day experiences and responsibilities. This leads to unwillingness to go out on a limb, try new things or put in too much effort -- why bother when everything could change on a whim? This takes the passion out of teaching and turns it into a guessing game of what will come next.

If a change needs to be made, be transparent about why this change is happening and, whenever possible, include the affected teachers in the process and avoid sudden changes that appear to come out of nowhere. Always think about how a change will affect teachers and staff and plan accordingly.

### **3) Find Lessons and Opportunities in Everything**

One of the easiest ways to burn out as a teacher is to get stuck in the same routine and practices year after year. Keep it fresh by reading new research on teaching, and by learning, talking, and collaborating with peers inside and outside of your school building. Attend conferences and other structured learning activities. Take on a leadership role in your school through which you can learn new skills or build new connections. Share what you're doing in your classroom with peers, solicit feedback, and revise your lessons. Oh, and read. A lot. *Always* keep learning. *Always* keep it fresh.

### **4) Nurture Peer Connections**

Give teachers opportunities to connect with each other about their teaching. When they don't have time or opportunities to connect, share, and plan together during the day, they start feeling isolated. Isolation can easily lead to burnout if you feel like you're all alone, figuring things out by yourself, and having few connections within the building. Feeling part of a team, knowing what others are doing in their classrooms, and seeing how your work fits into the bigger picture is motivating, inspiring, and increases feelings of self-worth. Give teachers across grade levels or subject areas the time they need to share student work, units they're teaching, and ideas they're working on. Give them opportunities to watch each other teach in a non-threatening, collegial way.

### **5) Keep It Light**

Incorporate humor and laughter into your classroom. Putting on a serious face every day, day after day, is hard. There's an old adage that says teachers shouldn't smile until winter break or they'll never be able to manage their class. Sure, it's important to be clear about expectations, and sometimes you need to put your foot down. But who wants to sit in a classroom where no one smiles and everything is super-serious all the time? It's OK to have a good time in the classroom and enjoy yourself. Your students will appreciate your class more, and you will win them over if you seem like you're having a good time! Teachers have bad days just like anyone, and sometimes we need humor to brighten our day. Letting some humor and laughter into your classroom and making it a pleasant place to be will help counteract feelings of burnout.

Does your school take steps to counteract burnout? Please share in the comments section below.

"