

THE READ APPROACH

To deal with the effects of stress, many teachers have successfully followed the steps indicated in the READ approach.

R STANDS FOR REST, recognized by stress managers as the first step in recovering from work-related stress. A good night's sleep of no less than eight hours, as well as 15-minute "power naps" during the day, are recommended - hopefully, these naps are not taken in the classroom! In the initial stages of depression or burn-out, sleep disturbance is usually the first symptom. It also is the last symptom to disappear, often years later. Please don't assume that your sleep cycle will return to normal when the school year is over. Tired bodies don't bounce back like they used to.

E IS FOR EXERCISE, which is essential in helping to dissipate the chemical spill that happens naturally in our bodies to prepare us for the fight-or-flight response to stress. In the classroom, there is minimal opportunity to have physical activity, while maintaining a professional stance, in the face of threatening situations. Even though a regular exercise program is recommended,

studies indicate that even a 15-minute daily walk can make a significant difference in the body's response to stress. Some teachers take the recommended 15-minute walk at noon or after school, before they return to their second shift of responsibilities at home.

A IS FOR ATTITUDE. Attitude can work for you if you can view problems as challenges, and can divide the challenges into tasks of manageable size and duration. The tendency of a teacher under stress is to feel overwhelmed, fearful and defeated; this can lead to a negative stress cycle. The strategy of breaking the school day into one-hour slots, and dealing with the tasks in smaller amounts, can make the situation manageable. It is imperative to develop some area of your daily school work over which you have personal control and influence. Many teachers practice mental techniques such as meditation, in an effort to maintain emotional and physical health.

In dealing with the shifting sands of educational reform and curriculum changes, it



is important for teachers to value their own personal styles of teaching, and to be aware of their own professional skills and successes. New trends can then be integrated with the skills and wisdom of the veteran teacher.

In returning to work after sick leave due to stress, many teachers have learned to adjust their attitude to: “I will do the least amount possible to do a good job.” This may be a horrifying thought to dedicated teachers, who have become ill from the attitude of: “I will do the most possible to do a good job.” Re-entry must be handled in a manner that aligns workplace expectations with the energy of the teacher providing the service. Individualized programs for students, strategic planning, committee participation and community liaison work all must be reviewed and prioritized in terms of what is humanly possible for the teacher to accomplish.

D STANDS FOR DIET. Healthy, balanced meals are essential for the prevention of illness due to stress. In the frantic attempt to get everything done for school, many teachers skip breakfast, don't take time for lunch and eat a fast food supper in order to make time for correcting and lesson preparation. It is helpful to treat yourself as well as you treat your car, and stop for a refill. Over-consumption of coffee and tea is another common practice. Stress managers suggest that coffee and tea should be limited to two cups a day, and consumed in the morning. Water and juices are recommended alternatives. Your body will thank you.

As counsellors, we are frequently asked how we cope with the job of listening daily to the personal and professional struggles of teachers. Our program is in its tenth year, and it is noteworthy that every teacher in crisis also has a story of commitment to their students, and an intense desire to make a difference in their lives. Their professional self-worth is defined by their ability to care for their students and staff members. A newly discovered ability, to care for themselves as well, can make a tremendous difference in teachers' well-being. It is a joy for counsellors to assist teachers on their journey.

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