



LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF.



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Joining the teaching profession is an exciting time. The beginning of a new career, working with new people, and of course working with new students. Once the excitement of the first few weeks settles, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. There are so many things to do, including the challenges and pressures of planning and assessment, classroom management and time management. It is important during this work that you take time to look after yourself including connecting with colleagues, friends and family.

Looking after yourself is a priority

Graduate teachers can spend a lot of time in their first year of teaching just keeping their head above water. According to Fantilli & McDougal (2009) the first year of teaching is usually the most difficult as new teachers are often expected to assume the same responsibilities as an experienced teacher.

Looking after yourself and your wellbeing is vital for your career to ensure that you don't burn out. You can't pour from an empty cup, so take care of yourself first.

In this article, I have set out some strategies that I have found useful in my own teaching experience and that I encourage the graduates at my school to adopt.

Tips for finding balance in your work and personal life

Finding a good balance between work and personal life is important to ensure that you are making enough time for yourself each week. As a teacher there are tasks that you will be required to complete after your daily teaching. The following tips will assist you with staying on top of your workload, staying sane, and making time for yourself:

Tip 1: work out when you work best

Some teachers like to stay after school and work for a few hours after the students leave, others prefer to head home and have some downtime before settling down to do some work in the evening. Others prefer to get up early to start their day fresh. By identifying when you work best, you will be more productive, get more work done and set yourself up with a good routine.

Tip 2: use a diary

Make sure you have and use a diary and make a daily “To Do” list. This will ensure you are keeping on top of meeting your deadlines (big and small) and keeping tasks on track.

Tip 3: get enough sleep

Make sure that you are getting enough sleep. Research indicates an adult requires a minimum of seven hours per night on a regular basis (Watson et al 2015). Lack of sleep can lead to significant poor health outcomes such as weight gain and depression. Ensure that your work routine allows you to get enough sleep.

Tip 4: make time to wind down

Ensure you have some wind-down time in the evenings after work. This may be heading to the gym, going for a walk, cooking dinner, watching some TV or reading a book. You will know what best helps you to de-stress after work.

Tip 5: fit in time to socialise

Your weekly routine should give you freedom on the weekend to socialise or doing activities that are not work related - weekends are valuable for fitting in time for a catch-up with friends or family. Making time to participate in activities that makes you happy on the weekends, helps to recuperate and feel refreshed and recharged for the week ahead.

Tip 6: eat well, even when you're busy

Consider what kind of food you are bringing to school that is good for you and is easily accessible for you to eat even when you are busy.

Connect with other graduate teachers

Connecting with other graduate teachers is an important part of being able to discuss challenges, share achievements and learn from each other. If you are one of several graduate teachers at the school, introduce yourself and find out a little about them. Make a time to chat where you can ask them how they are going, share something you have done well and maybe something you have found challenging. It is likely that they will have similar experiences. It is reassuring to know that others are experiencing the same challenges as you and perhaps you could discuss some ideas on how to overcome these challenges.

You might make a point to have a catch-up once a week. In my first year of teaching, I would have lunch with a group of fellow graduate teachers once a week and we used to bring along something to share. We also agreed to arrive early one day per week to begin our day with a quick yoga session. This was a great time to bond and connect with colleagues. You may like to set up something similar with the other graduates at your school or join a program that is already running at school.

If you happen to be the only new graduate at your school, try to make a time to connect with some of your university friends who might also be beginning as a graduate teacher at a school. Contact schools in your local area to find out where other graduates are employed and start a network. If you are interested in reading more about Networks, please refer to Lara Schendzielorz's [‘Using your networks to build your professional practice’](#) article in Edition 3 of the Graduate Teacher Learning Series.

Celebrate your achievements

One of the biggest challenges that I have faced and overcome in my teaching career has been the ability to develop confidence in my own teaching.

I spent a good deal of my first six months as a teacher doubting my own ability to teach. I looked in detail at what I could improve and what I could do better. I was critically reflecting on my faults. I missed many opportunities to focus on what I was doing right. Being a critically reflective teacher is a very important tool, however, when you critically reflect on your teaching practice, consider first reflecting on all the things that did go well. I learned over time to focus on elements of my teaching practice where I was succeeding, and I worked to strengthen these. By spending time focusing on my strengths, I developed my confidence and also learned to look after myself.

When I took time to celebrate my achievements (no matter how little), I really began to understand the value that I was adding to all of the students in my classroom, and I remembered why I had become a teacher.

There is a lot to learn as a graduate teacher and yet there are still many tools and experiences that you can share with others about what you or your students are doing. As a graduate teacher mentor, I am constantly amazed and excited to see the wonderful things that graduate teachers are doing in their classrooms. Being a new teacher means that you are fresh with ideas and new influences. When you share your achievements with others at your school, such as student work samples, photos or videos of an amazing activity that you ran, that will help to validate your achievement, and this is important in the development of your confidence as a teacher. Evely & Ganim (2011), suggest that it is good at the end of the day to think about what went well that day as it will assist you to think on the positives of the day rather than the things that went wrong. In addition, they suggest that when we are stressed, we can over-emphasise the negative. Focusing instead on the positives can assist with putting your day into perspective.

If it all gets too much

There are times that despite your best efforts to look after yourself, you may find yourself struggling to stay afloat and little things can seem very stressful. If it all gets too much, make sure that you raise this with your mentor, colleague, learning specialist or a leader at your school. You could ask a colleague to observe you as part of the [Peer Observation Protocol](#). If for some reason you are not comfortable talking to these people, chat to a colleague or friend and ask them for support. It may be that you need support in a meeting with the leadership team at school to make some changes. When your mentor or the

leadership team know that you are experiencing difficulties, they can then put strategies in place to help you.

The Department of Education (have external support available to all teachers. [To access assistance or seek further information please visit the Department's Health and Safety Wellbeing Policy and Support page.](#)

Discussion with your mentor

When I work with graduate teachers, we talk about being stressed or overwhelmed, finding a good work and personal life balance, and making time to relax. Talk with your mentor who should be able to help to put some strategies and supports in place to assist you. Discuss with your mentor the best way you can keep on top of meeting deadlines. Ask them to show you how they currently work and what tools they use. Do they use a diary, electronic system or another way of ensuring tasks are being completed by deadlines?

Takeaway message

Remember that you don't have to do this alone. There is always someone to talk to and being able to say when things are not OK is a very important part of looking after yourself. In addition, surround yourself with positive people who will support you and make sure you have someone who you can debrief with and chat to when you have had one of those days.

Remember that without you at your best, your class and your students cannot be at their best, so it's important to make sure that you are taking care of yourself in the classroom. This means that you are number one. Take time to look after yourself.

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