

# You Can... **Manage your stress levels**

*We need a certain level of stress or challenge in our working lives to stop us from getting bored and stale. However, there comes a point at which positive pressure tips over into negative and overwhelming stress. This stress can come from a whole range of different factors in our work – workload, lack of time, behaviour and so on.*

## Thinking points

- One of the reasons why teaching is so stressful is because we are dealing with the unpredictable nature of children and the range of ways in which they might react.
- Teaching is also stressful because we are constantly in contact with children. There is little or no chance to relax and put down your guard during the day.
- Workload pressures, and the feeling that there is not enough time to do everything, can be a powerful cause of stress.
- Because the profession tends to be a vocation, as well as a job, teachers might take on an emotional burden that causes stress outside of working hours.
- Where stress levels are not properly managed, by schools or by individual teachers, this can result in high levels of sickness.

## Tips, ideas and activities

- Different people find different things stressful. Consider what makes you personally feel most stressed and pressurised, and find realistic ways to deal with these issues. Ask yourself:
  - What things make me feel stressed and pressurised?
  - Is there a realistic way of overcoming these issues or making them have less impact on me personally?
  - Are there particular times of day when I manage stress less well, and can I find a way to make these times a little easier for myself?
  - How do I react to personal stress – do I take it out on others, whether the children or a partner?
- Try not to be a perfectionist, as this will inevitably increase your stress levels. The job of a teacher is simply too big and too complex to do everything perfectly. Don't be too hard on yourself when you let your standards slip a little.
- Learn to put a pause between your emotional reaction to a stressful situation and your actual (and hopefully more rational) response. Learn how to control your temper, for instance, by taking a few deep breaths or walking away for a few moments.
- Try not to take your children's misbehaviour personally. It is actually very rare that difficult behaviour is aimed directly at the teacher. Children who do seriously misbehave probably come from a pretty horrible home background, so aim to feel pity for them rather than anger.
- Take up a physical activity outside of school hours – it is a great way to get rid of stress. You might try pottery, gardening, Tai Chi or swimming.
- Don't forget that your children get stressed too and, when they feel under a lot of pressure, they may take their feelings out on you. Help your children manage their stress levels, particularly around exam time, and in the lead up to the transition to secondary school.

