

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

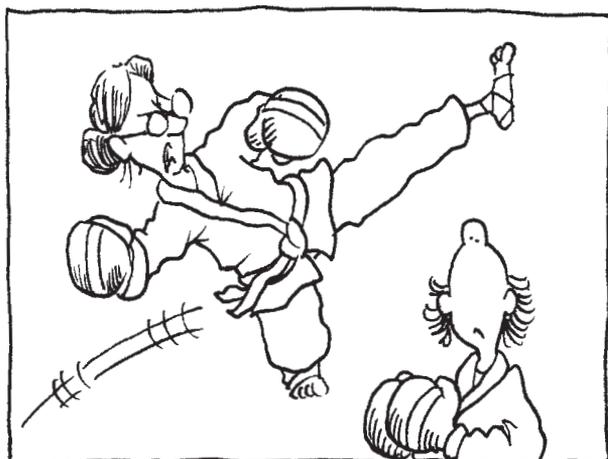
Teaching is a profession with high stress levels, whether this is because of behaviour issues, workload or just the time demands of the job. A certain level of stress is important to keep us happy: we need to feel challenged at work. There comes a point, though, at which stress gets out of hand. Managing your personal stress levels is an important skill to learn.

Thinking points

- Primary teaching can be particularly stressful because of the constant contact with children during the day. There are few chances to relax while you are in the classroom: it is therefore doubly important to find ways to manage stress.
- The organisational aspects of teaching can also cause stress, whether dealing with large groups of young people, or with equipment and resources. Getting 30 small children to clear up after a painting session will probably leave you feeling frazzled!
- Managing difficult behaviour causes your 'fight or flight' instinct to kick into action, giving you a rush of adrenaline to deal with the situation. Because teachers must react in a calm way, this adrenaline does not get used up, and this can lead to high stress levels.
- Don't forget that your children can get stressed too. This might be because of the pressures of school work, a busy classroom environment, or 'baggage' from outside of school.

Tips, ideas and activities

- Consider all the aspects of your work that cause you stress. Are there times of the day or week when you feel particularly harassed? Can you adapt your timetable to take account of this?
- It is tempting to work through your breaks, because there is always work that you could be doing. Break times serve a very important purpose though – they ensure that you are calm enough and have enough energy to teach effectively. They also offer a chance for social contact, which can really help you relax. Teaching is a job with limited opportunity for adult contact during the day. Your colleagues offer a wonderful source of support and also friendship. Try to be strict with yourself about taking your breaks, and ensure that you find ways to relax when you arrive at the staffroom.
- When your children mess around, consider why it is happening as this will help you stay calm. It is tempting to ascribe complex motivations to children's misbehaviour, but the reality is often much more mundane. Boredom, tiredness, misunderstandings, bad moods – children are just as subject to random emotions as their teachers!
- Learn not to take your children's behaviour personally – difficult behaviour is rarely aimed directly at the teacher. Learn to feel pity rather than anger when children mess you around or are rude. Any child who feels that this is acceptable in the classroom probably has a very difficult home life.



- Don't feel that you must react instantly to tricky classroom situations. Take a few deep breaths before you respond, to help you control your temper.
- Take up a physical activity outside of school to get rid of stress: depending on your preferences, you might try swimming, gardening, kick-boxing or pottery.
- Spend some time talking to your children about the things in school that cause them stress, and try to minimise the impact that these things have on them.