

Teacher Overload and Burnout

The Nature of Overload and Burnout

- Overload can be defined as excess demands impairing mental, physical, and emotional function. One can sustain short seasons of overload. Burnout, on the other hand, is a loss of enthusiasm and energy leading to cynicism, fatigue, racing thoughts, sleep issues, snappiness, reduced creativity, and relational strain. Once one is in a state of burnout, it is very hard to keep moving forward.
- If you are feeling constant tiredness and a “can’t keep up” desperation, this signals a need for action. Remember that deeper holes take longer to recover from. Be alert to early signs. Ask yourself, “Can I sustain this pace?”

Advice for Teaching Sustainably

- Taking time to prioritize self-care is not selfish (unless done at the expense of fulfilling one’s duties). Instead, taking time to do things that bring you rest and refreshment helps you to be a better teacher in the long run. This may include things like the following:
 - Maintain non-school hobbies
 - Get good sleep/take naps
 - Take walks or exercise
 - Embrace Sabbath rest
 - Spend time with Jesus often and let Him love you
 - Distinguish fun from obligation
 - Set boundaries and say “no” politely
 - Eat nourishing, nutritious food
- Ask for help when you need it. Perhaps you can recruit parent volunteers for things like daily checking or reading classes.
- A driver in burnout can be unclear expectations or nebulous job roles. Seek clarity from board/admin/principal/co-teachers on what your responsibilities are.
- Another driver in burnout can be differing goals and vision, perhaps from your board, parents, or co-teachers. If this is the case, communicate humbly. Talk it out with those involved in respectful ways.
- If you find that unresolved personal issues are causing your burnout, remember the importance of bringing your best self to the classroom. Seek counseling for healing and wholeness.
- Poor time management and/or procrastination is an issue worth attacking head-on. Assess where you are losing time and put safeguards in place to keep it from happening often. Put energy into building positive habits. Consider making yourself accountable to a co-teacher or administrator.

- Establish systems and routines for daily tasks and classroom management. Whenever you can put energy into planning responses and consequences once, it keeps you from needing to spend mental energy deciding in the moment whenever things come up.
- Ensure that you have a compelling vision driving you. While you may be teaching out of a desire to serve families and come alongside parents in the important task of educating children, if this is your primary focus, it can easily lead to people-pleasing and burnout. Instead, put your focus on serving Christ, His church, and His Kingdom. You are helping to train and equip more Kingdom workers. Keeping this perspective has the potential to revolutionize the ordinary moments of everyday life in the classroom. These moments become holy as you see them through the lenses of eternity and realize the impact that your work can have.
- Remember that things will not always go as you planned and you will not always be able to operate at 100%. Be gentle with yourself when you are tired, hungry, angry, or frustrated. Jesus sustains the teacher who calls out to Him. He is bigger than your sleepless night, your hastily crafted sticky note lesson plan, or your students' low spelling scores. You can trust Him to fill in the gaps when you have done your best.

Sources

- Avoiding Overload and Burnout by Arthur Nisly: [Avoiding Overload and Burnout - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Help for the Harried Teacher (Remedies) by Doug Kauffman: [Help for the Harried Teacher \(Remedies\) - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Workers in the Kingdom by Rosalie Beiler: [Workers in the Kingdom - The Dock for Learning](#)
- What I Wish I Had Known About Self-Care by Ruth Anna Kuhns: [What I Wish I Had Known About Self-Care - The Dock for Learning](#)