

November 2025

# Stress, Triggers and Prioritisation

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Navigating successful  
outcomes in wellbeing



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# INTRODUCTION

Looking after yourself isn't selfish, it's strategy.  
Stay well to teach well.

**Most people go into teaching because they care. Some would even go as far to describe it as a calling.**

They want to make a difference, do good work, and help others grow. However, caring doesn't make you immune to stress, in fact, it often makes you more vulnerable to it.

This guide isn't here to scare you. It's here to help you go into your teaching career with your eyes open and a few tools in your back pocket.

While teaching is one of the most rewarding professions, it's also one of the most demanding. The early years of your career can feel like an emotional rollercoaster; the workload, the expectations, the self-doubt, and pretending it's easy helps no one.

You don't need to be a wellbeing expert to look after yourself or to support others. You just need some structure, a bit of self-awareness, and the willingness to pause before you hit burnout.

This is the first of three sessions in this programme that will give you practical ways to manage pressure, understand your triggers, and respond to stress in real time, not after the damage is done.

Wellbeing isn't built through one big training session, it's built through small, daily choices. It's the moment you say "no" without guilt, take a breath before reacting, or ask for help before you hit the wall.

This isn't about perfection or performance. It's about sustainability, helping you stay well enough to teach well and leave enough of you, for you.



# TOP 5 STRESSORS IN TEACHING

Teaching is one of the most rewarding jobs you'll ever do, but it's also one of the most demanding. Don't panic, this isn't a scare tactic. It's about going in well informed and knowing what to expect, so you can protect your energy and stay in the game for the long haul.

Based on the latest evidence from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), Education Support's Teacher Wellbeing Index (2024), and research from the Education Policy Institute (EPI) and UCL Institute of Education, the top five stress areas in the UK teaching profession are consistently the following:

## 1. Workload & Administrative Demands

- Most frequently cited stressor across all teaching levels (HSE, 2024).
- Excessive marking, data entry, lesson planning, and accountability paperwork.
- Teachers regularly report working 50–60 hours per week, with little time for rest or recovery.
- Effect: chronic overload → exhaustion → burnout → retention issues.

## 2. Behaviour Management and Pupil Conduct

- Managing challenging behaviour is a major emotional and psychological strain, especially for early-career teachers.
- Links to anxiety, reduced confidence, and feelings of incompetence if not properly supported.
- Effect: increased emotional exhaustion and withdrawal from the profession.

## 3. Lack of Support and Poor Leadership Culture

- Perceived lack of empathy, communication, or recognition from senior leaders is a key driver of stress.
- Teachers cite inconsistent leadership, lack of clarity, and absence of psychological safety as major barriers.
- Effect: eroded trust, low morale, and reluctance to seek help when struggling.

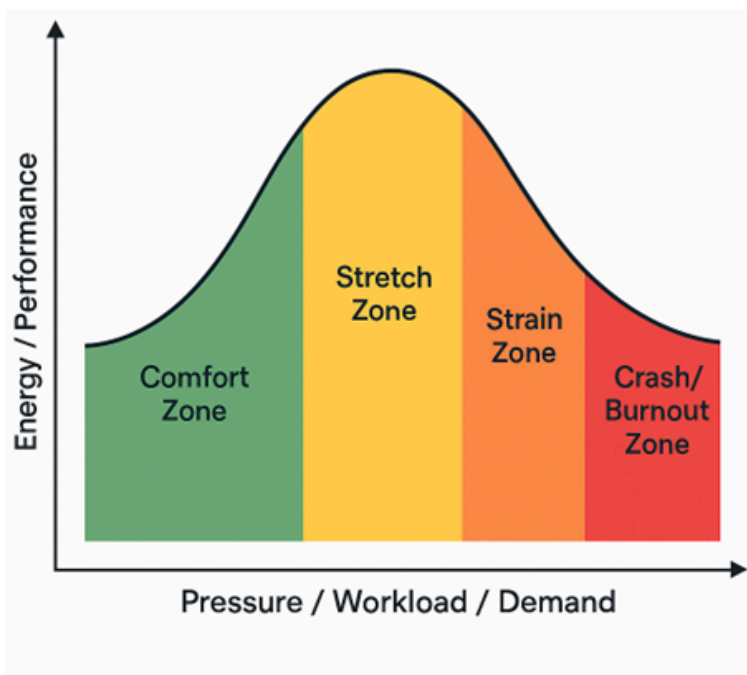
## 4. Work/Life Balance and Boundary Erosion

- Teaching is one of the few professions where personal time is routinely invaded by work (marking, emails, planning).
- The 'always on' culture is now a leading contributor to burnout, according to Education Support (2024).
- Effect: reduced recovery, high fatigue, poorer relationships, and increased sick leave.

## 5. Performance Pressure, Ofsted and Job Security

- High-stakes accountability culture amplifies stress, particularly around inspections, observations, and exam results.
- Newer teachers often internalise these pressures, linking their self-worth to performance outcomes.
- Effect: anticipatory anxiety, imposter feelings, and long-term attrition from the profession.

# THE STRETCH/STRAIN CURVE



This curve maps the relationship between pressure and performance.

At first, pressure boosts performance; think deadlines, challenges, a bit of adrenaline. This is the Stretch Zone, and it's where most of us do our best work.

But there's a limit. Push too far, for too long, and we tip over into the Strain Zone, and eventually into burnout. No one thrives in the red.

### Use it in conversation:

Ask others where they are on this curve, not just "How are you?" but "Where do you think you are on this line today?"

It opens up more honest answers and helps normalise the idea that not everyone is buzzing at the top all the time.

## Wellbeing Tipping Point



### Same tipping point idea, different visual.

This one works just as well for self-reflection or check-ins as it gives people a way to express how they're doing without needing to find the right words.

- **GREEN: MOTIVATED & ENERGISED**
- **YELLOW: OVERLOADED BUT COPING**
- **ORANGE: RUNNING ON FUMES**
- **RED: SHUTDOWN IMMINENT**

Use it in conversation:

Try:

"If your energy was a phone battery today, what percentage would it be on?"

It might sound daft, but you'll be surprised how quickly it gets to the truth, and it often leads to people sharing more.

# EMPATHY EXERCISE

You're going to jot down some bullet points about your own experience. Then you will be split into groups to interview each other using these questions, you will not have to take notes during that part, just listen and encourage your partner to share their experience.

What does stress mean to you?

How does it affect you mentally; the way you think?

How does it affect you emotionally; the way you feel?

What physical symptoms do you experience?

# PRIORITISATION: THE FOUR N'S

When everything feels urgent, it's easy to lose sight of what actually matters. The Four N's is a quick way to get your workload, and your sanity, back in order.

Start by listing everything that's on your plate, then sort each task into one of four boxes:

1. **Now:** urgent and high value — do it first.
2. **Next:** important but not urgent, plan to do it.
3. **Noise:** urgent for someone else, but not essential for you. Minimise or delegate to some one or some time else.
4. **Never:** low value, stop doing it for now at least.

This isn't about being lazy; it's about working smarter, protecting your energy, and recognising that time spent on "Noise" or "Never" tasks steals time from what truly makes a difference in your teaching and wellbeing.

**Can't Wait**

**Can Wait**

	<b>NOW</b>	<b>NEXT</b>
<b>High Value</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>NOISE</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
<b>Low Value</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

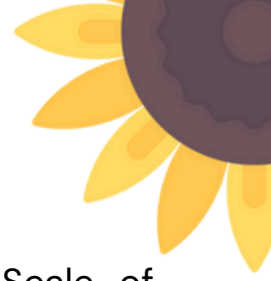
# THE FOUR N'S EXERCISE

Write down three of your priorities right now	
1.	
2.	
3.	

**Can't Wait**

**Can Wait**

	<b>NOW</b>	<b>NEXT</b>
<b>High Value</b>		
	<b>NOISE</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
<b>Low Value</b>		



# THE SCALE OF WILLINGNESS: THE ART OF SAYING “NO”

Saying “yes” or “no” isn’t always as simple as it sounds. The Scale of Willingness helps you recognise that between a definite yes and an absolute no, there’s a whole world of maybe; space for negotiation, reflection, and self-awareness.

Instead of defaulting to “yes” out of guilt or people-pleasing, you can pause and check where you really sit on the scale. Maybe you’re curious, maybe you’re unsure, or maybe you’re only willing **this time**.

<b>YES</b>	<b>I’m a big ‘Yes’ to that!</b>	<b>Action</b>
	<b>Yes, I am willing</b> <b>Yes, I am willing BUT...</b> <b>I’d rather not, but I’m willing to do that for you <u>this time</u></b>	<b>Openness</b>
<b>MAYBE</b>	<b>I’m curious, tell me more</b> <b>I don’t know</b> <b>I feel unsure</b> <b>Not that, but i could do this...</b>	<b>Negotiation</b>
	<b>I’m not willing to do that</b> <b>It’s a ‘no’ from me on that this time</b>	<b>Hesitance</b>
<b>NO</b>	<b>No way!</b>	<b>Non-Action</b>






Each point on the scale is designed to **Negotiate Outcomes**, a chance to find a solution that works for you and the other person. Using this tool helps you protect your boundaries, manage workload more honestly, and build confidence in saying “No” without damaging relationships. It’s not about being difficult, it’s about making thoughtful choices that support your wellbeing and effectiveness as a teacher.

# SOLUTIONS FOR STRESSORS IN TEACHING

## 1. Workload & Admin

Let's be honest; if teachers were paid per spreadsheet, they'd all be millionaires by Christmas. The problem isn't that people can't handle pressure; it's that **nonsense work** keeps multiplying.






### Five Solutions

-  **1. Four N's Grid:** Sort tasks into **Now, Next, Noise, Never**. If it's "Noise," bin it.
-  **2. Batch the boring stuff:** Emails, marking, admin; one window a day, then close it.
-  **3. Micro-planning:** 15-minute bursts. It's easier to climb a hill when you can't see the whole mountain.
-  **4. Template everything:** Don't start from scratch unless it's legally required or inspiring.
-  **5. Ask "Who actually needs this?"** If the answer is "No one," congratulations, you've found a time thief!

## 2. Challenging Behaviour

You can't control everything that walks through the classroom door, but you **can** control your energy, your boundaries, and how you recover after the chaos.






### Five Solutions

-  **1. Detach, don't absorb:** Their behaviour isn't about you, it's about what's happening **for them**.
-  **2. Reset, don't react:** Pause, breathe, reset your tone. Control spreads; chaos does too.
-  **3. Peer debriefs:** Find a trusted colleague and offload the nonsense before it festers.
-  **4. Reflect, don't ruminate:** Ask, "What's useful here?" not "Why do they hate me?"
-  **5. Recovery rituals:** After a rough lesson, do something that signals "it's over". Walk, music, coffee, swear privately.

## 3. Lack of Support

Sometimes it's not the work, it's **how** people make you feel doing it. A culture without psychological safety breeds anxiety faster than caffeine fuels marking.






### Five Solutions

-  **1. Build micro-support networks:** Two or three allies who 'get it' beat one distant line manager.
-  **2. Name what you need:** Don't wait for someone to guess, ask clearly and early.
-  **3. Feedback up, not just down:** Managers can't fix what they don't know (or what everyone's too polite to mention).
-  **4. Model transparency:** "I'm finding this tough too" normalises vulnerability and stops the superhero nonsense.
-  **5. Celebrate small leadership wins:** Catch good leadership in the act, it multiplies fast.

## 4. Work/Life Boundaries

Teachers are some of the kindest people alive, until you notice they treat **everyone else's wellbeing** as sacred and their own as optional.






### Five Solutions

-  **1. Tech curfew:** Pick a cut-off. Emails don't count as evening reading.
-  **2. Protect sacred time:** Guard your evenings, family time, or hobbies like you guard safeguarding data.
-  **3. Say no with grace:** "I'd love to, but I'm at capacity right now." Simple. Boundaries don't need an essay.
-  **4. Separate space, separate self:** Even if you are working at home, change location or clothes to switch off.
-  **5. Plan joy:** Literally put something fun in the diary. Joy isn't accidental, it's scheduled.

## 5. Performance Pressures

Few things spike cortisol faster than the words 'mock inspection'. The truth is, you'll perform better when you're not chasing perfection, you're chasing **progress**.

### Five Solutions

-  **1. Focus on controllables:** You can't control inspectors, but you can control preparation and perspective.
-  **2. Anchor yourself:** Why did you start teaching? Reconnect with your 'why' when pressure hits.
-  **3. Rehearse calm:** Visualise the day going well, your nervous system can't tell the difference.
-  **4. Peer reassurance:** Someone else has survived this week. Ask them how. Then steal their tips.
-  **5. Post-pressure recovery:** Build in decompression time, even athletes rest between races.



# UK RESOURCES FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

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## MIND

Provides information and support around mental health issues. Visit [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) or call 0300 123 3393.

## Samaritans

24/7 confidential emotional support. Call 116 123 or visit [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

## Shout

Free, confidential crisis text line. Text SHOUT to 85258 for support.

## Hub of Hope

Mental health support database provided by national mental health charity, Chasing the Stigma. Visit [www.hubofhope.co.uk](http://www.hubofhope.co.uk)

Creating a culture that prioritises mental health conversations is not just beneficial for individuals, but for the entire organisation. When people feel supported, they are more likely to stay engaged, productive, and resilient.

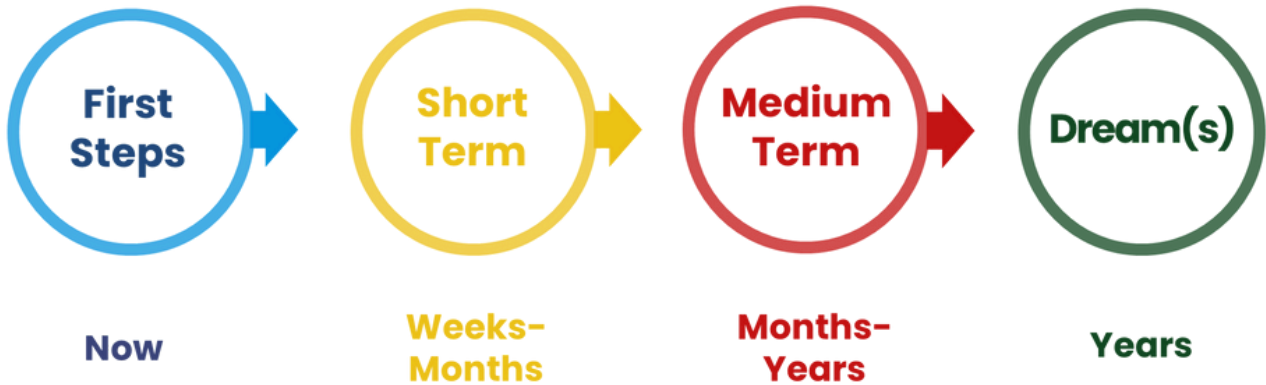
Are you ready to take the next step in supporting mental health in your organisation?

**Let's talk about how Feel Good Works can help you create lasting change.**



# TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

Dr. Sean Young: 'Stick With It'



We've talked about stress, priorities, and boundaries, but all of that only matters if you do something with it. Knowledge is nice, but it won't get you through a tough placement or a Sunday-night marking marathon. Action will.

Dr Sean Young's 'Stick With It' research shows that real change doesn't happen through willpower alone, it happens through structure. His Stepladders Model for Positive Change is all about building success gradually: one small step at a time, turning ideas into habits that actually stick.

You don't need to overhaul your entire routine overnight. Start small. Pick **one thing** from this workshop **that will make a difference**; maybe saying no without guilt, using the Four N's grid, or scheduling proper 'me time', and make that your first step. When that's embedded, move to the next.

Tiny actions, repeated consistently, create real improvement. That's how you go from knowing how to manage stress to living the change.

What will I start doing, stop doing, or do more of to make sure I feel better supported?

1.

## Final Reflection: What's Your First Step?

Writing down one small, realistic change to make this week can have a meaningful, positive impact on your wellbeing. Remember, start with a small step, nothing dramatic, just something you'll actually stick with and that will give you a good foundation to build on. Progress beats perfection, every single time.



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