

10 golden rules of mental health wellbeing

1. **Sweat the small stuff.** Every time you work 30 minutes too long, or you forego the gym or a drink with a friend, it's another step towards the point of no return. Respect the fact that there need to be limits and lines - in other words, where work stops and life starts. It's easy to dismiss small stuff as unimportant, but it adds up and becomes the big stuff.
2. **Know your work flow.** Teaching is naturally a work-intense profession, and there will always be points that are more intense than others. However, if you know you're doing an assessment with one class, you can plan to dial it back and do something less intense with another class, or even rely on self- or peer-assessment (as long as it's done thoroughly).
3. **Know your outlets.** There will be people around the school that may be able to take some of the strain from you. Planning in advance and getting requests into reprographics is important, as well as focusing time on your resources that will give you plenty of payback in terms of value and re-usability.
4. **Pause.** Where you can, try to catch yourself having thoughts which might feel overwhelming. Even just noticing is fundamental. Once you notice, you create the space and the distance from the thought so it can become less harmful. Over time, the intensity of negative experience will lessen.
5. **Be you.** Remember, you are you, and not just a teacher. Give yourself the time and space to be that person outside of the building - the key is to create the space to 'decompress' and experience life outside of the cauldron. Having experienced it myself, staying in the cauldron only makes things worse.
6. **Confide in people.** Schools are stressful. But they are also invariably full of like-minded people, many of which you might not expect to be like-minded. Supporting and being compassionate to others has a psychological basis in terms of promoting wellbeing.
7. **Watch your food.** Medicine isn't just paracetamol! It's easy to reach for the quick-fix biscuits in the staffroom to sustain some kind of feeling of energy. The problem is that people often end up chasing the feeling and not fuelling with food that will keep them feeling sustained.
8. **Watch your exercise.** One feeling to chase is the buzz after exercise. Tension is released physically and emotionally when we exercise, which forms part of the wider variety in our lives to help avoid the trap of constant stress.
9. **Practise joy and gratitude.** Six months ago, if someone had told me to practise gratitude, I'd have laughed at them. But now, when I'm feeling low in the morning, I hold my hands to my chest and force myself to think of 10 things I'm looking forward to that day, however trivial. It changes the narrative in my mind, and it works!
10. **Be compassionate.** The current education system interacts with our psychology to make us stressed, and it stops us from doing the very thing which can help - being kind to ourselves and others. Stop yourself from dismissing your own anxieties and worries, as well as that of others. Over time, you'll notice a change in how you feel.