



Strategies to Support a Positive School Climate

Coping and Support

Within the workplace, stress is defined as a change in physical or mental responses due to conditions that are perceived to be challenging or threatening (Colligan & Higgins, 2006). While coping entails the cognitions and behaviours used to manage situations that are interpreted as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). School leadership can play a role in helping staff learn about the effects of stress and how to effectively cope with stressors in their daily lives.



Why is it important?

- Educators deal with a wide variety of stressors daily, including job demands, student behaviour, role conflict and ambiguity (van Veldhoven, 1996).
- In comparison to other working adults, teachers experience more work-related stress, burnout, and poorer mental health (Johnson et al., 2005).
- Burnout is characterized by a chronic state of exhaustion from prolonged periods of stress, particularly in the workplace, and can negatively impact both job performance and health (Maslach et al., 2001).
- Teacher burnout can negatively impact student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016).

In Practice

Job-related stress is a result of the multi-faceted and highly demanding nature of jobs in education. School leaders can help staff cope with stress by offering ongoing support and strategies to manage stress.



What can schools do?

Schools can take the following proactive steps to establish a supportive work environment for employees:

- Foster an environment that supports staff health and well-being by providing opportunities for employees to participate in mental health and wellness workshops.
- Ensure that staff are well positioned to recognize the warning signs of burnout and can access mental health services when needed.
- Establish and maintain open communication with staff to help them identify underlying stressors.
- Make room for autonomy in the workplace by giving staff greater choice in how they conduct their work, thereby reducing stress and enhancing productivity.
- Regularly acknowledge staff efforts and achievements through various means, both formal and informal, to boost perceptions of efficacy to support well-being.
- Reduce workload by building planning time into work schedules to accommodate administrative tasks and, where teaching staff are concerned, lesson planning.



Leader Reflection

School leaders should strive to develop a work culture that helps staff cope with daily stressors. This can be achieved by:

- Encouraging self-care and stress management through a range of activities and training sessions, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Building out regular breaks within the workday to give staff moments to decompress and destress.
- Facilitating regular check-ins with staff to ensure they feel supported in their day-to-day responsibilities and with general concerns.
- Building perceptions of competence and efficacy by enhancing job-related skills (e.g., opportunities for professional development).
- Using online survey tools designed to gather formal feedback related to staff concerns (e.g., OurSCHOOL survey).

References

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