



Unwinding after a busy year

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For many educators, the first few weeks of summer can be very unsettling, especially after a

challenging year.

The pace required to be an effective and impactful educator while also managing all the invisible labour outside of your profession is exhausting. It is no surprise educators share with me they don't know how to relax!

My friends, you are not alone.

When busy has become your normative way of living your life, winding down is hard. Often once you stop moving and doing, you are hit with wall of emotions. It is actually easier to just keep going versus trying to navigate the emotional tsunami when you are already depleted.



The lead up to the summer season feels like an emotional roller coaster! You've successfully navigated new and changing guidelines. You've fostered a safe learning environment for students yet didn't know if you would have to pivot at any moment. You showed up in every area of your role, preparing lesson plans, teaching, grading, communicating with parents, consoling, mediating, and helping raise our future generations while also knowing fully well you are running the risk of burning yourself out. While returning to many positives this year like the return of assemblies, extra-curricular activities, and field trips may have offered some opportunities for flexibility, it once again created more work on an already full 'to-do-list'!

Then, comes that last day of class. You have to say goodbye to a community you have spent a year tending to and nurturing, every single day. One of my former students who is now a JK teacher said to me, 'You never prepared me for hard it was going to say good-bye to my class at the end of the year. They are like my family'. I explained to my dear student, 'Nothing prepares you for good-byes – ever'.

With the constant hypervigilance of last few years, stress and uncertainty have been constant. And now summer is here, so let's hurry up and rest!

No pressure, right?

For some, winding down is immediate. You may spend a week or so tidying up, preparing for next year, and then you're in vacation mode! For others, you may still feel the hypervigilance – a sense of waiting for bells, alarms, emails, notifications, and still feeling alert to all of the responsibilities you've been accustomed to these last 10 months. For these folks, it may take a few weeks to settle. We are now mid-summer, and many have reached out asking for support on this front. So, for those who asked, this resource is for you and for those who didn't ask but somehow found your way here, I am so glad you did.

In this article we'll offer some strategies to promote a sense of winding down and active recovery from a stressful season.

TIPS FOR ACTIVE

The word "rest." is written in a cursive, handwritten style in an orange color. It is positioned to the right of the "TIPS FOR ACTIVE" header, with a horizontal line extending from the end of the word.

In their book, "Burnout: The secret to unlocking the stress cycle", sisters Amelia and Emily Nagoski describe active rest as "working one gear while resting the others." This concept is popular in exercise and fitness – having a rest day doesn't mean you're not still working, but rather you might be using different muscles in a less intense way. We can think of our emotional and cognitive capacities in the same way. Active rest still involves using your brain and engaging with emotions, but perhaps using them in different ways, for example reconnecting with friends or family, or reading a book for pleasure.

GO BACK TO THE BASICS.

Rest and recovery are about basic wellness principles. Taking care of these areas helps us maintain our physical health, regulate our emotions, and live a good life!

Sleep:

Ideally 7-9 hours of uninterrupted sleep. Some folks might find they need more than this, or find they need a short nap during the day to help recover from the academic year. If you feel unrested after 9 hours of sleep on a regular basis, it may be worthwhile to check in with a health care provider.

Eat:

Find nutritious food and eat regularly. Indulge, of course, in moderation!

Move:

Movement and exercise are one way our brains and bodies make sense of stress. Running away from stressors and the relief after running is what your body understands. Engage in safe movement that increases your heart rate.

Connect:

Extra-curriculars, report cards, and other commitments during the academic year may have made it more difficult to connect with loved ones. Reconnect with your sense of belonging and those who support you.

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

(and be honest!)

Give yourself a score from 0-10 on the eight dimensions of wellness. How well are you showing up in each area? Recognize what's working well and what is not working so well. The idea isn't to have 10/10 in each dimension – it's just not realistic and not sustainable all the time. There are some times you may have 10 in some areas, 2 in others, or 5s across the board.

Emotional health

How well are you paying attention to and regulating your emotions?

Physical health

How well are you taking care of your body (sleep, food, movement, paying attention to aches/pains)?

Social wellness

How well connected are you feeling to the people that matter to you?

Environmental wellness

How is the space around you impacting your overall health or sense of feeling OK?

Occupational wellness

How satisfied are you with your sense of fulfillment from your current career or volunteer opportunities?

Financial wellness

How secure are you feeling with your present and future financial situation?

Spiritual wellness

How connected are you to a sense of meaning, purpose, or something larger than yourself?

Intellectual wellness

How stimulated are you? How are you satisfying curiosity, creativity and personal growth?

CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

(and be honest!)

Based on your responses, what dimension might need some attention first? I truly believe that self-awareness is key here. When you see what needs some extra support, explore options gently and kindly. As I often share, you cannot hate yourself healthy. You cannot not shame your way out of feeling bad. Just like how our students who need the most support tend to ask for it in the worst ways, our misbehaviours are telling us something. We don't need to judge ourselves. Notice, compassionately when there is a gap between your values and your actions. Start there.

Check in with yourself throughout the summer as your needs and goals change.



TRY SELF-COMPASSION

You may have high expectations of yourself and ambitious plans for summer. Yet, you may need some time to rest, sleep later, eat more, and not feel very productive. Ask yourself what you might tell a friend who has been through the same experiences you have. Self-compassion is treating yourself as you would a dear friend – being gentle with yourself when you might need it, and acknowledging you are a person with needs and limitations.

RECOGNIZE IF YOU'RE MOVING BACK INTO BUSY-NESS

Doing what is familiar is sometimes the easy choice. Throughout the summer, you may find yourself moving back into a state of busy-ness, filling your schedule, or saying “yes” to everything. Make note of feelings of overwhelm, stress, or alertness and pay attention to them. Emotions are vital tools; they may be telling you that you’re taking on too much. You may even have to say to yourself: “It’s OK. You can slow down now.”

It's OK. You can

slow down

now.



BURNOUT

Burnout was originally identified in the 1970s in the helping professions.
It's characterized by three symptoms:

EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION

CYNICISM

A SENSE OF PERSONAL INEFFECTACY

The remedy for burnout is rest. Dr. Steven Kotler recommends active brain recovery which shifts brainwaves into the alpha range.

This is achieved through interruption of our routine and demands.

We need to rest.

Active brain recovery happens through sleep, self-care, and total rest.

Self-care may be physical, mental, and/or spiritual.

If you've been approaching or experiencing burnout this academic year, summer provides an opportunity for this disruption of routine.

PLANNING YOUR SUMMER

Big Picture Planning

Summer goes by quickly. When making summer plans, zoom out from the daily or weekly schedule to see the big picture. Have you left time for rest, unforeseen circumstances and last minute fun? For example, if you plan to clean up your classroom, take or teach a summer course, go away for two weeks, paint a room in your house, and prepare your classroom for next year...there might not be time for anything else.

Decide What Matters Most

What is it that you value most about the summer months? Is it connecting with others, time alone, rest, family time, travel, or some other goals you're working toward? Decide what matters most to you this summer and make this the priority. I also recommend picking a theme word for your summer. Perhaps something that EASE, STEADY, GENTLE, or SOFTNESS, and then when you are planning your day, ensure there is something related to your theme in there too!

Building Transition Time

If you have plans to go away, bookend your vacation with time. Leave a day or two at either end to prepare, pack, rest, think, unpack, and unwind. For example, resist the urge to leave for vacation the day after you get back from a weekend tournament with your kids.

DAILY PRACTICES TO SUPPORT

Active Recovery.

● Bookend each day: Begin and end your day with something you enjoy or find worthwhile. Pre-load your self-care at the beginning of the day, intentionally. Listen to what your mind, body and/or spirit need. Then at the end of the day, choose a way to unwind and prepare your body for rest.

● Notice what went well and why: We are critically attuned to negativity, especially during uncertain and stressful seasons. Keeping attuned to negative events and threats keeps us safe, but it can easily slip into overdrive. Dr. Martin Seligman suggests a daily practice of naming what went well and why. Each day, take note of what went well and why it went well. This small practice helps us tune into the positive elements of our day.

● Breathe: Our breath is a built-in mechanism our body has to support emotion regulation and restore calm. In your mind, call up your favourite cake with lots of candles. Take a breath in, and blow out every last candle slowly. Slow breath is a signal to our bodies that we're safe.

● Move: Physical activity is the most efficient way for your body to make sense of stress. Physical activity can look different depending on the person. It may be walking the dog, playing pickle ball, going to the gym, swimming with your kids. Find something you enjoy that fits your lifestyle.

● Get outside: The research here is clear. Spending time in nature lowers blood pressure and heart rate, reduces stress hormones, and improves mood and focus.



REFLECTING TOWARDS THE UPCOMING YEAR

... when you're ready!

When you're ready to think about next school year, here are some question to ponder:

What/who contributed to my success this past year?

Why was that important?

How can I use this information to be successful next year?



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ABOUT DR. ROBYNE

Described as one of the most sought-after, engaging, thought-provoking, and truly transformative international speakers and scholars in her field, Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe is a multi-award-winning education and psychology instructor, author, and resiliency expert. She specializes in navigating stress and change, personal wellness in the workplace, and optimal performance. In her speaking and scholarly work, Dr. Robyne offers us accessible and practical strategies grounded in research that helps to foster and cultivate resiliency within ourselves and others.

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