

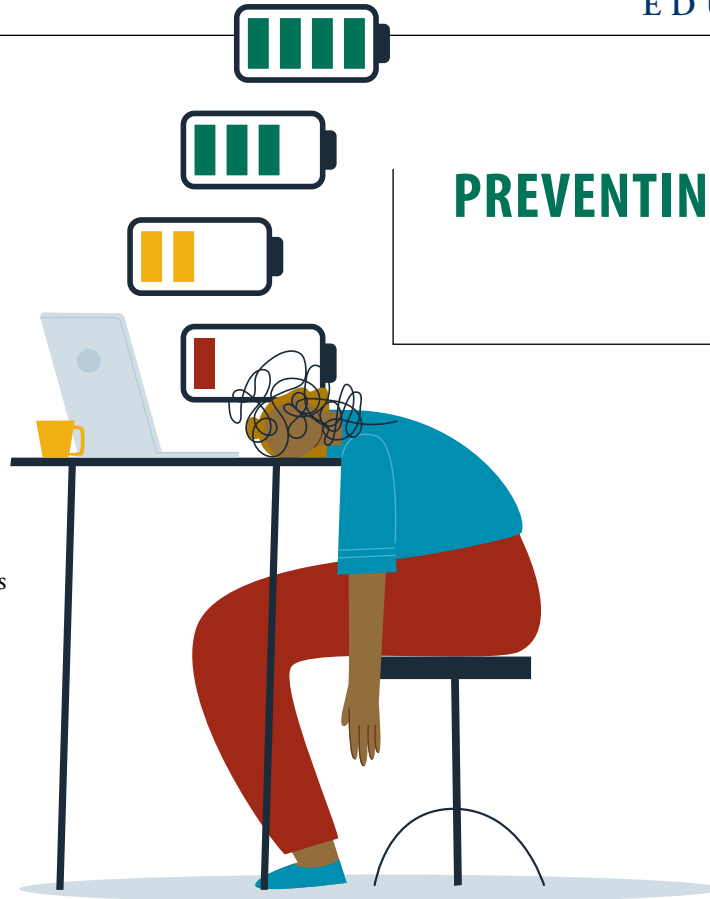
## PREVENTING TEACHER BURNOUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

BY KELLY MATTHEWS

Many animals spend the winter in hibernation, but teachers have no such luxury. After more than three years of pandemic-era pressures, we may wish we could crawl into a cave after the winter holidays and sleep off the toll these years have taken on our bodies and our minds. We have seen students and colleagues pushed to the breaking point by physical and mental health challenges, and those of us who are still in the field may understandably wonder how we will keep going for another year. The risk of burning out is all too real.

During winter, when days are short, students are stressed, and weather can be depressing, avoiding burnout is even more important.

One of my favorite books is *When Teaching Gets Tough: Smart Ways to Reclaim Your Game* by Allen C. Mendler. Teaching has never been tougher than right now. Wisely, Mendler begins his advice with a chapter on attitudes, counseling teachers to stay grounded in the moment — not succumb to worry about the many tomorrows ahead — and to understand that change is a roller-coaster ride.



He then separates into three chapters the main pressure points teachers face: working with students (a pressure we all know well), working with fellow adults (a pressure that usually gets less attention: cooperating with colleagues, administrators, and parents), and making the best of an imperfect school environment. In all three of these arenas, Mendler suggests concrete strategies to focus on the positives in those around us. To create an environment that discourages student misbehaviors, for example, he reminds teachers to use encouraging statements (he helpfully provides a list) at least once per day with even our most difficult students. To offset negativity in our school environment, he suggests identifying our most positive-minded colleagues, and making intentional efforts to spend more time around them. To

address shortages in underfunded school settings, he offers ideas to make the most of available resources, and to generate new ones when possible.

In short, he argues that seeking the strengths in our students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and school environment not only makes us more effective as teachers, it will make us feel better, too.

Perhaps most importantly, Mendler concludes his book with a chapter on taking top-notch care of yourself. Getting enough sleep is a priority, but so is exercise, as well as setting boundaries around your personal time — especially evenings and weekends. The work of teaching, planning, grading, responding to emails, organizing meetings, and filing reports could take up all the hours of every day we're alive. If we don't carve out some time on our own to breathe, read, take a walk with a friend, enjoy a meal, or just sit quietly in a beautiful spot, our energies may too soon burn out, and that would be a loss for our students, ourselves, and the entire teaching profession.



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