**Time management**

As a kindergarten teacher, it can sometimes seem impossible to juggle the day-to-day responsibilities and still have time to even use the restroom. Let's face it; there should be a handbook with time management tips for us! After all, the most valuable resource a teacher has is time: it's the basis to which we engage students in active learning while meeting the goals and objectives set in place by the state. Time also plays a vital role in managing the daily responsibilities in life. Finding that balance between work, family, and one's personal life is difficult.

Working as a teacher requires excellent time management skills. Teachers need to balance the long-term goals of the classroom, the immediate educational needs of the students and the large volume of paperwork that comes with every assignment. Between writing lesson plans, grading exams and actually teaching, teachers often feel that it is impossible to fit everything into the allotted time frame.

Here are some effective tips for teachers to manage time.

**Organize the day by priorities**

Teacher time management must start with setting priorities and organizing the day around the most important tasks. Setting priorities can help keep teachers on track throughout the day, even when the unexpected occurs and the workload can seem overwhelming.

Effective prioritizing is about arranging workload based on both the importance of the tasks as well the resulting impact of the completed tasks. Teachers must be able to assess whether projects can be put on hold if the outcomes are not as impactful as others.

Priorities are not as black and white as “putting math and English first and getting to arts projects if time avails.” This kind of thinking can lead to class burnout–for both teachers and students. Within certain contexts, an impactful art or outdoor activity can be just as stimulating as academic lesson plans.

 **Strategically plan homework assignments**

Both teachers and students may find that assignments that require repetitive practice is better suited for the home environment. Although in-class practice helps when framing and structuring problems, repetitive practice during class may not be the best use of time. Assignments that simply ask students to complete a set number of problems for practice unnecessarily consume valuable class time.

 **Avoid “loaded” procrastination**

According to Pinell, teachers find it more efficient to break up grading materials into small groups that are graded each day than to work on grading the work of the entire class on the same day. Avoid piling on loads of grading assignments, and try to knock out batches at a time. A small pile each day is easier to manage and allows a teacher to properly evaluate the assignment and offer feedback to students. Teachers can experience a sense of accomplishment from each completed batch.

**Plan for potential crises**

It is better to plan ahead for potential problems before facing them in the classroom, as urgent crises can distract teachers from their goals within the classroom. Although some problems have limited options, such as natural disasters, teachers can plan around the needs of students. A crisis that relates to student behavior is better to avoid or handle before it reaches the peak to avoid wasting class time. By learning about students before they enter the classroom, teachers can create a plan of action to avoid triggers and stop distractions early.

**Set aside personal time**

A teacher has many tasks that require attention and often focuses on the needs of students and their parents. Although it is tempting to put more time into grading, feedback and managing student needs, it is also important to set aside personal time to keep the priorities in proper perspective.

Prioritizing time for personal needs is necessary to effectively implement and execute the plans for educating students. When teachers are exhausted due to lack of personal care and time, it is possible that the classroom becomes less effective and efficient. Implementing time-saving plans only works when a teacher is energetic, healthy and refreshed.

**Leave Work at School**

For my first year as a kindergarten teacher, I didn't have a personal life. As a 22-year-old teacher, fresh out of college, I was eager to get started. It was my first "big" paycheck, and I had so many ideas of what I wanted to do in my classroom.

However, the reality of time management sunk in. I found myself feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and frustrated at the number of hours I spent at school on the weekends planning lessons, learning the curriculum, and prepping for the next week's activities.

Thankfully, I had a fantastic mentor who guided, supported, and cared for me. She taught me the importance of leaving work at school and using my time wisely during my planning and lunch period. For prospective teachers, surround yourself with people who will provide support, guidance, and strength during the overwhelming times of your first year of teaching. Devote time to yourself and prioritize what matters the most to you and what will have the biggest impact on your students. As a kindergarten teacher, you work hard and deserve time for yourself!

**Use Planning Time Wisely**

From experience, I know how easy it can be to start talking to your colleagues during planning time. But you'd be surprised at how much you can accomplish in a short amount of time if you use that time wisely. Here are a few tips to help you make the most of your planning period.

* Shut your door so colleagues are less likely to enter your classroom to spark a conversation.
* Position your desk so you cannot easily be seen from the door.
* Make a checklist of the things you'd like to accomplish during your planning time and before you leave school.
* Work outside your classroom in an isolated location in the school. Teachers will be less likely to bother you if they can't find you!

**Keep Lessons Simple**

As teachers, we often think that every single lesson needs to be a masterpiece and that we should always go above and beyond. Although it's important to keep our students engaged and on their toes, planning a simple and fun lesson can be just as effective. For instance, I have my students pretend they're getting on a boat to represent addition and subtraction problems. This is a great way for students to use their imagination and focus on the concept of addition and subtraction.

I do have two classroom transformations that I go above and beyond for my students. These two lessons include a punctuation police headquarters classroom transformation and my spy headquarters classroom transformation. You can use these ideas as inspiration but go for a simpler approach.

**Get Organized**

Staying organized is key to a great school year. We often spend too much time looking for supplies or papers. However, it's never too late to get organized! Are you ready to take your classroom organization to the next level, or are you just starting to feel like your school supplies are caving in on you? I've been there! Take the time to get things in order and you'll be thankful you did.

Here are some of my tried-and-true organizational tips for keeping your classroom and files organized:

* File your content by theme, subject, or month.
* Always organize materials for the following day prior to leaving school.
* Designate bins for each day of the week and sort your papers in each bin according to your lesson plans.
* Surround yourself with people who keep you focused and organized.

**Focus on Today**

As teachers, it's easy to get caught up in what didn't go well in a lesson or how things could have gone differently. Although it's important to reflect on our teaching, it's equally important to keep moving forward. Every day is a new day, so embrace it and allow your students to explore, discover, and investigate the world.

By [Chad Boender, Kindergarten Teacher, M.A.Ed.](https://www.wgu.edu/heyteach/article/5-time-management-tips-for-kindergarten-teachers1810.html)





**Stress management techniques**

**Breathe (properly)**

The classroom can cause sensory overload. Before you know it, your heart rate starts to climb, you break out into a sweat, and your mind races. In these situations, the most effective first step you can take is to breathe deeply. Ok, so it’s not exactly the newest technique, and it sounds like it might be too simple, right? The [Navy SEALs don’t think so](https://www.amazon.com/Navy-SEAL-Mental-Toughness-Developing/dp/1534875719/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1483553483&sr=8-1&keywords=navy+seals+mental+toughness), and they know a thing or two about stress. SEALs are trained in the “4 x 4 breathing” technique, which helps them lower their physical stress response and regain control. When you’re experiencing intense levels of stress, breathe in deeply (put your hands on your stomach and feel it expand out), for four seconds, then exhale evenly for four seconds. Keep this up for 2-3 minutes for maximum effect.

**Embrace the stress**

To modify Henry Ford’s famous phrase: whether you think stress is positive, or you think it’s negative, you’re right. According to health psychologist Kelly McGonigal, [viewing your stress in constructive ways](https://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend)will actually cause your body to respond to it differently and prevent long-lasting physical damage. By contrast, those who express negative attitudes toward stress face a range of negative health outcomes similar to those caused by smoking. So how do you change your outlook on stress? McGonigal suggests reframing changes in heart rate, and other stress-induced physical symptoms, with phrases like, “This is my body helping me rise to this challenge.”

**Be imperfect**

Over the course of a decades-long career in which she has interviewed thousands of people as an academic researcher, Brené Brown [has discovered](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability)that those who are overly stressed and unhappy often share the same trait: they believe that they need to be someone better than who they currently are. As a result, the current cohort of working adults is the most overweight, addicted, and indebted in history. Teachers are often prone to perfectionism and its ill effects: they often feel that they aren’t doing enough, or that their mistakes are magnified because of the importance of their job. If you find yourself feeling this way, fight back. The fact is, you’re already “enough” and you deserve love and credit. Don’t forget that.

**Practice emotional first aid**

Do you beat yourself up when you experience failure or make a mistake? Psychologist [Guy Winch has analogy for this:](https://www.ted.com/talks/guy_winch_why_we_all_need_to_practice_emotional_first_aid)it would be like getting a cut and finding ways to make the wound worse. We don’t do that when we experience physical pain, so why do we ruminate on mistakes and deepen the wound when the pain is emotional? If you find yourself taking your classroom work home with you, Winch advises finding ways to break the negative patterns of thought. A two-minute distraction is sometimes all that is needed to avoid digging yourself into an emotional rut.

**Be grateful**

This isn’t about delusion, or forcing yourself to be grateful for things that are clearly negative, but rather a determination to see the opportunity present in each moment to move in a new direction. Benedictine monk David Steindl-Rast, in his [TED Talk on how to cultivate gratitude,](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_steindl_rast_want_to_be_happy_be_grateful)offers a simple formula: “Stop, look, go.” We have to stop, quiet our minds, and create “stop signs”—little reminders of things that we should be grateful for every day. By “look,” he means open all of your senses and enjoy life simply. “Go” means moving forward and taking advantage of what life offers you moment by moment.

**Limit “grass is greener” thinking**

In the words of Robert Fulghum, author of “[All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten](https://www.amazon.com/Really-Need-Know-Learned-Kindergarten/dp/034546639X/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1483553999&sr=8-1&keywords=All+I+Really+Need+to+Know+I+Learned+in+Kindergarten),” “The grass is greenest where it is watered.” It’s not always what you want to hear when you’re having a tough day, but the reality is that you will have challenges anywhere you go.

**Work smarter, not harder**

It's easy to confuse feelings of exhaustion and burn-out with hard work. Working hard, and doing good work, does NOT have to leave you [feeling depleted and on-edge](http://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/10-reasons-you-have-to-stop-working-so-hard.html). Find ways to delegate some of your work, or invest in tools or technologies that will make your life easier.

**Ask for help**

Yes, it’s [ok to do this](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/new-chapter/200908/the-courage-ask-help). No matter how long you’ve been teaching, or how brilliant you are, there will be times when you need help, plain and simple. Asking for help doesn’t make you weaker, it makes you better at your job.

**Make a connection**

According to Kelly McGonigal’s [research](http://kellymcgonigal.com/books/), when you connect with another person, your body produces oxytocin, which is a chemical that helps repair the heart. And you don’t even have to be on the receiving end: reaching out to help someone else produces the same effect. Teachers already devote much of their time to this, but it’s important to cultivate relationships with colleagues, neighbors, and friends as well. McGonigal's research shows that major stressful life events are generally strongly linked with negative health outcomes, except for those who reported caring for others, who experienced NO such effects. If you help your neighbors, family, etc., you’re much less likely to experience the negative effects of stress.

By Chris Mumford MA Science education

