Almost 50% of teachers leave the profession within their first five years. Stress in its many guises is likely an important factor in this attrition rate. Stress can also negatively impact job satisfaction and overall quality of life for many teaching professionals. What is teacher stress and what can be done about it?

In this presentation you’ll find out what research says and what practicing teachers have experienced. We think you’ll find ways to help you or someone you know cope with stress and improve teacher

The demand for teachers in education is growing. Initiatives to reduce class size, imminent retirement plans for the baby boomer generation, and a novice teacher attrition rate of almost 50% are some factors that account for the 2 million teaching positions that will need to be filled this decade. (33; 45).

New teachers in particular are vulnerable to feelings of stress. New educators, as all new professionals, are affected by inexperience and unrealistic expectations. Compounding these feelings are the daily, unceasing demands of the classroom and the lack of systematic, targeted support. Novice teachers are expected to take full responsibility for their classrooms from the first day of school (26; 40; 51). This “sink or swim” situation is often in stark contrast to their pre-service training, where they were in another professional’s classroom with constant guidance and supervision (14; 51).

Add to this the fact that a brand new teacher usually is expected to perform the same teaching responsibilities as more experienced colleagues (14).

Novice teachers often consider the job an intimidating, and sometimes insurmountable, challenge. They report feeling overwhelmed by the multiple demands placed upon them and their lack of experience in dealing with these new tasks (48). The first year of teaching, in particular, presents a steep learning curve for new educators and accounts for high stress (48;57), burnout (60) and high attrition rates among this population (33; 45).

A useful way of conceptualizing the feelings experienced during that first year of teaching is to view them as a series of phases (50).
Anticipation stage – This is how one feels just prior to entering the classroom or during the first few weeks of teaching. This stage is characterized by the excitement, anxiety, and romanticism a new teacher feels about the profession.

Survival phase – During this stage the novice teacher is overwhelmed by the problems of the classroom. The focus is on the day-to-day routines, lesson plan preparation, behavior management, and familiarization with the curriculum, leaving little time for reflection or critical analysis.

Disillusionment stage – After being on the job for several months, the novice’s focus is still on classroom management issues. Novice teachers at this stage may also begin to question their commitment and competence as a teacher. This is the time when there is a critical need for intervention, which could take the form of mentoring or other strategies for dealing with the situation.

Rejuvenation stage – During this stage the novice teacher gains an understanding of the education system and the realities of teaching. The novice implements coping strategies to prevent, reduce, or manage problems. The focus is now on long-term planning and curriculum development.

Reflection – At this stage, the novice teacher reflects on the school year or semester and begins planning for the next.

Anticipation – A feeling of excitement takes hold as the teacher faces the new school year or new teaching assignment.

If the needs of beginning teachers aren’t met, and the sources of their struggles not addressed, they may become part of the 50% who leave the profession within the first 5 years. If assistance is not provided or if teachers cannot find appropriate coping strategies, they can become trapped at the survival or disillusionment stage. They may not be able to move on to the stages of Rejuvenation or Reflection. Recognizing the stages beginning teachers go through allows for the development of programs and identification of strategies to assist growth.

Although the model depicted here was developed specifically to address beginning teachers, it really is applicable to teaching in general. Because of the cyclical nature of the job and the different challenges new classes or teaching assignments can pose, even an experienced teacher may revert to an earlier phase.

In the video inserts we see two experienced teachers whose perceptions of their own competence were tested when they were faced with situations that upset their feelings of control.

Slide 5

At this point, it is useful to consider what the word “stress” means. In common usage, the word “stress” has negative connotations. But what is the psychological definition of the word? Selye (63) says, “Stress is defined as a state of mental or emotional tension due to involvement in adverse and demanding situations.”
Stress is not inherently “bad.” Nor is lack of stress “good.” Rather, it is a lack of balance that negatively affects one’s sense of well-being (54; 55).

**Slide 6**

Everyone experiences stress of some kind. Moderate to severe levels of stress are recognizable in people through various physiological and behavioral indicators (29; 32). These stressful feelings come about as the result of too many risk factors and too few protective factors. Risk factors include difficult personal, familial, occupational, and contextual situations or attributes (54; 55).

Protective factors, on the other hand, consist of positive personal or situational attributes. High emotional intelligence has been cited as a personal protective factor (25). A situational protective factor could be an empathetic school principal.

States of both insufficient and excessive stress can negatively impact a person’s mental and physical welfare (31). In other words, too little stress and the person may not be motivated to achieve. Too much stress and the person may find it difficult or even impossible to achieve. Well-being results when there is a balance (10; 38; 54; 55). As you can see in this diagram, when there is a balance between protective factors and risk factors, the result is a sense of well-being.

Stress also has been categorized either as positive, “eustress,” or negative, “distress” (63).

Let’s look at the contrast between these two kinds of stress.

**Slide 7**

In this diagram, eustress and distress are contrasted. Selye (63) conceived of stress as either positive or negative. A state of eustress, or positive stress, is achieved when a person is able to view the work to be done as achievable. Eustress gives one drive, energy, and enthusiasm. It acts as a motivator and increases the ability to be successful if one has the means and time to contribute to the work.

In contrast, when a person feels that what needs to be done is unrealistic, negative stress, or distress, is experienced (63). Distress occurs when there is an imbalance between what is realistic and what needs to be done. Distress can adversely impact a person’s mental and physical welfare. Under the right conditions, a sense of anticipation and excitement can increase the ability to be successful. But, maintaining that state too long can be unhealthy, especially if conditions for a positive outcome are lacking.

To apply this construct to the diagram on phases of teaching presented earlier, support interventions and mentoring can help teachers move from the Disillusionment Phase to Rejuvenation.

But if stress can be positive, how does one recognize when the balance is shifting? In other words, what are some signs of distress?
Physical symptoms are often the first signs of distress. These physiological signs of stress are associated with an emergency reaction, a fight or flight response, which can be experienced through symptoms such as: excessive perspiration, an increase in blood pressure, rapid heart palpitations, dilation of the pupils, difficulty in swallowing, and chest tension (32). Other physiological indications of stress include excessive fatigue, changes in eating habits, sadness and crying, increases in smoking, drinking or other drug use, and difficulty falling or staying asleep (29). In the video clip included with this slide, you’ll hear a teacher talking about how she felt during the first days of school.

Sometimes excessive stress can alter a person’s behavior. It is useful to recognize these kinds of behavior alterations so that one can be alert to the need for positive intervention.

Humphrey and Humphrey (32) classify the alteration of behavior due to stress into three categories: counter, dysfunctional, and overt behavior.

Counter behavior is characterized by defensiveness. It may elicit reactions such as crankiness, irritability, angry interactions with others, withdrawal from friends, family, or colleagues, touchiness, and heightened sensitivity (29; 31; 32). In the video clip, you’ll see a teacher who, after recognizing counter behavior symptoms in herself, found a solution.

Dysfunctional behavior impairs functioning to the degree that skill performance is decreased and perceptions of situations are distorted (32). This type of behavior can be expressed through increased anxiety and nervousness, difficulty in concentration and decision-making and excessive self-criticism (31).

The teacher in the video insert here, a relatively new career changer, was able to recognize that he had lost confidence in his teaching ability when he was assigned to a new grade. He was feeling highly anxious and, although he realized he should be planning his time, felt unable to utilize time management strategies. He came to realize that he needed to relearn and reorient himself to restore his confidence.

Overt behavior involves expressive actions in direct response to feelings of stress. There is either inactivity or excessive activity (31; 32). There may be physical manifestations such as tics, twitches or skin flushing. In the accompanying video clip, the teacher, who is also a fairly recent career changer, talks about her perfectionist tendencies and how she came home from school so exhausted that she just wanted to eat and go to sleep.
So far we have discussed physiological signs of stress and behavioral changes due to stress. It is important also to recognize possible sources of stress. By recognizing where risk factors exist, we can take preventive action.

What conditions or situations have the potential to cause or exacerbate feelings of stress? Are there strategies to reduce the likelihood of adverse responses to these stressful conditions? Stress and teacher burnout are complex issues; there are a number of theoretical models and competing research results that attempt to address the how and why of prevention. (8; 64).

People who are faced with the demands of a teaching career are exposed to a number of situations which can cause stress. Stress may arise from within one’s self, from various outside sources, or from a combination of internal and external factors (7; 52; 54; 64). It can be useful, however, to examine separately various potential sources of stress. The risk factors inherent in these sources can interfere with a teacher’s growth and well-being. They can elicit job-related anxiety for teachers, novice teachers in particular (62).

We’ll explore these sources of stress in the slides that follow and provide some suggestions for prevention, intervention, and amelioration. The first source we’ll look at relates to personal factors.

**Slide 14**

**Personal risk factors** involve concerns related to self-esteem, personal goals, changing values, social needs, personal competence, and abilities (32).

Personality traits may influence how effectively an individual can utilize specific coping strategies. There have been hundreds of studies done in this area, yet the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies is still not fully understood (7). Nevertheless, it is useful to be aware of possible risk factors and outcomes related to one’s “self.” This awareness may help you understand and manage stress.

A feeling of isolation or alienation can occur because there is not enough time in a typical teaching schedule to build good working relationships with others (31). It may also arise from an unwillingness to share difficulties or frustrations with colleagues (66). Isolationist tendencies are particularly hazardous for novice teachers because they can induce feelings of helplessness (31). The teacher in the video clip describes her feelings of isolation because support from colleagues was unavailable to her.

Closely related to isolation is alienation, which distorts perceptions of value and meaning in one’s daily activities. Alienation can arise from the gap between what one expects from a career and what one actually experiences. This discrepancy can precipitate feelings of powerlessness, (12).

When teachers start their career with unrealistic expectations, stress is a likely result if goals are not attained (22; 66). These stressful feelings are stronger for perfectionists, who invest fully in each task and expect to be thoroughly competent. When challenges can’t be overcome immediately, perfectionist traits can lead to self-punishment. Conversely, under-utilization of one’s abilities, misdirection of career skills, or the setting of goals at excessively low levels can exacerbate feelings of personal and career-based unfulfillment (31).
A feeling of inadequate classroom management skills is also a common source of personal stress for beginning instructors (66). In fact, classroom management is often cited by teachers as a major reason for leaving the teaching profession (2; 65; 58). Preservice and beginning educators often complain that they feel inadequately prepared to handle classroom management and student behavior issues (65). New teachers often describe their initial attempts to manage the classroom environment as a “reality shock” (68). The APA, in recognition of this issue, has developed computerized classroom management modules that provide useful information and ideas for coping with these problems.


Novice teachers assume the same teaching responsibilities as more experienced colleagues when they enter the profession (14). Novice teachers need to learn how to make smooth transitions between activities and maintain momentum during lessons (10; 44). Yet, these are skills solely developed through practice in the classroom, and they may be challenging for new instructors. As a result, some novice teachers rely on their own childhood school experiences instead of using instructional strategies learned in teacher preparation programs (58). As a result, they often feel overwhelmed by multiple demands and their inexperience in appropriate time management to deal with these new tasks (12; 48).

Given the many possible sources of stress, it is not surprising that many novice instructors find it difficult to separate their teaching persona from their home-life identity. New teachers in particular need to find a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. An example of this relates to emotional attachments to students and feelings of affection for one’s pupils. Of course you must care about your students, but instructors who become too emotionally attached may find daily teaching demands excessively draining (31).

Personal risk factors may lead to feelings of low self-esteem, low-morale, and reduced personal competence, compounding factors that further increase perceived levels of stress.

Slide 15, 16, 17

When a teacher is personally stressed, these feelings often stem from a sense of isolation or incompetence brought about by a lack of support from colleagues or supervisors. Teachers can help to resolve personal stress by reaching out to others for support. You can look into your personal habits for solutions, but you should also ask others in your professional or personal life for assistance. Research findings (11; 41) and suggestions from successful teachers can light the way.

Rather than be daunted by all the possible areas of stress, it is helpful to put them into “chunks.” The first chunk we’ll focus on is physical health. It’s all too easy to forget about this area in the early days of teaching when there are so many demands on one’s time. Nevertheless, it’s still vitally important to get enough rest, to exercise and eat nutritiously, to make time for leisure activities, and to care for one’s voice and general physical well-being. In the accompanying video clip, the teacher talks about her solutions to the issue of personal stress.

The next area of focus is emotional health; some might include spiritual practices. Just as we monitor the gas level in our cars, it’s important also to monitor our level of emotional well-being. Some find that relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation are helpful; some write affirmations to themselves; others may cope with personal stress by seeing the humor in the situation. But if the emotional gas tank
is running dry, that may be the time to seek counseling. The teacher in this clip is using affirmations to deal with the stress he experienced when he first became a teacher.

Good psychological health practices also are important in alleviating personal stress. The teacher in the video is pausing to recognize that she’s done a good job with a particular student.

Pacing oneself, taking things with more humor and less unnecessary seriousness, identifying one’s own negative behaviors, systematically desensitizing oneself to unsubstantiated negative feelings -- all are ways to deal with personal stress from a psychological perspective. So is asking for assistance from others. In fact, it is probably a good idea to ask a trusted colleague or mentor for help in sorting out what should be considered less seriously and what might need more attention. In the next section we’ll talk more about interpersonal factors and stress.

Teachers can alleviate personal stress; they have the right to be happy! The recent books by Lyubomirsky (41) and Dweck (11), referenced in the Resources Section, have a number of useful ideas for going beyond mere survival to happiness and success.

**Slide 18**

Interpersonal relationships can be a source of strength. But interpersonal relationships sometimes can be a source of teacher stress as well. Teachers are expected to interact effectively with students, parents, colleagues, and supervisors (51). The principal's administrative style and the attitudes of other teachers are critical in determining the type of teaching experience a beginning educator will have (1; 62).

Another source of stress for many novice teachers arises from what parents believe about their child’s education (58). While novice instructors expect parents to value and appreciate their work, parents often expect that teachers will raise student academic performance, teach their children interpersonal skills, and prevent or solve various social problems their children might have (16).

There is also conflict between what educators expect of parents in terms of discipline, homework support, and reinforcement of school rules. At times, new instructors may be faced with aggressive or irate parents, colleagues, or pupils (31). Situations such as these are difficult to negotiate. Without communication and support from colleagues and administration, novice educators may feel overwhelmed (58). In the video clip at the top of the slide, a veteran teacher talks about the stress she experiences at the beginning of each school year and how she resolves it by connecting with parents.

Professional interaction between novice teachers and professional colleagues, or lack thereof, can also be a significant source of stress. The first year of teaching is the most important occupational phase for beginning teachers (36). Support is vitally important for novice teachers who need guidance with classroom administrative tasks, paperwork, and time management issues (59). When novice teachers don’t receive such guidance, studies show that stress levels are increased, confidence falls, and feelings of isolation develop (49). Miscommunication and resulting denial of novice teachers’ needs and expectations can precipitate feelings of alienation and may ultimately increase the chance that teachers will leave the profession (58; 62).

An important source of significant risk factors for new instructors is interpersonal communication with students. Teachers need to regularly counteract some students’ low motivation or lack of engagement.
Additionally, conflicts with students can arise when rules are broken and teachers need to enforce consequences. Poor student behavior has been cited as the biggest barrier to teachers’ feelings of well-being (31).

A lack of social support or colleague contact may negatively affect beginning teachers. Teachers who are in educational environments that don’t encourage and support socialization may find it very difficult to develop collegial relationships. Similarly, novice teachers with heavy schedules or time management issues may not find the time to socialize with fellow teachers. Both circumstances can cause teachers to spend large amounts of time alone, which can lead to feelings of alienation (31).

In the second video clip, a teacher talks about the stress she feels when the balance is disrupted between the interpersonal demands of home and teaching.

**Slide 19**

**Interpersonal Survival Strategies**

In this slide, we see suggestions for avoiding interpersonal conflict and for coping with such conflict if and when it does arise (31; 32).

To avoid conflict, an awareness of one’s own body language and behavior is essential. The objective is to keep channels of communication open by being attentive, friendly, assertive but not aggressive, and to give and receive feedback.

For example, when dealing with others, try to portray yourself in the best light. Take the time to listen to others with care and to give credit to others when it is due. If you are respectful of others’ feelings and are generally friendly rather than distant, you are less likely to provoke interpersonal conflict.

This does not mean, of course, that you should never express your opinion or discuss problems openly. You should attempt to be assertive, not aggressive when you disagree with a colleague. It’s useful to self-monitor your facial expressions and voice intonation. Sometimes it is the way we say something and not what we are actually saying that can spark interpersonal conflict.

If, despite your best efforts, interpersonal conflict does arise, the overall aim in defusing the situation is to achieve a win-win solution. People can disagree without being disagreeable. In an amicable resolution to interpersonal conflict, both parties should feel satisfied with the outcome. The objective is not to become the clear winner. This only breeds further resentment and sets the stage for continuing conflict.

Each should state the situation from a personal perspective, give reasons for wanting consensus, and offer possible solutions. It is helpful to restate the other person’s point of view to ensure that you understand fully what has prompted the conflict.

In the school environment, be wary of people who seem to enjoy conflict, like know-it-alls, moaners, procrastinators, bullies, complainers, and killjoys. They not only tend to invite conflict, but also seem resistant to resolving it.
Strategies for avoiding or resolving interpersonal conflict do not apply only to colleagues. Sometimes a teacher can unwittingly provoke unpleasant interpersonal situations with students. Being aware of this can help a teacher create the kind of environment that prevents unnecessary conflict. In the attached video clip at the top, a teacher tells how she realized that if she showed interest and excitement, then her students did also.

In the second video clip, the teacher uses interpersonal skills he learned in his previous career to resolve student misbehavior issues.

Following this slide, there is a more detailed list of suggestions for avoiding and coping with conflict

**Slides 20, 21, & 23**

There almost certainly is no single recipe for avoiding or coping with interpersonal conflict. Humphrey & Humphrey (32) and Holmes (31), however, have provided some useful ideas. Summarized here are their suggestions, some of which already have been addressed with the previous graphic. It might be appropriate for you, perhaps in a teacher support group, to explore this list and see which items apply to your situation. You may also find Daniel Goleman’s book (25) about “emotional intelligence” a practical guide to understanding interpersonal behavior. His book and other similar resources can be found on the website accompanying this module.

A particularly helpful suggestion relates to the self-modification of behavior. It is recommended that you develop your own plan of intervention, ideally in writing, to avoid conflict by identifying, counting, and changing certain of your behaviors that seem to be leading to conflict situations. You’ll find some practical suggestions for self regulation in Goleman’s book. The resource activities accompanying this module can also assist you in identifying and classifying these behaviors so that you can develop plans to prevent them.

It should be noted that sometimes the prospect of interpersonal conflict is imminent even when no overt hostility is noted. It could be that the “quiet ones” are bottling up resentments that will result in later explosive situations. It might even be that you are one of the “quiet ones” whose coping behaviors will lead eventually to stressful interactions with others. This is why it is important to express your opinions and emotions as appropriate. A beginning teacher should probably discuss with a trusted colleague or mentor how and when to express dissatisfaction or question authority in the workplace. Accurate assessment of the situation with a more experienced professional is recommended. Also, as noted earlier, respectful language and behavior are essential.

**Slide 24**

Another source of stressors for teachers can be found at the organizational level. The actions of the administration, the administrative style of the principal, as well as the school’s organizational climate can have large effects on a teacher’s sense of well-being. (12).

The organizational risk factors shown in the slide can become overwhelming to a person if there is a perceived or actual imbalance between organizational demands and a sense of personal control. There
can also be an imbalance between too many expectations and too few rewards. This tension can create great stress for a person and severely threaten well-being (35; 43; 44; 54).

Studies show that administrative support is an important variable for novice teachers (58). In a study on novice educators, it was found that new instructors expected principals to clearly define good teaching criteria for them, communicate with them on a consistent basis, observe and present feedback about their teaching, and provide general emotional and professional support. In contrast, expectations of principals with new teachers on their staff did not concern interpersonal communication or support. These principals were more concerned that teachers demonstrate a professional attitude and display adequate knowledge of subject areas and classroom management techniques (3). These differing expectations can lead to miscommunication and easily result in further stress in teachers’ lives.

In addition to this lack of understanding, many novice teachers struggle to complete all administrative-based paperwork and often experience excessive workloads. Attempts to maintain accountability and to meet various educational requirements can be intimidating. The demography of the school and its organizational climate may also add to teachers’ feelings of lack of control and lead to a sense of powerlessness (31). Stress levels may rise when teachers are obliged to follow a highly prescriptive curriculum (such as being on a particular lesson on a particular day or reading a prepared instructional script), are inspected regularly without constructive feedback, or are not provided with sufficient classroom resources,

The teacher’s assigned workload and the time needed to complete it may be overwhelming due to job enrichment or expansion reasons (31; 32). In other words, teachers can have numerous additional responsibilities and duties assigned due to a lack of funds and/or personnel. Teachers’ job descriptions are usually constructed in such a way that more thought, work, and time can always be added on (66). Further, in order to avoid falling behind, teachers usually take school-related tasks home, heightening the chance of conflict between school- and home-life.

The ability to finish school-related work in a timely fashion is a skill that usually takes time to develop. For novice teachers, time management challenges are most severe. New teachers struggle to complete as many tasks as possible while learning to adapt to their fast-paced work environment. Other elements in the work environment may very well add to the stress that teachers experience. The physical environment plays a role as well. When needed academic resources aren’t available and classrooms are physically inadequate, the potential for stress is increased (31).

In the video clips, you’ll hear how two teachers addressed the competing organizational demands of home and school.

**Slide 25**

We’ve talked about the sources of risk for stress from a personal perspective, an interpersonal perspective, and now the organizational perspective. At this last level, the risks seem more removed from personal control; consequently, survival strategies may not be readily apparent to an inexperienced teacher. Teachers do learn, however, that with time and experience they can survive organizational risks. In the video clips, teachers talk about how they learned to manage their teaching environment.
A useful way of organizing and managing teaching tasks is to break them down into the three time frames, as depicted here: **before school starts**, **the first days of school**, and **during the school year**.

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**Slide 26**

Before school even starts, for beginning and experienced teachers alike, there are some things that can make the first days of school less stressful. A teacher should become familiar with the school and the neighborhood. Often there are school or district websites that can help a teacher learn important facts about a new assignment. Of course becoming familiar with the school's teacher handbook and the principal’s expectations is essential. Before the students arrive, a teacher should know all about the school's student management policies, curriculum, testing schedules, report card and parent communication guidelines, and procedures for ordering supplies and materials. The room should be made ready for the students and the teacher should organize the environment for easy accessibility and use.

An extremely important teacher survival strategy before school starts is to identify what systems of support and assistance are available. The teacher in this video clip discovered how she could connect with her colleagues in school by first finding collegial support outside of school, including a teacher support network.

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**Slide 27**

Often the help of a friend or significant other can ease the stress of those first days of school, as the teacher in the video explains. For another teacher, the establishment of routines was a critically important survival strategy. Other useful ideas for the first days of the school year are listed here: Prepare a letter to parents to introduce yourself. Complete required paperwork and preliminary lesson plans and short activities for the first week. Establish in-class procedures and complete class rosters, gradebooks, and seating charts. Determine the school activities schedule so that you are certain that your class activities are congruent. Usually the first days of the school year are reserved for teacher preparation and staff development. It’s important to take full advantage of this relatively “free” time before the students arrive.

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**Slide 28, 29, & 30**

This slide looks at organizational survival strategies needed throughout the school year in three segments: administrative, environmental, and skill usage.

The teacher in the first clip is a novice teacher who has learned he needs to pace himself and try one suggestion at a time when dealing with problem students. This is a reference to the first organizational survival strategy listed: Use the “little and often” approach to tackle administrative tasks.

The teacher in the second video clip minimizes the stress potential for herself and her students by the way she organizes the classroom environment. A great deal of organizational stress can be prevented by maximizing the potential of the work and classroom area and by keeping it uncluttered, well cared for,
and as attractive as possible. After all, the teacher and students will spend many hours each day in classrooms.

Sometimes the way to minimize risk factors in the organization is use your skills to become an effective part of the organization as a whole. This may not be possible when a teacher is new and just learning how to survive on the job. There may be a need to become more confident in the basic job responsibilities. There may even be a need to request a shift in one’s assigned tasks. There will come a time, however, when a teacher will have gained sufficient confidence to reach beyond the individual classroom. The teacher in the accompanying video clip experienced a sense of validation when she started participating more in the different activities and committees in school.

In each of these video clips, we see illustrations of teachers who have employed suggestions listed on the slide (42).

Slide 31

Issues and stressors from elements such as job expansion, job enrichment, and accountability have been discussed within other risk factor categories. Another potential stressor is routine or intermittent inspection, which may include direct classroom observation, review of lesson plans, review of teacher produced documents, examination of student progress reports and test scores, as well as other such potentially evaluative observations of a teacher’s work. All these factors can occur not only inside the actual school building, but also originate at the systemic level, distant from the individual teacher. Decisions and mandates from district, state, and federal agencies can strongly influence what happens inside the school and can pose significant risk factors for the self-esteem of individual teachers.

An obvious systemic force relates to funding. Generally, the district, state, and to some extent the federal government, all affect the level of funding for each school. This in turn directly affects the degree to which teachers’ job descriptions are expanded as well as the benefits and salaries that are assigned.

Other systemic teacher stressors include required compliance with educational standards and various accountability measures that influence not only what goes on in the classroom, but also what the responsibilities of the teacher should include (31; 32).

These elements may aggravate feelings of self-doubt and self-criticism in novice teachers, who view these measures as imposed external regulatory mechanisms. Continuous pressure to achieve these standards is a significant contributory stress factor for experienced and novice teachers alike (31).

Another systemic risk factor relates to public perception of the teacher and the teaching profession. Public understanding of what the job entails is often unrealistic. People may feel that generally low levels of compensation are justified because of the school schedule and other job-related factors. While these views are not universal, they can critically undermine teachers’ professional self-esteem, contributing to increased levels of stress (31).

In the references section at the end of this presentation, several excellent, recent books dealing with systemic sources of stress in education are listed (28; 53; 56).

Slide 32, 33, 34, 35, & 36
In this slide, survival strategies for dealing with systemic stress are categorized into four areas: Workload, Sense of Control, Accountability, and Powerlessness (31).

As noted before in this presentation, establishing an appropriate balance between protective factors and risk factors becomes critical if you are going to combat workload stress. Without this balance, long-term productivity will diminish.

With all the external pressures on teachers, it is easy for them to feel they have little or no control over the demands of the job. It’s important to identify the autonomy that you DO have in your work and find appropriate ways to exercise it. For example, by talking to your principal, department head, or other professional colleague, you could find out you have the right to select the ancillary textbooks you want to use, or that you can vary the sequence of your coursework, or take a personal day to attend to pressing non-school issues. Some teachers have found that joining a professional group such as the National Education Association (NEA) or the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) enables them to help shape school policies, not just respond to them. In some schools, there are opportunities to participate in school based management or to serve on policy making committees.

In this age of externally imposed educational accountability, it is important for a teacher to maintain a realistic separation between a sense of personal worth and the outcome of accountability measures. Recognize that you as a teacher do have control over certain factors, but that you cannot control everything. Maintaining physical and emotional health, talking to colleagues about their experiences, and utilizing the school’s support systems are all worthwhile strategies for dealing with the stress inherent in accountability. In fact, studies have confirmed the importance of social connections in maintaining health at work (44; 69) and the consequences of stress in reducing productivity in the workplace (35).

A sense of powerlessness can induce feelings of distress. To alleviate such stress, ensure your voice is heard and become involved in those decision-making processes available to you.

The teacher in the clip at the top of the page changed her feelings of control by working with the administration to make her job more personally satisfying.

The teacher speaking in the second clip has 20 years of experience. She has learned how to connect with the families and the community outside the classroom to minimize stress inside the classroom.
In the preceding slides, we looked at how stress is experienced as well as various sources of stress, from self to system, that teachers encounter. We also presented some strategies to prevent, intervene, or ameliorate distress. The graphic here summarizes these sources of stress: Personal, Interpersonal, Organizational, and Systemic.

Teaching is not just an activity where one seeks to minimize discomfort; it can be a source of professional growth and great personal satisfaction. In the next section, we’ll look at how one can thrive, not just survive, in a teaching career through professional growth opportunities.

One of the ways to thrive in teaching, perhaps in any career, is to recognize that, although you strive for excellence, perfection is not always an attainable goal. This is sometimes referred to as “professional mindset.” It is important to recognize that teaching is a profession that requires continuous learning. In fact, continuing to learn and grow professionally will increase the power of one’s “protective factors” and can help to balance risk factors that can lead to stress. The teacher speaking in the video at the top here has been teaching for 38 years and is still passionate about her profession because she knows that she will never stop learning.

The second teacher is always open to new learning experiences as a way to boost her professional confidence. The third teacher has examined her career decisions and has come to realize that, although she has options, it’s teaching that truly fulfills her.

In the References section accompanying this presentation, there are a number of books to help you move beyond survival to thriving. Dweck’s *Mindset*, Lyubomirsky’s *How of Happiness*, and Layard’s *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* are three excellent ones (11; 41; 38). Other good sources included there are by Michael Fullan (17; 18; 19; 20) and E. & S. MacDonald (42).

Also included in the Resources section is an annotated list of popular fictional and real-life accounts of teaching, describing the profession’s challenges and rewards. Additionally, there is a list of instructional resources recommended and used by teachers who have successfully overcome many of teaching’s possible pitfalls.

In the next three slides more suggestions for thriving, adapted from Holmes (31), are grouped under the headings of Personal and Professional Development, Career Planning, and Opportunities for Development.

Listed here are suggestions adapted from Holmes in his book *Teacher Well-Being: Looking after Yourself and Your Career in the Classroom* (2005). In the first section, there are a number of ideas relating to personal and professional development. Teachers, at least successful teachers, have learned that gaining a teaching credential is not the end of learning; in fact it marks the beginning of a lifelong pursuit of learning opportunities. Some of these will be formal; some informal. But it is important to approach the job as one of continuous reflection and professional development.
Other suggestions for personal and professional development relate to the importance of social networking with like-minded colleagues and the benefits of professional collaboration. Holmes suggests that teachers should strive to see the potential for positive learning in all aspects of life. He reminds teachers that they don’t need to reach “perfection” on all aspects of the job. This doesn’t imply, of course, that teachers shouldn’t strive to be excellent; it is just unrealistic and inevitably disappointing, however, to expect to be perfect in everything. The job of teaching is vitally important, but it is essential for one’s well-being to retain an appropriate and healthy work-life balance. Doing so will build up the bank of protective factors to offset the inevitable risk factors inherent in the profession.

Slide 40

The second set of suggestions relates to career planning as a means of thriving in the profession. It may not be possible or even advisable to set a fixed career path. It is important, however, to make short, medium, and long term plans with your values and capabilities in mind. There are people who would be willing to serve as mentors to advise you on appropriate professional decisions. It may be that you want to devote your career to honing your skills as a classroom teacher, or you may want to take the knowledge and skills gained from teaching to move into other aspects in the education field. In addition to analyzing your preferences and aptitudes, you should remember that your instinct also can play an important part as you make these career development decisions.

By working on the enhancement of previously acquired skills while simultaneously developing new skills, a teacher can engage in the early stages of career planning. There are also sources of funding available to help teachers pursue professional development. Many districts have staff development incentives, and there are local, state, and federal grants available that can also facilitate career enrichment or advancement. Even if you are not thinking now of a career beyond the classroom, there are simple changes in numerous aspects of your current work that can revitalize you and keep you from succumbing to risk factors that may threaten your professional well-being.

Slide 41

Some of the opportunities for development that help teachers thrive in their profession are noted here. A post-graduate course or a staff development training session on action research can lead to an exciting and productive new way of practicing one’s craft. Other activities mentioned include job shadowing; learning via information technology; participating in job coaching, mentoring or tutoring; self-directed study of a particular topic or area related to pedagogy or the subject you teach; becoming a member of a professional learning team.

Suggested additional opportunities that could help you grow as an individual and professional include personal reflection, collaborative learning, joining a peer group, and experimental or temporary assignments.

One illustration of how these suggestions might be combined is found in National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification. In recent years, many teachers have found personal and professional satisfaction in seeking National Board certification. This has been an opportunity to participate in self-directed study, work collaboratively with one’s peers, receive additional funding for staff development and mentoring, and to reflect and grow in one’s profession. National Board certified
teachers are often financially rewarded by districts or states for their enhanced credentials and have been able to pursue satisfying career redirection as job coaches and mentors to other teachers.

(www.nbpts.org)

**Slide 42, 43, & 44**

In this module we learned that a person’s well-being depends on a balance between risk factors and protective factors. By looking at stress in this way, psychological, physiological, and behavioral indicators can be identified.

We then located these indicators according to various sources of teacher stress: personal, interpersonal, organizational, and systemic. Within each of these environments, ways of preventing or balancing stress were suggested. You might think of these suggestions as “survival strategies.”

In this final section, we hope you have been able to view the future as one of professional growth, a time beyond mere survival. There are many opportunities for development within the teaching profession once one has passed through the “survival stage.” Teaching can be a great path to personal well-being, as the teacher in the video explains.

In the puzzle pieces you see various strategies that can lead to your growth as a professional, one in charge of his or her own career.

As you continue your journey from surviving to thriving, there are many resources available to you. Accompanying this module are some suggestions for further study. Take control of the journey and you are well on the way to controlling your own well-being.

**Slide 45, 46, & 47**

Teaching is one of the most important professions in society, and yet it’s one of the least appreciated. You have chosen a career that involves many challenges as well as rewards. As professionals, we often tend to internalize failures because we are socialized to believe we can conquer all challenges by ourselves. This results in isolation and a reluctance to reach out for help. Unless experienced teachers and administrators reach out to teachers, and unless teachers feel comfortable asking for help and support, the current exodus of novice teachers from the profession will continue.

There are many proven psychological techniques to help you alleviate your isolation and to cope with stressors. The books by Lyubomirsky (41) and Dweck (11) are full of useful strategies. But these coping techniques and other tangible resources need to be complemented by social support strategies. If your school does not have a network of support for novice teachers, don’t be afraid to recommend one to your principal or administrators. Keep in mind that doctors spend much more time than teachers in supervised settings before they practice fully independently. You will not be showing signs of weakness by wanting to belong to either an existing or new network of support. On the contrary, you will be asserting your determination to combat well documented feelings of isolation and stress.
You may feel shy about suggesting your school establish a support network for novice teachers. After all, “you are supposed to know it all.” Not true. You are not supposed to know it all, just as a new physician or lawyer is not expected to know it all. If your administrators do not support your participation in such a network, you can create one yourself. You are not the only novice teacher in your school or district. Reach out to other new teachers. Start a conversation about establishing a professional study group or a mentor group. The sense of community that is likely to emerge among all of you will go a long way in alleviating the isolation that teachers have documented for decades.

In such a circle of support, you will be able to give and get help. You will learn how to support your students and how to become a better teacher. If you have an interest in learning more about how to develop a fulfilling career, we invite you to explore the resources that accompany this module.