



Summers Almost Here... What Now?!

by Lori Hewitt

As we quickly approach the end of another busy school year, it is time to look forward to longer days, warmer temperatures and summer holidays. Summer offers the opportunity to relax, rejuvenate and recharge. It is a time to shift gears, unwind, and take advantage of the unstructured moments spread out in front of us. And yet, while you may be anticipating the freedom and excitement that a holiday break can bring, you may also be struggling with the transition to these less structured days. If you are, you are not alone.

Transitioning into summer mode can be difficult and stepping away can be challenging. Teaching is more than a profession; it is who you are, and the task of shifting gears may not be as easy as it seems. In fact, it is probably more difficult now than it has ever been. Teaching is a highly stressful profession. Recent NLTA research shows the average stress levels during the school year reported by teachers on a scale from one (not at all stressed) to ten (extremely stressed) was nine. High-stress concerns and the impact on teacher wellness have been reiterated time and time again. The Teachers Think Tank highlighted that many of you are working regularly in crisis mode, which makes the shift to summer break all that more difficult. In EAP we hear this on a regular basis.

Do any of these comments resonate with you?

- I feel rootless. I am happy to have a break, but I am also feeling something else as I let go of each school year.
- During the school months my partner and I share parenting responsibilities, but during the summer I'm responsible for everything... because I'm "not working" – it's like I have whiplash for the first few weeks.
- By the time I learn how to let go of the crazy high energy I had to expend during the school year, I'm having to gear up again for the fall – there is no quality downtime. I just don't know how to relax.
- It's hard to say to a non-teacher, "I'm feeling off

because I don't have to work for 12 weeks." Or "I'm feeling down because I don't know what to do with myself all day." They just don't understand.

- Most of my social connections are with other teachers – during the summer I feel a little lost, anxious and alone.
- I just don't know how to create a balance with more time. I don't know where to begin with the things that have been put off all school year. Shouldn't I just be enjoying my summer break?

It is hard to give voice to these concerns, and some of you have expressed surprise that you are not alone in them. No wonder you may be struggling to adjust!

We find meaning, value and purpose in the work we do, and we sometimes define ourselves based on our vocational role. While busy, hectic and stressful, the routine you experience from September to June may still provide you with clarity, comfort, familiarity and function. When this is no longer the format of your day, your sense of purpose can become hazy.

So how do you shift and adjust from "school year you" to "summer you"? It starts by recognizing that the thoughts and feelings you may be experiencing are not unique to you but are a secondary hazard of the work. We've established that change can be hard, but the good news is, that hard is doable – you do hard every day. Once we acknowledge this and recognize we are not alone in its impact, it opens up space to breathe and move from our emotional brain to our rational brain, where we can better access the tools we need to develop a plan of action.

But first, it is important to check in with yourself. Being honest with where you are on your mental wellness barometer can help you in reaching out for extra support. It can set you up for success in developing and implementing your "summer to do" action plan.

Christian van Nieuwerburgh, a Professor of Coaching and Positive Psychology at the University of East London, states that when creating a well-being plan, teachers should consider what they need to

sustain their mental wellness. Here are five questions that may be helpful to ask yourself when developing your own well-being action plan.

1. What are the things that boost my well-being?

- This will be unique to you. Perhaps you love the outdoors and being outside for some time each day will help re-energize you.

2. When am I going to have some downtime?

- It's important to build that time in. Having committed downtime during the school year will lead to an easier transition to embracing downtime activities during the summer months.

3. What am I doing to nourish myself during challenging times?

- If you know there's going to be challenging times ahead, recognize that resilience is going to be called for. Having a strategy already in place to provide comfort can pre-emptively address upcoming stress.

4. Am I achieving what's important?

- What's truly important to a person can be lost in their day-to-day work. Identify what's most important to you beyond your workday and write it down. It is sometimes hard to access this information when you're in stress overload.

5. What am I looking forward to?

- Looking forward to things is helpful to a teacher's mental health. Think about what you can feel optimistic about, even if it is weeks away. Preparing for upcoming changes and developing a plan to fill your time with meaningful activities may be helpful.

Check in with yourself regularly as your mental wellness barometer can shift monthly, weekly, and even daily.

Remember, if you're struggling with adjusting from full-time teaching to full-time summer break, you're not alone. If you feel you could use additional support in any area of your personal wellness, please feel free to reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We're always here to help.

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3 THINGS

Three things that may assist you in having a more productive and empowered summer:

- **Do some journaling and set a summer intention** – Write down an intention or journal the direction you want your summer to move in.
- **Start a morning routine to set the tone for your day** – This may include gratitude journaling, mindfulness practice, and some kind of exercise. Spending even 5-10 minutes on each of these activities will help.
- **Create a daily or weekly schedule** – By developing a schedule, you ensure you create places in your days and weeks for those special things you want to focus on. For example, make a list of meaningful activities and pick at least one a week to do. By the end of the summer, you'll have been able to experience lots of different little adventures that keep you excited. Small steps in the direction of your goals will add up to big results.



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