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**How to Shake the ‘October Blues’ and Rediscover the Joy in Teaching**

Teachers share their tips for getting through a rough patch

 By [Madeline Will](https://www.edweek.org/by/madeline-will) — October 03, 2022  6 min read



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It’s not just you: October is notoriously the toughest month of the year for teachers.

Teachers start the school year with a “sense of possibility” and reenergized from the summer, said Roxanna Elden, an author and former teacher. But as the weeks go by, some of their best ideas and plans fall by the wayside. Work piles up, and they stop getting enough sleep. Classroom management may become a major source of stress.

“And then you have a moment in your class that feels like your fault, makes you feel like a terrible teacher, ... and then you’re still facing down the rest of the year,” said Elden, who now pens a weekly newsletter for teachers and offers one-on-one confidential “office hour” sessions.

Ellen Moir, the founder of the New Teacher Center, a nonprofit that works to strengthen beginning teachers’ practice, has deemed the stretch of time between mid-October and Thanksgiving break the “[disillusionment phase](https://www.aliefisd.net/cms/lib/TX01917308/Centricity/Domain/140/Phases%20of%20First%20Year%20Teachers%20Text.pdf)” of the school year. It’s when teachers’ morale dips as they realize things aren’t going as smoothly as they had hoped.

This time of year is particularly challenging for new teachers—but it can also be draining for veteran teachers, especially as schools continue to emerge from the pandemic.

“It’s a very, very long stretch while you’re tired,” Elden said. "[You’re] hitting the wall, you can barely make it through the week, and there are just endless weeks [of the school year] ahead of you.”

[Teacher stress in general has gone up](https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teachers-are-not-ok-even-though-we-need-them-to-be/2021/09) since before the pandemic, and a nationally representative survey conducted at the start of 2022 found that teacher job satisfaction levels [appear to be at an all-time low](https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teacher-job-satisfaction-hits-an-all-time-low/2022/04). Teachers say they’re grappling with a larger-than-normal workload due to staffing shortages, that students are disengaged or behaving badly, and that political pressures have affected their abilities to do their jobs.

In a nationally representative survey conducted Aug. 31 to Sept. 15, the EdWeek Research Center asked more than 1,000 teachers for their tips for rediscovering the joy in teaching. Their answers ran the gamut, from putting up professional boundaries to collaborating with peers to focusing on the students.

As for Elden, her advice is threefold:

* Keep some perspective and know that you’re not alone.
* Take some time during the weekends to think strategically about one thing that can make a difference the following week.
* Make sure you’re getting enough sleep.

Teachers can feel like, “‘You should be working harder—if not, you don’t care about your students,’” Elden said. But “getting enough sleep is one of the main things that makes you fit to be in a classroom with a child.”

Here are some of the biggest pieces of advice from other teachers on shaking off the doldrums and remembering the good parts of teaching. The responses, from the EdWeek Research Center survey, have been lightly edited.

Shake up your routine

“You have to get out of the rut of planning with the same plan [or] book each year. Yes, teach the same lesson/standard, but find new ways to teach it. Also, you get a new, ‘fresh’ set of minds each fall. They need that joyful teacher. They need that [teacher] who once loved the job more than they dread it,” said an elementary English/language arts teacher.

Another elementary teacher suggested embracing a different kind of work: “Find or create yourself a passion project. The kind that you would daydream about as a bright-eyed college student dreaming about their classroom. It can be a writing club, book club, community project, etc. Talk to your boss about it. It’ll make you look good, it’ll make teaching feel more like you imagined, and it will give you something to look forward to.”

Several teachers—and Elden—suggested changing grade levels or subjects after several years if the school year becomes monotonous. But even if you can’t make a big change, every year can still hold some surprises, teachers said.

“It is new every day and every year,” said a high school teacher. “Enjoy reflecting on and adapting your lessons and the new students you have the challenge of reaching and helping.”

Set some boundaries, and stick to them

“Do not answer emails after contract hours. Do not spend your own money—not a cent. Never give out your personal phone number. In short, have the boundaries of a professional to command the respect a professional deserves,” said a high school ELA teacher.

A high school foreign language teacher emphasized “learning that we can’t do it all and allowing ourselves to accept that some things just can’t happen any more.”

Said a middle school science teacher: “Learn to say no to administration when they keep asking you to do more. Focus on your classes and what you were hired to do.”

And several teachers emphasized the importance of self-care, in whatever form works best.

“Get up early to have quiet time,” an elementary teacher said. “Whether it is to work out, read, go for a walk, or simply veg while watching TV. Try for this quiet time every day.”

Focus on the joy of learning

Teachers said they get joy from watching students make a connection or a discovery. A 1st grade teacher spoke of “the moment students discover anything other than the world within themselves.”

One elementary teacher said, “Watch beginning-of-the-year to end-of-the-year progress. We do this for the kids, and their growth makes it all worth it.”

“Try focusing on the one kid that really needs the help,” another elementary teacher said.

And several teachers recommended focusing on the learning that happens on a daily basis, rather than the high-stakes exams.

“Take time to get to know your students. Create activities that have the students working together in small groups. Move through the classroom observing and answering their questions,” an elementary teacher said. “Don’t obsess about state tests and district assessments. Find what interests and engages your students. The rest will come.”

Collaborate with your colleagues

“Seek out colleagues who are supportive and willing to help you rediscover your passion for teaching,” one elementary teacher said.

Professional learning communities can be a good source of energy, teachers said, as can professional development—as long as it’s useful. One high school ELA teacher said that, “meaningful PD with like-minded professionals—PD that I choose,” can be a rejuvenating spark.

Said a fine arts high school teacher: “Spend time watching other master teachers, even if you’ve been in the field for a long time.”

An elementary teacher advised that educators find like-minded people and “hold on tight for a wild ride. Make sure to share outside of school with them so you have more in common than just work.”

Embrace humor

“Find humor in the day to day,” a special education teacher advised. Said an elementary teacher: “Find a way to laugh, every single day, with your students.”

And teachers urged their peers to take some time to goof around and be silly with their students in order to forge strong relationships and bring some joy to the school days.

“Be in the moment with your students,” said one elementary teacher. “Joke around, sing, share, learn something new together for five to 10 minutes each day. Start each day with a five-minute, mindfulness meditation. Challenge them to compete with you in something silly. Remember that most kiddos need you to see them. They are doing the best they can with what they are given. If it is not good, then give them more tools.”

‘Remember your why’

Above all, teachers said, remember why you got into teaching. For most teachers, that reason is the students and the love of learning.

“The kids ARE the joy in teaching. Let them remind you of why you do what you do each day. If we ignore the bureaucracy and center our jobs on the kids, the problems will become less daunting,” said a high school ELA teacher.

Another high school ELA teacher recommended that teachers reconnect with their former students to remember the impact they have. And several teachers said they try to find at least one positive thing about every school day.

“Look for the little things—they’re there,” said an elementary special education teacher. “That face a student makes when a concept finally clicks. The first hug you get from a student who was struggling to connect.”



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