

Managing the stressors of the season

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Teachers are no strangers to stress during the work week. But stepping away from school responsibilities can sometimes mean stepping directly into a new set of pressures—especially during the holidays. Managing expectations, planning celebrations, and trying to create a festive season can bring its own unique stressors.

It is not so much about the stressors, it is about your individualistic expectations as to how you “should” handle these stressors—that terrible word “should.” We invite you to stop “shoulding” all over yourself.

Most people make the holiday season about creating happiness for other people, forgetting about what makes them happy. NSTU members are quite familiar with this concept. This time of year, presents a period to reflect and be intentional as to what you wish to occur and how you wish to feel during these holidays. Review the following list to assist you in going into the season with intention:

1. Make a list of what you normally have done during past holiday seasons. Set it down for a day. Then go back to the list and put a check mark by three things that bring you happiness. That may be baking—no judgement—just bring it in internally and see how it feels. Does it bring you joy?
2. Look at the remaining things that are on the list and if they are truly important to you—then delegate—for example, hosting a dinner—ensure it is now a potluck.
3. No comparisons are allowed. To be specific, no looking at the Martha Stewarts or Meghan Markles of the world. Limit use of your Pinterest, Threads and other social media networks.

4. Look at your calendar and have a “do nothing” day, or days, or hours, and by nothing—it means being decadent—long baths, reading in bed, hot chocolate, napping with a do not disturb sign on your door.
5. This may be a time when there is a loved one no longer with you—make time to share stories about that loved one and what they loved about the holidays. Stories are very healing and keep their memories close to your heart.
6. If you are alone, consider going to a community centre to share a meal. And if you are not alone, and know someone who is alone, start a tradition of inviting them to your table.
7. Get out in nature—trail walking (don't forget the hot chocolate at the end of the trail—holding it, smelling it, and feeling the warmth of it all.) Go sledding, skiing, or have a snowball fight.
8. Laugh—tell stories that made you laugh in the past—bring that laughter into the present—laughing is so good for the body. Watch a comedy show.

Setting boundaries around your time can be challenging, especially when long-held beliefs make it hard to practice self-compassion. Be gentle with yourself and remember that caring for your own well-being is essential—particularly during a season filled with outside demands. Just because you're acclimatized to constant pressures as a teacher doesn't mean you need to carry those expectations into the holidays. Healthy boundaries not only strengthen your relationships but also support a healthier, more balanced you.

Happy Holidays.

