

Stress management

In my presentation I would like to present basic facts about stress and its management useful for teachers. I am going to talk about what is stress, then to describe its causes and effects, and finally, give advice on how to cope with stress by offering some effective strategies.

Stress was originally defined as *a neutral general adaptive syndrome of the human body to demands*. Later it has acquired a negative connotation, implying excessive demand or pressure.

The research study carried out by Sttn nrodn stav (2003) showed that 80 per cent of primary school teachers acknowledge high mental working load and thus working under pressure.

Studies of occupational stress indicate that *workload* and *communications* are significant causes.

What might be the stress factors? Among the main ones belong social and financial devaluation, pressure on constant presence (regardless personal or health reasons), work overload (work under time pressure, great responsibility, great demands as for cooperation) and physical factors (noise).

According to the research it was evident that teachers' stress in 60 per cent of informants is caused by four main stressors such as bad students' attitude towards school work, misbehaviour of students, low social prestige of teaching and underpayment.

60 per cent of teachers admitted reduced efficiency, well being and physical discomfort (headache, dizziness, swoon, sweating, warm or cold intolerance). Other **effects** of stress are lowered attention, increased sense of responsibility, lowered motivation, deteriorated employee relations, greater health risk, strain, tiredness and reduced efficiency.

The general advice for helping teachers cope with stress is to develop realistic, positive attitudes and good physical health.

Strategies can be divided into:

1. **direct techniques:** the easiest way is to remove yourself from the stressful situation – leave the work, or to discuss possible problems with the school authorities, change some working conditions, which is quite difficult if almost impossible.

2. **palliative techniques,** Dunham suggests a list of these strategies (Dunham as quoted in Wilson):
 - set aside a certain amount of time during the evening free from school
 - try to come to terms with each individual situation
 - talk over stressful situation with a partner or family
 - become involved with family and friends when not at school
 - learn to say „No“ to unnecessary demands
 - switch off
 - be open about feelings and opinions
 - admit your own limits
 - accept the problem
 - talk about the problems with colleagues at school

It is needed to appreciate that one coping strategy may be effective in one situation but wholly inappropriate in another.

However, some general strategies can be defined as follows: keep things in perspective, avoid confrontations and relax after work.

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