

Teacher Wellbeing - Understanding and improving wellbeing at work

Samantha Young





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TEACHER WELLBEING
SYMPOSIUM
2022

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Samantha Young

Director, Human Psychology and Corporate Speaker

For the last 14 years, Human Psychology has been one of Adelaide's largest psychological service providers

Samantha has designed and delivered training for over twenty years and is a sought-after facilitator and speaker, working with hundreds of employees and managers and dozens of organisations every year.

Samantha brings a unique combination of senior management and commercial experience, psychological intervention skills and Masters-level formal education in both business and psychology to her clinical, training, coaching and consulting work.

Samantha is passionate about helping people to think, feel and perform better to realise their potential.





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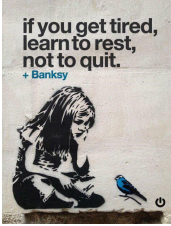
Wellbeing

Samantha Young, MD / Clinical Psychologist
Human Psychology

Think.
Feel.
Perform.
Better.

We will look at:

- Defining 'wellbeing' and 'mental health'
- Barriers to wellbeing and engagement in schools – stress, burnout and vicarious traumatisation
- Strategies for enhancing individual and team resilience and wellbeing



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Why is this important to you?



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This is important because...

- We matter (quality of life).
- We often prioritise the needs of our students / school community / colleagues over our own needs.
- What is the alternative to self-care?

When someone says teachers are lucky to “only” work 9 months each year.



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Resilience

- Adapting well in face of adversity, trauma, stress.
- “Bouncing back” from difficulty.
- Is ordinary, not extraordinary.
- Can be learned.
- Still have painful emotions.
- A finite resource so needs renewal.

resilience:
“an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.”

—Merriam-Webster Dictionary

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The Resilience Spiral - How Resilience Fades



Resilience is not easy and requires a combination of character traits, including curiosity, strength, will, tenacity, discipline and faith.



Confused

Disengaged

Withdrawn

Vulnerable

Distressed

Depressed

Adapted from The Resilience Institute

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How does your Resilience Fade?

- **Confused** – State of agitation, overload, mindless busyness
- **Disengaged** – Loss of attention and concentration, worry, boredom
- **Withdrawn** – Loss of energy, avoidance, isolated
- **Vulnerable** – Indifference, self-neglect, fatigue
- **Distressed** – Stress symptoms, sleep problems, illness
- **Depressed** – Loss of interest, sadness, anxiety



Adapted from The Resilience Institute

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Rapid bounce



Simplify: what is the one key task to attend to
Be disciplined about defining and completing each activity.
Remove distractions

Refresh: notice the mind drift, take a break
Stretch, coffee, break, low carb snack, walk about,
get in sun or fresh air

Connect: notice withdrawal, seek a safe connection
Talk to someone, call a friend, take time for yourself

Renew: be firm about taking defined renewal steps
Get to sleep early, long weekend with no devices, well-being
Initiatives, massage

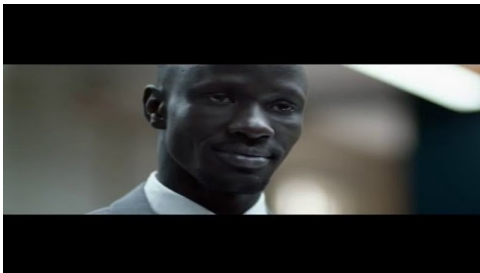
Seek help: define and understand the symptoms
Clear diagnosis, counselling, exercise, yoga, massage, meditation and sleep

Get help: must define and understand your situation
Diagnosis, counselling, positivity, reframing, exercise, sleep, support and medication

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Radical Resilience



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What is stress?

- Physical Signs....
- Non-physical signs.....
- So what is it???



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Body's stress response

- Acute stress response
 - Adaptive
 - Sudden
 - Short-lived
 - Body returns to a state of balance
- Chronic stress response
 - Maladaptive
 - Prolonged and ongoing
 - May not be immediately aware of this
 - Wear and tear on your body



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Stressors....

SLI.DO POLL - What is the main thing causing you stress at work currently in one word?



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Threats to staff wellbeing in schools

- Staff in schools are being squeezed in a vice of increasing demands and expectations:
 - Societal change
 - Within-school factors
 - Changing education paradigms
 - Moral injury and meaning and purpose
- "Australian teachers are 'at the end of their tethers' and abandoning the profession, sparking a crisis" (News January 2019)
- "Teachers experience more stress than other workers, study shows. One in five felt tense about their job compared with 13% of those in similar occupations" (The Guardian, February 2019)

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Threats to staff wellbeing in schools

- In Australia, 41% of teachers report high levels of occupational stress (Milburn, 2011) – Teachers make more mental stress claims than any other industry (WorkCover, 2014).
- Excessive workload and working hours.
- Poor student behaviour including lack of motivation and effort, disrespect, violence, challenging authority.
- Management of bullying.
- Aggression from pupils and parents.
- Classroom and school climate.

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Threats to staff wellbeing in schools

- Pressures of assessment targets and inspections.
- Conflict with management and colleagues.
- Adapting and implementing new curriculum.
- Teaching efficacy and learning new skills.
- Self-esteem and status.
- False public perceptions that teachers have masses of holidays.
- Lack of professional opportunities.
- Lack of involvement at the decision making level of educational reforms.

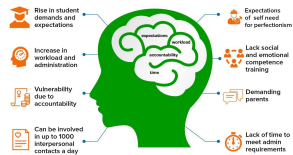
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Threats to staff wellbeing in schools

Education is a profoundly **human** enterprise - "Everyone who remembers his own education remembers teachers, not methods and techniques. The teacher is the heart of the educational system." Sidney Hook

CAUSES OF TEACHER STRESS



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Protective factors

Factors identified as protective against teacher stress and burnout:

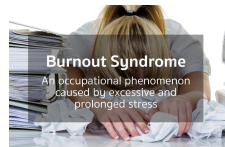
- Resources to increase sense of self-efficacy
- Connectedness with students and colleagues
- Feel supported by colleagues
- Feel supported by management
- Receive recognition for their work
- Connectedness to values and purpose
- Safety (physical and psychological)
- A culture of sustainable wellbeing

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Warning Signs of Burnout and Chronic Stress

- Burnout is a state of physical and emotional exhaustion.
- Burnout can occur when you experience long-term stress in your job, or when you have worked in a draining role for a long time.
- Burnout reduces productivity and saps your energy, leaving you feeling increasingly helpless, hopeless, cynical, and resentful.



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Risk Factors



Personal

- Trauma history
- Pre-existing psychological disorder
- Young age
- Isolation, inadequate support system
- Loss in last 12 months
- Personality/coping style
- Training and career history

Professional

- Lack of quality supervision
- High percentage of highly distressed/trauma exposed in caseload
- Little experience
- Worker/organisation mismatch
- Lack of professional support system
- Inadequate orientation and training for role

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Personality Risk Factors



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Burnout – Contributing Factors

- Professional isolation
- Emotional drain
- Difficult client population
- Long hours with few resources
- Unreciprocated giving and attentiveness
- Failure to live up to one's own expectations for effecting positive change

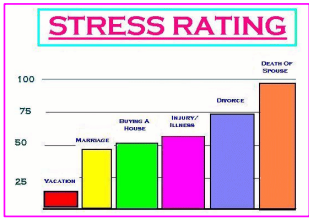


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Are you stressed?

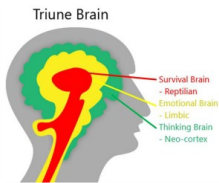
Complete “Wellbeing” and “Signs of Stress” Checklists



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Stress Management



1. **Calm the Survival Brain**
 - Breathing
 - Relaxation
 - External Focus
2. **Allow yourself to feel your emotions and connect with others.**
 - Acceptance of emotions versus suppression and avoidance
 - Talk with others
 - Self nurturance
 - Engaging in meaningful/ absorbing activities
3. **Use the thinking part of your brain to:**
 - Problem solve
 - Reality test/ challenge your thinking
 - Create balance in your life.

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Let's check in ...

Raise your virtual hands
if, in the past year,



- You've experienced relatively little stress
- How about a moderate amount?
- Who has experienced a lot of stress?

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Research

- 30,000 sampled over 8 years:

"How much stress have you experienced in the past year?"

"Do you believe that stress is harmful?"

- **Bad news** ~ People who experienced a lot of stress had a 43% increased risk of dying

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Research

- Only for those who believed stress is harmful

A lot of stress + No belief = No more likely to die

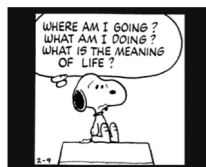
- They had the lowest risk of dying!
- **Change your mind** about stress and you change your **body's response** to stress

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Stress can be your friend

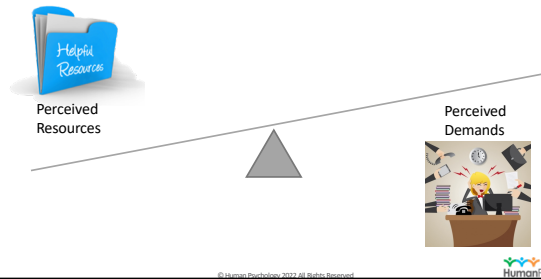
- Choosing to view your stress response as helpful, creates the **biology of courage**:
 - Connecting with others under stress can foster resilience.
 - Stress gives us access to our hearts.
 - Choosing **meaning** is better for your health than trying to avoid discomfort.



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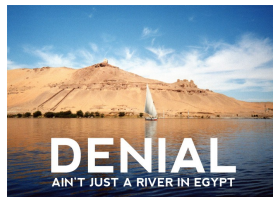


Stress: a Balancing Act



Barriers to support

What are some of the mindsets that stop us from getting help?



Beliefs that Prevent Us from Getting Help

- We should not experience personal problems.
- We view personal problems as a sign of inadequacy or failure.
- We think that there is no safe place for us to get help.
- We have helping skills and can take care of ourselves.
- We often intellectualise and/or disassociate from the emotional impact of our problems.
- We often counsel family, friends, and significant others.
- We feel responsible for and often take the blame if a family member or significant other has a personal problem.
- We feel embarrassed to seek help.

Reframing Thinking Patterns

- We all have “stress beliefs”
- Identify the stress beliefs you can change.
- Is it a **FACT** or a **STORY**?



Stress is a byproduct of subconscious beliefs you have about the world. You can't choose not to believe something. You believe it because you think it's true. To eliminate stress, you must learn to challenge these beliefs so that you see them differently.

Andrew J Bernstein

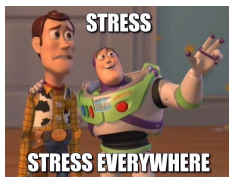
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Self-Care Assessment

Assessment Worksheet covers:

- (1) physical self-care
- (2) psychological self-care
- (3) emotional self-care
- (4) spiritual self-care
- (5) professional self-care



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Resilience Is Not Always Enough

- Not infinitely sustainable.
- Can increase personal resources, but not job resources.
- Resilience is reactive.
- People should not always have to be resilient.
- Burnout has a values and an energy process.



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Protective Factors

Factors identified as protective against stress and burnout:

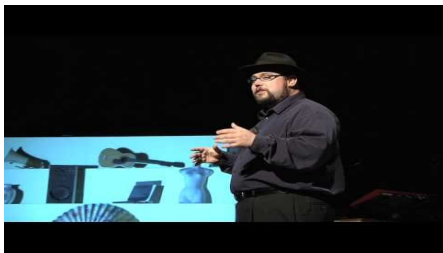
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Lollipop Leadership



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Invitation

Commit to doing at least one thing that will make you more resilient from now on.



Thank you for your time.

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COMING UP NEXT

Time: 9.45am

Keynote

Findings Arising From the VET Delivered to
Secondary School Students Scoping Study

Carmen Basilicata, ASQA
