

Teachers who struggle to cope with stress report far lower job satisfaction, study finds

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As teacher shortages continue to worsen across the United States, a new study at the University of Missouri gives insight into why so many stressed and burnt-out teachers are leaving the profession. The study

found teachers who struggle to cope with the stress of their job report far lower job satisfaction compared to teachers who find ways to manage the pressure.

Seth Woods, a former doctoral student at MU, collaborated with Keith Herman, a Curators' Distinguished Professor in the MU College of Education and Human Development, and others to analyze [survey data](#) of 2,300 teachers from Missouri and Oklahoma who were asked to rate how stressed they were at work, if they found ways to cope with [work stress](#) and how satisfied they were with their jobs.

Woods said while the findings were not particularly surprising, the study highlights how the ability—or inability—to cope with work stress can be a significant factor contributing to teacher burnout, which ultimately leads many teachers to leave the profession.

"In my 20 years as an educator, I've seen many great people leave the profession unfortunately, and this research confirms that we need to start devoting more time and resources into helping teachers identify and adopt healthy coping mechanisms," said Woods, who is now principal at Beulah Ralph Elementary School in Columbia, Missouri.

"Finding ways to mitigate teacher stress and investing in ways to help them cope with stress in positive manners will pay us back in not having to constantly hire and train new teachers all the time. In addition, retaining experienced teachers will likely benefit [student achievement](#) as well."

The researchers explained that positive, healthy coping mechanisms can be quick, easy and free. One healthy coping mechanism Woods suggests for stressed teachers is writing and delivering a short letter of gratitude to a colleague they enjoy working with. Herman, who authored a book titled, "Stress Management for Teachers: A Proactive Guide," said

simple things like increasing positive interactions with students and peers, improving classroom management skills, and avoiding gossip at work can also help.

Herman added that while systematic issues, such as low teacher pay and overburdened teacher workloads remain critical topics to address, [school principals](#), district superintendents and [school administrators](#) can all play in a role in supporting stressed teachers who may be struggling to cope.

"Communicating with teachers about their concerns, demonstrating empathy and checking in on their health and well-being shows that you care," Herman said. "Our overall goal is to create school environments that allow teachers to thrive and give them the tools they need to be successful."

"The relationship between [teacher stress](#) and [job satisfaction](#) as moderated by coping" was published in *Psychology in the Schools*.

More information: Seth Woods et al, The relationship between teacher stress and job satisfaction as moderated by coping, *Psychology in the Schools* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/pits.22857](https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22857)

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