

HEARTS AT WORK



Why Happy Teachers Create Great Schools

*A Resource Book for Principals, Leadership Teams, and Teachers on
Fostering Teacher Wellbeing, Strengthening Morale,
and Developing Schools of Excellence*



**CHAPTER ALIGNED REFLECTIONS, ACTIVITIES, ASSESSMENTS,
PULSE SURVEYS AND MORE FOR PRINCIPALS, LEADERSHIP TEAMS,
TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS**

CHAPTER 9

Addressing Challenges and Stressors in Teaching

Chapter Summary

- Teaching stress is real, common, and often invisible until it becomes burnout.
- Early awareness and supportive leadership can prevent long-term damage.
- Resilience grows through habits, mindset, and strong relationships.
- Well-designed interventions create a culture of care, not crisis control.
- When schools prioritize well-being, everyone functions—and grows—better.

Action Steps & Practice

Understanding Stress and Burnout in My School

Reflection Prompts (Principal Self-Reflection)

- What are the most common sources of stress for teachers in my school right now?
- Which signs of burnout have I noticed recently (fatigue, withdrawal, irritability, disengagement)?
- Are these stressors seasonal, structural, or leadership-related?
- How safe do teachers feel admitting they are overwhelmed?

Action Steps (Next 30–60 Days)

- Conduct a short anonymous teacher check-in or pulse survey on stress.
- Identify top 3 recurring stressors and categorize them (workload, behaviour, communication, expectations).
- Schedule one non-evaluative conversation with each department or grade team.

Chapter Activity: Stress Mapping Exercise

Activity: Create a simple “Stress Map” of the school.

- Columns: Source of Stress | Who Is Affected | Frequency | Control Level
- Outcome: Identify what can be changed immediately vs what needs long-term planning

The Principal’s Role in Reducing Stress

Reflection Prompts

- How predictable and clear are my expectations for teachers?
- Do teachers approach me with concerns-or avoid me?
- How do I respond when teachers make mistakes?
- What daily behaviours of mine reduce stress? Which may increase it?

Action Steps

- Introduce a weekly or fortnightly informal walk-through focused on listening, not observation.
- Replace at least one directive meeting with a listening circle or open forum.
- Publicly acknowledge effort, not just outcomes, during staff interactions.

Chapter Activity: Leadership Stress Audit

Activity: Rate yourself (1–5) on:

- Clarity of communication
- Emotional availability
- Response to mistakes
- Fairness in workload distribution

Outcome: Choose one leadership habit to intentionally change this term.

Building Teacher Resilience and Coping Capacity

Reflection Prompts

- Do teachers feel encouraged to learn from failure—or fear it?
- What coping strategies do teachers currently use?
- Is collaboration part of our culture or an exception?
- How do we support new or struggling teachers emotionally?

Action Steps

- Create peer-support pairs or small resilience groups.
- Include short reflection or breathing moments in staff meetings.
- Normalize conversations around stress and coping (not weakness).

Chapter Activity: Resilience Toolbox

Activity: Ask teachers to list:

- One practice that helps them cope
- One situation that drains them
- One support they wish existed

Outcome: Develop a shared resilience toolkit for the school.

Creating Supportive Interventions and Resources

Reflection Prompts

- Are our well-being initiatives actually used—or just announced?
- How easy is it for a teacher to ask for help?
- Do resources match real needs or assumptions?
- How often do we review what is working?

Action Steps

- Pilot one small, low-cost support intervention (e.g., mentoring hour, wellness corner, quiet room).
- Appoint a teacher well-being coordinator or committee.
- Review and simplify access to existing support resources.

Chapter Activity: Support Design Lab

Activity: Form a small teacher group to answer:

- What support do we need most right now?
- What is one simple change we can try for 30 days?

Outcome: Implement and review after one month.

School Self-Assessment Tool

Teacher Stress, Well-Being & Support Systems

Purpose:

To help school leaders reflect honestly on how effectively the school identifies stress, prevents burnout, and supports teacher well-being.

How to Use:

Rate each statement on a scale of 1–4

1= Not in place; 2= Partially in place; 3= Mostly in place; 4= Fully in place and consistent

A. Identifying Stressors & Burnout Early

Statement	1	2	3	4
We regularly check in on teacher workload and stress levels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers feel safe admitting they are overwhelmed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership can identify early signs of burnout	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stress is discussed openly, not only during crises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reflection Prompt: What stress signals are we currently missing?

B. Principal & Leadership Response to Stress

Statement	1	2	3	4
Expectations and deadlines are realistic and clearly communicated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers feel listened to by the principal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leadership responses reduce fear rather than increase pressure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reflection Prompt: Which leadership behaviours might unintentionally add stress?

C. Workload, Balance & Daily Practices

Statement	1	2	3	4
Teacher workload is reviewed periodically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-instructional tasks are kept reasonable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers are encouraged to disconnect outside work hours	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Breaks and rest are respected, not discouraged	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reflection Prompt: What could we remove or simplify to reduce daily pressure?

D. Resilience, Coping & Peer Support

Statement	1	2	3	4
Teachers have access to peer support or mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collaboration is encouraged over competition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff meetings include space for reflection or well-being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers are encouraged to ask for help without stigma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reflection Prompt: Who supports teachers when leadership is not immediately available?

E. Supportive Interventions & Resources

Statement	1	2	3	4
Well-being resources are visible and easy to access	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interventions are based on real teacher needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statement	1	2	3	4
Staff feedback is used to improve support systems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We review well-being initiatives regularly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reflection Prompt: Which support exists on paper but not in practice?

Scoring & Interpretation (For Leadership Teams)

- Mostly 3s & 4s: Healthy systems in place → Focus on sustainability
- Mixed scores: Inconsistency → Strengthen leadership habits and communication
- Many 1s & 2s: High risk of burnout → Immediate action required

Priority Action Planning

Top 3 Stressors Identified:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

One Immediate Change (Next 30 Days):

One Structural Change (Next Term):

Who Is Responsible:

Teacher Pulse Survey

Stress, Well-Being & Support at School

Purpose (to share with teachers):

This survey helps the school understand teacher stress levels and how well support systems are working. Responses are confidential and will be used only to improve school practices—not for appraisal.

Response Scale

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

A. Workload & Daily Stress

1. My workload feels manageable most of the time.
2. I am clear about what is expected of me at work.

3. Non-teaching tasks are reasonable and well planned.
4. I usually have enough time to prepare and reflect.

B. Emotional Well-Being & Burnout Signals

1. I feel emotionally energized by my work.
2. I feel exhausted or drained at the end of most days. (reverse)
3. I still find meaning and purpose in my teaching.
4. I feel comfortable acknowledging when I am overwhelmed.

C. Leadership Support & Communication

1. School leadership is approachable when I need support.
2. I feel listened to by the principal or leadership team.
3. Leadership communication reduces stress rather than adds to it.
4. Mistakes are treated as opportunities to learn.

D. School Culture & Peer Support

1. Teachers support one another in this school.
2. I feel safe asking colleagues for help or advice.
3. Collaboration is encouraged over competition.
4. Staff interactions generally feel respectful and positive.

E. Well-Being Supports & Resources

1. I am aware of well-being resources available at school.
2. These supports are easy to access when needed.
3. The school takes teacher well-being seriously.
4. I feel the school tries to respond when stress concerns are raised.

Open-Ended Reflection (Optional but Valuable)

- One thing that currently causes me the most stress is:
- One thing the school does that helps reduce stress is:
- One small change that would improve teacher well-being is:

How Principals Should Use This Survey

- Share themes, not individual responses
- Compare results with the Principal Self-Assessment Tool
- Identify:
 - 1 quick win (immediate)
 - 1 structural change (longer term)
- Communicate clearly: “This is what we heard → This is what we will do.”

Quick Interpretation Guide

- Mostly 3s & 4s: Healthy culture → sustain and protect it
- Mixed responses: Inconsistent support → focus on leadership habits and workload
- Many 1s & 2s: Burnout risk → urgent action needed

Closing Note for Teachers (Optional to Include)

Taking care of teachers is not a weakness of a school—it is a sign of strong leadership.

Closing Reflection for Principals

A school that manages stress well does not remove challenges— it removes fear, isolation, and silence.

Chapter Integration Summary for Principals

This chapter invites principals to:

- See stress as a system issue, not an individual failure
- Lead with empathy, clarity, and consistency
- Build resilience through relationships, not slogans
- Design support that is practical, visible, and trusted

When principals reduce fear and increase support, teacher morale rises—and learning follows.