



**KEEPING
IT
REAL**

**A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO
KEEPING YOUR PASSION
AND YOUR SANITY**

KEEPING IT REAL



Let's keep it real. Teaching isn't a job; it's a calling - a tough one. The "to-do list" is never-ending for the teacher who tirelessly strives to help students reach their full potential and set them up for success. It may be one of the most rewarding and demanding professions on the planet. And those who've never been in your shoes, may never really truly understand what it takes to do what you do.

It takes passion, dedication, patience, hard work, and a whole lot of energy to take care of your family in the classroom and your family at home. Some days, it may feel like you have so many balls in the air that if you lose focus for even a second they'll all come crashing down. But, never underestimate how important you are, and never lose sight of how many people your efforts impact.

Through my own classroom experience and my work with teachers all over the country, I know the challenges that teachers face to reach every student and set them up for success. I hope this resource is valuable to you in keeping your passion and your sanity as you engage in one of the most important professions to society.

Sincerely,

Dr. Melissa Hughes
Founder and President



Written by Dr. Melissa Hughes

Dr. Hughes is the Founder and President of the Andrick Group as well as the Education Advisor for Elmer's Products, Inc. She holds her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction and her research focuses on the achievement gap impacted by summer learning loss and parental involvement. Throughout her career, she has taught in both the public K-12 sector as well as at the university level and has authored more than a dozen instructional resource publications for teachers. In addition to creating teacher resources for Elmer's, Melissa currently delivers professional development workshops in schools and districts across the country.

For more information about the professional development services, visit www.andrickgroup.com. For free lesson plans, projects, and printables created by Dr. Hughes, join the Elmer's Teachers Club at www.elmers.com/teachers.

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I | DEAR TEACHER,

“In a completely rational society, the best of us would aspire to be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less, because passing civilization along from one generation to the next ought to be the highest honor and the highest responsibility that anyone could have.”

-Lee Iacocca

Your days are busy and your schedule is full. Managing everything you do at home and at school, there will be days that it may be difficult to see all of the things you do each and every day to make a difference for the children you touch. Here is a reminder for you on those days.

Thank you for choosing a profession that is among the most important to our society. You could have chosen a career with better pay and higher status, more opportunities for advancement and better working conditions. But you chose to spend your time and talents as a teacher.

Thank you for spending your evenings and weekends grading papers, planning lessons, creating learning games and center activities.

Thank you for shopping the clearance sales with your own money to make sure that you have extra glue sticks, crayons, pencils, and scissors for the students who have none.

Thank you for packing an extra snack or peanut butter and jelly sandwich for the child that comes to school hungry.

Thank you for the sleepless nights spent worrying about the child who is much too young for the “grown-up” challenges he faces at home.

Thank you for dealing with yet another evolution of standards and adjusting to new policies and measures of accountability prescribed by those who have never been responsible for the academic success of 25 children with diverse needs, learning styles, and home environments.

Thank you for all of the self-control that it takes not to respond the way you'd like to a parent who blames you for her child's disrespect, misbehavior, and failing grades.

Thank you for continually trying different strategies to involve parents who may not seem the least bit interested in what is happening in your classroom.

Thank you for bringing your own child's extra winter coat for the child who is still wearing a wind-breaker in the middle of January.

Thank you for recognizing that everyone has a bad day and could use a hug sometimes - even children.

Thank you for maintaining your professionalism even when people say, "It must be nice to only work 181 days a year."

Thank you for the dedication, passion, and hard work that it takes to assume one of the most challenging, rewarding, sometimes frustrating and exhausting jobs in the world. Never underestimate the importance of what you do!

2 | PERFECTIONISTS, BEWARE!

There will be days when nothing goes according to plan, your job feels like it's harder than it has to be, and no one seems to notice your efforts. Don't let those days overshadow the reason you chose to be a teacher in the first place. We all need a little reminder from time to time, and even the smallest expressions of encouragement can make a big difference.

Build a healthy network

In the business world, it's called networking. But teaching can be isolating. It's not uncommon for teachers to feel more like an island than a country and miss out on the rewards of collaborating with colleagues to celebrate successes and overcome daily obstacles. If you don't already have a network in place at your school, build one. Schedule time to meet or have lunch on a regular basis to give you time to share a new teaching strategy you tried, a challenge you may be experiencing with a student, or a fantastic new recipe. Build a healthy network with colleagues that have a positive attitude. Positivity breeds positivity and the converse is also true.

"I've failed over and over in my life. That is why I have succeeded."
-Michael Jordan

-Michael Jordan
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Daily Inspiration

Start or end each day with a bit of inspiration to help you refocus on why you teach. Write inspirational quotes on small strips of paper, fold them up, and put them in a jar or container. I've included a few on page 13 to help you get started. You'll find that some days that little reminder can help you readjust your attitude. Make it even more personal by adding your own positive thoughts throughout the year. When a child tells you that he "loves to come to school because of you," write that down and add it to the jar. You'll be amazed at how uplifting that can be to you later.



Celebrate mistakes

We tell students that mistakes are okay because that is part of the learning process. But we expect them to perform with 70 percent accuracy often when learning new skills. And when they do not, some teachers assume that "failure" right along with their students. But, as Dr. Phil says, "we can't learn from our mistakes unless we acknowledge them." Instead of collecting and grading students papers only to be returned with a score at the top, once in a while go over the assignment together and let the students explain their mistakes in a risk-free environment. Then, give them the opportunity to redo the assignment and turn it in. Your students will be more likely to embrace the learning process, and you'll have a better understanding of who still needs additional help.

3 | MAKE A LIST

Every teacher has a never-ending “to-do list.” But sometimes, a “don’t-do list” is just as important. Here are five “DON’Ts” to consider to keep your focused on doing what you love and loving what you do.

1. **Don’t over-plan your days.**

Teachers are ambitious creatures. But, be careful not to try to do too much at one time. Focus on quality over quantity. Think “deeper” instead of “wider.” Sometimes, this means building in time for reflection to process new material and giving students choices to extend their learning. Assess your lessons to determine how much is too much.

2. **Don’t step out of the leadership role.**

Sending students to the office for misbehavior suggests that you aren’t the captain of the ship. Save that for extreme situations. You may have to experiment a bit to determine what works with each group of kids, but you’ll undermine your own authority by passing the buck to the principal.

3. **Don’t under-deliver.**

Say what you mean and do what you say. There are times when we can’t get everything on the list done, but if you say you are going to do something, then do it. Otherwise, you’ll give students the impression that you’re all talk.

4. **Don’t forget that some kids come with baggage.**

Often times, they don’t have much of a choice about the support they get from home. Try to remember that when kids come to school without supplies or homework or lunch money, it may be much more than a case of irresponsible behavior. A little compassion can go a long way.

5. **Finally, don’t forget why you chose to teach.**

Remember to do what you love and love what you do. Don’t get caught in the weeds of the daily challenges. Take time to enjoy the small victories.



*Do what you love;
love what you do.*

4 | INSPIRE CREATIVITY

Inside every child is a great artist! There are lasting benefits to recognizing and nurturing them.

There is a common misconception out there that kids are either creative or they aren't. The truth is that creativity can be nurtured or stifled as early as the preschool years when children are developing essential fundamental skills that will impact their academic success later in life.

Picasso once said that in every child there is a great artist. If you have ever truly watched a child use crayons, glue, and scissors to create a masterpiece, you understand that statement. Picasso also went on to say that the problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.

Ask 20 kindergartners, "Who is an artist?" and 20 hands will go up. Ask the same question to a group of 4th graders and you'll find that somewhere before the age of 10, many kids lose confidence in their inner artist. Somewhere in the quest for "serious learning" and academic competition, our focus has shifted to test scores and other concrete examples of understanding and achievement. And, sadly, in that quest, time for the arts and risk-free creativity has taken a back seat to mathematics, reading, science and engineering.

Recent research has found that, from kindergarten scribbling to high school self-portraits, risk-free creative experiences and artistic expression can play a vital role in the way students approach problem solving and learning in general. And, let's face it... if we can break away from the "one right answer" model of teaching and learning, kids are more likely to enjoy the process of learning. Kids who love to learn will be adults who love to learn.



7 ways to inspire creativity in every child

Promote curiosity

Introduce children to new situations or unique experiences. Give them opportunities to wonder and explore and discover. Shift the focus from the “right answer” to “I wonder...” and “What if...”

Encourage orange skies

Kids who have can make sense out of an orange sky or a purple dog learn how to tap into their own imaginations and nurture creativity. Get past the expected and the accepted. Give them the freedom to color outside of the lines.

Create “maker spaces”

If we want kids to be creative, we have to give them a space to be creative. Dedicate a space for kids to make, create, tinker, and experiment. Stock it with scissors, markers, paints, glue, glitter, construction paper, googly eyes, pipe cleaners, cotton balls, fabric scraps, and anything else that can spark their imagination.

Shift from inspiration to production

The process of taking an idea from inspiration to production is where kids can really begin to the process of creative thinking. When we actually make things through experimentation or “what if” questioning, we develop new and innovative techniques for thinking that can be applied in other areas.

Let them get messy

Neat freaks, beware! What looks like chaos and disorder may be creative genius in the making. Provide opportunities for open-ended play, creation, and discovery. When multiple senses are engaged and stimulated, children are more likely to make an emotional connection with what they know, see, and do.

Encourage drawing the answer

Give students opportunities to explain their answers in drawings, doodles, flow charts, and other pictorial representations of understanding. Brain-based research shows that we actively engage different parts of the brain when we doodle and draw than when we write, and this enhanced brain activity facilitates understanding and long-term memory.

Embrace mistakes

Facilitate the wonder and exploration and experimentation that enable kids to produce their own ideas and solutions. Embrace the mistakes they make along the way and help kids do the same in a way that they can learn from the process.

It’s going to be messy, but we owe it to our kids to get past the expected and accepted, let them roll up their sleeves, and inspire the creative artist in each of them.

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up.”
-Pablo Picasso

5 | GETTING PAST THE GUILT

What is your biggest challenge as a teacher? There seems to be three common answers regardless of the school community, the grade level, or how long the teacher has been in education:

- 1 Effective parental involvement
- 2 Fitting everything in
- 3 Being everything to everyone

Combine all of those into one package, and most teachers will discover a new challenge: There simply isn't enough – not enough of *you* to go around. There will be days that it seems the harder you try to meet the demands of your classroom, the less (time, energy, attention) you have to give to your family. It's a constant cycle as both home and school demand a great deal of time and attention.

The laundry is stacked to the ceiling, you've ordered take-out for the last three nights, you practice spelling words with your own kid in the car on the way to school, and the "quality time" you set aside for the family on Sunday looks more like you sitting at the kitchen table grading papers as your spouse passes by every once in awhile to see how much longer you'll be. Sound familiar?

How long can you keep that up? How long before you're exhausted trying to keep everything afloat? How long before you feel the guilt creep in?



It doesn't take long for that guilt to become burdensome and turn into fatigue. Eventually the fatigue becomes burnout.

Research shows that teachers have the highest burnout rate of any public service profession. And our new teachers are bringing even worse statistics. Studies show that young teachers (under 30 years old) leave the profession at a rate of 51% higher than older teachers.

Teachers have the highest burnout rate of any public service profession.

Good teachers want every student to be successful, they want to make sure every parent is equipped to be involved effectively, and they are always looking for ways to improve instruction. You spend countless hours creating units and lessons, bulletin boards, center games and at-home learning materials. And just when you feel like you've checked more than a few boxes on the classroom list, the home list continues to grow. As hard as you try to be everything to the kids in your

classroom, being everything to everyone all the time is just not sustainable and will likely lead to fatigue and burnout.

The happiest, perhaps most effective teachers may just be those that have a healthy work-life balance and make time for themselves. They have lives and interests and hobbies, and strong networks of family and friends. They make time for vacations, reading for pleasure, a walk or a quiet cup of tea. They become better teachers from the learning and personal growth they experience in their own lives.

Finding a work-life balance can be difficult, but it is absolutely essential if we are to keep the best, brightest, and most passionate teachers in the classroom. Take a few quiet minutes, find time for you, and think about how you can find your balance.



6 | EAT LIKE A GROWN-UP

While most folks in the business world get to enjoy lunch like civilized grown-ups - maybe even choosing their meal from a menu - teachers are lucky to squeeze in a quick bite after getting all the kids situated in the cafeteria and setting up for the afternoon. Your days are fast and furious, and sometimes fueling up with healthy choices is your last priority. While it might be tempting to grab the nearest pre-packaged snack, you may pay for it in more ways than one. Just because you work with kids doesn't mean that you have to eat like one. Protein snacks are a great way to keep your energy levels even throughout the day without the sugar crash. Here are five healthy, portable, high protein snacks that take no time to prepare and will keep you eating like a grown-up.

Hummus-to-Go

Hummus is chock full of protein! Put a few tablespoons in a travel mug, add vegetables like peppers, carrot sticks, or snow peas, and you've got the perfect on-the-go healthy snack.

Fruit and Cheese Kabobs

A little cheese goes a long way. Just one ounce of sharp cheddar contains 8 grams of protein. Cube your favorite cheese into bit-sized squares. Pair the cheese with sweet, juicy grapes onto toothpicks for a delicious, grown-up treat!

Mixed Nuts

Almonds and pistachios are the high-protein winners, but almost all nuts will serve up a good dose. Mix in a few dried fruits to satisfy your sweet tooth and keep it healthy. Keep a stash in your desk for those draining days. If you're counting calories, watch your portions.

Celery and Nut Butter

It doesn't get much simpler than celery and your favorite nut butter for a quick protein boost. Not a celery fan? swap it out with apple slices.

Guilt-free Orange Creamsicle

Protein shakes are quick and easy to prepare in advance, and the possibilities for ingredients are endless. Try mixing one scoop of vanilla whey protein powder with a cup of your favorite orange juice and blend with ice.



Inspirational Quotes

Getting your students to like you is merely the other side of you liking them. -Anonymous

Your classroom must honor student questions as much as student answers. -Anonymous

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. -Maya Angelou

To the world, you might be just one person; but to just one person, you might be the world.
-Anonymous

Kids don't remember what you try to teach them. They remember what you are. -Jim Henson

Teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools. The miracle is that at times they accomplish this impossible task. - Haim G. Ginott

There is no profession more essential than that of an educator, and it's time for all of us to embrace and celebrate their importance and contribution to America's children. -Queen Latifah

Think of that teacher that you loved... think of how much you respect that person...think about that person and be that person.

-Bill Cosby

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." -- Anonymous

Remember why you chose to become a teacher and let that get you through the tough days.
-Melissa Hughes