

# Getting the right work–life balance and protecting yourself:

**A guide for School  
Business Managers**

in partnership with





**Being a School Business Manager is an ever-changing career that allows you to work with a wide range of interesting people. It can be fulfilling. But it can also be exhausting, mentally and physically.**

**How often do you take work home or work beyond your contracted hours?**

**Work-life balance is often discussed in the education sector but can be difficult to achieve. Excessive workload and the lack of balance remain key issues at work which drive poor mental health for education staff, including School Business Managers. But, taking some time and space for reflection – not only to think about your approach at work, but also your personal life can help you notice and tackle barriers to achieving a better balance.**

**One of the main difficulties in finding a balance is that life constantly changes, as does the amount of pressure at work. In this guide we provide you with some key insights, strategies and techniques you can put into practice when needed.**

## Key Stats

**77%** of education staff experienced symptoms of poor mental health linked to their work<sup>1</sup>



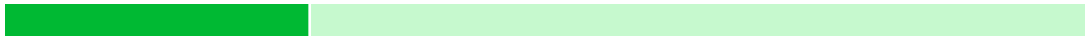
**66%** of staff who experienced behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms say poor work-life balance was an issue<sup>1</sup>



**70%** said workload was the main reasons for thinking about leaving their jobs<sup>1</sup>



**28%** were working more than 11 hours unpaid overtime per week<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Figures from The [Teacher Wellbeing Index](#). They refer to all teachers, leaders and support staff.

<sup>2</sup>[The challenges of school business management during COVID-19](#) by The Key

## Why prioritising your wellbeing is important

In 2020, The Key followed three SBMs in Kent, Nottinghamshire and London for a day. 'Getting the 10,000 steps done in a day is a doddle, as they pace the corridors, tracking down teachers who need to sign HR forms, site managers who need to fix broken equipment, pupils who need medication, absent cooks, contractors who have gone AWOL, SLT who need to make critical decisions. Someone is always looking for them, and they are always on the hunt. Everything is urgent, much is reactive.'

*Does any of this sound familiar to you?*

Often, the truth is we do not realise how pressured our role has become and we continue to get up and come to work. We think we are being conscientious but we are gradually exhausting our stamina. And if you do not get balance between different parts of your life – home, work, social life, hobbies, you have no break from your busy daily routine.

Sometimes it can begin to affect your physical health too.

The side effects of a poor work-life balance can include:

### Health

- *exhaustion*
- *anxiety*
- *sickness in holidays*
- *absence from work*
- *loss of voice*
- *panic attacks*

### Wellbeing

- *no time to exercise*
- *lack of sleep*
- *short-tempered*
- *loss of confidence*
- *poor quality of life*

### Personal life

- *poor relationships*
- *poor social life*
- *detachment from others*
- *lack of time with children*
- *lack of time with friends*

## Burnout and spotting the signs

The World Health Organisation recently redefined burnout as 'a syndrome linked to chronic work stress that has not been successfully managed.' And we know in our fast-paced world burnout has become a far more common risk (especially among SBMs and education staff).

But would you be able to spot the signs in yourself?

The main signs are:

- **Exhaustion**
- **Mental detachment from your work**
- **Problems with performance or relationships at work**

Some people also mention physical symptoms like disrupted sleep or head and stomach aches. If suffering from depression, this can also be a precursor.

It is *really important* to be aware of the warning signs. If you do spot them, the good news is that you can recover from burnout.

## **So, what can be done to protect yourself as a School Business Manager?**

### **Set your wellbeing non-negotiables**

A good place to start can be taking ownership of your wellbeing non-negotiables. What are the actions you will do no matter what? These actions should keep you balanced and help you feel good. It could be regular exercise, time to enjoy a hobby or a simple routine that helps you organise your time. Share these with your colleagues, friends and family so it becomes widely understood that you keep this routine.

For example, your wellbeing non-negotiables might be:

- **“I’m going to leave on time everyday no matter what”**
- **“I will schedule time off and take it”**
- **“I will not bring work home with me”**

### **Define your boundaries**

Burn out, work fatigue and work stress are closely linked to working long hours and a failure to set boundaries. But before you can protect your boundaries you need to set them. Setting them will require you considering:

- **Your role and existing responsibilities;**
- **Your career aspirations,**
- **Your commitments outside of work**
- **Your work life balance, and**
- **Your preferences around working styles, patterns and colleague relationships.**

Take account of processes, culture and context at your school to ensure your boundaries are realistic and straightforward to communicate. It will help to share your boundaries – perhaps as part of a wider conversation about work, responsibilities and planning. Or it could be at key moments such as the start of a new school year or term.

### **Get comfortable saying ‘no’**

Can it be delegated? Is it in line with your own priorities right now?

Accept that you can't do everything and there are times when it is better for you, your health and your team to say no! It can feel uncomfortable saying no, but when you already have plenty to deal with, getting comfortable saying no is a skill all School Business Managers need. Take a look at this advice for [saying no](#) and setting boundaries.

## Let go of guilt

Let go of the guilt that can come with drawing lines in the sand. Saying no well, gets easier with practice. Set out your expectations, priorities and your boundaries and stick to them. And remember – creating boundaries and taking care of you is an important part of being good at your job.

## Remember you are not alone

Build a network.

When was the last time you looked at what other SBMs were up to? Lockdown has made us quite insular at times and we might assume that every school does things in the same way.

Several respondents to the Creaby report spoke of looking outwards to the wider profession and their networks. Some felt isolated, especially if it was a small setting or they were working part-time in different schools. There was not always someone to hand to ask for advice or discuss different solutions. Many had found support through joining organisations such as [ISBL](#); others had joined local or regional support groups or made contacts through facebook groups and twitter accounts.

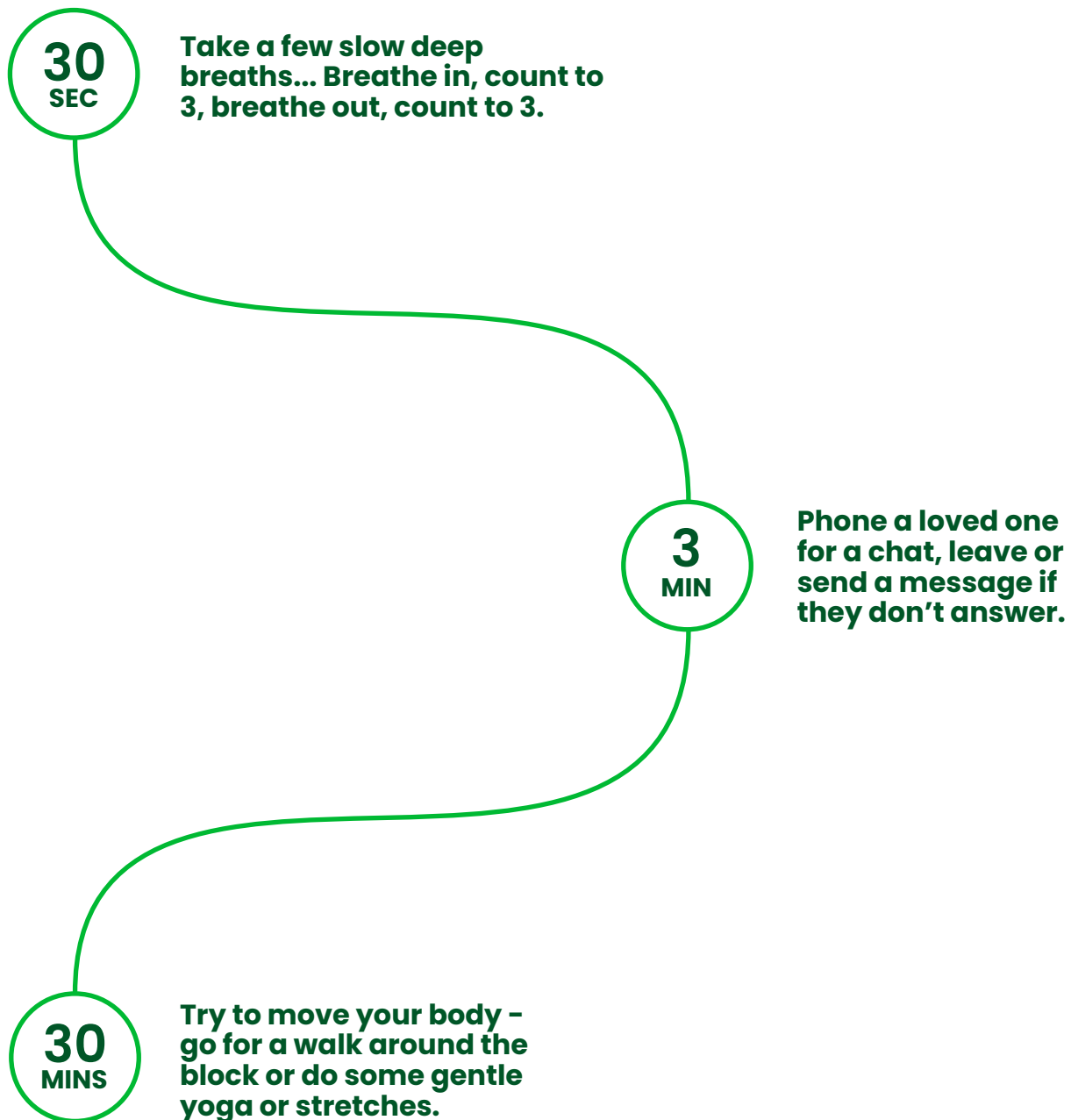
One respondent said: '...get out there and see how ... different people and different areas do things differently is vital ... it just opens your eyes to managing people so much better... I think it's important to have that experience... I think the sharing of experiences and good practice, or even sharing bad practice, is incredibly worthwhile.'

You can also join the [Association of School and College Leaders](#) (ASCL) a professional association and trade union with over 21,500 members, who advocate for senior leaders from primary, secondary and post-16 education. Find more about how to sign-up via their website.

The [Confederation of School Trusts](#) (CST) is another national organisation and sector body for School Trusts in England advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leaders. Find out more about their membership and mission via their website link above.

## The 30-3-30 approach

A tool that can help you prioritise taking time out during the day to feel good is the 30-3-30 (or wellbeing window) approach. The suggestions below are grouped into things that take about 30 seconds, things that you can do in about 3 minutes, and things that might take 30 minutes or longer. The 30 second ones are quick fix 'emergency' actions you can do if you suddenly find you are struggling to cope, whereas the others give you slightly longer to replenish. Have a go at filling in some of your own suggestions:



# Get Support



**If you are struggling to maintain a work-life balance or feel you're heading for burnout, don't suffer alone. Speak to colleagues, friends, family or call **Education Support's free, confidential helpline**, staffed by **qualified counsellors** and available **24/7** on **08000 562 561**.**





# Further ways to support staff

**Education Mutual's staff absence protection support's member school and trust staff with a wide range of health and wellbeing services as part of all memberships providing support through Stress coaching, Face to Face counselling, 24/7 GP support, nurse support services as well as school wide mental health first aid training and Occupational health services.**

**Get in touch today to find out more at [educationmutual.co.uk](https://www.educationmutual.co.uk)**





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