

Managing return-to-work anxiety: tips for teachers and education staff



Returning to work after time off can be challenging, especially for those in the education sector who have fixed holiday dates. Whether it's the summer break or even Sunday night, we know feelings of anxiety and apprehension are common. Take a look at our expert-led strategies that can help you ease this transition and reclaim your time off, to get the rest and recuperation you need.

Tips for teachers and education staff:

Recognise that you are not alone in this feeling



You are not alone — many educators feel this way. It doesn't necessarily mean you don't like your job (although of course, for some people it's because they are not happy in their role or setting). The anticipation of high workload and having to face unfinished tasks can cause feelings of anxiety and stress for staff. For others, being away for a long or even a short period may make them question their abilities, bring about feelings of imposter syndrome or make them question if they can transition into the faster pace of work.

Your students might be feeling anxious about returning too. Your own experiences may help you to connect and empathise with your students to build stronger relationships, creating a more enjoyable and fulfilling teaching experience.

Name the feeling — say it out loud if you need too



It can help to recognise how you are feeling and name it: "I'm feeling worried", "I'm feeling anxious", "I'm feeling overwhelmed." This can help to put some separation between yourself and your anxious thoughts, let you take a step back for a moment and make the thoughts less powerful.

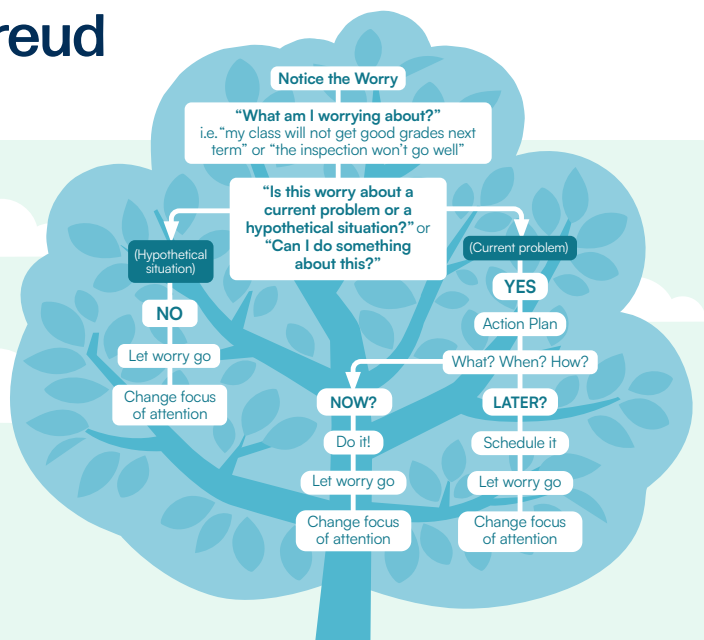
You may also find some of these [simple breathing exercises](#) useful in helping you to process your thoughts.

Try to put your worries into perspective

It's easy to play out worst case scenarios. This is not unreasonable given the pressures of your role, but it's important to find a balance to ensure you are not spending too much time trapped in a cycle of worry or anxiety.

The Worry Tree* is an exercise you can use to proactively shift the focus of your attention and look for the balance. This exercise is not about dismissing or brushing anything aside, but more about giving you greater perspective.

*Source: The Worry Tree, Anxiety and the NHS



Minimise working during your time off



You are more likely to get the Sunday or 'summer scares' if you work during your down time. Set boundaries around accessing work emails or following social media accounts that remind you of work.

Take a look at this advice for [setting technology boundaries for yourself](#) or this [advice for leaders and managers](#) on how to set up a technology strategy to support staff.

Plan some gentle, fulfilling activities beforehand



Don't ask too much of yourself before you make this transition back. Ease in gently with activities that nourish, soothe and replenish you. Make a list of three things you can do to show yourself compassion in the lead up to your return — pick one to do the day, night and morning of your return to work. If doing some planning during the holidays helps you with stress, try and get the hard stuff done first — spend just a few minutes to plan out your week and then put the 'to-do-list' away.

Try gentle, fulfilling activities such as being active, talking to a loved one, or spending time reading or journaling. Our [self-care summer resource](#) developed with Anna Freud offers many practical activities that can be trialled during breaks.

And finally...

Everyone's return to work experience is different and that's okay. For some, it can help to ease back in gradually by reintroducing simple routines towards the end of the holiday such as regular sleep or mealtimes. Others find that connecting with colleagues ahead of the term can reduce feelings of isolation. A chat over coffee or even a quick message can offer reassurance and a fresh perspective.

Whatever approach you take, the most important thing is to be kind to yourself and go at your own pace.

And remember, **you are never alone with your worries or anxiety.** Teachers and education staff can call Education Support's helpline 24/7, including school holidays and weekends. You will speak to a counsellor who understands the education sector and what you're going through.

Call us. We'll listen:
08000 562 561

