



# The impact of teaching on personal relationships

By Kat Cauchi



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# Overview

## Purpose of report

When speaking with teachers/former teachers initially from our R.I.S.E. Magazine Twitter DM group, it was alarming to see just how many reported that teaching has or had a negative impact on their relationships. Also, I discovered through researching what was already out there on this topic, that the returns were poor to say the least. There was a significant lack of accessible data and information about teachers' personal relationships and given (as you will see in the results) this is a widespread issue, this needs to change! You can read more about the story of how and why this report originated [here](#).

This report sets out to discover the impact of teaching on personal relationships. Finding out, for example, how many teachers are affected, what kind of relationships are impacted, the causes of this negative impact, and what if any kind of workplace support is in place for teachers. These findings are to be coupled with recommendations so that teachers are better supported in maintaining good personal relationships.

## What is covered?

- The percentage of teachers/former teachers who have found teaching has/had a negative impact on their personal relationships, as well as what type of relationships were impacted, and the percentage whose intimate relationships were specifically impacted.
- What common reasons have been cited for why teaching is having a negative impact on relationships.
- The percentage of teachers/former teachers who feel/felt able/unable to prioritise their personal relationships while teaching and the percentage who considered taking time off or leaving teaching due to or in part due to this negative impact.
- The percentage of teachers/former teachers who feel/felt their setting provided support to maintain good personal relationships, e.g., mental health support.
- Causes of teacher stress and mental health issues and how these impact on their personal relationships.
- Whether emotional investment in teaching has a negative impact on relationships.
- Recommendations for how settings and individuals can support teachers in having good personal relationships such as maintaining healthy boundaries.
- Feedback from teachers/former teachers about their own experiences of how teaching impacts/impacted on their relationships.

# Methodology

Due to the lack of research specifically on the impact of teaching on relationships, I wanted to get more of a feel of how many teachers were affected, why, and if their setting was providing any support. To do this, I created an anonymous poll on Twitter, given the huge number of educators globally who use the platform. I thought by keeping it anonymous I was more likely to get honest responses to the questions and, by using social media, it could be easily shared with others. Additionally, I was hoping it would open discussion opportunities through comments and private messages, which it did.

The survey ran for approximately one week from the 11th August 2022 and had 2,937 respondents. Following this, I spoke with teachers/former teachers who were happy to voice their experiences.

I also looked at other polls, articles and data around related content such as teaching and intimacy, teaching and mental health, teaching and stress, emotional investment in teaching and healthy boundaries to further explore why teaching was impacting on relationships and to identify where support was lacking.

Finally, I spoke with experts in clinical psychology, psychotherapy, and wellbeing to better understand these topics and how we can support teachers going forward.

The comments provided in direct written conversations with me are highlighted, while others from publicly available sources appear within the text.

# Premise

## Why are relationships so important?

This report focuses on personal relationships – family, friendships, and intimate relationships – and how working in the education sector can affect them.

As humans, we have this innate desire for connection. These connections benefit us in many ways: they give us a sense of belonging, joy, stability, support, challenge, and growth. Social worker and psychotherapist, Dr John Sharry, explains, “[The more closely we are connected to the people we love, the happier we feel and the more personal satisfaction we have in our lives. Most people rate moments of connection and shared enjoyment with their loved ones as their most important life experiences.](#)” <sup>2</sup>

So, if good relationships have a positive impact on our mental health and wellbeing, understandably when relationships break down, we see negative impacts. Minding Your Head Info (part of Public Health Agency, NI) says, “[After a relationship breakdown you may feel a range of powerful emotions, such as fear or uncertainty for the future, anger at your partner or yourself, sadness at the end of a phase of life, loneliness and isolation and often a sense of failure.](#)” <sup>3</sup>

In our conversation about the impact and knock-on effects in a professional setting from breakdowns in personal relationships, wellbeing in education expert and [@HealthyToolkit](#) founder, **Andrew Cowley**, commented:

“A staff member, particularly if in a senior role, who becomes more ‘hardened’ as a response to personal circumstance, may upset colleagues, e.g., in observations and appraisal, key areas of professional development. Likewise, the breakdown of friendships outside of a school setting may impact upon the social group a young teacher has. If they only have friends within the school setting, there is the potential for toxicity to take hold as the limited outlook of the group may mean discussion is around life in the school, which leads to gossip and resentment in some cases.”

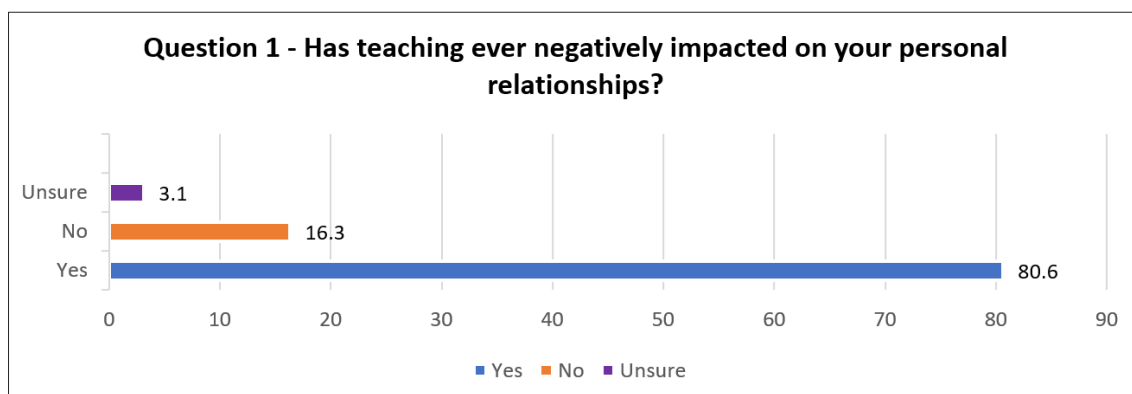
# Key findings

I organised the results from my [anonymous Twitter poll](#)<sup>1</sup> asking teachers/former teachers seven questions about teaching and relationships into these three sections:

**Personal relationships**, **Intimate relationships**, and **Workplace support**. (NB:

Questions do not appear in numerical order).

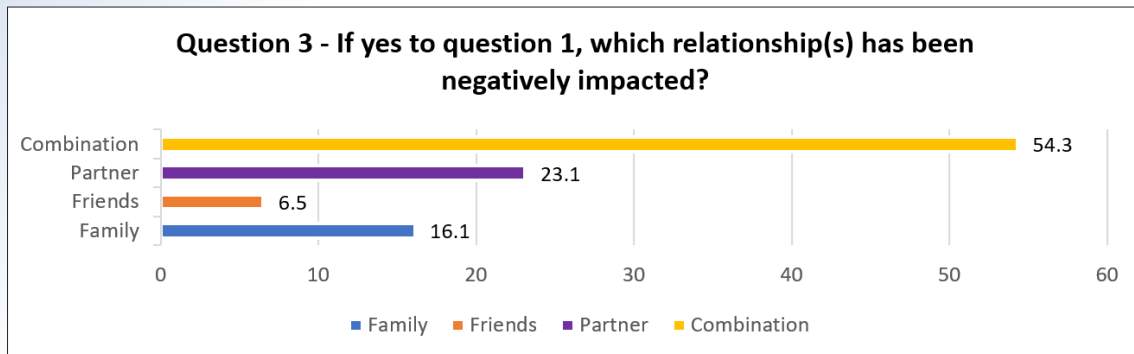
## Personal relationships



As you can see, the majority of the 2,937 respondents have responded that 'yes,' teaching has negatively impacted on their relationships. This matches with the discussions I had with our R.I.S.E. Magazine contributors' group, many of whom are teachers/former teachers. Within this group, many reported teaching having a negative impact on their relationships and shared concern for how widespread it seems to be.

For example, **Allen Tsui**, a computer science lead and computing specialist teacher, shared:

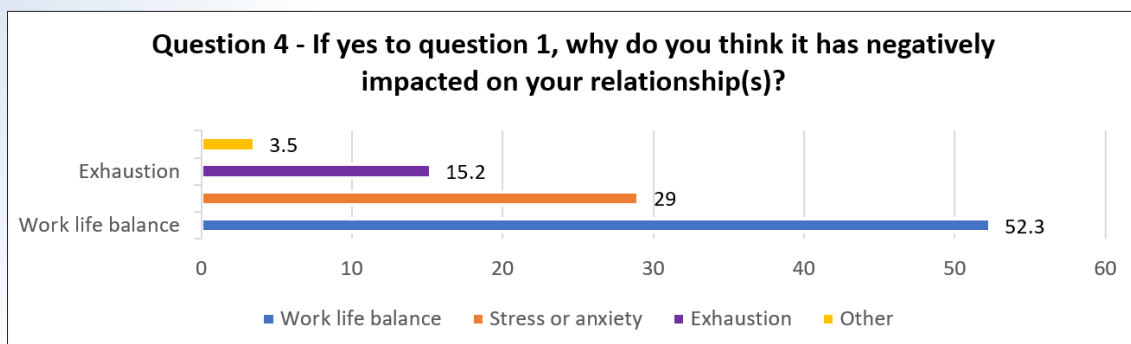
"Yes, teaching has negatively impacted on my personal relationships. At its worst in 2013, my mental health was so poor, I sought medical advice from my GP who referred me to psychotherapy. I attended two-hour long sessions a week for the best part of twelve months before being discharged. During that time, I resigned from the school I was working for."



I also wanted to delve into this a bit further to see if the negative impact on personal relationships was more common for particular types of relationships. For example, is it more common to negatively impact on a partner rather than friends, is family more impacted, or is it more likely to be a combination?

As you can see, over half of the 1,027 respondents said that the negative impact was a combination of personal relationships. This makes sense, as individuals have a network of different relationships to manage and an impact on one of these could have a knock-on effect on others. For example, if you live in a household of multiple people and a relationship with one of them becomes strained, the environment changes and this can then impact on other relationships. Having a strained relationship at home might mean you are less available with your friends, as you try and work things through.



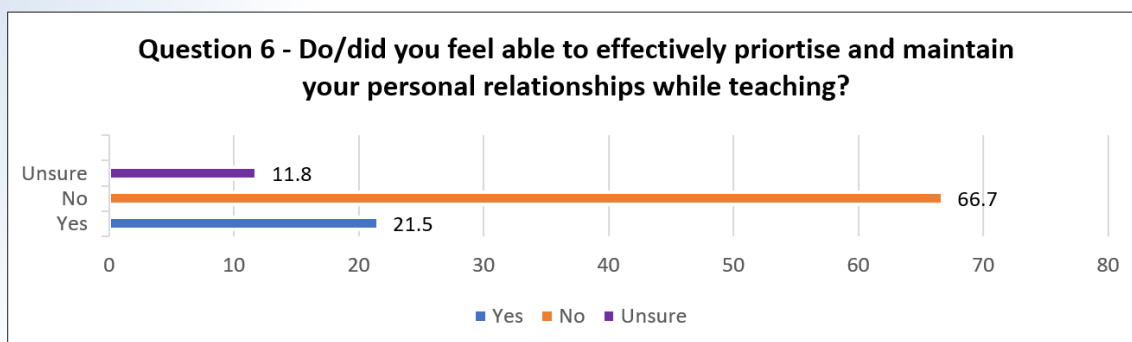


When I spoke with teachers/former teachers about the impact teaching had on their relationships, I noticed some common causes being cited for why this was the case, such as the lack of ‘work-life balance,’ ‘stress’ and ‘anxiety’ from their job and being completely ‘exhausted.’ I wanted to see if the commonalities were similar with a wider group and found that many respondents selected these same reasons. We will dive into these further into the report when we look at causes of the negative impact. Interestingly, work-life balance was the highest percentage at over 52% of participants, selecting it for the reason they feel teaching has negatively impacted on their relationships.

Head of Year, KS4 and PE Teacher, **Samuel Chapman** explains:

“At times, managing working expectations and time after school with the demands of childcare and time with my wife, has impacted on our relationship. This was very noticeable in COVID time. As a Middle Leader, I was expected to be in at times with very little flexibility for having children, e.g., school drop-off. Balancing workload has been considered more since COVID, ensuring we got home. But recently with the return to normality, it feels very much that more and more is put on our plates.”





So, we have a majority sharing that teaching has negatively impacted on their relationships – but how about how many of those respondents feel or felt able to effectively prioritise and maintain their personal relationships while teaching? Perhaps some teachers had a negative impact at one time but now have ways to manage this better? Well perhaps not, as 66.7% of over 1,000 teachers said ‘no’ and another 11.8% were ‘unsure.’ Sadly, this makes a lot of sense when you look at the number of teachers who felt their workplace didn’t support them with this (54.9%) and the number that have considered leaving or taking time out (69.8%). Without the right support in place, no wonder teachers are feeling unable to effectively put their relationships back at the forefront and that’s leading many to have to take time out or leave to regain them.

An anonymous teacher shared that:

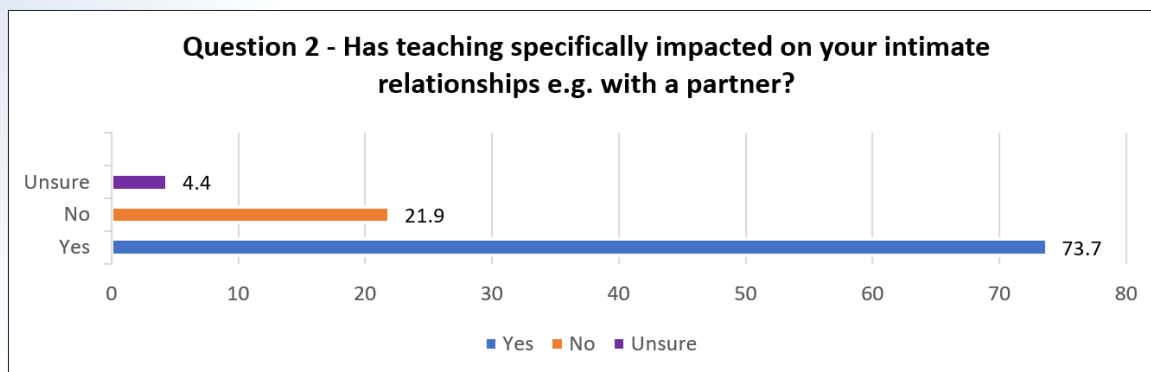
“The stress and anxiety cause me to shut down and not communicate with friends/family.”

This break-down of communication can be a huge factor in negatively impacting on a relationship. Communication is key in maintaining healthy relationships and, without this, loved ones may not even understand how we are feeling and why we are behaving as we are.

Additionally, it is worth considering the work environment as a whole for why teaching may negatively impact on personal relationships. As teacher **Allen Tsui** explains:

“As a more general observation, schools are perhaps or potentially the most inhospitable working environments for families who have children of school age. This is because teachers and other school-based staff rarely can attend or support those special events at their own children’s school, such as accompanying their child’s class on a school trip or attending any end of term performances. We, as a workforce of adults working in schools, are also expected to provide or deliver a very curated persona where we are expected to leave our personal woes at the school gate.”

## Intimate relationships



Looking at intimate relationships specifically, a big 73.7% of over 1,000 respondents said teaching impacted negatively here. Delving a little bit further, [Caroline Keep](#) shared an [anonymous Twitter poll](#) ‘Has teaching impacted on your sex life?’ and found that 68% of teachers said yes, their job has/had impacted on their sex life.<sup>4</sup>

Reading articles and blogs such as [Is teaching affecting your marriage?](#) and [Teachers too tired for sex](#) alongside the results from my poll and Caroline’s poll, it seems to me that it isn’t ‘teaching’ specifically causing the relationship and intimacy difficulties, but rather the stress, exhaustion, lack of work-life balance and mental health issues that can result from being a teacher. This also rings true from what teachers shared with me about teaching impacting negatively on their own relationships, citing reasons such as ‘too tired,’ ‘not being able to switch off,’ ‘working all the time.’ In fact, according to a 2019 survey from NASWUT, ‘83% of teachers felt too tired to do the things they wanted to do.’<sup>5</sup>

SEND and Wellbeing Consultant, **Lynn How**, explains:

“In my professional experience, I have found that if a teacher’s partner does not support them, then they may work extra hard as a form of escapism. This is not healthy.”

She goes on to speak about the negative impact teaching had on her own intimate relationship:

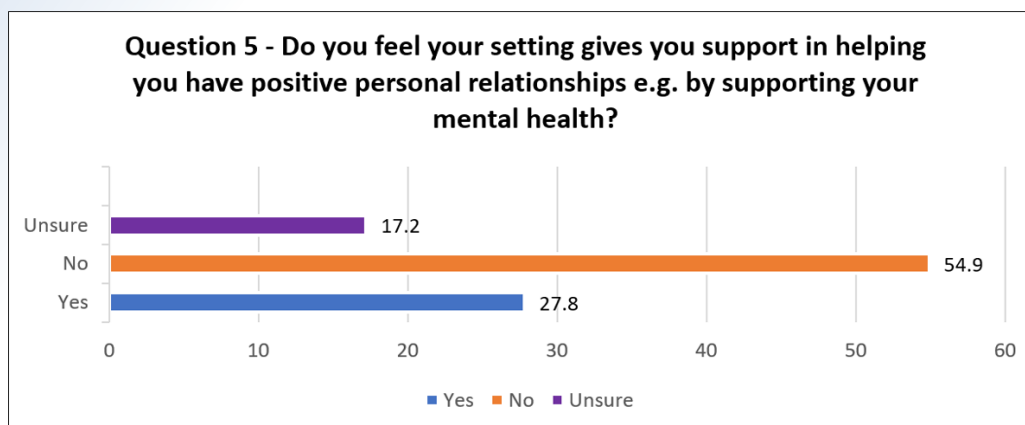
“In my personal experience, teaching as a career has negatively impacted on my personal relationships. Working late into the night and always needing to get something done for a deadline, certainly helped the spark go out. That, coupled with parenting and my husband having an even more demanding self-employed job, resulted in the marriage [coming] to an end. We had been together 20 years and, although there were other factors, I would say a large factor was the inability for us to disconnect from work to put the time and energy needed to keep our relationship going.”

Interestingly, speaking with teachers whose partners have no experience working in education, they explained that their partner ‘didn’t understand’ things like why they were working in the evenings and at weekends; why they were responding to emails out of work hours; why they were making classroom displays during half term; why they couldn’t go straight into holiday mode as soon as the summer break hit, etc. This lack of understanding can cause a disconnect, particularly if communication breaks down.

[Relate.org.uk](https://www.relate.org.uk), explains that stress can change our behaviour, for example ‘we might get angry, lash out or be snappy’ or become ‘withdrawn, shutting ourselves away and keeping emotions to ourselves.’ This kind of change in behaviour can be hurtful to your loved ones; they may become defensive or feel ignored and rejected. “What can be really problematic though, is that they may want to help, and feel that their efforts are being rebuffed. This can feel like a real rejection and can result in them becoming withdrawn or snappy themselves.”<sup>11</sup>

Your partner/friend/family member may not realise why you are behaving this way, especially if you are unable to recognise or address the stress causing the behaviour yourself.

## Workplace support



We can see the negative impact hitting hard, so what are schools doing to support?

Unfortunately, on the whole, not enough. Looking at the results for how many teachers felt their school provided relationship support, wellbeing in education expert, **Andrew Cowley**, shared his concerns:

“For the breakdown of a marriage or partnership – such a break-up changes people. Given that more than half the respondents felt that their setting gave no support to such a situation, this has the potential to reach beyond the person concerned.”

This isn't entirely down to the schools themselves; there are always external pressures placed upon them – statutory requirements and expectations from the Government – but that shouldn't define the culture of the school itself. An inclusive school environment that is underpinned by wellbeing has a hugely positive impact on teacher wellbeing, making it a place where staff feel able to open up and know where to get support.

An anonymous teacher shared:

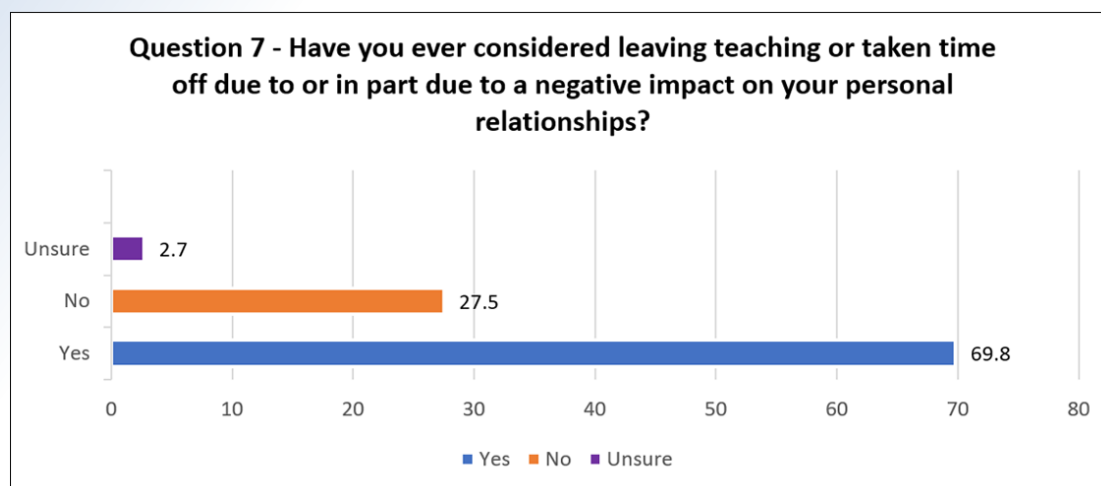
“Balancing time between work and supporting my family was (and still is) very challenging. I recently stepped down from my pastoral responsibilities due to the impact it was having. The school provides some support, but they are sadly bound by a severe lack of Government funding, meaning not enough PPA time for teachers and school leaders, therefore meaning most/all staff having to work during evenings and weekends to fulfil the demands of the role. This has a huge adverse effect on the wellbeing and morale of school staff and seems to have worsened leading up to and after the COVID-19 lockdowns.”

Time is a huge issue here when we consider school support: how can teachers possibly maintain good relationships if so much of their time is occupied by work or thinking about work? Respondents made comments such as:

“Lack of time and always thinking about work. There’s always something to do and feel like you should be doing it. The pressure is escalating and the expectations constantly rising.”

Additionally, teachers feeling valued and trusted is significant to wellbeing and therefore relationships. The NASWUT’s ‘Teachers’ Mental Health in the UK’ 2019 survey found that 56% of teachers believe they are not managed in a way that empowers them, 38% do not feel respected as a professional, 72% feel that they are held responsible for things out of their control, and 59% believe their opinions are not valued by management – and these figures only increase when looking at minority groups.<sup>5</sup> This is a startling number of teachers feeling unsupported and unappreciated in their roles.

Teachers need a voice, they need to feel respected and appreciated; this is a win for all schools, as better job satisfaction equals better retention.



Speaking of retention, let's look at the results for teachers who have considered leaving or had time off because of (or partly because of) a negative impact on their relationships. 69.8% of 1,179 respondents said 'yes', they had considered taking time off/leaving or had taken time off/left. As mentioned before, this couples with the lack of teachers who felt able to maintain and prioritise their relationships and the lack of teachers who felt their personal relationships were supported by their organisations.

Considering known difficulties with teacher retention, this shows how significant these results are and how much of an impact could be made, not only for the individuals themselves but also the teaching profession, if teachers had the right support to foster their personal relationships. Co-Founder and Engagement Director at YouHQ (a wellbeing tools for schools and colleges), **Jez Belas**, explains how he ended up leaving teaching:

"As a young teacher, I didn't notice any negative impact on my personal relationships. Looking back, I think I probably invested less emotionally before I became a dad and was able to leave my work baggage at school. As I got older, got married and became a dad, my empathy with the parents and young people in my care grew and I did then notice I was finding it harder to come home and give my own family the quality of attention they needed. This ultimately led to me changing careers recently, and my wife has commented on the difference it's made to our family."

**Lynn How** adds:

"I've even seen teachers leave the profession because they couldn't cope with the demands of the job when a personal issue such as marital discord came up. Schools are ill-equipped to support struggling staff at best, and at worst, morally negligent."

Those words ‘morally negligent’ really hit home for me when you consider how well-known teacher stress and poor mental health is. When you hear about teachers working in toxic school environments that continually exacerbate this, we really have to take a hard look at how some organisations are treating their teachers and make a point of learning from those who are showcasing best practice.

## Causes of impact

### Stress in teaching and how stress impacts on relationships

Education Support’s UK ‘Teacher Wellbeing Index 2021’ found 72% of school staff described themselves as stressed – and, broken down further into roles, 84% of senior leaders and 69% of schoolteachers are stressed.<sup>6</sup>

So, what is causing this stress? There were six consistent reasons cited in the survey:

- excessive workload
- pupil/student behaviour
- unreasonable demands from managers
- work/life balance
- COVID-19
- lack of trust from management

with the two largest causes being excessive workload and work-life balance.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the conversations I have had with teachers, this is unsurprising – many mentioned workload and difficulty with work-life balance as reasons for stress and anxiety. Additionally, this excessive workload was sometimes linked to unreasonable demands or lack of trust from management.

COVID-19 was not something teachers mentioned in our recent conversations, but in 2020 and 2021 this was mentioned frequently as a stressor. Teachers were on the frontline during the pandemic, many got ill, feared infecting their loved ones, had the stress of trying to teach online from their bedroom, then being in and back off again and so on. Additionally, many teachers are still experiencing long COVID, in fact, alarmingly, “Long COVID rates among teachers and other education staff are now the joint highest of any listed occupational group.” TES, 2022<sup>7</sup>

It interests me that pupil behaviour is mentioned by 36% of staff as a reason for stress and I wonder if this is linked to a rise in pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs following the pandemic. With this rise, but without additional support, training and resources for staff to meet these needs, I can see how pupil behaviour could become more difficult to manage. If pupils feel their needs are not being met, if they are stressed and anxious or feel they aren’t being understood and valued, this could of course translate into behaviour that challenges teachers and other school staff.



Additionally, a preliminary study into working conditions and mental health in teachers found that, “[Poor mental health in teachers is significantly associated with high job demand and low social support.](#)”<sup>8</sup>

Concerningly, I found articles such as [Top 5 Most Stressful Jobs](#) and [Professionals That Are Prone to Burnout](#) that cited teaching as one of the most stressful occupations with one of the highest burnout rates. However, this is not the same in all countries. The FFT Education Lab explains, “[Teachers in England are more likely to perceive their job as causing them stress – and having a negative impact upon their mental health – than teachers in other countries.](#)”<sup>9</sup>

Looking at international figures more closely, [@TeacherToolkit](#) shared this comparison graphic from the OECD of the ‘extent of school accountability and share of staff stressed by accountability.’<sup>10</sup>

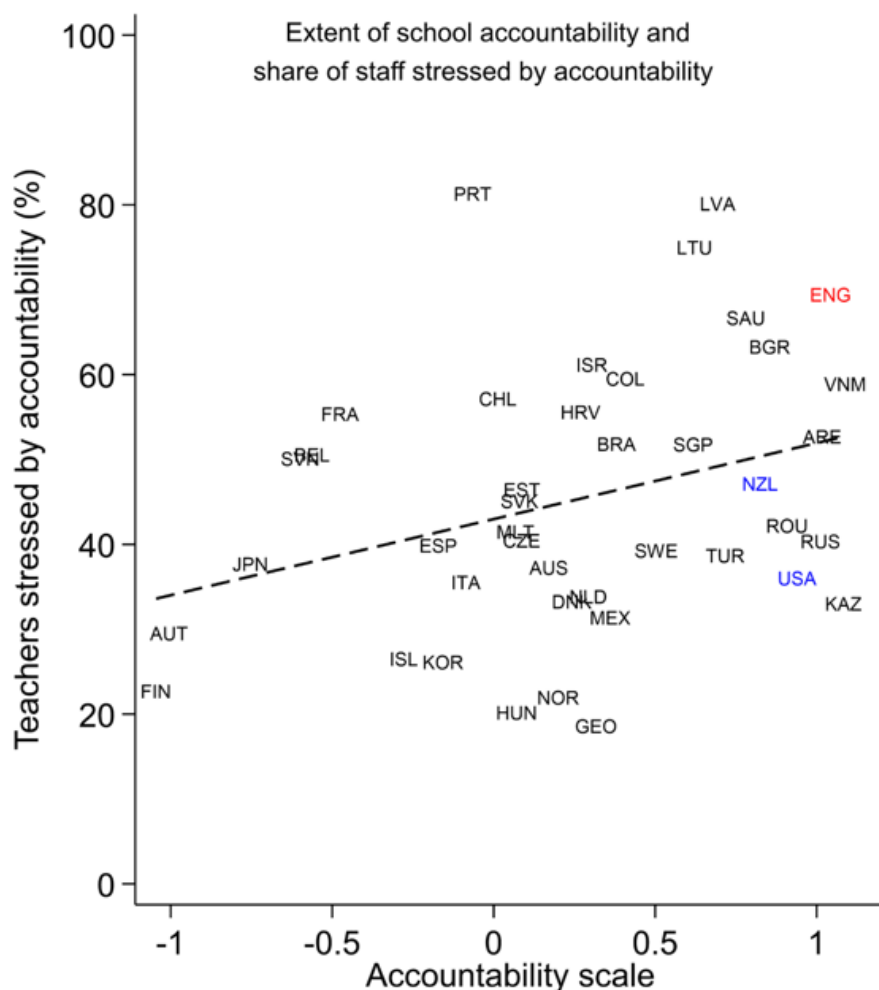


Image source: [@TeacherToolkit](#)

## Mental health in teaching and how it impacts on relationships

In the same Education Support's UK '[Teacher Wellbeing Index 2021](#),' 28% of staff reported experiencing a mental health issue in the part academic year, with 44% sharing they had symptoms of anxiety, 28% with symptoms of depression and 29% exhaustion. These figures are concerning, especially when you consider that some staff may not have wanted to share that they have a mental health issue due to concerns of being stigmatised, so the actual figure could be higher. Additionally, although 28% reported experiencing a mental health issue specifically, 77% said they had experienced behavioural, psychological or physical symptoms due to their work. A significant 54% have considered leaving the profession due to pressures on mental health and wellbeing. <sup>6</sup>

So, are staff getting appropriate support with their mental health? Disappointingly, less than 50% of respondents to that survey felt supported by their organisation when experiencing mental health problems, 42% of staff considered their organisation's culture had a negative effect on their wellbeing, and 61% of staff said they hadn't had sufficient guidance about their mental health and wellbeing at work. <sup>6</sup> **These figures need to change for teaching to be a sustainable career.** Schools who are lacking this supportive culture need to look at good model schools for wellbeing and mental health to improve.

Like with stress, mental health issues and poor wellbeing can affect our behaviour, which impacts on our relationships. If we are not in a good place ourselves, it becomes difficult to be our best selves in our relationships. We can be withdrawn and despondent, angry and frustrated, we can even change between behaviors and emotions rapidly, leaving others confused and unsure about what is happening and how they can help. It can become a vicious cycle: good relationships benefit our mental health and wellbeing, poor mental health and wellbeing can negatively impact on our relationships, strained relationships can negatively impact on our mental health; and it continues round and round until the metaphorical wheel comes off and rolls away, leaving you chasing after it.

## Does emotional investment play a role?

Given most teachers get into the role because of their passion for education, an understanding of its importance in the lives of pupils (whatever age) and a want to be a fundamental part of their lives; is it possible that this creates an emotional investment in their career that may cause a negative impact on their mental health and relationships?

Clinical Psychologist and youHQ Wellbeing Director, **Alistair Bailie**, explains:

“Over recent years, there has been a greater emphasis on teachers’ responsibility for pastoral care and their pupils’ emotional wellbeing. This isn’t something that all teachers feel equipped or confident in managing, which inevitably leads to greater stresses. As the world has become a more stressful place in the last couple of years, particularly how this is manifested in children’s behaviour, that, yet again, has an impact on teacher wellbeing. This becomes a vicious cycle of increased stress that transfers to lower wellbeing and therefore naturally reduced performance. This in turn leads teachers to feel they have to work harder just to stay still, and their work life balance is further compromised. You can see how the cycle continues until the holidays and a chance to reset. That temptation to wait to do something or hope that a holiday will resolve the issues is unfortunately something of a fantasy. How far into Autumn term do teachers continue to feel the benefit of a six-week holiday? Probably not long and certainly not long enough to sustain them through the year.”

He continues:

“My clinical experience of having lots of teachers referred to me is that they are a very difficult group to work with because of their difficulties with availability. My attempts to arrange appointments are often met with ‘Can we do it in 15 minutes on lunch whilst I’m marking work and eating?’ Teachers more than other professional groups have difficulty taking time out inside term time in order to best look after themselves. As a professional group teachers, like many other public service employees, can be quite poor at looking after themselves. A huge part of their identity and role is wrapped up in caring and nurturing others. To look after themselves feels selfish and so they avoid it but bear the cost themselves. I often hear the same mantra-like responses: ‘It’s ok, I can cope with it’, ‘It’s bearable.’ That might be true but for how long?”

## Making it work

Additionally, it is crucial to clarify here that although many of the teachers surveyed and those that shared personal experiences reported a negative impact, not all teachers find teaching negatively impacts on their relationships. For example, when I asked teacher and founder of Tiny Voice Talks, **Toria Bono**, about her thoughts on teaching and relationships, she explained:

“I have found that teaching doesn’t have to have an impact on relationships, but I have to consciously prioritise my relationships. Teaching can be all-consuming, and I have had to work hard to plan time with family and friends. I have colour-coded diaries and block out teaching/work time. All other time is given to rest time, family, friends, exercise and me time. We need to learn/I have needed to learn how to manage it.”

In the right environment, good relationships can be fostered. Take for example **Allen Tsui**’s experiences at his current school:

“I am fortunate that the amazing school I have worked for since 2015 has been incredibly supportive of enabling me and my colleagues to put our families first. When my son was about to begin Reception at his school and was offered a staggered start much later than other children in his cohort, the Executive Head, Head of School and members of the Senior Leadership Team were more than happy to accommodate my son on a temporary basis at my school in the Reception Class until he was to formally begin at his own school. More recently, when I explained to the current Head of School my family circumstances, she and the current Senior Leadership Team agreed that I would not be expected to regularly attend after school or Twilight INSETs.”

An anonymous teacher shared that their college supports staff in maintaining positive relationships, explaining that:

“There are plenty of social events and support for our families to be fully involved in the daily workings of the college.”

They also explained that they ‘block off’ a specific time on weeknights for

“family time and work-free conversation.”

# Summary

The Twitter surveys show that many teachers have experienced or are experiencing a negative impact on their personal relationships from teaching, most commonly from key stressors such as excessive workload, unreasonable expectations from management, poor work-life balance etc. These stressors are, in far too many cases, leading to mental health issues and strains on personal relationships.

Disappointingly, fewer than half of teachers feel supported by their schools with their relationships which causes the problem to continue to grow and, in some cases, can cause relationship breakdowns or teachers having to take time off or leave the profession altogether. By not better supporting teachers in this way, we are not valuing them as people; we are doing them a huge disservice. They deserve better and the impacts can cause ripples across the whole school, reaching pupils too. How can teachers put their best into their work when they are exhausted, struggling with work-life balance, their relationships are falling apart, and they don't feel they have anywhere to turn in school?

Wellbeing in Education Expert, **Andrew Cowley**, also commented on the Twitter survey results:

“We should all be concerned at the figures that the survey into how teaching affects relationships shows. Nearly three thousand respondents have shown that, overwhelmingly, teaching has impacted on the friendships and intimate relationships of our teaching workforce. By ‘impact,’ we mean the possibly irretrievable breakdown of these relationships. In a profession that relies on the good health and wellbeing of the workforce, we cannot be flippant about the long-term damage.”

# Recommendations

Although relationship issues do seem to be concerningly commonplace, there are things that educators can do – and, more importantly, that their workplaces can do – to help foster personal relationships. Sometimes, a person may find they have to step away from teaching, and that is okay too. What is important is that teachers have the best support in place that enables them to put themselves first so they can keep hold of their important relationships.

## For organisations

### How can we support teachers in their relationships outside of school?

With 54.9% of teachers surveyed feeling they didn't have support from their school in maintaining healthy personal relationships, it is crucial we look at practical ways that organisations can help their staff.

Here are a few things schools can work on putting into action:

- First and foremost, schools need to **actively monitor** staff mental health, wellbeing and stress so they can see what the factors are and actively address them.
- Have **wellbeing policies** and involve staff in creating them.
- **Ditch data-related performance targets** etc. All these things cause extra stress of accountability for teachers.
- Work with staff on a **workload policy**: look at ways to minimise work, streamline daily activities, make marking simpler etc.
- Look to and **learn from other organisations/professions** with comparable time and emotional commitment requirements (public services) where things are working well in this area.
- **Create an open culture** where staff feel able to talk about their mental health and stresses openly without fear of stigma or being told they are being 'too negative,' not being a 'team player,' etc.
- **Actively model this culture**. If senior leaders are open, teachers are more likely to be too.



It can be tempting for schools to have a 'tokenistic' approach to improving mental health – a yoga class here, a twilight there. What we really need is sustained change embedded throughout the school culture with actions that are planned and reviewed. Teacher, **Allen Tsui**, explains:

"Having 'be kind' or 'mental health matters' being almost screamed at you does not constitute actual support to improve well-being. Practical support of being scheduled time off to have the 'headspace' to reflect on and devise a well-being action plan that will be loosely monitored and reviewed, would be my suggestion. This could help me and potentially others to effectively prioritise and manage personal relationships and professional obligations."

Wellbeing Expert, **Andrew Cowley**, reiterates the importance of a supportive school culture where staff feel they are able to ask for support:

"The answer? School leaders need to be aware, without intruding into the relationship structure within the school, and be open for staff to discuss their personal challenges without being judged. Relationships are made and broken all the time, but an empathetic ear might just save the ethical school leader a problem or two."

**Alistair Bailie**, Clinical Psychologist and youHQ Wellbeing Director, contributes some additional ideas:

"Without being too prescriptive, I would encourage the following:

1. The school sets **reasonable and healthy boundaries** with parents, students, and other staff regarding teachers' availability. This includes expectations about responding to emails, calls etc.
2. **Teachers individually practise their own boundaries** around contact; personal phones only accepting calls from friends/family, don't have push notifications outside of working hours or only check them during working hours.
3. The school should **check in and manage the planned and actual work week of teachers**. These often differ significantly, and unhealthy expectations can develop if you prop up dysfunctional systems by simply working longer and longer.
4. **Teachers must develop a reason to stop work**. If the time outside of work is absent of enjoyable and engaging activities with friends and loved ones, it's easier for the boundaries to get blurred e.g. 'I'll work because I'm just sitting in front of the TV and have nothing else to do.' This helps ensure you bring balance and don't forget the person you are outside of the teacher.
5. **Don't compromise your essential wellbeing time**. What you need will vary from person to person but if you can prioritise time for you that is essential, then you can have greater flexibility around when you do work.



6. Expectations around students' performance cannot exclusively be attributed to teachers' performance. It's completely unfair to appraise a teacher's performance exclusively by the results of their students. Of course, there is some degree of influence, but this is never going to be an outcome that is within a teacher's control. **A focus on process goals rather than outcome** will encourage healthier working boundaries.
7. The school needs to consider **how space can be given for teachers** to be able to attend counselling, therapy, doctor's appointments etc. during term time so that there isn't the temptation to simply avoid or delay getting the support they need.
8. As a general principle, **help teachers be proactive rather than reactive** when it comes to pastoral responsibilities, then the predictability of workload can be managed better. If you constantly feel like you're firefighting, it's an uphill struggle."

## For individuals

### What can teachers do themselves to prioritise their relationships?

Teachers need support from their schools, but what they receive is out of their control, so what *is* in their control can help them get a better balance work and relationships. A large part of how we can maintain positive relationships with ourselves, and others is setting and adhering to healthy boundaries. Clinical Psychologist, **Alistair Bailie**, explains:

“Healthy boundaries are essential to help balance the work-life conflict. This is more pronounced for teachers because of the blurry boundaries and hours worked.”

This need for healthy boundaries relates to reducing some of the stressors that were covered earlier, such as excessive workload, poor work-life balance, and insurmountable expectations and pressure.

Here are some ideas of things to do to prioritise and maintain personal relationships:

- **Block out time** for family/friends/partner.
- **Communication is everything.** If you are behaving differently, explain why so they appreciate it is not personal to them but rather how stress/anxiety/exhaustion is presenting in you.
- **Be more aware of your feelings and behaviour** so you can get the right support.
- **Ask for help**, whether from your school, a trusted friend/colleague/family member or an external service.
- **Set aside time for yourself.** Time to recharge can help you be more present when with others.
- **Practise saying ‘no’** to extra work you don’t have time for, responsibilities you can’t manage, and unreasonable demands. Also, practise asking for time to consider so you can weigh up options before making commitments you later come to regret.
- **Talk about it.** Let others know they are not alone, break the stigma, normalise the need for support to maintain positive personal relationships.
- **Thank people for their support and show your gratitude.** That way, in those times when you are snappy, withdrawn etc. they’ll be more understanding and not take it personally. They should, in turn, show more of their support and gratitude for you.
- **Try not to be defensive**, particularly if your partner isn’t in education and doesn’t understand why you are writing reports over the weekend, etc. Explain instead why you need to do it and make a compromise of when you can make time for them. It all goes back to communication.

Psychologist, Psychosexual Therapist, and CORST Professional Standards Manager, **Jo Coker**, adds:

“Here are some tips that may help teachers – and indeed all of us – to remember to focus on our own lives and loved ones, and not let them come last in the queue to work.

- Try to **maintain a boundary** around work. Where possible, finish all work at work and do not take it home.
- When you are with your loved ones, concentrate on just them. **Put the phone away** and spend time talking to each other and sharing your day.
- **Be available for your partner.** Nourish the relationship and do not let it be the casualty of a work schedule because it was not nurtured.
- **Share out the home chores:** cook together, clean together - no one person should have to do everything.
- If help is on offer, either from relatives or by paying, then take it. **Do not be a martyr.**
- **Whatever you find relieves your stress, timetable it in.** e.g., exercise, social contact, pampering time etc.
- To avoid eating junk, **plan food and batch cook** ahead for the week.
- **Get rest!** Don't get so tired you fall asleep in a chair.
- **Learn to say 'no'.** You are not superhuman and cannot do everything. Saying 'no' makes your 'yes' more powerful.
- **Plan breaks.** Even if you cannot afford to get away, staycations can be a brilliant breaks.

There is a saying, ‘Those who do not make time for health, will in the future have to make time for illness.’ Heed these wise words and **make that time for you and your loved ones.** It will pay dividends.”

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