

# FINDING OUR SOLUTIONS

by Kathy Burford

Teachers often have good ideas on how to resolve many of the stressful issues confronting them each day. This fact was clearly demonstrated at a teacher in-service I helped to facilitate recently. Workshop participants were involved in a small group exercise in which they were asked to identify some of their common work or personal stressors. They then used their collective wisdom (two heads are better than one) to find solutions to the particular problem they had identified. The exercise was such a positive experience that I asked their permission to share the results with other teachers who might benefit from the suggested solutions.

## **(1) Identified Problem Causing Stress:**

Work Overload —; multi-jobs, teaching plus too many tasks for the time available. Help!

### *Obstacles/Barriers to Solving the Problem:*

finances/monies are not available for hiring more teachers; time line is still there for things you don't get done.; there are things that parents cannot do —; they have their workloads too; ourselves —; we have trouble saying "no!" —; we are our own worst enemies.

### *Solutions to Barriers:*

money saved on education reform be put back into system; public access to government accounts (education); more support people to do typing, copying, extra-curricular activities, duties etc.; some parents "do" have extra time and are willing.

### *Solutions to Solve Problem:*

prioritize list of tasks to be completed on a daily basis —; deal with "have to's" first; hire more staff; enlist parents to help.

## **(2) Identified Problem Causing Stress:**

Coping with behaviour of students in a classroom session —; disruptive behaviours.

### *Obstacles/Barriers to Solving the Problem:*

lack of in-service to deal appropriately with problem situations; lack of parental support; grade levels; time to chart behaviours; classroom size (too large); lack of policies in place; lack of guidance/special services; "outside the classroom" can result in more serious problems.

### *Solutions to Barriers:*

more conferences/sharing and in-service; develop rapport with child and parents —; practice good P.R.; committee in charge of charting behaviour; detention classes; alternative measures for those who don't fit into our system; more conflict management for all teachers.

### *Solution to Solve Problem:*

time outside of the classroom environment; researching solutions to the "particular" problem; get enough sleep (be well rested); take note of patterns; do not take it personally; think before you act —; pause!; be consistent.

## **(3) Identified Problem Causing Stress:**

When a work related incident affects home life and can ruin an entire day.

### *Obstacles/Barriers to Solving the Problem:*

difficult to leave work at work —; human nature does not allow that; leave school as quickly as possible —; go somewhere before you go home; reluctant to discuss problem with others —; can make you feel incompetent; learn to relax first —; need time away from the problem to reflect; we don't know how to relax.

### *Solutions to Barriers:*

leave —; be sensible —; you have to be good/kind to yourself (first!); trust yourself and others (there has to be someone you can trust); think of all possibilities —; widen your viewpoint —; nothing is carved in stone.

*Solutions to Solve Problem:*

learn to be adamant about leaving "work" at "work"; do not leave school at 3:00 on such a day —; take time to work the problem out at school; a confidante to help you work out the problem; learn to see the "other side" of the problem.

**(4) Identified Problem Causing Stress:**

Lack of time to do the insurmountable number of jobs teaching entails.

*Obstacles/Barriers to Solving the Problem:*

administration demands completion of duties —; all duties; some things you can't complete —; your back is against the wall; when stressed it is hard to relax; taking time away from family adds more stress; "unwise" amounts to do —; unreasonable workload; you are often expected to be perfect —; you are the teacher; if you are a new teacher, you could be looked down on; teachers involved in more are often "valued" more. (e.g. extra curriculum).

*Solutions to Barriers:*

value yourself.; be positive/proud that you give your best; meet administrators —; clarify roles/expectations of each side; time management —; set family time/day; accept your humanity (God alone is perfect).

*Solutions to Solve Problem:*

prioritize items; learn to say no; laugh; allocate time in personal schedule; use available time wisely; accept that you can only do what it is humanly possible to do; be happy with the decisions you make.

**(5) Identified Problem Causing Stress:**

Discipline - lack of interest shown by students.

*Obstacles/Barriers to Solving the Problem:*

time to do preparation of class time and having backups; dependence on support of others; lack of flexibility by administration to fulfill your solution; degree to which course can change yet remain as specified by objectives; ability of class.

*Solutions to Barriers:*

Get students involved (a largely untapped resource). They know what interests them, and respond well when trusted with power and encouraged to act responsibly. (1) Student ownership is key today. (2) Even most students of limited ability have a grasp of the computer world. (3) Delegating responsibility to students saves us time! (4) Students can be the "others we depend on!"

*Solutions to Solve Problem:*

talk to the individual (might have different problems); look at how we teach; how do we handle our own anger?; leaving situation —; not forgetting; dignity —; for me, the teacher, and the student; parents; Guidance Department; double checking students' abilities = 33; preparation of "your" class time and having backups.

As you read through these issues you may have found one or more that struck a familiar chord. It might have been one that you were struggling with yourself, or one that you solved on your own in a similar or different way. The main thing to keep in mind is that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. If something doesn't work for you, try something different, or as the workshop participants found out, sharing issues with colleagues can sometimes give a new perspective to an old problem.

If you are experiencing a work-related or personal problem, or would like information about the Employee Assistance Program for teachers, you can contact EAP Coordinators at the NLTA, Kathy Burford (Ext. 242) or Claudette Coombs (Ext.265).

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