All over the country, students and teachers have been walking out of schools in protest of unsafe learning and working conditions amid the Omicron surge.

New research suggests that teachers are facing a similar mental health crisis to students, but they’re left with little support.

In a recent assessment conducted by Miami University in Ohio, nearly two-thirds of teachers reported increased concern for emotional exhaustion, while three out of five reported concerns about anxiety.

Researchers told Verywell via email that while teachers are feeling isolated and depressed, they’re much less likely than students to have access to mental health resources in school.

"I'm feeling at a zero, but I walk into the class and I have to pretend I'm at 100%," Quennie G., an elementary school teacher in Toronto, Canada who is currently on stress leave from her job, told Verywell. "I have to just do my thing, teach my lesson, be engaging, be supportive, be patient with them, but I myself feel like I'm pouring from an empty cup."

Quennie teaches at an elementary school in a low socioeconomic area of Toronto, where students were already at a disadvantage before the pandemic. She said she's been struggling with her mental health ever since school returned to in-person learning and she began to witness an alarming increase in violence in the halls.

"Kids need to know their schedule on a day-to-day—that's how they cope," she said, explaining that she's seen everything from children trying to push each other over the stairwell banister to students slamming each other's heads into bathroom doors this year.

"When they don't have a set routine, behaviors start to change and that's where we're noticing the violence is coming from," she added. "If they don't know what to expect, they're anxious, and they're showing it through violence."

The lack of socialization students experienced for the better part of two years is also a contributor, she said, as kids have had little experience learning how to communicate and resolve conflicts with one another.

As Quennie started to see an increase in student violence, she started staying up late at night researching new methods to help students navigate difficult emotions. Often spending her nights in distress about what she'd seen earlier that day, she began to experience extreme sleep deprivation and night sweats, which in turn made it even more difficult to do her challenging job.

Full article found at https://www.verywellhealth.com/teachers-mental-health-crisis-pandemic-5216702
Teachers: Protecting Your Mental Health

According to several studies and reports, teaching is one of the most stressful jobs in the country. The American Federation of Teachers’ 2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey found that 61 percent of teachers said their jobs were always or often stressful—more than double the rate of non-teaching working adults—and 58 percent said they had poor mental health due to stress levels [1]. That was before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and since then, the transition to online learning, debates over reopening, and individual safety concerns are making teachers’ mental health worse. [2]

If you’re feeling tired and disengaged, there’s a good chance it’s related to trauma, secondary traumatic stress, and/or “battle fatigue.” Teachers are often focused on taking care of and supporting others, but without prioritizing your wellbeing, those stress levels won’t lift. Your mental health isn’t only important to you—teacher wellness is also linked to stability in schools and student achievement. [3]

Ways To Help Yourself

**Set boundaries early on and hold them.** Expressing your needs is necessary. Whether your school has gone virtual or not, you may be in more constant contact with parents that you’re used to. You can’t be on-the-clock at all times, so set office hours for remote teaching—even for young kids. A 2-hour block a few times a week lets students (and parents) know when they can reach you immediately and allows you to protect your free time. Schedule time to respond to other requests or let students’ families know that you’re unavailable after 5pm and will return any emails or calls the following day. If your school goes virtual, give yourself a dedicated workspace at home to signal to both yourself and others that you’re in work mode.

**Focus on what you can control.** COVID-19 has taken a lot of certainty away from everyone—controlling what you’re able to will help give you back structure and a sense of security that you’ve likely been craving. You’re in charge of how you spend your free time, your priorities, and your mindset. Check in with yourself: Are your news sources trustworthy? Do you need a break from media exposure? What can you do to boost your own sense of safety? Get involved in policy decisions in your district, attend school board meetings, and participate in your union to voice your opinions on school plans.

**Move your body.** Teachers are often on their feet all day and spend a lot of time moving around the classroom. It may not seem like much, but you’re actually releasing a lot of energy through that constant movement. If your school has gone virtual, you may be sitting a lot more. Set a timer to remind yourself to get up, even if it’s just for a 30-second stretch or walk around your house or apartment. If you want more consistent movement, think about using a yoga ball for a chair, get a standing desk, or buy a mini exercise bike for under your desk.

**Stay in touch with friends and family.** Social connection is crucial during times of hardship, so lean on your support network. You aren’t the only one trying to adjust. Feeling isolated or unsupported can make things worse. Reach out to that colleague who seems to “get” you, the person who always makes you laugh, or someone else who you can count on to validate your feelings. A short conversation can go a long way in helping you feel less alone.

*Full article found at https://mhanational.org/teachers-protecting-your-mental-health*