

38.

## TEACHER HAD A PERSONAL EMERGENCY THAT IMPACTS THEM EMOTIONALLY

Asher was an instructional coach who found himself facing a dilemma when a teacher mentioned that he was experiencing marital issues. Asher had noticed a decline in his colleague's ordinarily bubbly energy and in his participation at meetings. Asher stopped by informally to check in and the teacher shared his raw personal struggle. Leaving this conversation, Asher had to consider how to support his colleague on a personal level, while also ensuring that students would get the quality instruction that they needed.

As a result of the relationships you build as a coach, you may be privy to personal details that people share with you. After all, life does not stop happening at the schoolhouse door. The needs that arise based on a sudden personal emergency may differ substantially from those caused by long-term burnout. But just as they do with job-related stress, a coach may often have to help teachers manage issues stemming from personal crises so that the teachers can continue to take care of their students.

Helping a teacher develop habits of self-care is a great first step. When appropriate, the coach can also help the community wrap their arms around this person to provide a support network.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

What is the most pressing issue for this teacher at the moment (e.g. substitute plans for days out)?

Has the personal emergency impacted the teacher's ability to teach? If so, how?

Do you feel confident that you can address this situation sensitively?

Is this a sudden traumatic event or a long-term situation? How does it affect the immediate and long-term needs of the teacher and their students?

Does this teacher already have self-care strategies in place?

Has the school community also been affected? How do you know?

## PLAN A: SUPPORT THE TEACHER IN THE MOMENT

In a sudden event that requires the teacher to leave the building on short notice, you could (within reason):

- ✧ Teach the class
- ✧ Write lesson plans
- ✧ Grade assignments
- ✧ Cover bus, cafeteria, or playground duty
- ✧ Offer to drive
- ✧ Bring dinner for an evening or create a meal train
- ✧ Send flowers on behalf of the staff
- ✧ If the person wants to communicate but does not want to do it themselves, act as their liaison to the staff and community

## PLAN B: SUPPORT THE TEACHER LONG TERM

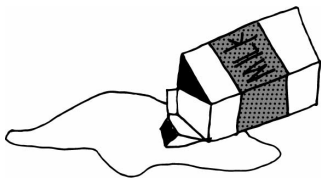
In the case of the onset of a long-term stressor, the coach can help the teacher develop habits for resilience and purpose.

Focus on the relationship before the task. A coach can allow for more time for informal conversations and check-ins that communicate caring and attention.

- If a teacher is struggling to feel grounded, consider conducting a “Core Values Inventory” (see **Read This** at the end of this scenario) with the teacher as a means of reflecting on strengths and focusing on what matters. This activity can also be replicated with students!
- Ask the teacher if they are interested in trying new strategies for stress relief and self-care. Refer to **Stress Rescue Tool (Appendix)**.
- Consider using the **Success Analysis Protocol (Appendix)** and celebrating wins in a team meeting. If appropriate, connect the teacher to instructional resources that align with their strengths and desired areas of growth.

Always remember to allow the teacher choice and voice in the direction of professional development and coaching.

## WORST CASE SCENARIO



It's important to remember that coaches are not counselors or therapists. While coaches offer an important platform for teachers to express their feelings in confidence, there are times when a teacher may need to consult outside resources. Your district may offer or cover mental health counseling, addiction treatment, or financial planning classes. If your advice is requested, say, "I would like to help you but this is outside my area of expertise. Would you like me to help connect you with outside resources?"

### FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

- ✧ Remain confidential
- ✧ Respect boundaries
- ✧ Practice self-care yourself
- ✧ Redirect toxic gossip

### PITFALLS

- ✘ Acting as a "savior"
- ✘ Smothering
- ✘ Making assumptions

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## YOU GOT THIS!

A sense of belonging is an incredibly important factor in one's ability to push through personal and professional challenges. If you spend time being a positive connector for teachers who might feel isolated, you are helping them thrive, and in turn helping to build a strong school community. Take a moment to appreciate this power.



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## READ THIS

Elena Aguilar, "How Core Values Foster Resilience in Educators" from *Bright Morning* (2018).

Jane Dutton, Peter Frost, Monica C. Worline, Jacoba M. Lilius, and Jason M. Kanov, "Leading in Times of Trauma" in *Harvard Business Review* (Feb. 2002).

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## APPENDIX TOOLS

Stress Rescue Tool

Coaching Question Stems

Success Analysis Protocol

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## SEE ALSO

#33 TEACHER FEELS OVERLOADED OR IS ON THE EDGE OF BURNOUT

