

WORRYING THAT YOUR TEACHING ISN'T UP TO PAR? TAKE THE "GOOD ENOUGH" TEST TO FIND OUT. (Spoiler Alert: You'll Pass With Flying Colors)

Ninety-three percent of teachers experience high stress levels on a regular basis. And these are most definitely not regular times. Teaching is overwhelming even in the best of circumstances, when we have regular routines and know what to expect day to day. Right now we are doing our best in a whole new model, trying to do it all, often with no framework to guide us. We love our students and we care deeply about our jobs. *And* we are stressed, exhausted, and overwhelmed.

Now, more than ever, you need to check in with yourself to make sure you're protecting and nurturing your own mental and physical health. So...how are you doing?

Let's start with a simple checklist, looking back at your recent remote teaching days.

Check off any that apply to you:

- I care about my students
- I create daily lessons for remote instruction, without the usual tools and resources I usually have at my fingertips
- I stay connected to students despite not seeing them in person
- I check in with colleagues to see how they're doing
- I do my best to stay on top of school communications, updates, and emails
- I balance virtual instruction with my own household's needs as best I can
- I find little ways to take care of myself, whether it's a bath or a bike ride, when I can

You likely checked off at least a few items here. Of course you did. You're a go-getter, a rockstar, a dedicated professional—in other words, a teacher. And like all teachers I know, you're worrying whether what you're doing is enough.

Here's the catch. If you checked the first item, "I care about my students," then you are doing just fine. Of course we want to excel at all the rest. But for now, this—caring about students—is the foundation and the vital linchpin on which everything else depends.

Knowing that you care, and care deeply, about your students means that you can shred your mental to-do list that has you trying to master virtual instruction, become an expert at remote feedback, and perfect your Zoom lighting. We tend to expect a lot of ourselves, so that list may be hard to erase. But try to let it go. Here's why.

This, caring about your students, is the essential cornerstone. All the rest will come and go, depending on the day. Expecting more of yourself is asking to set yourself up for frustration, and that's the last thing we need to add to our plates right now.

Remember that teaching is brutally difficult to "get right" and that no one ever really does, even in ideal circumstances. Don't let your performance in these trying times define you.

Make it your mantra: “I care about students.” Because you do. Even through the computer screens and emails and Zoom sessions, students can feel this. They will know you care.

In this time, we need to be kind to ourselves and prioritize what is most essential.

You may feel downright depleted after organizing a day of virtual instruction, and then there’s keeping up with the news, getting food in your fridge, and worrying about students and families’ health and well-being. Each day can feel like an endurance test as we face so many unknowns, all while continuing to steer our ships the best we can.

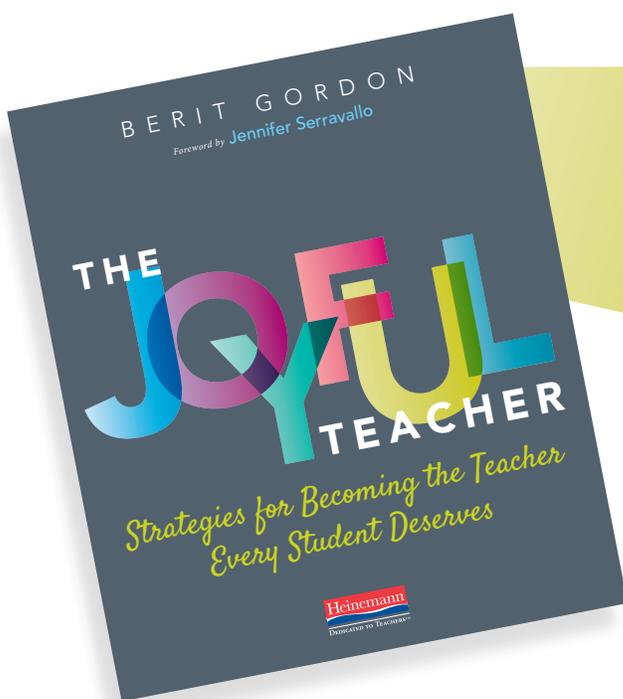
Whether you are in your classroom or teaching remotely, a hierarchy of teaching goals, where one goal builds on the next, helps to put the essential foundations in place first. You can start by creating a list of **achievable** goals that are aligned to your values and will help you take steps to survive and thrive in a demanding profession.

In my book *The Joyful Teacher*, I created a progression of teaching goals, organized so that one focus area builds on the one before it. Each chapter helps you put necessary foundations in place so you can build toward the next goal, helping you to be kind to yourself and to set yourself up for success. Each chapter provides ten strategies with step-by-step procedures to help you reach that goal.

The very first goal in a hierarchy of teaching goals, no matter the circumstances? Staying happy and healthy in a demanding job. And if ever there were a demanding time to be a teacher, it’s now. This goal is the foundation on which all our expert instruction rests. Without this, we cannot truly be there for our students who need us (and whom we care about so much).

While we want to be able to give meaningful virtual feedback, design engaging online lessons, and maintain a class community, we risk burnout by trying to get good at all these things at once, especially while we are also taking care of our own families and trying to find toilet paper. We need to take it one step at a time.

Anytime you’re taking out that mental list of what you haven’t done or perfected, remember the “good enough” test. You care about students. **Period.**



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