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## 6 ways teachers can master motivation in lockdown

If your motivation has begun to wane, Gemma Corby offers practical ways to give yourself a boost

**Gemma Corby**

Today at 7:00am



For most living in the northern hemisphere, January is a notoriously miserable month, even when there isn't a global pandemic and a national lockdown.

There is every chance that your motivation has dipped as low as a limbo dancer in the Mariana Trench as you continue to battle with remote learning, unstable internet connections and a computer screen full of blank squares, in place of a classroom full of eager faces.

It. Is. Tough.

## Coronavirus: How teachers can maintain motivation

In the absence of a silver bullet, the following practical tips may help to boost motivation levels.

### 1. Know your value

When you're trying to keep your head above water on a daily basis, it can be hard to visualise the bigger picture. Lee Prichard, head of UK regional development at [Thrive](#), a company that specialises in training teachers and other education professionals to support children's emotional and social development, encourages all teachers to recognise the difference they make to their students: "I hear from lots of adults [in schools] that they feel that the world is against them, but they should keep in mind that they are valued by lots of people – including parents."

### 2. Relational regulation

In plain English, [relational regulation theory \(RRT\)](#) involves people interacting in order to regulate their emotions. It's not rocket science; just having a chat with someone who actively listens can help when facing stressful situations.

As Prichard explains: "It's not about trying to problem-solve, it's about the right person listening and validating your experience by showing that they 'get it'".

This is something that many teachers are familiar with. Experienced teachers and co-directors of Love Literacy, Cal-I and Zara Muirhead, found that developing a support group with colleagues was essential during times of high pressure. Zara Muirhead says: "Having friends at work helps me to unwind, seek confidential advice and create a collective sense of identity and shared experience."

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### 3. Channel your inner Marie Kondo

There used to be a time when colour-coding your stationery collection was viewed as "procrastination" – but now it, alongside other organisational activities such as [writing lists](#), tidying and ordering things, is recognised as an effective coping mechanism.

Gill McKarkiel-Powell is assistant head of inclusion at an East London primary school, who always plans for the week ahead.

"Planning your to-do list for the week, rather than the day, helps you to pace yourself and to not become overwhelmed."

Creating a sense of order is what assists Norfolk English teacher Sue Lewis. Whether she's in school or not, having structure is essential.

"Keeping the same routines, such as having a regular spelling day, is a healthy tactic. My students are used to practising their spellings in pairs – encouraging their spelling bee buddy to get the word right. I think it's important for students to feel 'heard' while out of sight, and regular opportunities to contribute to lessons are vital."

When we're busy, the thought of trying to "fit in" exercise can seem overwhelming. If you're not a natural runner or gym bunny, exercise can feel more like a punishment.

The key is to find something you enjoy and can easily fit into your schedule. A brisk walk around the block at lunchtime could be the pick-me-up that you need, as Prichard notes: "Exercising outside is so important for mental and physical wellbeing."

Now we are in lockdown again, group classes are no longer feasible. However, thanks to months of restrictions, many of us are au fait with remote offerings – either through live classes or via apps – some of which offer discounts or are [free to teachers](#).

### 5. Find a creative outlet

You don't need to be the next Michelangelo to reap the benefits of creativity. Prichard recommends doing something where you can get lost in the flow and put school out of your mind for a period of time.

For Cal-I Muirhead, being creative boosts his mental health. He explains: "Holding on to my creative outlet (for me this is song writing, playing the piano and guitar and participating in evening acting classes) has been particularly important during moments where I felt tremendously swamped and my work-life balance was out of whack."

### 6. Be kind to yourself

If life feels overwhelming, McKarkiel-Powell suggests treating yourself with the same understanding and compassion that you would your best friend.

As Prichard puts it: "You cannot expect to steady the children you teach if you do not feel steady in the world. You do not need to work 24/7 – and you shouldn't feel guilty about taking time for yourself."

When working from home, decide a time when you will log-off – and stick to it, as it's tempting to continue into the evening.

McKarkiel-Powell also recommends seemingly small acts of self-kindness, which can really make a difference to your working week.

"Have clear boundaries and cut-offs – decide what they are and stick to them. For example, I always leave school at 4.30pm on Thursdays to visit my mother.

"Always try to eat breakfast and lunch. Everything seems worse on an empty stomach. Allow yourself a treat day – have something to look forward to, no matter how small. On Fridays I would go off-site for lunch, even if I ended up bringing it back to eat at work."

This can still apply when working from home when it's just as important to get some fresh air and often easier to eat lunch away from where you are working to help you feel re-energised. You could treat yourself to an episode of your current favourite TV show (there are benefits to WFH!).

Whatever you do to boost your sense of wellbeing and to keep motivated during this challenging time, remember that what you do *is* valued by your students, their parents and your colleagues. Even when it doesn't feel that way – perhaps, especially when it doesn't feel that way.

Take care of yourself and, as McKarkiel-Powell keeps in mind when the grass is looking seemingly greener on the other side: "The grass is greener where you water it – think about what you want to achieve and keep going."

*Gemma Corby is a freelance writer and former special educational needs and disability coordinator*

You can learn more about the [Thrive Approach here](#).

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