

Welcome to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast, the podcast for special educators who are looking for personal and professional development.

Christine Reeve: I'm your host, Dr. Christine Reeve. For more than 20 years, I've worn lots of hats in special education but my real love is helping special educators like you. This podcast will give you tips and ways to implement research-based practices in a practical way in your classroom to make your job easier and more effective.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Christine Reeve. I wanted to just give you a quick introduction to this replay. This is an episode I actually recorded last December, thinking that it would not be relevant by this December. I'm sorry to say that it still is relevant. While a lot of the world may look at our classrooms and think that things at school are back to normal, I think we all know that things are not back to normal. We had different problems maybe than we did last year, some are the same, but there's still a lot wrong with what is going on. I want you to know that you're still in the middle of crisis teaching, we're still dealing with a lot of the same issues. I know many of you are understaffed, many of you are dealing with rotating staff, many of you are dealing with rotating understaffed. We're still in the middle of teacher tired, which is what this is about. We are still in the middle of compassion fatigue. We're still in the middle of our families being in crisis, and everything in this episode still really applies.

I'm playing it a little bit early this year because I want you to plan, to take the time for yourself over break, to put the work away, to spend the time with family and friends, to spend time for yourself, to find a community for yourself, to take care of yourself. Self-care is not going to make the problem go away, I'm not saying that it will in any way. What I will say in this episode are lessons that I learned from highly stressful personal situations that I went through. I've linked to some of those and I've linked to some tools and some places that I think can be helpful, particularly if you're feeling the stress really badly at this time. Please reach out, if you are, to someone you love, reach out to us, reach out to the Facebook community, wherever it is that you feel that you can get help, and we will help as much as we can. I hope that this provides some ideas, at least, to let you know that you are not alone and that this is not just something that's happening to you; it is everywhere. This is a message from my heart to all of you, and as always, to thank you for everything that you do for your students and your families.

Welcome back to the Autism Classroom Resources Podcast. I'm Christine Reeve. I'm your host. Special educator and teacher burnout, or just plain teacher tired, was a real problem before the pandemic. But it's a really serious problem now and I'm worried because y'all are tired, and you should be, because I've never ever seen anyone do so much with so little for so long. I've been saying regularly on social media and in newsletters recently that it's important to remember that this is still crisis teaching. Everyone is stressed and teacher tired. Tensions and emotions run high and that's because this isn't just about remote teaching; this is about teaching in the middle of a pandemic. Some of you have lost families or those close to you. Many of you have quarantined or had friends or loved ones who have had to do so. Some of you have been sick, and it's a lot. I'm not saying this to add more stress; I'm saying this because I think we need to face what we have and I think that we can't find a solution if we don't face where we're at.

I'm also saying it because I want you to know that it isn't you failing. We've never done this before and frankly, we have to adjust in order to move on. We're also coping with compassion fatigue, which is a very real phenomenon that's experienced by caregivers like teachers. It's different than burnout which is caused by stress, and it's the emotional toll that caring for our students and their families and the trauma that we take on from caring for them creates. This year, the stress, trauma, and emotion are all higher in and out of the classroom. This episode is an episode from the heart. It's based on lessons that I learned about dealing with compassion fatigue from an experience of my life and having to adjust expectations to manage to get through it, that it's specific lessons that I'm pulling from that are related to this time. I wrote a post with all the gory details and you can find a link to that at the blog post along with resources for how to deal with compassion fatigue and other issues related to the pandemic at autismclassroomresources.com/episode63. Then the podcast and I are going to take a two-week break so I can practice what I preach. Let's get started.

These are lessons that I learned when my mom was battling Parkinson's at the end of her life and my sister was battling respiratory issues. They were lifelong issues of learning for me the way stress often is. I'm fortunate because I've always had a very supportive family who are a very big part of my life. But that meant that I needed to be there for them as they have always been there for me. I'll put a link in the blog post at autismclassroomresources.com/episode63 if you want to read more about the journey that I went through. I wrote this post a couple years ago. But these are a couple of the elements from that experience that I wanted to highlight that I think are relevant to the current experience.

The first strategy I want to talk about is reframing our thinking. I think for me, to prevent burnout, this is the biggest element. There's some good research that supports it by Martin Seligman that optimistic thinking leads to more positive outcomes. That doesn't mean that you have to think of everything as all unicorns and four leaf clovers, instead it means that you look at situations and find the good parts about them. This is a premise that my mother always taught me to look for the good in things, but it's also something that I was taught in graduate school because the focus of cognitive behavioral psychology and the focus for addressing depression actually focuses on reframing your perspective to look at the positive approach. It's got a good research behind it.

As an example, personally, when my mom started to decline, I became very stressed and frustrated. I was worried about the time that it was taking away from my work and earning my livelihood. I was worried about her and how she was doing. But once I started to accept that this was a fact that it was the end of her life, and I viewed it as an opportunity to treasure the time I had left with her, it totally changed my perspective and I found that I enjoyed my time with her much more. That caused my stress to significantly decrease. How does that relate to our classroom? If you're teacher tired, let's think about how you can lessen your demands and reframe your expectations. Take your time during this break to spend more time with your immediate family. Maybe you aren't traveling or having family come to you as you usually do, and maybe the holidays will be different, so take the time to make this a more relaxing holiday or take time to do more with your immediate family.

For instance, I'm going to take more time to bake, wrap presents, and do the things that I like to do instead of leaving everything to the last minute. When it comes to your students returning in January, think about how you can reframe your thoughts about teaching. We focus so much on the demands of academics, and I know that that's important, but maybe we need to think about really just focusing on maintaining their interest in learning and helping them build solid relationships with learning and their teachers, building solid relationships with their parents and their families because those are the things that will make a difference for them in the long term.

Another is to find community. There's a lot that goes into this one, and I'm just going to hit the highlight; everyone needs a community. Hopefully you have a good friend that you can go to when you need support but it's also really important that you have what some people refer to as a marigold—and I'll put a link in the resources for that—a marigold to someone who avoids the drama and cheers you on. You need positivity around you, not someone who competes with you. Competition is useful but when you have five IEPs to write this week, it's really not helpful to have someone who runs you up by saying, "Well, I have seven, I know, it's so hard." If there's no one in your life at the moment that you can reach out to that really understands what you're going through, there are a couple of things you can do.

One of the things I wrote in the earlier post was that I found with my mom that sending a text to some family members at the end of the day with a summary of how my mom was made it easier for me to put it all away at the end of the day and not have it creep into everything I did. Another option is to look online. Come join our free Facebook group for educators at [specialeducatorsconnection.com](https://www.facebook.com/specialeducatorsconnection). I try really hard to make sure that's a positively focused supportive educators community. Or come to [specialeducatoracademy.com](https://www.specialeducatoracademy.com) and try us out. We have live Zoom calls every Sunday and a very supportive online community.

Finally, when you have a community, make sure that you ask for help and that you accept it. That's one that I really struggled with but I hit a wall eventually and I learned it's important. You can't do this job alone, you need help. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Finally, take time for yourself to get over teacher tired. That sounds really so straightforward but it took me six months to really understand that when I was dealing with my crisis. I realized that it really meant taking care of myself and not doing everything for everyone else. It sometimes means saying no even when you want to say yes. I believe it's probably different for everybody. For me, it meant finding time to work on my own stuff. I didn't really finish a lot of things at that time. I had a lot of ideas. I had a lot of half finished products that I played with, but the creativity really refreshed me.

For you, maybe it means having time to take a walk by yourself, painting, scrapbooking, playing computer games, or taking a nap, it could be anything. Find out what it is. Make a promise to yourself to do it two or three times at least over break. Make time for yourself to refresh your spirit. You need the time to refresh yourself and take the time to come back refreshed and be there for your student. We can do this. You are your student's greatest resource. You can only be that resource if you take time for yourself. I look forward to seeing you in the Facebook group, in the academy community. Check out the resources in the section in the blog post at autismclassroomresources.com/episode63. I'll be back with a new podcast in two weeks. Enjoy

your break and make sure you take time for yourself and take care of yourself. Thanks so much for listening. I'll see you in two weeks.