



Staying Steady in Uncertain Times

— For Educators —

Practical Psychological Strategies for Managing Stress, Online Teaching & Supporting Students



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Today We'll Cover (Teachers Edition)

-  **Why this may feel especially activating**
Understanding the brain's threat response
-  **The extra cognitive & emotional load on teachers**
-  **How stress (and calm) spreads**
Regulating classrooms and online spaces
-  **Practical regulation tools for the school day**
-  **Structuring online teaching to reduce overwhelm**
-  **Supporting students without absorbing their stress**
-  **When to seek further support**



Why This Feels So Disruptive



Threat Response Activated

- 🛡️ Am I safe?
- 👤 Is my family safe?
- ❓ What happens next?

⚡ Uncertainty activates the threat system.

When the brain perceives ambiguity—like the foggy path shown here—it defaults to a state of hyper-vigilance. It prioritizes survival over higher-order thinking like planning or patience.

For Teachers specifically:

Stress is paired with the demand for **rapid adaptation**.

Uncertainty + Workload = Overwhelm

💡 **Clinical Insight:** Under stress, working memory is reduced and decision fatigue sets in faster. This is a physiological response, not a professional failing.

If You've Experienced Conflict Before



The Body Remembers

Current events act as triggers, reactivating old neural pathways. This is not "over-reacting"—it is a physiological recognition of danger.

Current events may feel familiar.

If you have lived through instability or crisis, your brain may bypass "assessment" and jump straight to "defense." Common reactions include:



Hypervigilance

Constant scanning for danger; inability to relax.



Sleep Disruption

Insomnia, vivid dreams, or waking exhausted.



Emotional Flooding

Sudden, intense waves of anxiety or grief.



Numbness

Feeling "checked out" or detached from reality.

Teacher Insight



Front-line roles intensify this. Teachers provide emotional containment for others all day. Constant exposure to students' and parents' emotions can prevent you from processing your own, leading to delayed exhaustion.

Panic Spreads — But So Does Calm



Emotions are contagious

Escalation spreads quickly through a group.



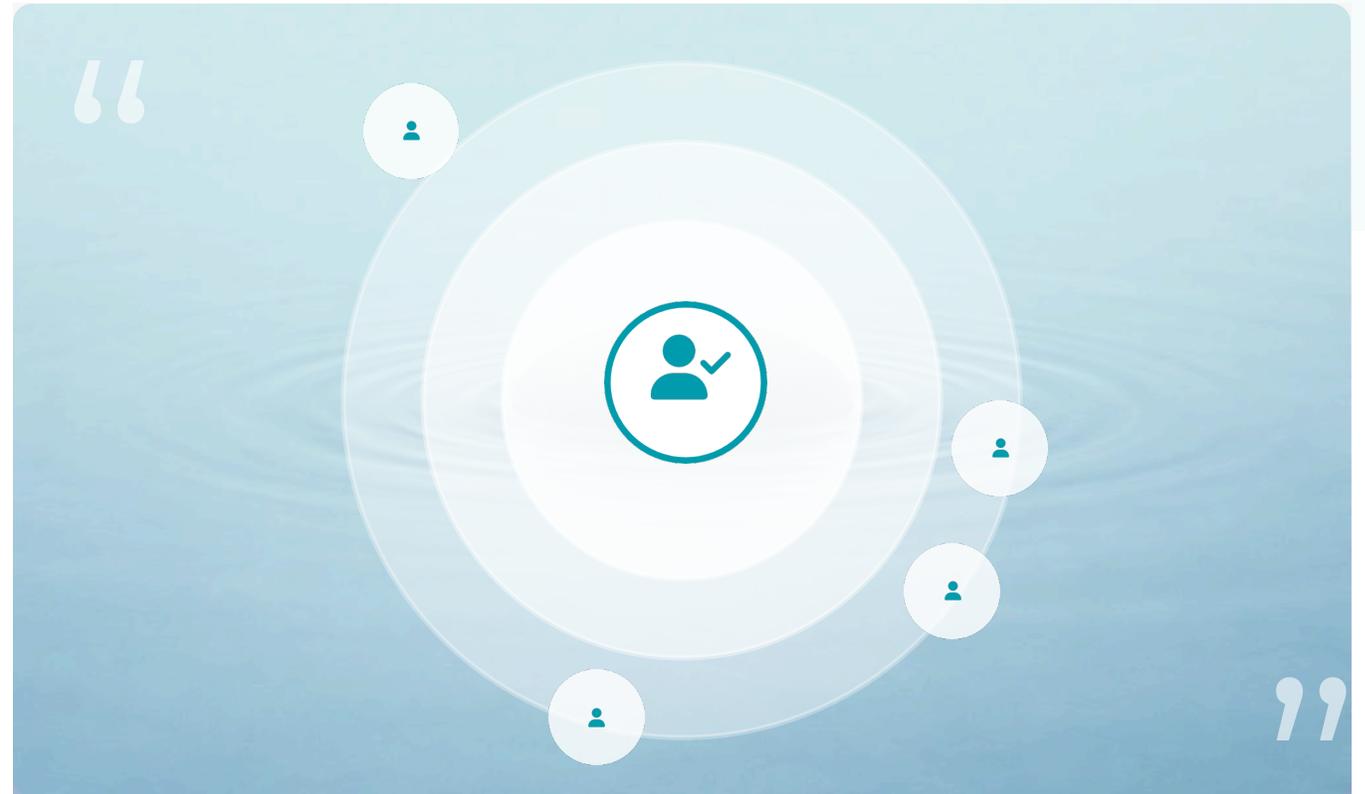
So does steadiness

A regulated adult can co-regulate a room.



Regulation is relational

This applies in classrooms and even on Zoom.



**The calmest nervous system
often sets the tone.**

We Are in Safe Hands



While uncertainty feels unsettling, robust structures across the UAE work in the background to ensure safety.



Authorities are Monitoring

Official bodies are constantly assessing the situation to provide timely updates and guidance.



Systems are in Place

Established protocols and infrastructure are activated to maintain order and public safety.



School Contingency Plans

Schools have prepared detailed strategies for continuity of learning and student welfare.



Precautionary Steps

Proactive measures are already being implemented to minimize risk and protect the community.



We can acknowledge uncertainty without assuming catastrophe.

From Rumination to Practical Action

Shift your focus from the unanswerable to the actionable.

Anxiety asks:

"What if?"

- ✗ Imagining worst-case scenarios
- ✗ Checking news obsessively



Regulation asks:

"What can I do?"

- Verified information sources
- A simple safety plan
- A structured daily plan

Focus Strategy

CANNOT CONTROL

Global Events
Others' Reactions
Uncertainty
The Future

MY ENERGY

CAN CONTROL

My Response
My Routine
My Words
My Self-Care

Make Two Plans (Plus One Teacher Add-On)

All three reduce anxiety differently by targeting specific sources of uncertainty.

1



A Safety Plan

Simple & Contained

Addresses the "Am I safe?" question. Establish reliable sources and emergency contacts once, then stop checking.

↓ Reduces Panic

2



A Daily Plan

Stability Plan

Routine protects mental health. Anchors like wake times and breaks tell the brain "life continues."

↓ Reduces Decision Fatigue

3



A Teaching Plan

Minimum Viable Lesson

Lower perfection strategically. Focus on connection and predictability over complex delivery.

↓ Reduces Overwhelm

Your Safety Plan

Simple & Contained



Plan Once.

Do not revisit repeatedly. Once these items are set, your brain can stop asking "What if?".

 **Secure & Done**



Choose 1–2 reliable news sources

Limit intake to verified official channels only.



Confirm emergency contacts

Ensure numbers are saved and accessible to all family members.



Agree family communication plan

Decide how you will stay in touch if separated during the day.



Follow school guidance / updates

Stick to official protocols rather than speculation.

Your Daily Plan

Stability Plan



Routine Protects.

Routine tells the brain: "**Life continues.**" It provides a safety container when the world feels unpredictable.

 **Daily Anchors**



Wake time

Maintain a consistent start to your day.



Work blocks

Define clear start and end times for teaching.



Breaks

Step away from the screen completely.



Movement + light exposure

Essential for regulating sleep and mood.



Connection

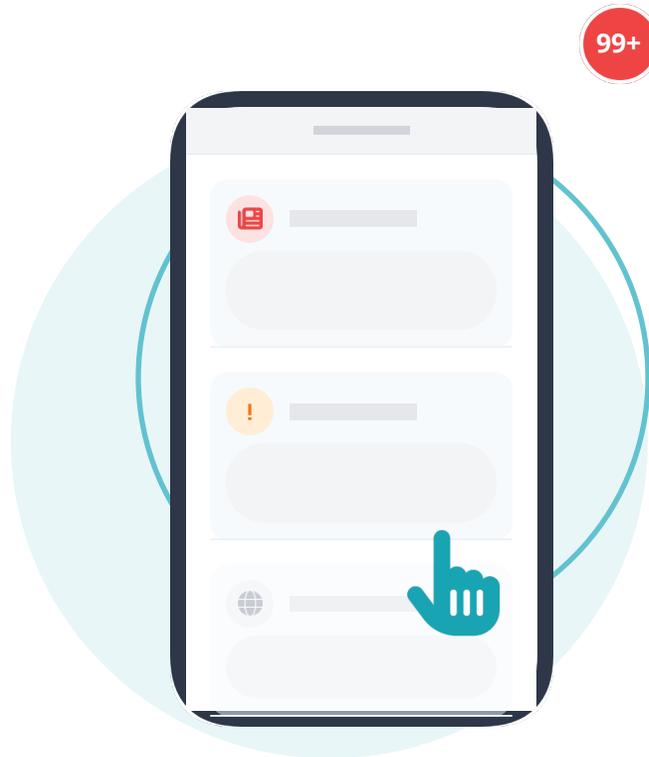
Reach out to friends or family (voice/video).



Wind-down

Disconnect from news/work an hour before sleep.

When Scrolling Becomes a Coping Strategy



Refreshing news feels productive.

It creates an illusion of control ("I am staying informed"), but constant monitoring keeps the threat system activated without offering a solution.



Increases Anxiety

Reinforces the brain's "danger" loop.



Activates the Nervous System

Keeps cortisol and adrenaline levels high.



Reduces Concentration

Makes lesson planning and deep work significantly harder.

Information without action = Agitation

Replace Scrolling With Regulation

A simple three-step micro-shift to interrupt the anxiety loop.

1



Pause

Stop the physical action of scrolling. Put the device face down.

2



Breathe

Take one slow, deep breath with a longer exhale to reset.

3



Replace

Choose one small, physical action to do immediately instead.



Ask Yourself:

"What would regulate me more right now?"

Productive Alternatives (Hands on)

Use your hands to calm your brain. Physical tasks discharge nervous energy.



Sort One Small Area

Clear a single desk drawer or organize a shelf. The visible order creates internal calm.



Prepare Materials

Set out everything needed for tomorrow's first lesson physically on your desk.



Organize Lesson Files

Rename and sort digital files into clear folders for just 15 minutes.



Make a Simple Checklist

Write down 3 achievable tasks on paper. Crossing them off provides dopamine.



Water Plants

Tend to something living. The sensory experience is grounding.



Small Household Task

Fold laundry or wipe a counter. Repetitive motion soothes the nervous system.

Productive Alternatives (Mind & Body)

When the urge to scroll hits, choose a stabilizing activity instead.



Mind:

"Focus & Distract"

Mental Regulation Tools:

Audiobook / calming podcast

Reading fiction (escapism)

Puzzle, Sudoku, or Crossword



Body:

"Release & Reset"

Physical Regulation Tools:

10–15 min home workout

Stretching or Yoga

Walking (within safety guidelines)

Sunlight exposure

Note: Movement physically discharges stress hormones.



Reduce Anxiety Amplifiers (Teacher Edition)

Temporarily reducing these specific triggers can significantly lower your baseline stress levels.



THE ANXIETY FORMULA

Caffeine + Uncertainty + Load

= Amplified Anxiety



Excess Caffeine

Especially in the afternoon. Stimulants mimic anxiety symptoms (racing heart) in the body.



Late-Night Planning & News

Working or doom-scrolling late disrupts sleep architecture and keeps the brain in threat mode.



Background Media

Listening to news while prepping lessons keeps the nervous system constantly activated.



WhatsApp Speculation

Groups spreading unverified info spiral quickly. Mute these chats temporarily.

Online Teaching Under Stress

Lower perfection strategically. Aim for the "Minimum Viable Lesson" using these four pillars.



Connection

Prioritize relationship. A warm welcome and check-in is more important than a complex slide deck.



Clarity

Simple instructions. One platform. One clearly defined goal per lesson to reduce cognitive load.



Predictability

Consistent structure. Start and end the same way every time to create psychological safety.



Essential Learning Only

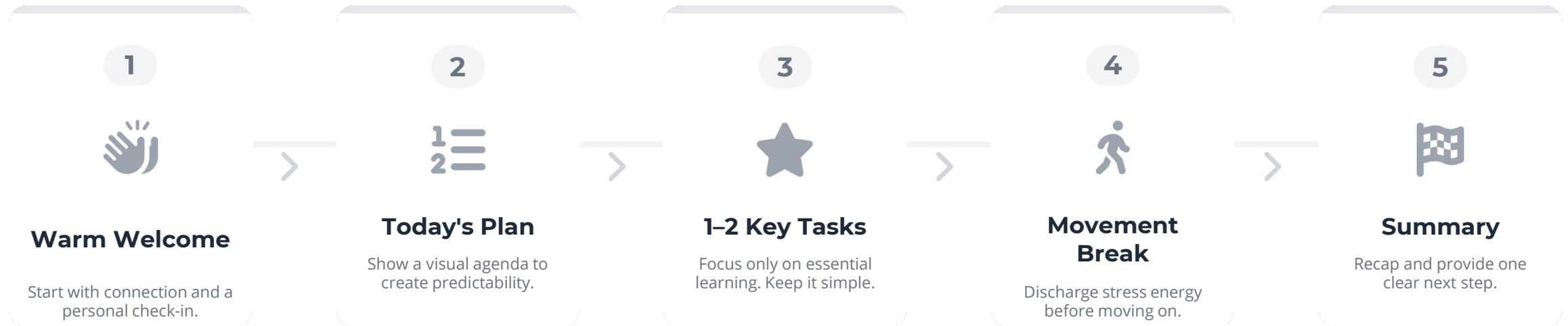
Focus on the "Must Know" vs "Nice to Know". Trim the content to prevent overwhelm.



Students benefit more from a steady teacher than a perfect lesson.

Structure Your Lessons to Reduce Overwhelm

A consistent routine reduces dysregulation for both teacher and student.



 **Predictability reduces anxiety. Structure is safety.**

Micro-Regulation During the Teaching Day

Small resets prevent escalation. Practice these between classes.



Slow Exhale Breathing

Spend 60–90 seconds focusing on extending your exhale. This signals safety to your nervous system.



Stand & Stretch

Stand up and gently stretch your shoulders and neck to release physical tension.



Step Into Daylight

Briefly step outside or look out a window. Natural light helps regulate circadian rhythms and mood.



Drink Water Mindfully

Take a slow sip of water. Notice the temperature and sensation to ground yourself in the present.



Drop Your Jaw

Unclench your jaw and drop your shoulders. Physical relaxation cues mental relaxation.



Brief Reset

Take a moment to pause before starting the next task. Small resets prevent stress accumulation.

Support Students Without Absorbing Their Stress

You can validate feelings without escalating fear.

✓ Validate & Contain

“ That sounds worrying.

Validation

“ Right now, we're safe.

Safety

“ Adults are handling it.

Containment

“ Let's focus on today's plan.

Redirection

||

✗ Avoid Escalating



Speculation

Avoid guessing about "what might happen" next.



Graphic Detail

Shield students from distressing imagery or specific descriptions.



Long Group Debates

These often increase collective anxiety rather than resolving it.



RULE: Regulate first. Then redirect.

Phrases That Spread Calm



Teacher scripts to validate feelings and provide stability. **Language matters.**



“We’re focusing on learning and staying connected today.”



“If anything changes, the school will tell families.”



“Let’s do one step at a time.”



“Here’s what today looks like.”



“Your feelings make sense.”

When Students Return — What Do I Say?

Keep it Simple. Keep it Contained.

Whole Class / Younger

"Some worrying things happened recently. Right now, we are safe."

"Adults are working very hard to keep everyone safe."

"If anything changes, the school will let families know."

"Today, we're going to focus on learning and being together."



Older Students

"There's a lot of information online. Not all of it is accurate."

"If you have questions, we can talk about them calmly."

"We'll focus on what we can control."



Teachers' DOs

Best practices for maintaining a calm, supportive, and structured classroom environment.



Explanations

Keep explanations short, factual, and easy to process.



Tone of Voice

Use a calm, steady tone to regulate the room.



Reinforce Safety

Focus attention on safety in the present moment.



Known Facts Only

Stick to verified information; avoid speculation.



Routine

Redirect students back to routine and structure.



Validate

Acknowledge feelings: "That sounds worrying."



Consistency

Use consistent language and messaging across staff.



Younger Children

Keep information very simple and contained.



Older Students

Allow questions, but steer clear of debate.

Teachers' DON'Ts

Be mindful of these behaviors to maintain psychological safety in the classroom.



Don't speculate



Don't discuss worst-case scenarios



Don't allow group panic discussions



Don't share graphic details



Don't dismiss feelings ("Don't worry")



Don't over-reassure with unrealistic certainty



Managing Mixed Messages From Home



Navigating diverse student experiences and home environments with sensitivity.



Remember:

"Every student enters the classroom with a different piece of the puzzle."

Some children will know very little

Some will have seen distressing footage

Some may have heard alarming adult conversations

Cultural backgrounds influence understanding



Response:

"Bridge the gap between home anxiety and school safety."

Start by asking: "What have you heard?"

Gently correct misinformation

Avoid correcting parents directly

Keep the focus on safety and routine

Quick Classroom Regulation Activities (5 Minutes)



Use one per lesson (3–5 minutes) to reset the collective nervous system.



4–6 Breathing (Whole Class)

Inhale 4, exhale 6. Do 5 rounds together. Longer exhale = nervous system calming.



Grounding 5–4–3–2–1

Name: 5 see, 4 feel, 3 hear, 2 smell, 1 thing you like. Brings attention to present.



Feet Press Exercise

Press feet firmly into floor. Push hands into desk. Hold 10s. Muscle engagement reduces anxiety.



“Circle of Control”

For older students. List two columns: Can Control vs Cannot Control. Reduces rumination.



Routine Reset

Begin each lesson with: Agenda slide, clear time boundaries, and predictable structure.



Teacher Tip

Choose one activity today; rotate through the week for variety + predictability.

Signs a Child May Need Extra Support

Identifying distress and understanding your role in regulation.

Watch for:

- Repeated reassurance seeking
- Tearfulness or emotional outbursts
- Withdrawal or shutting down
- Increased irritability / anger
- Refusal to separate from adults
- Physical complaints (headaches, stomach)



What to do:

When to Refer:

Contact the school counsellor if distress persists or escalates beyond normal adjustment.

Your Responsibility is to Provide:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Calm tone | Clear structure |
| Present-moment safety | Predictable routine |

 **Children regulate through you.**

You are not responsible for removing their anxiety completely.

Emotional Regulation Tools

Quick, classroom-friendly techniques to calm the body first. Regulation before rationalisation.



Physiological Sigh

Two sharp inhales through the nose, followed by one long exhale through the mouth to quickly offload CO2.



4-6 Breathing

Inhale for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 6. Extending the exhale activates the parasympathetic nervous system.



Grounding (5-4-3-2-1)

Name 5 things you see, 4 feel, 3 hear, 2 smell, 1 taste. Brings the brain back to the present moment.



Wall Push

Place palms flat on a wall and push hard for 10 seconds. Proprioceptive input helps calm a flooded system.



Chair Push-Down

Hold the sides of your seat and push down as if lifting yourself. A discreet way to release tension in class.



Feet Press

Press feet firmly into the floor. Feel the ground supporting you to center your gravity and reduce anxiety.



If Stress Becomes Overwhelming

Be aware of the warning signs. Seeking professional support is a strength, not a weakness.



Persistent Insomnia

Difficulty falling or staying asleep despite fatigue.



Panic Symptoms

Sudden waves of anxiety, racing heart, or shortness of breath.



Heightened Irritability

Short temper impacting relationships with family or students.



Emotional Shutdown

Feeling numb, detached, or unable to experience joy.



Unable to Function at Work

Impossible to concentrate, plan, or execute daily tasks.



Early support is protective.

Reliable Resources

Verified information sources for teachers to use and share with families.



Mental Health Foundation

Guide: Talking to children about scary world events
mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health



WHO Stress Management

Official publication: Doing What Matters in Times of Stress
who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003927



UAE Government Portal

Official updates and government initiatives
u.ae



NCEMA

National Emergency Crisis and Disasters Management Authority
ncema.gov.ae



WAM News

Emirates News Agency - The official source for UAE news
wam.ae



Access Digital Handout

Scan to save all links directly to your device.

PRO TIP

Limit news checking to scheduled times (e.g., once at 5 PM) to prevent constant nervous system activation.

Final Takeaways (Teachers)



Regulate First

Calm body before reacting.



Make 3 Plans

Safety, Daily & Teaching.



Keep Predictable

Simple lessons reduce stress.



Action > Scrolling

Stabilising tasks with hands.



Lower Perfection

Strategically reduce load.



Stay Connected

Co-regulation is key.



Seek Support Early

Don't wait for crisis.



"Panic moves fast. Calm moves deliberately."

"Be the deliberate presence."

Stay Connected

We are here to support you, your students, and your school community.



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