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ReFresh

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Welcome Back – Now, It Is Time for Some Rest!

It is time to put the spotlight on "rest" to contribute to a healthy, resilient 2026/2027 school year!

This topic may seem odd, when you recently returned from summer break. For some, this will be particularly perplexing, especially if you are someone whose mind and/or body craves productivity or engagement and finds it difficult to flip a switch and just sit down and "rest." For those who crave productivity, engaging in "unproductive" rest can feel uncomfortable. Maybe at times you have a vague sense that you need a break, but feel too engaged or task-motivated to take one.

Folks who crave productivity, and those who may be perfectionists, face a higher risk of burnout, anxiety, and irritability. In these cases, restorative practices may need to be personalized and could be more active than what others may usually consider "rest."

Educational leaders work hard and, hopefully, play hard too! ***Rest*** is an essential element of your resiliency cycle as you begin the school year, as it provides the recovery time required for your mind and body to adapt to stress, regulate emotions, recoup, and prevent burnout.

Many associate rest with sleep or napping. It *can* be this, but it is also so much more. Rest is an intentional disengagement from effort. In a job when we may be expected to be available and perform 24/7, we need to remember that energy and attention have limits.

After working or playing hard, or when your mind and nervous system are anxious, take a moment to pause to see if it is your mind or your body that needs rest – or, it may be both.

When the *body* needs a rest, but your mind seeks activity, consider a form of rest that requires low physical effort, yet keeps the mind engaged — think puzzles, reading, colouring, listening to podcasts, playing an instrument, or building LEGO.

Perhaps it is your *mind* that could use a break from focused attention or problem-solving, but your body wants to stay busy. In this scenario, do something active that keeps your body engaged by performing a physical task where little mental effort is required – think walking, folding laundry, practicing yoga, or taking a dance break. Venturing into nature has also proven especially beneficial for reducing stress and improving cognitive functioning.

Rest is a form of self-care, and while sleep is an important component of well-being, a multi-faceted approach to rest is key to restoring energy levels and improving your ability to function.

And this is exactly what Dr. Saundra Dalton-Smith, MD, author of *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*, reveals. The key is to identify where you use the most energy, and focus on finding what type of rest restores *you* in these seven areas**.**

1. Physical rest. Feeling fatigued, grumpy, foggy, or forgetful? You may need more physical rest to restore your body's energy. Longer nightly sleep may be your answer, but alternately it may be taking active steps to improve sleep quality. Sleeping at night, napping, or simply laying down is considered resting. But so is gentle movement such as stretching, yoga, and walking, as active physical rest can boost energy.

Physical rest may include a massage to address tense muscles after a stressful week, or a stretching session rather than a hard workout.

2. Mental rest. When your brain is active for long periods, you may start to feel mentally drained. Mental rest means calming your thoughts and giving your brain time to recoup. Mental rest allows you to quiet the mind from constant thinking, problem-solving, or information gathering.

When at work, a brain break means taking time to do low energy, low-stake tasks to slow the neurons firing. Photocopying or tidying up, doing artwork, colouring with students, or doing a puzzle for a short time helps the brain refresh.

At home, mental rest can look like jotting down a to-do list, or journalling at bedtime to release these thoughts from your mind. Mental rest can also be meditation or mindfulness. Practicing mindfulness or meditation can also help by redirecting focus to physical sensations, rather than to racing or repetitive thoughts.

3. Emotional rest. A significant component of educational leaders' jobs involves emotional labour: caring for others, being the source of strength, and demonstrating empathy as a servant leader. Over time, or even on heavy days, this can be particularly depleting.

Emotional rest involves finding ways to authentically express your feelings to relieve the pressure of "holding it together". This could include confiding in a friend or processing your emotions with a therapist, versus burying them in an effort to project resilience.

Emotional rest may also include setting limits and boundaries from emotionally draining people and roles, or turning your phone on "do not disturb" mode for a short period of time to distance yourself from emotionally stressful demands or conversations.

4. Spiritual rest. Sometimes your work, the organizational politics, and even global factors can be challenging to navigate; you may feel cynical, disconnected, lost, and in need of a spiritual reboot. Spiritual rest involves connecting to something larger than yourself through nature, prayer, or the community. Going for a walk on the beach, a hike in the mountains, or volunteering may provide you with the spiritual rest to help reset.

5. Sensory rest. In today's world, information is coming at you full speed, faster than you may be able to absorb and process. This may leave you feeling irritable, numb, or "fried", and may indicate sensory overload. Be aware of what in your environment contributes to sensory stimulation. To reset, put your devices down, turn off the TV, dim the lights, and bask in a quiet or natural environment.

6. Creative rest. Jobs like yours that require creativity, brainstorming, or repeated problem-solving, can lead to the need for creative rest. Similar to mental rest, your brain may need an occasional break from these demands, but you may also find rest in doing creative tasks or hobbies for fun, like woodwork, painting, writing, sketching, or writing music.

7. Social rest. Even if you are an extrovert, being around people all the time, feeling scrutinized all the time, and being "on" can be draining for anyone. Social rest may mean scheduling fewer activities during the week or spending more time alone to recharge. As with emotional rest, you may want to set boundaries or limit time with some contacts. Alternatively, increasing the right kinds of social connection can also be restorative, such as focussing on relationships that feel supportive and meaningful.



Remember to take time to rest. Throughout your day you can:

- Build in protected time for breaks: even 10 minutes of calm can reset your nervous system
- Learn to recognize the early signs of burnout, such as irritability or fatigue that doesn't improve with rest
- Try stacking habits, for example, pairing a daily walk with a no-phone policy to mentally decompress

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If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.