

## Key Takeaways

- The biggest thing is to be empathetic with yourself, each other, the kids, and your families. We have all been dealing with our own things, and kindness goes a long way.
- Allow voice and choice in the classroom when possible, it goes a long way. Student ownership has a lot of power.
- Colleen's tips for burnout:
  - Focus on your why
  - Find a positive support system
  - Focus on relationships and joy, especially in the classroom
  - Love yourself enough to put yourself on the list (and forgive yourself).

## Episode Notes

In this week's episode, our guest host Erin Sabina spoke with the incredible Colleen Schmit TS about overcoming burnout.

In this episode, Colleen admits that at one point, **she fell out of love with teaching**. She attributes this to a couple of things:

- To fit the mold, she **conformed her teaching practices**. She strayed away from relationship building and focused heavily on rote learning, took away autonomy, and didn't focus on interactions. Looking back now, she acknowledges that her classroom expectations did not meet the needs and abilities of the children she was serving. All of this ultimately led to a loss of joy in teaching, a job that was always challenging, but now was no longer fun either.
- Another contributing factor was her **complete lack of self-care**. She said "I would work with young children all day and then come home to my own sweet babies and have nothing left to give. It was dinosaur chicken nuggets and blue box mac and cheese for dinner. I was in survival mode and didn't feel like I was able to fully give myself in either role I was playing." Colleen wants to encourage our listeners as it is fully possible to be both a great caregiver and teacher, but she was stuck. When teaching was no longer enjoyable and she wasn't able to prioritize herself, it became too much.

When Colleen and Erin talked about the impact this had on Colleen's students, she is sad to say that she does think it affected them. "When you take away choice for children, when you take away ownership of learning, when you take away the joy in the classroom, they feel that." Ultimately, Colleen found the CLASS Tool and realized that all of her initial motivations in teaching in her early years were right on track! She shared that it was like an awakening that someone put all of the things educators know to be true into words and backed it with data.

Colleen also shared an example of an interaction from when she was substituting for the fourth grade. During writing time, she asked the students if they would like it if she played music. They were excited about this, so she also offered for them to select the music! They then asked if they could turn off some of the lights in the room, and Colleen eagerly agreed! She explained how they were so

floored about this opportunity for autonomy, and how even this minimal choice and allowing ownership meant a lot to them.

Burnout is at a whole new level within the last couple of years. Anyone who is a stakeholder feels certain levels of burnout, and there isn't a magic cure or quick fix, so be empathetic towards yourself, this isn't always easy.

### **What helps Colleen now, and what could have helped her then are these tips for burnout:**

- Focus on your why: Write your why on a sticky note where you will see it, feel it, and remember it. If you didn't love or have an interest in what you do, you wouldn't keep showing up, and this job is challenging! Physically, mentally, and emotionally, so being grounded in your why can really help get through the day-to-day.
- Find your people: find positive people who will support you! Surround yourself with positivity and people who will empathize with you. Be mindful of who you are interacting with and how you're responding.
- Focus on Joy and Relationships: One of the biggest perks of working in early childhood education is that you get to work with young children, have fun, and be silly. You get to go and focus on joy and building relationships. Sometimes it is more important to pause your lesson plan and go with what you know works, or what should be addressed at that moment. Relationships impact all of the learning outcomes you're trying to achieve.
- Put yourself on the list: There is no program or regime for self-care, it is different for everyone. It can feel difficult to make time for yourself, but just do your best to be mindful of the things that will take care of your physical and mental health. It all boils down to the things that you do to take care of yourself in a way that makes you feel most like yourself. Also, if you aren't engaging in self-care, don't be too hard on yourself. Be gentle with yourself and do what you can to prioritize your needs.
- Advocate for yourself and your students: It's not just about being a voice for the voiceless of your children, but also yourself, the families, your co-workers. It's a big job, but when you are advocating for everyone but yourself, you will burn out.

### **Learn more about combating burnout on our website:**

- [How I Found Joy in Teaching after Losing Focus on What Matters](#)
- [Interactions at the Heart of Healing](#) - A trauma-informed CLASS® professional development series

### **More good reads:**

- [Stress Levels of School Administrators and Teachers in November and January](#)
- [If You Feel Like You've Hit A Teaching Wall, You're Not Alone](#)
- [Why is November so stressful?](#)