

# At the Chalkface: 16 Best Practice Tips to Help New Teachers Thrive

*By Alan Newland – Published 5 October 2022*

*“Teaching is more than a job—it is a vocation.”*

## Introduction: The Challenge of Becoming a Teacher

Starting out as an early career teacher can be exhilarating, but also overwhelming. You are not only grappling with lesson planning, behaviour management, and curriculum demands, but also adjusting to a professional identity that carries enormous ethical and moral responsibility. As a teacher, you are entrusted with shaping lives and communities. To sustain this career—and thrive within it—you must look after your wellbeing, develop resilience, and build character. As Plato taught, virtues become habits, and habits shape who we are. Practising these virtues—courage, wisdom, fairness, kindness, and truthfulness—not only makes us better people, but also better teachers.

## Part One: Start with the Fundamentals

The foundations of your health and wellbeing must come first. Here are some practices to embed:

### 1. Exercise

Movement relieves stress. Walk or cycle to school if possible. If you drive, take a short walk at lunchtime. Yoga, stretching, or even a stroll in the park can boost energy and calm your mind.

### 2. Nourish Your Body

Eat balanced meals at regular times. Avoid sugary snacks that spike and crash energy levels. Instead, choose fresh, nutritious food or small portions of nuts and seeds. Proper nourishment fuels both concentration and resilience.

### 3. Train Yourself to Sleep

Good teaching requires rest. Leave screens outside the bedroom, keep a regular bedtime, and start the day with water. Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake, especially at night. Jot down next-day tasks on paper to quieten a racing mind.

### 4. Be Sociable and Show Affection

Stay connected to friends and family. Laugh, play, and share time with others. Acts of kindness, affection, and gratitude build joy and resilience in both personal and professional life.

## **5. Practise the Cardinal Virtues**

Plato's "virtue ethics" remain timeless. Show courage, moderation, justice, kindness, and gratitude. As a teacher, humility and magnanimity are especially powerful—children quickly recognise and respond to them.

## **Part Two: Getting Your Priorities Right**

Once your foundations are secure, focus on priorities that shape professional resilience:

### **6. Prioritise Wisely**

Not every task is equally urgent. Distinguish between the critical, the urgent, and the desirable. Learn to say "no" politely, and remember that managing competing demands is part of building resilience.

### **7. Watch and Learn**

You are surrounded by master practitioners. Observe how experienced colleagues manage behaviour, build rapport, and inspire learning. Adopt their techniques and refine them into your own style.

### **8. Ask Questions**

As an early career teacher, curiosity is your greatest asset. Ask questions freely—your growth depends on it, and colleagues often appreciate the chance to reflect through answering.

### **9. Focus on the Future**

Don't dwell on a poorly planned lesson or a sharp word spoken in frustration. Instead, focus on how you will improve tomorrow. Like practising an instrument, mastery comes from refining good habits, not repeating mistakes.

### **10. Learn by Mistakes**

Remember the advice you give pupils: mistakes are learning opportunities. Teaching is the same. Ask yourself: "Am I a good person trying to do the right thing?" If the answer is yes, forgive yourself and move forward.

### **11. Keep Your Private Life Private**

Maintain professional boundaries with pupils and parents. Protect your social life outside school. You need not be a saint, but you must be a role model.

### **12. Manage Workload**

You are not a teacher 24/7. Plan your work, limit late nights, and accept that sometimes you may need to "wing it." Better to arrive rested and energised than exhausted and uninspired.

### **13. Reflect and Read**

Set aside time to reflect. Record challenges and tick them off as you overcome them. Read books that inspire and broaden your professional knowledge—not only subject-specific texts, but also thought-provoking works on education and ethics.

### **14. Recognise Success**

Celebrate small and large wins. Acknowledging progress builds motivation and reinforces your sense of purpose.

### **15. Build Friendships**

Teaching is highly collegial. Fellow early career teachers are invaluable allies—share knowledge, support one another, and tackle challenges together.

### **16. Build Your Community**

Get involved beyond your classroom. Join school life, contribute to wider initiatives, and embrace the privilege of shaping civic values in your community.

### **Conclusion: A Unique and Rewarding Profession**

Teaching is more than a job—it is a vocation at the heart of society. Entering this profession means taking on one of the greatest privileges imaginable: the chance to change lives. So, nurture yourself, build resilience, and practise virtues that will sustain your character. In doing so, you won't just survive your first years at the chalkface—you'll thrive.

### **Author**

Alan Newland spent 40 years as a teacher, lecturer, headteacher, and advisor at the Department for Education and the General Teaching Council for England. He now writes and speaks on ethics and professional values in teaching and runs the social media network New Teachers Talk. He is the author of *\*Becoming a Teacher: The Legal, Ethical and Moral Implications of Entering Society's Most Fundamental Profession\** (Crown House Publishing).

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