

Managing Your Wellbeing: Time and all the other stuff!

“ *The roles and responsibilities expected of me have increased dramatically, but the time in which I have to do them has not! There is never enough time!*

Teaching Assistant

Having worked with groups of teaching assistants for over two decades in a variety of schools and settings, the one thing teaching assistants say they want more of is time.

Whenever I ask the question, ‘What one thing would make your job easier?’ the answer I hear repeatedly is, ‘more time’. But is time what we always need? Here is what I have found helpful

talking with and listening to teaching assistants over many years.

I’ll often start by asking teaching assistants to list all the things they would do with any ‘extra’ time if we had it.

Here are some of the things they say. They may sound familiar to you!

Talk to class teacher or line manager about:

- A pupil or pupils
- My lesson plans
- What I am teaching. Where, when and who?
- Feedback from a lesson
- Share a worry or concern
- Specific behaviour, positive or negative

General:

- Find out what is going on, attend a staff meeting or even staff training

Talk to line manager about:

- My hours, job and role expectations

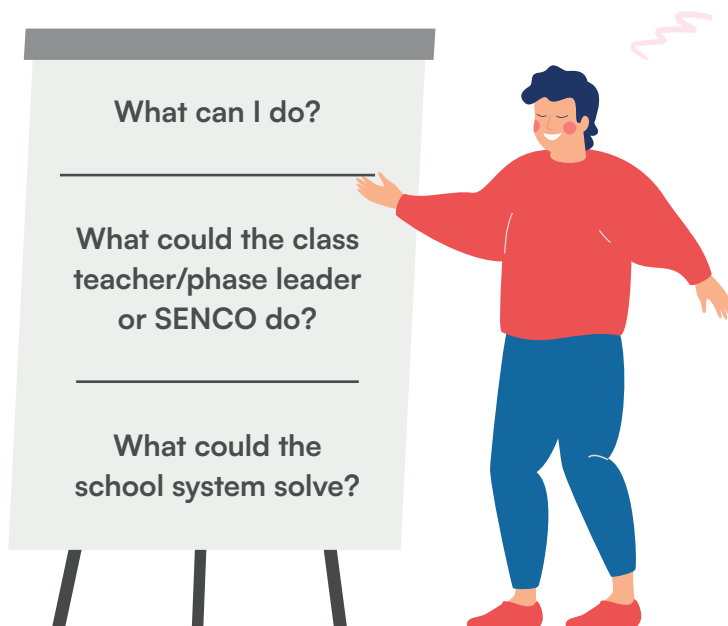
Talk to each other:

- Talk to my colleagues and share ideas and problem solve
- Offload and unpack the emotional and challenging aspects of the role

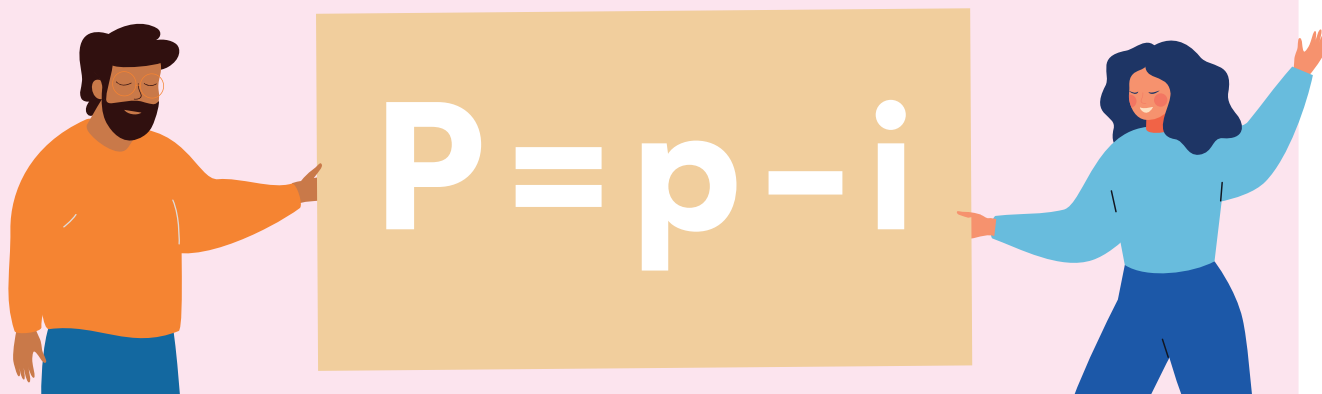


When we explore these themes more deeply we find that some things on the list fall into three categories. The things teaching assistants can tackle themselves, other things the class teacher could organise/arrange and other things only the school organisation can resolve. **Our flip-chart lists these headings (right):**

The fact is that some schools have simple systems in place to enable the sharing of information that can make things so much easier.



So, with these things in mind what can you do to help yourself?



The first P is your 'performance at its very best'. This is you when you are flying and in the zone. Everything is going to plan and things are just great!

The next p is your 'every day performance' and the **i, is the 'interference'**, in other words all the stuff that gets in the way.

Imagine this simple equation without the interference. Your every day performance would be you at your very best, every day! Simple right? So, the more we can do to lower or remove the things that get in the way, however small, the closer you will be to your best self.

How can we use this?

Take a piece of paper and write a list. Write down all the stuff that gets in the way. Try not to think about it too much but do try to be as specific as you can. For example, instead of writing 'poor communication', be specific. Is it about plans, or groups or where you will be based?

Ok so you have written your list.

On to the next step.



What can you influence or control?

In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) Stephen Covey distinguishes between proactive people — who focus on what they can do and can influence — and reactive people who focus their energy on things beyond their control.

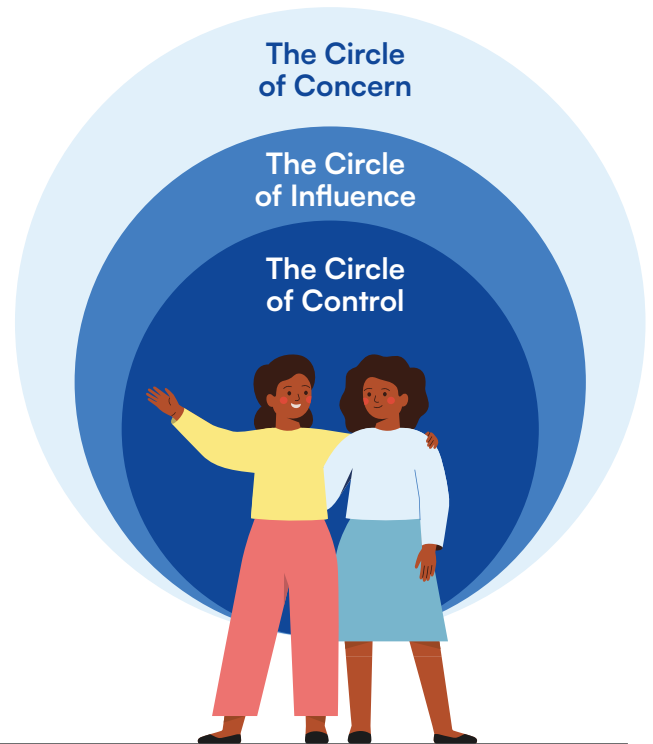
The Circle of Control: these are the things you have control over.

The Circle of Influence: these are the things you may not have full control over but you could influence.

The Circle of Concern — these are the things you may have little control over or maybe no control and they cause concern

Go back and take a look at the list you wrote, all those things that got in the way and caused interference, stopping you be the very best you could be.

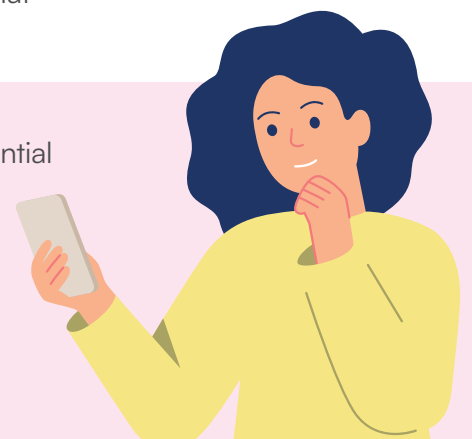
Now see which column you would put each one into.



The Circle of Control	The Circle of Influence	The Circle of Concern

The idea here is start on those things you can do something about, the circle of control and grow from there. Once you have a clearer idea of what you can control you can feel more empowered and be more proactive.

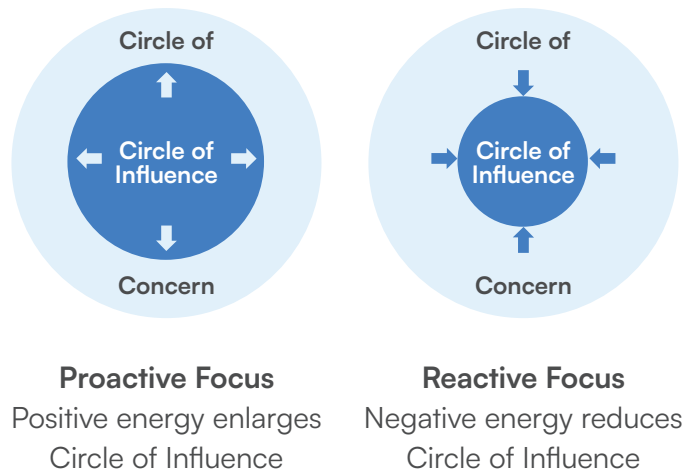
Please remember that at Education Support we provide a free and confidential helpline. **You can call 24/7 for emotional support: 08000 562 561.** Please don't wait until things are really difficult for you or you're in crisis to ring that number. Of course you can ring then but it's very important to know that we can also support you at an earlier stage if you're struggling.



By starting with the things you placed in the Circle of Control you have a proactive focus that can enlarge those things you can influence.

By spending too much time focusing on those things you cannot control there is a possibility you end up with a reactive focus that results in a negative energy and can reduce the Circle of Influence.

In other words spend time and effort on those things you can influence first!



Other things you might consider:

Ask for a meeting with your class teacher or phase leader. This may initially take 'time' but if you are prepared this could be the start of something useful. For example you may ask about:

- How could I get plans in a little earlier?
It would help me as I would be able to...
- Is there any classroom system we can put in place so we can exchange information about the learning? Log-book, assessment folder, concerns book etc.
- Could we catch up for 30 minutes every couple of weeks just to check in on... ?
This would help me be able to...

Or if there is someone in the team such as the SENCO or other leader with the responsibility to lead teaching assistants you may ask:

- What chance is there for us to meet more regularly as a group and share ideas? This would help me in my role to...
- Can we build in time to off-load challenges even if we do not have solutions yet? This would help me in my role to...
- How could we use P=p-i or Covey to support our team and explore how we work?

Further guidance

Guide - More on the circle of control:
<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-organisations/guides/circle-of-control-influence-and-concern-tool/>

Video - Boundaries, rest and letting go:
<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/resources/for-individuals/videos/boundaries-rest-and-letting-go-how-to-give-yourself-permission/>



Thinking about your wellbeing

Very often when teaching assistants do find time to meet regularly it is predominantly the 'job' that is discussed rather than the 'impact of the job' on your wellbeing. Like any profession, it is important to be able to share challenges in a safe and sensitive environment.

If you feel this is something you would benefit from, raise it with your line manager. But bear in mind that they may not have all the answers or solutions. Often the first step in moving forwards is sharing things openly, honestly and safely without focusing on solutions. Even this first step can make you feel better and is a good building block for the future.