

Ep #5: Final Year Tips



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With Your Host

Sarah Michelle

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hey friends, before we really dive into this week's episode, I first want to say that I have truly loved talking to you guys about the podcast over the last several weeks. It makes my heart so incredibly happy to know that you guys are loving the show. And a lot of you that have reached out and that I've talked to said that the topic that I'm going to be discussing today is something that's weighing heavily on your minds right now. And so I actually rearranged my original plan for episode five and I'm recording this episode for you instead.

Which means by the way, if you guys want to hear about a particular topic, I am all ears. With this podcast I want to support you guys and address your concerns. And ultimately show you that becoming a stress-free nurse practitioner is actually possible. So you can always feel free to email me podcast ideas at sarahmichellenp@gmail.com. I'm here to be your number one cheerleader.

And so let's dive right into today's topic, three solid ways to maintain your sanity in your last year of nurse practitioner school. Yes, it's possible. Easier said than done, especially in a pandemic. But I'm going to walk you through my method step by step.

Let me start by painting you a quick picture of what my life was looking like my last year of nurse practitioner school. Looking back on it now, I still have no idea how I did it. But I was planning a wedding, I was working full time as a nurse every weekend on the weekend plan, which I'm sure many of you are familiar with. I was already teaching nursing students at this point. I was doing two to three days of my own nurse practitioner clinicals per week. And until my last semester I was still taking didactic courses as well. Oh, and I bought a house and I moved across the state.

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And maybe you're thinking to yourself there has to be a little bit of exaggeration somewhere in there but my now husband, and most definitely my coworkers, can attest to the fact that I was running full speed for an entire year. And if you did the math on all of that, that adds up to being committed to being somewhere 7 days a week for that year. 7 days a week. Literally some of my coworkers used to call me the energizer bunny.

Juggling life, work, school, a new house, a new marriage. It had me at my wit's end some days. And some days it honestly seemed like there could never possibly be enough hours in the day to do all the things I wanted to do and do all the things I needed to do. But retrospectively I learned so much about myself and I grew so much during that time that I could never even see back then.

So I really want to share these growth tips with you on how to keep yourself together and in check during what can be such a stressful time. And spoiler alert, you can do this. It's not going to necessarily be easy, but I do want to remind you, you can do this. There is no way around that final year of nurse practitioner school but through it. And since I've done it and I've figured it out, let these quick tips be your guide for doing it in the very best way that you can.

Tip number one, let the people around you know what you need. And I'll be the first to tell you, I'll be honest, this tip for me was very much the hardest. I'm sure a lot of you out there listening right now are type A, and go-getters, and ambitious. Because I mean, hello, you're in nurse practitioner school and that doesn't happen coincidentally or without sheer drive. I can promise you that. And people with that personality type definitely don't ask for help typically when they need it.

But to survive nurse practitioner school, and to survive especially that last year of nurse practitioner school where you're going to be grinding it out with heavy clinical hours and heavy course work, you're going to have to turn to those that you love and you're going to have to ask for help. Hear me out here, it doesn't mean you need to ask for every little thing or throw

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away all of your responsibilities to the shoulders of your loved ones. That's not what I'm saying. But what it does mean is delegate out the small stuff.

For example, something that may seem small but was a huge thing in my house was delegating dinner. I am very grateful that I have a husband who steps up whenever I need him. And for the entire last year of nurse practitioner school, and maybe a little bit now with me running a business, I think I personally maybe made dinner one time myself. And while that may seem trivial, my husband making dinner for us gave me extra study time, it gave me break time, and most importantly it gave me one less thing to worry about.

And when you're in that grind like that even one less thing to worry about can be absolutely critical. My husband and I frequently and very purposely checked in with each other when I was finishing up school that year to see where I was at mentally, what I needed, and what we needed to do together as a couple to be able to accomplish that and keep everybody sane. Being able to let him know where I was at and what I needed was sometimes the only thing that kept me sane. Especially in those last few months when my work commute and my school commute really started to get out of hand a little bit.

And along those same lines let your friends and coworkers know where you're at too. Outside of my family I felt like my coworkers were some of my biggest supports during this crazy time, because they were who I was spending more time with than my family most days. My at home time was dedicated to studying a lot of times and so there were times that I had more conversations with my coworkers than literally anyone else. Having a conversation with someone a little bit more external to my chaos gave me such a nice mental break.

So take the time to talk to those around you about something outside of school. Even if it's just for five minutes. You are not your degree; you are a person who needs to be taken care of both mentally and physically. Being

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wrapped up in school every second of every day is exhausting and so you're going to need these little external conversations along the way.

I can vividly remember sitting with my friend Adrian at work talking about my wedding, and life, and everything but school. And those conversations with her were my life savers on the days that I was the most exhausted. And to give you perspective into my level of exhaustion, when I worked the weekends, I would get up at 3:45 am because I had a two-hour commute one way into my nursing job.

So to wrap up tip number one of letting those who love you know what you need, this also means doing the scary thing too and saying no sometimes. I'm sure the people pleasers like myself out there are screeching on the inside at the thought of saying no. But listen, to get through that last year of school there's a certain degree of putting yourself first no matter how hard it is.

I would remind myself, and remind those around me, "Hey guys, I'm working over full time and doing school full time. I'm not always going to be able to commit right now. But when I accomplish this goal and I become a real deal nurse practitioner; I am here for it. Count me in then."

All right, so moving on to tip number two, which may be the tip that brought me some of my most joy in that last year. And this tip is to be purposeful in the decision to find friends in your nurse practitioner program. We live in a world and realm of online nurse practitioner programs, and that can become isolating really quickly as we get lost in message boards and behind screens. And it's really just a totally different feel than that traditional brick and mortar school like most of us are accustomed to being in.

This is a tip that I did a really good job of at first. But ironically the two friends that I made from my general classes both chose the psych NP route. And so in the middle of my program we parted ways for our specialty tracks. I spent a couple of semesters after that doing it solo, but then luckily

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during my second to last semester I was invited into a Facebook group with a lot of the people that I was taking classes with.

And I can't tell you what a relief it was to be surrounded again by people in that same situation as me, all juggling life, and school, and work at one time. And that is where I found who will now be a lifelong friend of mine, Shelby. And we huddled together and supported one another so much in those last few months of our program.

We could not only pick each other's brains about assignments, which we did frequently, but we could also vent and find space to breathe and pick each other back up again when it all just felt like too much. And there were plenty of days that it felt like too much. But together me and Shelby made it through. For example, I still have no earthly idea how I flew literally in for my honeymoon and less than 24 hours later took the midterm for my hardest class. But I did and having someone like Shelby in that mindset with me to push me along was just what I needed.

So what if you're thinking to yourself right now what I told myself during my program initially? Which is that I didn't have the time or the capacity to make friends in an online program. Then I would tell you you're selling yourself short. Seriously, your other friends and your family are not going to be able to fully comprehend what your life is like as you're trying to figure yourself out enough to not only make it through school, but to also transition into being a new nurse practitioner. It's such a mindset shift that not even school is really going to prepare you for. You really need some friends in the trenches with you, even if it's just one or two.

And if this is something you're struggling with in your current space and you don't have any idea where to start, then just join my student Facebook group on Facebook and that can be a really great first step. There's so many students in that group and online programs looking for that community and support, much like I was in that final year. And I can promise you there is no better support group out there than the Sarah Michelle community, like we talked about back in episode three. We will

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rally behind you and push you through until the end of school and your eventual board exam.

And tip number three, squeeze in what you can when you can. And this tip can really take shape in a lot of ways, but for me I never felt like there could possibly be enough time in the day to exercise while also working and doing school. I was already at my max capacity for hours and so the thought of even just driving myself to the gym, working out, and driving home felt like too much of a time drain. But I knew that I needed that physical outlet because it made me so much more clear mentally.

And so that's when I literally started squeezing it in when I could by walking laps around my unit at work and taking the 17 flights of stairs to and from my unit. It sounds silly, it definitely sounds way too simple, but there were a lot of weekends that I could easily get 20,000 steps just by doing my nursing job and taking a handful of laps around the unit. And I felt so much better for doing it.

Another way that I squeezed in things when I could was by doing flashcards for school at work. Whenever there was downtime, or I was eating lunch, or whatever that looked like, I studied or I made my way through more assignments. And what it boils down to is in that last year of nurse practitioner school every minute, and it kind of felt like every second, counted. And if I could just get one more assignment done at work that was one more assignment I didn't have to do at home so I could spend time with my husband instead. Because believe me, after a two-hour commute home the last thing I ever wanted to do was more schoolwork or more studying.

I also really think it becomes easiest to squeeze things in when you have a dedicated plan and schedule. I know some of you may not be planner people, and you know that's okay. But for me my planner held me together. I had it color coded, I had it down to the minute so that way I could figure out where is my free time at? When can I take time to just breathe and reset?

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In your final year of nurse practitioner school you're going to need that off time to make it through, there's no way around it. Which also ties into something else that I want to throw out here. Of course squeeze in time too, just for you. As nurses and nurse practitioners we are called to serve others. But that does not mean that we need to serve those people in exchange for taking care of ourselves. And so this is my little plug to you about self-care that I absolutely think has to be included in this final year episode.

Guys, you cannot adequately care for others when you're barely caring for yourself. And if you feel like that sentiment is really speaking to you right now personally, please take some time today to reboot, reset, and figure out what you need to be doing to take care of you. It's definitely worth the pause and it's definitely worth your time.

I see so many students frazzled out by the time that they even get to the board exam that they take months and months and months of breaks before testing. Don't let that be you if it doesn't have to be, because the longer you push it out the harder it is to make yourself actually do it. Versus if you graduate school and you're mentally at a level point you're going to be in a great place to begin that board preparation and to pass the exam and just get it behind you.

All right friends, I know this was a little bit of a quick episode, but I also think it was such an important episode that I felt like a lot of you out there listening really need it right now. We're about to head into spring here, finally getting out of this winter, which is when the student world burnout is at an all-time high because a lot of those graduations are coming up in April and May.

And if you're in your last year, if you've made it to this point of almost graduating you should be so proud of yourself. Seriously, you do not get to this point right here without true dedication. And you should recognize yourself for that and you should definitely own that. And you should also utilize these tips to keep yourself sane in the process.

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Let those around you know what you need and when you need it. Keep them in the loop with you. Find who those supports are and cling to them. You're going to need them, especially if your graduation is right around the corner. Also, try to make some friends along the way so you can be in a space where others truly know what you're going through. Of course, also squeeze in what you can when you can, including that time for self-care too.

If you're listening to this episode, that means you're about to be a real deal nurse practitioner so soon. And I cannot wait to continue helping you along in this amazing and sometimes a little bit scary evolution. Feel free if you haven't already to go ahead and join our student group if you need that little bit of extra support along the way. And other than that, I'll see you guys next week.

Now, to celebrate the launch of the show, I'm going to be giving away a Medelita gift card which will allow you to go buy a gorgeous white coat when you're ready. Now, I'm going to be giving away a gift card to two lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on iTunes. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I really do hope you love the show. I want your honest feedback so I can continue creating a show that provides tons of value for you guys as nurse practitioners.

Visit stressfreenp.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. And I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit stressfreenp.com. See you next week.