

How to Cope with Burnout

What is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress and can leave you feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, drained and eventually affecting your ability to meet goals.

The risks when burnout is not properly identified and rectified is that many people will end up losing motivation for the activities and tasks which are contributing to the burnout and eventually becoming disinterested and stopping.

Burnout can be dangerous to your health and can actually weaken your immune system which can leave you open to catching illnesses easier.

Why is it important to me?

Burnout is not only an issue when volunteering. It can also be seen in your education, work and social life. Young people, especially those in tertiary education and their last few years of secondary education, are more susceptible to burnout due to them having too little time for themselves between school/college/university, extra-curricular activities, work, volunteering and maintaining a social life.

In Scouting, we try to identify burnout amongst ourselves and our peers and encourage people to talk through the issues they are having with the intention of finding a solution and keeping them involved. This resource should help you to identify the signs of burnout & how to go about targeting it.

How do I identify Burnout?

There are some questions that you can ask or some feelings to pick up on to tell if someone is showing signs of burnout.

- I don't feel me or my work is appreciated
- I am tired all the time
- The tasks I do are boring or repetitive
- These tasks are too difficult
- I don't care about anything
- I can't see the positives

If some of the answers to these questions are yes, this is an early sign that this person is on the road to burnout.

Burnout is a very gradual thing and will not occur suddenly but instead happens over a period of time. The longer the burnout is left, more of these symptoms will appear.



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Do not panic, but instead, treat this as a cautionary sign that you should watch out for these symptoms getting worse. The danger with ignoring these is that you are opening yourself up to the possibility of a breakdown or total burnout.

Below is a number of symptoms which someone with burnout will exhibit:

Physical

- Aches & pains, especially in the head and muscles
- Feeling tired or physically drained
- Lack of appetite
- Change of sleeping habits or pattern
- Compromised immune system & feeling ill more often
- Spots & skin blemishes

Emotional

- Feeling unmotivated
- Negative and cynical outlook on everything
- Feeling defeated, trapped and helpless
- Feeling on your own, isolated and detached
- Sense of failure and self-doubt
- Getting no satisfaction or accomplishment from your work

Behavioural

- Taking your frustration out on others
- Isolating yourself deliberately
- Procrastinating or delaying getting tasks done
- Trying to get out of your responsibilities
- Not showing up, turning up late or leaving early
- Using food, drink or drugs to cope with your feelings

This sounds like stress. Why isn't it stress?

Stress and **Burnout** can seem similar at first but they are actually opposite ends of the same spectrum.

A good comparison is with first aid. Stress is like Hyper, which we use for Hyperthermia and Hyperglycaemia. These are when there is too high a heat and too high a sugar level, respectively.

Burnout is like Hypo, which is the opposite, where things are at the low end of the scale.

Stress	Burnout
Over-engaging	Disengagement
Over-reactive to emotions	Blunted emotions
Hyperactivity and Urgency	Helplessness and Hopelessness
Loss of Energy	Loss of motivation, ideals and hope



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Leads to Anxiety disorders	Leads to depression
Physical damage	Emotional and Mental damage
Can be damaging to physical health	Life does not seem worth living

The danger with burnout is that people are usually aware that they have high stress levels but many people aren't aware they are suffering burnout and the effects can remain unseen for a long time.

What can cause burnout?

- Lack of recognition
- Unclear or difficult tasks
- Repetitive or boring tasks
- High pressure or chaotic environments
- Working for too long a period at once
- Taking on too much work
- Not enough sleep
- No time to socialise with family and friends
- Perfectionism
- Being overly controlling or hard on yourself and others

High achieving personalities are more likely to experience this as they seek to always maintain a high standard and can burnout in doing so.

How do I stop this?

The three R's can be used here as they can be in many situations

Recognise - Watch out for the signs of burnout (and stress as this can be equally damaging).

Reverse – Undo the damage by requesting support and manage the situations which were causing this.

Resilience – Take care of your physical and emotional health and you will build your resilience to stress and burnout.

How can I help?

If you are experiencing stress or burnout, turn to a trusted friend or family member and talk through your emotions. You will find that this actually takes a large weight off your mind and will make it easier to go through the next steps. Your peers in Scouting can also be a good group to share this with but if you don't wish to, you should always feel like you can talk to a Scouter.

On the flipside, if you think someone is showing signs of this, talk to them and get them to communicate.

Try not to think about what is burning you out by separating yourself from it for some time. This should help you to calm down and instead use this time to de-stress, have fun or talk to those



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around you. Prioritise doing something that makes you happy. Stay away from people or things that have a negative effect on you or that have a history of bringing you down or stressing you out.

Find something meaningful to do. If you are working with a cause already, ask to step back for a short time to re-evaluate your priorities if possible. This will allow you to find something which works better for you and doesn't have the same affects. Picking up a new hobby or a new volunteering opportunity can help you out too. Separation can also help you to decide if this is really for you or if you would be more suited somewhere else. Remember, leaving on good terms is better than damaging your health and letting them down at a later date.

Make sure you're getting enough sleep. Tiredness can heighten the negative emotions that you feel and dull the positive ones. By getting enough sleep you should reverse this. Even if it doesn't, it has taken your mind off of things for a few hours.

Exercise helps to de-stress and clear your head. Going on a short walk, cycle or swim, etc gets the blood pumping and helps to re-frame your mind. Practicing meditation or going out in nature has the same effects.

Eating a better diet helps to improve your mindset. Reducing fatty & high refined sugar foods and high sugar carbohydrates are a good start. If you smoke or drink alcohol, these can affect things too so reducing your consumption will help. Caffeine, found in coffee and fizzy drinks, should also be reduced if possible.

Re-evaluate your priorities. Scheduling yourself for tasks can help you to avoid over-working. Overworking can also affect your efforts on something else which can make things worse. Saying 'No' to more work is something we all have trouble with but is necessary to get on top of things. Say 'Yes' to things which will make you happy and build yourself.

Take a break from technology. Technology is everywhere and hard to avoid. Having a mobile phone means you are constantly reachable and it is hard to disconnect from the world. Putting it away, on silent & do not disturb will help you forget about it and concentrate on yourself and your mental health or the task at hand and avoid the distractions from constant notifications.

If you do all of this, it should help you to avoid burnout.

Remember, there is no shame in admitting when you are feeling low or suffering and there is always someone out there that can help. If you do think you are suffering from stress or burnout, doing some research on it and seeing what works for other people is a great start.

What works for you may not work for someone else as we are all unique, but trying what worked for people is always worth a shot, and you never know, you could help someone else in the future with your advice or help someone else open up or realise they are experiencing this too.

