

## Are you burned out?

Take this self-assessment to see where you are on the burnout scale...

### Have you noticed changes in yourself over the *past 6 months*?

Assign a number from 1 (for no change) to 5 (for huge change).

- \_\_\_ 1. Do you tire more easily? Feel fatigued rather than energetic?
- \_\_\_ 2. Are people annoying you by telling you, "You don't look so good lately"?
- \_\_\_ 3. Are you working harder and harder and accomplishing less and less?
- \_\_\_ 4. Are you increasingly cynical and discouraged?
- \_\_\_ 5. Are you often invaded by a sadness you can't explain?
- \_\_\_ 6. Are you forgetting (appointments, deadlines, personal possessions)?
- \_\_\_ 7. Are you increasingly irritable? More short-tempered? More disappointed in people around you?
- \_\_\_ 8. Are you seeing close friends and family members less frequently?
- \_\_\_ 9. Are you too busy to do routine things like make phone calls, read reports, or send out cards?
- \_\_\_ 10. Are you suffering from physical complaints? (Aches, pains, headaches, a lingering cold)
- \_\_\_ 11. Do you feel disoriented when the activity of the day comes to a halt?
- \_\_\_ 12. Is joy elusive?
- \_\_\_ 13. Are you unable to laugh at a joke about yourself?
- \_\_\_ 14. Does sex seem like more trouble than it's worth?
- \_\_\_ 15. Do you have very little to say to people?
- \_\_\_ TOTAL (from H. Freudenberger and G. Richelson)

### Scoring:

- 0 - 25            fine
- 26 - 35        there are things you should be watching (most adults fall in this range)
- 36 - 50        you're a candidate for burning out
- 51 - 65        you are burning out
- Over 65        It's a dangerous situation threatening your physical and mental wellbeing.

## Resiliency and Burnout

**Resiliency** refers to the ability to bounce back in the face of stress or adversity (Garmezy, 1991). Risk factors inhibit resilience and protective factors enhance it. **Risk Factors** are all those things that have happened to you that are in and out your control – poverty, disability, trauma, and abuse. There are three types of protective factors: 1) individual biological attributes; 2) family factors; and, 3) social and environmental factors. **Protective factors** are critical for dealing with stress, whether you are a parent, a

student, a teacher, an administrator, or all of the above. So, what happens when you aren't feeling resilient, especially when you are responsible for bolstering the resiliency in others – as a teacher, a parent, a supervisor? Many researchers have identified links between stress and health problems (see Kushnir, 1994 for an example) as well as the detrimental effects of job stress on student outcomes (Anderson, Levin, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999). Stress has also been linked to burnout among employees in a variety of professions, teaching included (see Guglielmi & Tatrow, 1998 for an example). **Burnout** is defined as “persistent, work-related state of mind... that is primarily characterized by exhaustion... accompanied by distress, sense of reduced effectiveness, decreased motivation, and development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work” (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998, p. 36). So, burnout is like a three dimensional mix of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (van Dierendonck, Garssen, & Visser, 2005). Individuals most vulnerable to burnout are often those who are strongly motivated and involved in their work (Van Dierendonck, Garssen, & Visser, 2005).

### **What to do now...**

In order to address the issue of burnout within a work environment, there are two levels of intervention: organizational efforts to reduce sources of stress and individual efforts to increase one's capacity to deal with stress. The more significant the burnout, the more intensive the intervention needs to be.

#### *Organizational Intervention*

The following list of interventions indicates potential techniques, trainings, and other activities that organizations, specifically schools, can implement to mitigate risk factors that can lead to stress and burnout.

- Social Support: intentional activities that foster peer support among classroom workers. Mentorship pairs (veteran and new teachers) have been effective at preventing burnout (Guglielmi, S. & Tatrow, K., 1998). Peer collaboration pairs emphasize supportive, constructive dialogue by taking turns presenting issues in four steps: 1) clarify the problem; 2) summarize the specific patterns of behavior, typical teacher response, and aspects of problem that are within teacher control; 3) develop three actions plans, predict the good and bad, and choose one plan to implement; 4) Evaluate the process (Cooley, 1996).
- Self Preservation Skills Training: emphasis of this training is on effective coping skills. Skills necessary to change the stressful situation are: assertive communication skills; problem-solving skills; setting and keeping limits; and identifying aspects that can change. Skills necessary to change how one thinks about stressful situations are: replacing distorted, self defeating, and self-limiting beliefs with more constructive, realistic, and empowering beliefs; recognizing distorted beliefs; letting go of unrealistic expectations; and giving one's self permission to believe that best efforts are good enough (Cooley, 1996).
- Systematically recognizing worker talents and skills through positive feedback has proven effective as a protective factor against burnout (Zuns, 1998). Examples could be "worker of the month" awards and gifts based on merit.
- Development of worker sense of self-efficacy is helpful to prevent burnout because people develop confidence in their abilities to handle stressful experiences. Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1977), is the "aspect of self perception that reflects one's capacity to get things done." Evaluating job descriptions to see how job mastery is defined helps to clarify objectives in the work.
- Fostering a professional purpose and sense of mission has have been effective to mitigate burnout because people regain connection to why they are working so hard (Zuns, 1998). Two

ways to accomplish this are through regular review of realistic goals and cultivation of collaborative group environment toward common vision.

It is also helpful to perform a program evaluation to determine sources of stress and whether these sources can be changed through policy or training. If it is impossible to change the source of the stress, then the intervention needs to focus on changing an individual's response to the stress.

### *Individual Intervention*

The following interventions have been proven effective in bolstering protection against burnout.

We cannot take care of others if we do not know how to take care of ourselves.

- Be diligent, set limits on time devoted to work, be flexible, and be prepared to take responsibility for these decisions.
- Activities that allow self evaluation of *how* you think about things (cognitions) can be helpful when exploring how stressful situations affect you. Try keeping a journal where you write about things that you find difficult (risk factors) and feelings that you are having (warning signs) in regards to stress (Barnett, Baker, Elman, & Schoener, 2007). Then look for patterns and implement coping strategies (protective factors) that combat the stresses.
- Keep an eye out for negative coping skills (self medicating techniques) that you might use: drugs, alcohol, food, seeking emotional support from students, and minimizing, denying, and rationalizing the work you do (Ibid.). then, bolster your usage of positive coping skills (like the ones mentioned above) to reduce the effects of stress.
- The effects of meditation have been studied among teachers and the results suggest that it is a useful method to prevent burnout. Meditation combats fatigue and allows for a deep state of relaxation in a short period of time (Anderson, Levinson, Barker, & Kiewra, 1999).

- Exercise, stretching, deep breathing, and adequate nutrition have been effective to reduce stress.
- Building coping resources is key to managing stress. A step toward building these resources is through recognizing your emotions and then learning to control them. The following is a list of resources that can be addressed when we focus on our emotions: assertiveness, anger, understanding what we control, managing time effectively, issues of power, achieving goals, and solving problems (Kushnir, 1994).
- In cases of severe burnout, individuals must seek professional help through support groups or individual therapy because they are unable to fix the situation alone. Talk to your mentor, your supervisor, your pastor, or someone who is reliable and supportive to develop a plan together.

While feeling burned out is never easy, you are not alone. And remember, the cure for burnout is also the prevention. Hang in there.

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