

Signs and Symptoms of Burnout

School Resources to Support Military-Connected Students is a project by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness an applied research center at The Pennsylvania State University and is funded by the Department of Defense Education Activity Grant number HE1254-19-0009.

For more information click on the links below:

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/>

<https://www.psu.edu/>

<https://dodeagrants.org/>

Our goal is to provide school personnel with free, evidence-based resources to support military-connected students. This training is part of our *Suicide Prevention* series.

Important Reminders

Before starting this training, please read the items below carefully and check the box in front of each item to indicate your understanding.

- The following content discusses suicide and may be upsetting to some individuals.
- Follow all district, local, state, and federal regulations. This training is **NOT** intended to replace or override existing procedures or laws.

Introduction

What is the purpose of this training?

School support personnel such as school psychologists, school nurses, and school counselors, often engage in daily activities that help others in their professional and personal lives. It is not uncommon for professionals in the business of helping others to be consistently relied upon to serve as a crisis manager, counselor, confidant, and advisor to a number of people in their personal and professional lives. Helping professionals tend to rely on their own interpersonal and coping skills in their efforts to support others. In the context of suicide prevention and intervention, professionals may not only feel ill-equipped to handle such stressful situations but may find that over time their personal resources for providing support in their professional roles may become depleted.

Unfortunately, depleted personal resources and decreased coping skills are risk factors for burnout among professionals. Given their geographic locations, school personnel may face additional burnout risks due to social and professional isolation associated with serving in remote areas. Therefore, it is imperative that student support personnel successfully engage in self-care, recognize signs of burnout, and develop action plans to support their well-being.

Objective

The goal of this training is to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Identify signs of professional burnout in yourself and colleagues.

How confident are you in your ability to do this now?

Please click on the link below to submit your response.

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6Gp3iBHlvhcTluR?modulenumber=suicide38

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below before proceeding with this training.

Answered the survey question in the link.

Clicked the arrow underneath the survey question to submit your response.

Recorded the ID number provided after you submitted your answer to the survey question. You will need it to complete the survey at the end of this training.

Research

What is most important for me to know?

Burnout is a term that is sometimes used very loosely to describe anything from typical job dissatisfaction to a reflection of mental health symptomology associated with work-related stress. Despite the colloquial uses of the term burnout there is a generally accepted definition of burnout used by researchers and clinicians. Burnout is usually defined as being a combination of three primary symptoms (Maslach, 1982): 1) emotional exhaustion, 2) depersonalization, and 3) reduced personal accomplishment. We will examine each of these symptoms in turn and describe important ways to look for signs of burnout in yourself and your colleagues. Throughout this section, consider a time when you or a colleague have exhibited some of these signs. Reflect on those experiences and try to identify risk and protective factors that had an impact on responses to burnout.

Emotional Exhaustion

Everyone, at some time in their lives, experiences a need for rest and breaks. The daily demands of work and personal responsibilities can take their toll both physically and emotionally. Emotional exhaustion, however, is a persistent state of being physically and emotionally tired due to continuous stress. Signs of emotional exhaustion may include:

- Feeling tired most of the time, having a pervasive lack of energy
- Difficulty sleeping (falling asleep or staying asleep)
- Forgetfulness or difficulty concentrating
- Physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach problems
- Being physically ill more often than previously (e.g., more colds, flu, infections)
- Feelings of anxiety
- Feelings of depression

Depersonalization

Depersonalization, as it relates to burnout, is distinct from other kinds of dissociative symptoms in that it typically does not include feelings of unreality. Individuals who are struggling with burnout who have symptoms of depersonalization may

experience increasing cynicism about their work and progressive disengagement from their working and personal relationships. Educational professionals are often very dedicated, caring persons who chose their profession because of a deep commitment to helping children to learn and grow. Yet when professionals become exhausted, it is possible for them to progressively become more detached, uncaring about their performance, or disinterested in their colleagues or students. Signs of depersonalization include:

- A general decline in enjoyment in aspects of their work (may be gradual over time and may extend to personal endeavors as well)
- Pessimism which may include negative self-talk or negative talk about work, students, or colleagues
- Isolation from work-related or personal social interaction, increased anger toward others
- Detachment or a sense of being disconnected from others at work or at home

Note that descriptors used in this section indicate a behavioral change toward depersonalization and are not intended to characterize general traits of pessimism or cynicism.

Reduced Personal Accomplishment or Sense of Ineffectiveness

All professionals have times in their careers where they may feel ill-equipped to deal with the demands of their job or may have a sense that there are important areas where they want to further develop their skills. A healthy sense of knowing what you do well or where you need more training or support is an indicator of professional maturity. Yet, when professionals begin to experience a pervasive sense that nothing they contribute is “enough,” this may be a sign of burnout. Signs of a sense of ineffectiveness include:

- Feelings of hopelessness or not caring (e.g., “nothing matters anymore,” “nothing works anyway”)
- Marked increase in irritability
- Decreased performance and productivity at work

Other Signs of Concern

In addition to these main warning signs, burnout may be exhibited through sensory responses such as hypervigilance (e.g., startled responses to hearing the phone ring or a knock at the door); physical responses like a change in appetite, difficulty sleeping, chronic exhaustion, or physical illnesses; or through addictions.

Application

How might this look in my professional practice?

The objective of this training is to:

Identify signs of professional burnout in yourself and colleagues.

Answer the following questions, try deciding whether these statements about burnout are true or false.

1. Depersonalization is a symptom of burnout, not necessarily a psychiatric illness.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: a) True

2. Any sense of feeling ill- equipped to do your job or being fatigued is burnout.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

3. Burnout is a mental health diagnosis that needs intensive treatment.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

4. Isolation from work or personal social interaction may be a sign of burnout.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: a) True

5. A balanced diet and avoiding high-fat foods can prevent burnout.

- a) True
- b) False

Correct Answer: b) False

Implementation

How can I effectively implement this content in my professional practice?

Please review the considerations below regarding potential implementation strategies, barriers to implementation, and collaboration strategies related to this content. This will help you coordinate the next steps as you begin to incorporate the information presented in this training into your professional practice.

This information can also be found on a handout that you will be able to download at the end of this training.

Implementation Strategies

- Training and awareness of burnout should be regularly visited in school settings so that all personnel can take steps toward prevention.
- Employee assistance programs, including short-term counseling, should be made available and easily accessible.

Overcoming Barriers to Implementation

- Some professionals hesitate to speak to colleagues about signs of burnout. If you are worried about a colleague and concerned about speaking up, consult with a trust colleague about how to broach the subject with kindness and respect.
- Make efforts, through education and ongoing discussion, to destigmatize burnout among your colleagues.

Collaboration Strategies

- Be sure to make regular contact with therapists in your area who may serve to support school personnel in the wake of crisis.
- Be sure that your district has an employee assistance program and materials readily available to assist with making referrals as needed.

Resources

Are there any resources available to help me implement this content?

Click on the link below to download a tool that you can use to implement this content in your professional practice.

<https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:f30765be-0586-4548-877d-ae4231c30121>

Feedback

How can I help improve this training?

The objective of this training was to increase your confidence in your ability to:

Identify signs of professional burnout in yourself and colleagues.

Answer the questions in the link below to let us know how well this training increased your confidence in your ability to accomplish this objective. Once you have answered all of the questions, click the blue arrow button underneath to submit your responses.

https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d771mLr9ZgW3kyx?modulenummer=suicide38

Verify that you have completed each of the tasks below.

Answered all of the survey questions above. You may have to scroll to see all of the questions.
Clicked the arrow underneath the last survey question to submit your responses.

Additional Readings

Where can I learn more about this content?

The following resources were used to create this training. If you would like more information about the information presented in this training, we encourage you to start here.

Maslach, C. (1982). *Burnout: The cost of caring*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this training. If you have any questions or comments, please email us at schoolresources@psu.edu.

Proceed to the next training

Click on the link below to move on to the next training titled *Contributing Factors to Burnout*. In this training, you will increase your confidence in your ability to identify how burnout can spread amongst school personnel and strategies to prevent it from doing so.

https://learning.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/school-resources/modules/suicide_39-contributing-factors-to-burnout_201022/

Return to the module directory

Click on this button to return to the module directory.

<https://schoolresources.militaryfamilies.psu.edu/modules/>