

16 Signs of Burnout

Feeling helpless and hopeless – The overwhelming feeling that positive change is unattainable. The positive changes become hard to recognize while the negative impacts and feelings of despair take over. These feelings leave people feeling like they are not making an impact.

A sense that one can never do enough – Begins to translate into the feeling that the individual person is not good enough or trying hard enough leaving dissatisfaction in themselves, their lives and the work they do.

Hyper vigilance – This is where we become wholly focused on our job or helping to the point that it feels impossible to be present for anything else. Often people begin to view everything as a potential threat in order to regain a sense of safety. This can result in hyperarousal, anxiety or depression.

Diminished creativity – The feeling of boredom, the lack of creative or original thoughts. This may come as a result of creating structure in order to feel safe in turn removing the flow of creativity.

Inability to embrace complexity – This is identified as when people begin to need clarity in good vs. bad and right vs. wrong. Can create the desire to take a stand or take sides increasing drama, gossip or exclusiveness. The ability to see life as a complex, multi-faceted process diminishes. This is when people struggle with embracing the “gray areas” of the world.

Minimizing – When we begin to trivialize a current situation by comparing it with another situation we see as more dire. We begin to lose our ability to empathize because we are comparing people’s suffering and ranking it.

Chronic exhaustion/physical ailments – you can’t remember a time where you weren’t tired. Your body, soul and heart are exhausted. Often the result of the struggle against despair and suffering in the world and is related to the feeling of hopelessness and not feeling like we can do enough. Often transfers into physical or chronic ailments.

Inability to listen/deliberate avoidance – This begins when a person begins to feel overwhelmed with their work or lives and begins finding ways to avoid contact with others. Sometimes it looks like wishing – wishing someone will cancel or bad weather will happen. You begin to let the phone ring and go to voicemail or you feel dread when the phone rings.

Dissociative moments – Overwhelming feelings and experiences that result being so engaged in your work that you check out on the inside. It becomes common to notice that you did not hear the last few sentences of someone talking to you, not following a story, etc. Instead you are lost in the thoughts of the stories or experiences you witness.

Sense of persecution – This is the idea that we deserve better and it is someone else’s responsibility to provide that. Rather than finding ways to seek change people feeling this way begin to believe that they have no capacity to influence change. This often results in negative, angry, blaming feelings.

Guilt – The discomfort and blame for having more than the people you serve or help. This can stop all feelings or pleasure, beauty and happiness. It keeps us from being fully present in our work instead we try to hide our privileges from others, creating dishonestly.

Fear – The constant exposure to trauma can affect our feeling of safety in the world. It can create in us the fear to feel, the fear of vulnerability or possible victimization. This makes us feel vulnerable, blocks creativity and freedom.

Anger and cynicism – Constant exposure to what is unjust in the world can make us feel angry at the world, at each other at ourselves. Not being able to recognize and find a healthy outlet for that anger can make it hard for those we serve to process their own anger with us. Often this anger can get taken out on others not connected to the feelings. Cynicism is the result of not being able to deal with our feelings of anger and is used as a coping method to avoid these feelings.

Inability to empathize/numbness – Blocking out feelings and creating a wall to them in order to control our exposure to them. Not being fully present. Sometimes people try to numb the pain with substances or other addictions. Sometimes people keep themselves constantly busy in order to not feel. This affects our ability to connect with others.

Addictions – finding something you become attached to that helps you check out from your feelings. We begin to feel like we need the thing we are addicted to in order to make it through another day or deal with our feelings. Examples are alcohol, sugar, food, adrenaline, overworking. These become unhelpful when we are not living a balanced life and processing our emotions.

Grandiosity – The work we do becomes the center of our identity. The more important this work is, the more important we become. People can become obsessed with fixing others' problems and not addressing their own. Often this results in staying involved in a cause longer than is good for you.