PREVENT BURNOUT

Burnout is a mental, emotional, and physical condition characterized by **emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of inefficacy** (Maslach & Gomes, 2006). As of 2019, burnout was recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and included in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as an occupational phenomenon (WHO, 2019). Burnout differs from other mental health disorders because it is tied directly into a person's relationship with their work. It is often experienced in helping professions, and can also occur as a result of helping roles you take on in your personal life, including activist work, volunteer roles, or caring for a family member or friend.

RECOGNIZE BURNOUT IN YOURSELF

We tend to minimize or brush aside our symptoms until they reach a breaking point. It's important to understand what burnout is because the first tool to protect yourself from burnout is to notice the early signs and take those signs seriously. Common clues that you're getting burnt out include: sleeplessness, irritability, lack of motivation, frequent illness, forgetfulness, and low energy. Of course, this isn't the same for everyone, so you need to pay attention to your own signs of burnout.

▶ How do you know when you're getting burnt out? Brainstorm some of the signs in each category below.

Physical (e.g., headaches, tension in shoulders, jaw, or or stomach):

_____

Behavioral (e.g., numbing behaviors like drinking alcohol, scrolling through social media, or watching tv more than usual):
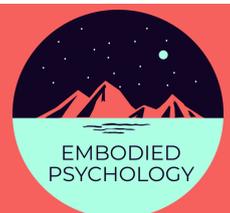
_____

Mental (e.g., spiraling thoughts, wondering what the point is, asking self if the work you do matters):

_____

Emotional (e.g., irritable, sad, hopeless):

_____

PAGE 1

TAKE YOUR HEALTH SERIOUSLY

▶ Now, make a commitment - "When I notice any of the above signs of burnout, I will take my health seriously and respond immediately by taking care of myself in the following ways":

Physically: _____

_____

Emotionally: _____

_____

Mentally: _____

_____

Spiritually: _____

_____

Socially: _____

_____

TUNE INTO YOUR NEED FOR SELF CARE

Self care can be anything you need to replenish your fuel tank and allow you to continue doing helping work. It involves tuning into yourself psychologically and physically to identify your needs. In order to do this, it's important to make time for moments of reflection. You can participate in mindful acts through formal meditation, a few minutes of mindful breathing, or simply allowing yourself to be present to whatever is happening in the moment. Once you're mindful of what you're experiencing, you can learn to regulate yourself and find a balance in your life. Self-regulation includes regulatory processes like exercise, relaxation, and managing things such as affect, stimulation, and energy. Balance means being able to find a middle ground between dualisms in our life (e.g. work and play) and tend to our needs.

▶ What practices do you have for tuning into your needs, regulating yourself, and finding balance?

_____

_____

_____
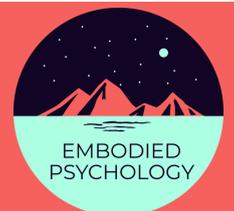
MAINTAIN HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Healthy boundaries involve understanding what nourishes you and what drains you, then being intentional with your actions. We all have limited energy and time, so setting boundaries is about deciding which helping actions you are willing and able to say yes to, and which you need to say no to. To make that decision, you may need to examine the cost/benefit ratio of the things you are agreeing to, and use mindfulness to help you decide what types of helping actions are the best fits for you. It also involves going "off duty" from time to time. Just like everyone else, you need space that's just for you.

▶ What boundaries do you already have in place to help protect your time and energy?

_____

_____

_____

FIND AND FOSTER HOPE

It's so easy to lose our hopefulness when we're focused only on what's not going well or still needs to change. And while we can't ignore the work that needs to be done, we need to recognize that the promise of future change isn't enough to sustain us. We need to be able to notice what's already connecting us to hope in the present. Take the time now to celebrate successes.

▶ What are you aware of happening right now that makes you feel hopeful?

_____

_____

_____

ADDRESS SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Burnout often stems from lack of support in structural systems. You're not alone in dealing with the effects of burnout, and you don't need to be alone in combatting it! Rather than focus only on what we can do to cope as individuals, it can be empowering to brainstorm and implement change at a larger level.
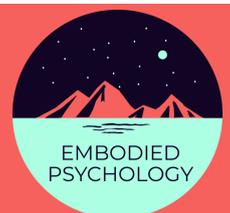
▶ Who do you know who's fighting for social justice alongside you? (note: this can be people in your existing community, or folks you are aware of doing work you respect from a distance).

_____

_____

_____

Sometimes just being aware that you're not alone in your struggles is enough to help combat burnout. Other times we need support that's a bit more concrete.

▶ Who in your life would be able to help you advocate for structural change? What's the first step in connecting with this person or agency?

_____

_____

_____

In 2020, I wrote a manual for settlement workers called **Vicarious Trauma and Burnout** that expands on all the tools in this worksheet. It also has an entire section addressing what workplaces can do, so if you're in a leadership role in your organization, this may be a great resource to check out!

References:
Maslach, C. & Gomes, M. E. (2006). Overcoming burnout. *In:* MacNair, R. (Ed.). **Working for peace: A handbook of practical psychology and other tools**, (pp. 43-49). Atascadero, CA: Impact.
2. Le, L. & Perry, N. (2016). **Combatting Burnout Workshop** (handout).