

Burnout Syndrome

The Burnout Syndrome is a progressive loss of energy, idealism, and purpose experienced by people working with other people in professions like teachers, doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, managers, policemen etc. It is a result of conditions of their work and it was first defined in 1975 by H. Freudenberger. It is described as an emotional state which can be observed among people working with other people and whose profession is dependant on the interpersonal communication.

There are several symptoms which can be observed: the joy of living and the enthusiasm about work is missing; the person is tired physically and psychically with feelings of helplessness and desperation. The Burnout Syndrome is not the result of isolated traumatic experience but it often comes slowly as a psychical exhaustion due to the long-term incidence of stressing incitation.

A teacher is one of the professions whose members are likely to suffer from the Burnout. There is a need to identify causes of Burnout and possible ameliorative strategies, as perceived by teachers. The five causes of Burnout which are cited most frequently are low student motivation, lack of parental and community support, lack of administrative support, workload, and discipline problems.

Results can be seen very quickly. Gone is the initial enthusiasm for work, satisfaction from the achievements and self-fulfillment in the job slowly declines. Irritation, alternated by gloominess appears with the loss of self-confidence and the feeling of internal emptiness. Even the behaviour at work is changed; interest in students, patients or clients vanishes, their problems are seen as a burden and they are often dismissed by ironical remarks.

The Burnout Syndrome is divided into three phases:

1. Phase Zero

The person works at his/her best, although s/he experiences that the effort is not evaluated sufficiently and it is not possible to manage the requirements.

2. Phase One

The person experience feeling that s/he cannot cope with the work and starts to lose a system.

3. Phase Two

The symptoms of neurosis appear (e.g. anxiety) together with the feeling that something must be done whereas the person acts chaotically.

4. Phase Three

The feeling that something must be done disappears and it's substituted by the opposite feeling – than nothing must be done. The person is irritated with only the presence of others and the loss of enthusiasm and interest appears along with tiredness, disillusion and exhaustion.

Typical warning signals are: tiredness, anger at those making demands, chronic fatigue - exhaustion, negativity, a sense of being physically run down, self-criticism for putting up with the demands, cynicism, and irritability, a sense of being besieged, exploding easily at seemingly inconsequential things, frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances, weight loss or gain, sleeplessness and depression, shortness of breath, suspiciousness, feelings of helplessness, increased degree of risk taking. However, there are some specific strategies for preventing job and caregiver burnout or additional burnout-busting strategies that are universally helpful and can help to deal with this problem.

The school system can however prevent teacher Burnout by some interventions.

Among these are:

1. stress management workshops
2. improving working conditions
3. relaxation training
4. classroom environment
5. offering professional development activities
6. time management workshops and nutrition
7. dealing with salary issues

Teachers themselves can focus on:

1. avoiding the negative thinking
2. learning to say "no" when feeling that they are being hazed
3. lowering the demands
4. planning well, dividing the work equally, and not avoiding it
5. expressing feelings, but be careful not to hurt anyone else
6. sharing problems with someone close
7. asking colleagues for support and ideas for solving the situation
8. avoiding impulsive solving of the stress situations
9. making breaks; not hurrying from one activity to another
10. avoiding the syndrome of "a helper", be emphatic, but with an emotional distance
11. not refusing the offers to help
12. analyzing previous behaviour in critical situations, finding alternative solutions
13. relaxing and getting back the energy
14. doing activities that make them feel well and learning relaxation techniques
15. learning new things and educate themselves further
16. taking care of their health - lower the amount of work, get enough sleep, eat healthy food, do sports, and please themselves.

Burnout Syndrome is the result of long lasting situation when one is unable to cope with daily life demands. Teacher must face a classroom full of students every day, administrators, counselors, other teachers, negotiate potentially stressful interactions with parents, and deal with many other stressful situations. It is no wonder that many of them experience a form of Burnout at some point in their careers. However knowing the problem is the first important step of preventing it.

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