

Burnout Can Scald Parents

Executives and other professionals aren't the only people facing the risk of burnout in today's tumultuous society. Parents can suffer burnout too. In fact, the better a parent is at parenting, the higher the odds that he or she will suffer burnout. Parental burnout is often a combination of fatigue, guilt, anger and frustration that can result from sacrificing personal needs and desires for the sake of the children.

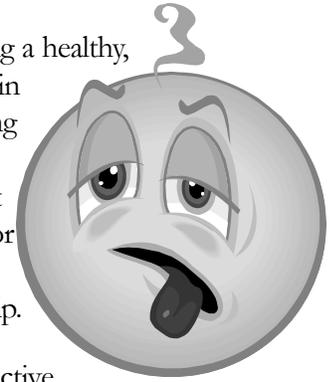
This quickly becomes a vicious cycle as a parent tries hard to be a perfect parent. Because perfection, especially in parenting, is impossible, the parent sooner or later begins to feel guilt for his or her perceived failure as a parent. Guilt is often followed by anger and frustration, which may be taken out on the children. Then the parent, realizing the failures are getting more numerous, feels even guiltier and becomes angrier.

The final phase of parent burnout can be total resentment and withdrawal from the family. In the extreme, the parent may experience depression, abuse the children, misuse alcohol, medicine or other substances, or abandon the family. Such parents can help themselves by finding professional help and counseling for their problem. People don't have to be neurotic or 'sick' to suffer burnout. It can happen to anyone and parents need not be afraid or ashamed to seek help.

However, parent burnout can be prevented or at least minimized. Parents don't have to feel they have to meet all needs within their families. It's impossible for anyone to be all things to all people, and parents can benefit by giving up those impossible expectations of perfection.

Parents can help themselves by establishing boundaries between different responsibilities and not confusing problems with children with problems at the office, and vice versa. If you worry about everything at once, instead of leaving problems where they belong -- at home or at the office -- you'll lose control over situations and feel overwhelmed.

Parents can work at keeping a healthy, vital relationship with an adult in their lives, rather than dedicating all their emotion and energy to their children. That 'significant other' can be a spouse, friend or work colleague, but it's important that it be a peer relationship.



When parents practice effective time management, they have more control over their lives. It's important that parents set priorities for their families and avoid wasting time on unimportant or unproductive tasks. While home-cooked meals every evening are an admirable ambition, this kind of work overload eventually leads to burnout. A more effective approach is to eat out or order in occasionally or use prepared foods, then spend the time saved playing with your kids or talking with your spouse.

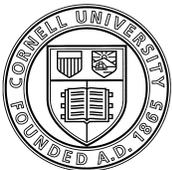
Likewise, parents should learn some stress management techniques. When stress strikes, practice a simple relaxation method that works for you, like taking a walk or rhythmic breathing. Coping with stress also means talking about and solving problems and making changes in specific areas of your life.

An important part of stress management is taking care of your health by eating right, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep. Avoid too much caffeine and alcohol, and, if you're a smoker, try to quit or cut back.

Finally, parents must take care of their own needs, in addition to those of their children, rather than always sacrificing for the sake of the children and family. Constant sacrificing leads to resentment. Parents who take care of their own needs usually do a pretty good job of taking care of children too.

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