

March

Reducing Stress; Preventing Burnout

At this time of the year, the pressure mounts.

Echoing through the school are phrases such as:

It's too Hard! It's Not Fair! You Can't Win! No one seems to care!

#####

The impact of new accountability standards and assessment has increased pressure on administrators at state, district, and local schools.

As a result, teachers are experiencing tremendous pressure to prepare students for high stakes testing.

In turn, students are under enhanced pressure to perform well on accountability tests.

At this time of the year, there is major concern about the negative impact of the mounting pressure on students, staff, and parents.

It is easy to overlook the psychological needs of staff. Yet, when school staff don't feel good about themselves, it is unlikely they will be effective in making students feel good about themselves.

#####

Clearly, it's time to take care of ourselves and each other in ways that reduce stress and enhance hope.

Support staff can play a major role in all this. For helpful tools and information, see the Quick Training Aid entitled: *School Staff Burnout* (online at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>)

Below are a few excerpts related specifically to "Burnout;" however, much of what is presented is relevant to stress in general.

=====

I don't suffer from stress.

I'm a carrier.

Dilbert

=====

What Causes Burnout?

Burnout is used to describe a syndrome that goes beyond physical fatigue from overwork. Stress and emotional exhaustion are part of it, but the hallmark of burnout is the distancing that goes on in response to the overload.

Christina Maslach

(Excerpts from: A. J. Cedoline (1982) *Job Burnout in Public Education: Symptoms, Causes, and Survival Skills*, Teachers College, Columbia University.)

- **Lack of Control Over One's Destiny**
- **Lack of Occupational Feedback and Communication**
- **Work Overload or Underload**
- **Contact overload resulting from the necessity for frequent encounters with other people in order to carry out job functions.**
- **Role Conflict/Ambiguity (Uncertainty about what one is expected to do at work).**
- **Individual Factors, including financial stability, marital satisfaction, neuroticism, excessive shyness, inflexibility, and poor stress management skills**
- **Training Deficits**

Some Secondary Factors:

- **Poor working conditions**
- **Lack of job security**
- **Lifestyle changes**
- **Rapidly changing society that force individuals to make unexpected adjustments in their way of life and work.**

#####

An Intrinsic Motivational Perspective of Burnout

The behavior referred to as burnout is a psychological phenomenon. One way to understand the problem is in terms of three psychological needs that theorists posit as major intrinsic motivational determinants of behavior. These are the need to *feel competent*, the need to *feel self-determining*, and the need to *feel interpersonally connected*. From this perspective, burnout can be viewed as among the negative outcomes that result when these needs are threatened and thwarted. And, such needs are regularly threatened and thwarted by the prevailing culture of schools.

Dealing with Burnout

As with so many problems, it is easiest to view burnout as a personal condition. And, as in many other instances, this would be the least effective way to understand what must be done over the long-run to address the matter. The problem is multifaceted and complex. While stress-reduction activities often are prescribed, they are unlikely to be a sufficient remedy for the widespread draining of motivation. Reducing environmental stressors and enhancing job supports are more to the point, but again, alone these are insufficient strategies.

The solution requires reculturing schools in ways that minimize the undermining and maximize the enhancement of intrinsic motivation. This involves policies and practices that ensure a daily focus on (1) promoting staff and student well-being and (2) addressing barriers to teaching and learning.

#####

(Excerpted from: Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B., & Leiter, M.P. (2001). Job Burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422)

- **Individuals are capable of learning new coping skills.**
 - >Research demonstrates that educational sessions are effective in helping individuals to learn to cope with the demands of their jobs.

- **Changing the job environment, as well as the person in it, is essential for interventions to deal with burnout.**
 - >The most effective interventions combine changes in managerial practice with individual-level educational interventions.

- **A combined managerial and educational approach to intervention tends to emphasize building engagement with work.**
 - >Focusing on engagement creates an increased alliance with the organizational mission.
 - >Work settings which support positive development of energy, vigor, involvement, dedication, absorption, and effectiveness among employees should be successful in promoting their well-being and productivity.

#####

Promoting Well-Being and Preventing Burnout

(Excerpted from *Addressing Barriers to Learning, Spring 2002*, Center for Mental Health in Schools.)

School-based programs should include the following key elements:

- 1. Inducting newcomers into the school culture in a welcoming and socially supportive way.**
- 2. Opening classroom doors and creating appropriate teams of staff and students who support, nurture, and learn from each other every day.**
- 3. Personalized staff development and support, including:**
 - C In-service programs that account for interests strengths, weaknesses and limitations;
 - C Approaches that overcome avoidance motivation;
 - C Structure that provides personalized support and guidance; and
 - C Instruction designed to enhance and expand intrinsic motivation for learning and problem solving.
- 4. Restructuring school governance to enable shared decision-making.**

%%%%%%%%%

Providing strategies and skills so everyone at a school can take care of each other and enhance the nurturing environment necessary for learning to occur and all students to succeed is an opportunity for support staff to demonstrate the critical role they play in ensuring No Child is Left Behind.

%%%%%%%%%

If you want to know more about reducing stress see:

>>Quick Find: Burnout (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>) for online articles and centers specializing in this topic as well as links to Center produced materials such as

>>Introductory Packet: Understanding and Minimizing Staff Burnout

>>Quick Training Aid: School Staff Burnout

>>Quick Find: Environments that Support Learning

#####