

Coping with Parental Burnout

It is hard to imagine the condition “parental burnout” when one is zealously entering parenting, whether by birth, fostering or adoption. Hopes run high and a “can do” attitude prevails. Over time, parents recognize that their emotions are always swaying and influenced by what is happening in the lives of their children. From time to time, some parents can be beset by unanticipated parental burnout. This is when they experience emotional exhaustion due to sustained stress, and are feeling mentally and physically exhausted, with little left to give. During such times, one might not know where to turn or how to navigate this response.



What Causes Parental Burnout?

Parental burnout is most likely to occur when one is consumed with the needs of a particular child—or more than one child at the same time. The needs may be due to restraints in time to give to the child, a lack of financial resources, overwhelming physical or emotional concerns for oneself or the child, and in some situations, unrealistic expectations about what it means to be a “good” parent.

Symptoms of Parental Burnout

Parents experiencing burnout most often report one or several of the following symptoms:

- Changes in sleeping patterns—trouble falling asleep or needing increased sleep.
- Negative changes in emotions ranging from irritability to frequent bouts of anger.
- Feeling fed up with parenting.
- Detachment—a sense of numbness and lack of responsiveness to events and people.
- Sense that things will never improve—hopelessness.

7 Ways to Reduce Parental Burnout

Parental burnout does not usually go away without concerted efforts to address the sources of extreme stress and to practice self-care. If you are experiencing parental burnout, the following behaviors may assist you with rejuvenating and re-engaging in a more balanced caregiver role.

1 Pay attention to when your body and mind are saying, “I’ve had enough.”

This is the message that you need a break. You may notice a pattern to when you experience these sensations and proactively schedule in time for rest. Some ways to practice this include creating a transition time between work and greeting your children; dedicating the last half hour of your day as being free from all tasks; or delegating one responsibility each week to a different family member and celebrating their efforts to assume a new responsibility.

2 Address the basics of healthy sleep, nutrition, and exercise.

All three of these spheres of wellness are interconnected and can counter elevated levels of stress hormones and influence the production of hormones that promote positive well-being.

3 Create a music and video playlist that inspires you.

Practice affirmations throughout the day that influence your ability to adapt, such as “I’ve got this.” “I am not my worries.” “I have the capacity to thrive.”

4 Become part of a community that cares for one another.

This can reduce the sense of being all alone with challenges. Remember that the only way to be a part of a community is to be an active community member. This can be an in-person or virtual group—but the key is to participate.

5 Pay attention to how you handle stress.

Practicing mindfulness meditation can increase your awareness of how you are responding to things that are happening outside of you, as well as within you. By learning to focus on your thoughts and feelings, you can build tolerance for your responses by lessening judgment and increasing intention.



6 Increase your parenting skills.

Parents experiencing burnout often feel responsible for meeting all their child's needs and/or resolving their challenges. Learning how to shift your expectations for yourself and for your child and other family members is what is needed to begin to heal.

7 Reach out for professional guidance.

None of us know how to parent correctly all the time. Fortunately, there are experts who can help us navigate circumstances and restore our desire to parent with compassion for ourselves and our child.

For help reducing parental burnout, contact your EAP benefit through Carebridge.