

# Activist Burnout: How to Recognize, Prevent & Recover From It

## ***IS THIS BURNOUT? A CHECKLIST***

Use this handout to engage deeply on your own with the themes from this workshop, so you can recognize burnout when it happens, cope with it, and prevent it from happening again.

Other situations can look like burnout, including if the work you're doing isn't the right fit, if the environment is toxic or abusive, if you're going through changes in your personal life, or if you're dealing with a physical or mental health issue. Sometimes what you're dealing with could simply be a bad day, or a bad fit—you're working behind-the-scenes on policy when you really prefer to be directly involved with organizing and people managing, or you're a part of an activist community that doesn't fit with your morals or the kind of justice work you want to focus on. This checklist can help you differentiate if you're dealing with burnout so you know how to identify and treat it.

- Do you feel guilty, anxious, depressed, apathetic, pessimistic, or unmotivated?
- Do you have any of these physical symptoms: Heart racing, stomach ache, insomnia, physical pain, headache, exhaustion, forgetfulness, lack of concentration, increased illness, or loss of appetite?
- How long have you been feeling this way? Can you tie it to a specific situation?
- How long have you been doing activist work? How many hours per work do you spend on it? How often do you take a break from activism?
- Do you think taking a meaningful rest from your work would help ease the problem, or does it feel like this is a larger issue (with your role, organization, or the type of work you're doing)?
- Do you typically feel energized and excited about the work, but only recently you've been feeling this way?
- Did any major event change your perspective in the last few months?
- Are you having trouble keeping up with your typical habits, like meeting with friends, sleeping regularly, exercising, participating in a club, etc.?
- Are you constantly placing the needs of others and/or your work over your own needs?
- Do you feel detached from people and ideas you used to care about?

If you answer yes to all of these questions, the feeling is persistent over time, it happens in more than one scenario, and/or it is a change from how you used to feel in similar scenarios, then

you're probably burnt out from your activism work and need to make sustainability and self-care a priority in your schedule.

## **A PERSONAL SELF-CARE AUDIT**

Here are a few questions to ask yourself about your self-care habits so you can build a sustainable practice of self-care into your daily life and activism work. Use these questions to interrogate your current habits and map out an intentional path forward.

When is the last time you:

- Spent time alone, not working (including unpaid work), doing something just for yourself because you wanted to?
- Felt genuinely happy and fulfilled?
- Knew you'd gotten enough sleep, and spent the day feeling like your physical and/or mental pace was steady and manageable?
- Talked to a loved one about how you're actually feeling, challenges and all, and received genuine empathy and understanding?
- Made a list of all the pressures and priorities in your life?
- Accomplished a goal just for yourself that wasn't related to work or other obligations (like running a marathon, writing a book of poetry, completing a painting)?

## **HOW TO CREATE AN EMERGENCY SELF-CARE PLAN**

It's important to build an emergency self-care plan before you actually need one in the moment. Here are some tips for building one and changing the plan as you see what works best for you.

An emergency self-care box can be a physical item, like an actual box or bag of items that will help you when you're upset. If you're creating a physical self-care emergency, box, make sure that it's either easy to travel with or that you're creating at least a few of them (one for every place that you frequently spend time, such as home, work, or school).

The box can contain items like:

- A journal or a sketchpad and some pencils and markers
- A stuffed animal
- A stress ball
- A list of mental health emergency numbers
- A list of contact information for several trusted people in your community who you can talk to about what's going on

- A non-perishable small meal, snack, or drink
- A daily to-do list with non-negotiable things you need to do to survive every day (such as take necessary medication) and things you'd like to do every day (such as take a hot bath or make a warm meal for yourself)
- A device you can use to listen to music, a podcast, or other soothing noises with, and working headphones
- A favorite book or magazine to read
- Letters, photos, or cards from loved ones that make you feel grounded and cared for
- A personalized list of self-care actions that generally work for you (this will be individual, but it can be things like go for a run, rip up pieces of paper, work on some art, listen to a playlist of your favorite songs, take a nap)
- Any necessary items (a phone charger, medications, a change of clothing,

While building a self-care plan, you should also keep in mind what you'll actually do in the moment.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and burnt out, will you need to go to a safe spot by yourself to rest? Is there someone you can call if you need help, like finding safe transportation? Are there go-to locations that make you feel safe? Do you have a couple of self-care tactics that almost always work that can be your go-to first plans of action?

An emergency self-care plan should be tailored to your specific needs and what works for you.

Don't forget to update and change your plan as you need to. If you build out an emergency plan and then find that it's not working, ask yourself how you can make it more effective.

What are you feeling in the moment when you need the emergency self-care? What do you have the most trouble giving yourself? What could you use some help with? What kind of things usually get you through the hardest parts? What things are helpful once you're over the initial hard part and need to get re-energized and motivated?