



Creating a Culture for Success

Educator Series: 4.1 Recognizing Teacher Stress and Burnout

Hello and welcome to the QuaverEd Professional Learning course on self-care for school staff. My name is Lindsey Jannaman, and I am the Director of SEL content here at QuaverEd.

Today, we will be discussing recognizing educator stress and burnout. Our objectives for today's session are to identify the impact of stress on our physical, mental, and emotional health, draw connections between prolonged stress and educator burnout, and examine the symptoms of educator burnout and compassion fatigue.

When we are able to identify the signs of stress and its impact on our professional and personal lives, we are one step closer to an effective practice of self care. When educators incorporate these practices, they will be able to contribute to a culture of success for students.

Let's begin by defining the different types of stress we can experience. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. Stress is a regular emotional and physical response to any obstacle or change in one's life. Stress can impact one positively or negatively, depending on the situation. Our brains are designed to react to danger in a fight, flight, or freeze manner. These reactions can help us stay safe and avoid harm.

Let's discuss different types of stress. Positive stress is temporary in nature and might be useful in helping us prepare for a performance, plan a wedding, or study for a test. However, when any stress is experienced for a long period of time, it is often negative in nature. Negative stress is often felt intensely and repeatedly and has physiological effects on one's body. This type of stress often requires intervention by taking steps toward consistently practicing self-care.

Prolonged stress can affect one's physical, mental, and emotional health. Physically, high levels of stress can impact our sleeping and eating habits, resulting in habitual fatigue. This fatigue can also lower our capacity for physical activity or desire to participate in social activities. Emotional stress can impact our interactions with others. This often presents as anger. A lower desire to be socially active can impact our connectedness with friends and family, often leading to isolated and depressed feelings. Mentally, stress affects our ability to concentrate, focus, and make decisions.

As you can see, prolonged stress has a great deal of impact on our minds and bodies. It would be very difficult for someone experiencing these symptoms to create a culture for success for students.

Professionally, high levels of stress often lead to job dissatisfaction and burnout. This can occur even more so when we feel powerless to make change or are overloaded with tasks. Other causes of burnout include lack of communication in the workplace, training deficits, role conflicts or ambiguity, and a rapidly changing environment.

Those of us who serve in schools and center our careers around supporting students are helpers. We help students achieve their full potential not only academically but also socially and emotionally. When you are a helper, it's natural to put the feelings and needs of others ahead of your own. It's second nature to you, and you undoubtedly do this not only in your career but also at home and in your community.

When the helper role is combined with the inability or prevention of opportunities to rest and recover, it can result in compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is the personal impact helping has on our physical, emotional, and mental well-being. We often see this in educators and those in the medical field. The adage "You can't pour from an empty cup" is true. When we don't care for ourselves, we lack the capacity to help our students, colleagues, friends, and families. Creating a culture for success is an ongoing effort, so it is critical to continually recharge. By utilizing self-care practices, we can recover and ease the strain of compassion fatigue.

For helpers frequently working with students who have experienced trauma, compassion fatigue can lead to vicarious trauma. This is because the helper is exposed to traumatic information repeatedly. If you think you might be experiencing vicarious trauma, it is important to seek further intervention from a licensed medical professional. Remember that burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma don't have to last forever. With the right supports in place, they can be alleviated.

Let's take a few minutes to reflect on this session by answering the following questions:

- **Have you ever felt you may be experiencing stress, burnout, or compassion fatigue?**
- **If so, how were you able to overcome these feelings?**
- **If not, what strategies do you use to manage these factors in your life?**

Thank you so much for taking part in this session. We invite you to continue learning with us and hope you will find meaningful takeaways to inform your teaching and your self-care. Take care and stay well.