

CARING FOR YOU SO
YOU CAN CARE FOR
OTHERS

FACT SHEET
ACTIVIST BURNOUT

Campaigning for human rights can be really tough. People are activists with Amnesty because they care deeply about people and want to create a world where everybody's human rights are protected. This can be a great motivator but can also put activists in a place where they're exposed to human rights abuses or where their deep drive to change the world impacts their mental health.

Burnout and vicarious trauma happen all the time in the activist world and it's important to keep a look out for the signs in yourself and your friends.

Burnout

Burnout relates to the amount of emotional and psychological resilience you have. It's not a yes or no, but a scale. You can try and do an assessment on whether or not you're burning out by asking yourself some reflective questions.

Are you feeling any of these?

How often are you feeling it? How intense is it?

- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Isolation
- Irritability
- Anger
- Sadness
- Pessimism
- Disappointment
- Numbness
- Fatigue/Insomnia
- Lack of motivation
- Physical pain/Sickness
- Compassion fatigue

You can distinguish burnout from bad days if you find that a) it's persistent over time, b) you experience it in more than one situation, and/or c) if it's a change from how you used to feel in similar situations. If you're unsure how you rate you can do a short self assessment below.

What is compassion fatigue?

People who suffer burnout often have signs of compassion fatigue. Compassion is not an uncapped resource and from time to time it can run out. This is a reduced capacity to feel empathy for the people we work directly or indirectly with, or your "care factor". You may notice compassion fatigue in your activism activities or in multiple areas of your life.



Vicarious trauma

Vicarious trauma is a health and safety hazard that impacts on people who provide support to individuals who have been traumatized or deal with material that is violent, confronting or abusive.

Along with burnout and compassion fatigue, VT also impacts on your fundamental beliefs about the world, yourself and others. Here are some signs of VT that you can look out for in yourself and fellow activists.



- Changes to how you see the world, you might now see it as bad, dangerous or unkind.
- Changes to how you see yourself, especially your ability to work, achieve tasks and help others. You might notice a sense of helplessness about being able to improve the well-being of others.
- Changes to how you view your life and how you fit in. "Helping people was part of my identity. Now I'm not sure who I am." or "I've failed my clients. They need someone better than me."
- Changes to your emotions, how well you can regulate how you feel, not experiencing highs or lows, compassion fatigue, sensitivity to unexpected content.
- Changes to memory, most often short term.

How do I ask a friend, are you okay?

Worried about a friend, fellow activist or family member but unsure about how to start a conversation? R U okay have put together this great guide to help you break the ice and plan out your conversation.

FIND OUT HOW AT
WWW.RUOK.ORG.AU/ASK-A-MATE

Helpful resources

Dealing with Activist Burnout, Everyday Feminism :

<http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/05/dealing-with-activist-burnout/>

How to cope with traumatic news, an illustrated guide, ABC:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-23/illustrated-guide-coping-traumatic-news/5985104>

R U Okay, ask a mate: <https://www.ruok.org.au/ask-a-mate>

Lifelong Activist: <http://lifelongactivist.com/>

BURNOUT RATING SCALE



Rank your experience of the following symptoms over the past three months.

0 = Never 1 = Very rarely 2 = Rarely 3 = Sometimes 4 = Often 5 = Very often

SCORE

- 1. Do you feel fatigued in a way that rest of sleep does not relieve?
- 2. Do you feel more cynical, pessimistic or disillusioned about things you used to feel positive about?
- 3. Do you feel a sadness or emptiness inside?
- 4. Do you have physical symptoms of stress. eg: insomnia, stomach pains, headaches, migraines?
- 5. Is your memory unreliable?
- 6. Are you irritable with a short fuse?
- 7. Have you been more susceptible to illness lately, eg: colds, flu, allergies, hay fever?
- 8. Do you feel like isolating yourself from your colleagues, friends or family?
- 9. Is it hard to enjoy yourself, have fun, relax and experience joy in your life?
- 10. Do you feel that you are accomplishing less at work?

TOTAL

Scoring

0-15 You are doing well.

16-25 Some attention needed, you are a candidate.

26-35 You are on the road to burnout. Make some changes now.

36-50 You need to take action immediately - your health and well-being are at serious risk.

I'M NOT OKAY,
WHAT CAN I DO



YOUR SELF-CARE TOOLBOX

Take some time out. Have a rest from the activism that is adding extra pressure. Sometimes this is all you need.

Do thing that you love. Reconnecting with the hobbies and activities you enjoy can help remind you that there good things in the world.

Healthy body, healthy mind. Eat healthy foods, exercise and try and get enough sleep. This one is pretty obvious but is still very important.

Spend time with the people you love. Spending time with your support networks and talking about how you're feeling helps to reduce feelings of isolation and connectedness with others.

Challenge your brain. Learning a new skill can help distract you from your worries, challenge you in a different way and build a sense of accomplishment.

Investing in you is investing in your activism. Sometimes people feel guilty taking time out to do the things in their self-care box. While it can be hard, it's important to remember that you can't effectively care for others if you're not okay.

Different things work for different people, but if you're planning on a long life of activism then building up a coping bank will help you stay effective and in the game for a long time.

NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE

Amnesty provides access to a counselling service (EAP) for activists call 1300 361 008 or email contactus@optum-au.com to make an appointment on the phone or in person.

If you or another person is in crisis call Lifeline on 13 11 14 available 24 hours a day or 000.

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 

