

Preventing Burnout: Strategies and Tips For Activists



KEY DIMENSIONS OF BURNOUT



BURN - expresses as *irritability, frustration, anger, cynicism and possibly bitterness and grief*

OUT - feeling drained, exhausted, powerless. Decreased passion and enthusiasm. Feelings of detachment (don't care) not just from others but emotionally and mentally from our work.

INEFFICACY - burnout is often accompanied by negative self-evaluation, self doubt, feelings of incompetency.



CLIMATE ACTIVISTS VERY VULNABLE TO BURNOUT

- Part of a large complex global problem
- Climate crisis overwhelming and urgent
- Carrying a burden of knowledge that society as a whole is unable or unwilling to face.
- Being made aware of disturbing and negative information and future projections
- High levels of investment and unrelenting commitment to an issue

CONTEXT

- face resistance (e.g. fossil fuel industry and government, climate denialists)
- Facing harassment and threats.



CLIMATE ACTIVISTS VERY VULNABLE TO BURNOUT

There is mounting evidence (Chen and Gorski 2015) serious impact activist burnout is having on activists and movements.

Culture of martyrdom that discourages conversations about burnout and self-care persists

Deeply sensitive to injustices

Infighting and tense relationships within organisations

Research about it is scarce but starting to rise

Are Activists neglecting themselves whilst helping others and the planet.
(Boeckenhoff 2021)



WARNING SIGNS OF BURNOUT

EMOTIONAL SIGNS	COGNITIVE (personal thoughts) SIGNS	BEHAVIOURAL SIGNS	PHYSIOLOGICAL (how your body reacts) SIGNS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rage over trivial matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty in making decisions or staying focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imbalance between work, family, play, hobbies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general sense of running on empty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling guilty for resting, doing pleasurable things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A growing tendency to think negatively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty getting out of bed in the morning • , substance abuse (addictive behaviour) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle tension, headache, backache, tiredness.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of hopelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A loss of sense of purpose and energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming accident prone, procrastination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe and life-threatening illness



WHAT ARE WE DEALING WITH



WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?





**THE
PSYCHOLOGICAL
AND MENTAL
HEALTH
CONSEQUENCES
OF CLIMATE
CHANGE
(Barnwell 2021)**



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

- GARETH BARNWELL (2021) STATES THAT CLIMATE CHANGE HAS PROFOUND ADVERSE MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS FOR THOSE LIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA
- CLIMATE CHANGE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DEEPEN THE WOUNDS OF HISTORICAL INJUSTICES.
WILL AFFECT THE MOST VULNERABLE
- MOST SOUTH AFRICANS WILL STRUGGLE TO ADAPT TO ADVANCING CLIMATE SHOCKS, DAMAGE TO OUR OCEANS, FOOD SECURITY, IMPACTS ON LIVELIHOODS, DISASTERS, WATER INSECURITY AND ECONOMIC LOSSES.
- GOVERNMENTS LACK OF ACTION CREATES A DEEP SENSE OF BETRAYAL AND TRAUMA, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.
- THOSE SUPPOSED TO SAFEGUARD COMMUNITITES ARE MAKING DECISIONS THAT WILL HAVE IRREVERSIBLE AND PROFOUND CONSEQUENCES FOR PEOPLES MENTAL HEALTH



FEELINGS

Alone

Guilty

Outrage

Overwhelmed

Futility

Frustration

Hopeless

helpless



WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?



SOUTH AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST

- **Found himself ill and close to burnout...** working excessive hours,
- travelling intensively, feeling sick and
- suffering from severe uncontrolled high blood pressure.
- **Friends and family warned that it was a simple choice... change or not be around for much longer.**
- **Needed to develop a more SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE**
- Then he could contribute for another 10 to 20 years.

**KUMI
NAIDOO**



NONHLE MBUTHUMA



Please watch video from 3 minutes 24 seconds to 4 minutes 36 seconds.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccGGJYfxhbY>



INTERVIEW WITH NONHLE

- Her work is extremely stressful, she is dealing with death threats, one always feels stressed
- You question yourself whether you are doing the right thing or not
- She needs and receives support from the **following pillars** in her life:
 - her **organisation**
 - her **community**
 - her **family**



THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Nonhle says needs to get **emotional support** at times, and this means she needs someone to speak and cry too, and who can listen to the stresses she is under.
- A human rights organisation has paid for an open door for her to receive psychological help when ever she needs it. She **speaks to a psychologist** when she starts feeling burnout coming.
- When she feel burnout coming one of the first things that happen is that she finds herself **unable to sleep** she says its like a car, have to have a service now and then, to keep everything running properly.
- Most importantly she has learnt along the way that the **consequences** of not getting help means that you can damage yourself, but also cause huge damage to others around you.



PRACTICAL TIPS FROM NONHLE

- **HAVING SELF AWARENESS IS VITAL. CARING FOR YOURSELF IS ESSENTIAL**
- **NATURE** PLAYS A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF HER HEALING WORK
- SHE WALKS AROUND IN HER **GARDEN** AND IN THE **FOREST**, SHE **LISTENS TO THE BIRDS** AND RELAXES BY THE **OCEAN**.
- SHE FINDS PLAYING WITH **SMALL CHILDREN** HELPS TOO.



4 ACTION STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVISTS



1. SUPPORT

Surround yourself with a good support system

Connect with other activists

Share your struggles.



ACTION STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVISTS



2. REST

Take time to restore

spiritually

mentally

emotionally



ACTION STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVISTS



**3. SWITCH OFF
(boundaries)
just don't go there**



ACTION STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVISTS



4. BALANCE



SOME PRACTICAL TIPS TO END WITH

- **DEEP BREATHING**

- 6 : 6 : 8 technique
- Reduces blood pressure
- Calms the mind
- Focuses one on counting

- **SELF CARE**

- Eat regular and nutritious meals
- Get enough sleep
- Exercise/ movement
- Spirituality/commune with nature - reaffirm why you are doing this.



Enkosi

Dankie

Thank You

WHO STOLE OUR OCEANS?



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STANDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE