



Parent Burnout

Why do parents burn out?

Today's parents seem to face an even greater pressure than previous generations. We are expected, by others but mainly ourselves, to juggle it all, to near perfection. We are trying to be hands-on, engaged and in-tuned parents, while at the same time maintain fulfilling and demanding careers - constantly trying to prove to ourselves and others that we can 'have it all'. Then there is the expectation or need to expertly document these experiences through Facebook, Pinterest and other social media sites, in order to show the world how well we are doing. We are also living life at a faster pace, with high stress and a low tolerance for delaying gratification. And despite all the new technology to keep us 'connected', it is leaving parents feeling more isolated. There is also an excessive, and often contradictory, amount of information available about what parents 'should' be doing and how children 'should' behave, to the degree that it is paralysing and overwhelming parents. Parents are burning out because they are trying to do everything at unsustainable pace – we are setting parents up to fail by not addressing these unrealistic expectations.

What kind of parent are most at risk

All parents are at risk, but there are some factors that can make a parent more vulnerable

- Parents who usually set high expectations for themselves
- Parents of young children (increased physical demands with less sleep)
- Parents of children with special needs (Can range across the spectrum of severity)
- Parents experiencing additional stress/conflict – financial, relational, work etc
- Single parents, parents who have uninvolved partners and isolated parents
- Parents with their own mental/physical/emotional difficulties

“Bad habits” that make parents vulnerable to burn out

Many of these 'bad habits' can start even before we become parents and continue building as we parent until breaking point

- Unrealistic expectations
- Comparing yourself (and then your child) to others
- Trying to control/micro-manage all situations or experiences involving your child
- Striving for perfection, and considering anything less as a failure
- Equating your child's behaviour as a direct reflection of your ability to parent and thus 'failing' when their behaviour does not meet your expectations (which are usually unrealistic)
- Overscheduling your own and your child's life – leaving no room to slow down and connect



Warning signs

- Ongoing physical, mental and emotional exhaustion – even after getting ‘good night’s rest’ or a break/holiday
- Lack of interest/desire to engage with your children, and/or activities that previously gave you enjoyment
- Higher levels of anger, irritability and resentment – little things set you off and often can be quite disproportionate to the event.
- Constantly feeling overwhelmed - at home, work, socially, emotionally –that nothing you do is good enough
- Difficulty sleeping even if your children are
- Anxiety levels skyrocketing – moving from helpful to debilitating; possibly panic attacks and other related physical symptoms
- Increase in illness – getting colds and flu more often, stomach/digestion concerns, back pain, migraines

Tips to avoid burnout

- Make changes! It won’t improve on its own.
- Be kinder to yourself – honestly consider the expectations that you are trying to fulfil. Are they manageable? Who is setting those expectations? Would you expect that of someone else?
- Learn to let things go – if something doesn’t turn out perfect, its ok! Easy to say, very hard to do. I will often say to myself and to clients ‘what’s the worst that will happen” when your mind starts to race.
- Prioritise yourself – if you do not take care of yourself, you can not take care of others. Schedule in non-negotiable times to focus on yourself, eat healthily, do some light exercise and to rest. Set the time and stick to it!
- Build up your support network – the old saying of, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ has meaning. If you do not have a family network, create one- through friends, other parents and even paid support.
- Explore new ways of stress management – therapy can be a really helpful space to explore which areas in your life are causing high stress and to develop new coping tools. Often so much of our parenting has to happen in the moment, as a reaction; but with the therapy space we have a moment to pause and reflect on how things are going and how we would like to parent. Other helpful outlets include mindfulness and mediation which can teach you tools to quieten some of our internal ‘noise’ and remain present
- Remember that it won’t always feel this way. Parent burnout is not a lifelong feeling, nor is it a failure as a parent. In fact, it takes strength and courage to know when you need help. If you take proactive steps to address and manage your stress levels, you will find more balance and enjoyment with your children and other aspects of your life too.