

THE TEEN MAG.

Why Are You so Tired? Let's Discuss Teenage Burn Out

MENTAL HEALTH

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When was the last time you saw a teenager slumped over a desk, eyes glazed, clutching a coffee or energy drink, seemingly running on fumes? It is a familiar image worldwide in the 21st century. It is easy to dismiss this as typical teenage “laziness” or “moodiness,” but it is often much deeper.

Teenage burnout is a significant worldwide mental health issue. The CDC found 40% of US high school students felt persistently sad or hopeless. Especially during the winter or this time of the year, when finals/exams, APs, or SAT/ACTs are coming or just happened, teenagers tend to be exhausted or burnt out. Therefore, it is crucial for teenagers to look for the causes, risks, and strategies to get help. They should know the difference between burnout or exhaustion.

What is Exhaustion?

Exhaustion is a state of extreme tiredness, either physically (body) or mentally (mind). It usually does not last long and tends to happen when:

- you are super busy
- not getting enough sleep
- feeling sick
- having emotional distress

Physical exhaustion usually feels like your arms or legs are extremely heavy, muscles are sore, have no energy, sleep a lot, or have a hard time performing physical things. You might be physically wiped out after a tough project, a long trip, or even a hard workout.

Mental exhaustion usually feels like you are having a difficult time concentration or making decisions, tend to forget things, get really irritable, and feel emotionally sensitive or overwhelmed. You might be mentally drained after an intense study session, prolonged focus on emotional work, or even during critical decision making.

The good news is that even though physical and mental exhaustion can be super tiring, getting more hours of sleep, cutting down on stress, and taking care of your basic needs can really help you bounce back!

What is Burnout?

Burnout is a state of chronic physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that is caused by prolonged and excessive stress. It is usually related to school, extracurricular activities, social pressures, family expectations, and future anxieties. It is not just feeling tired; it is constantly feeling:

- overwhelmed
- drained
- cynical
- ineffective

Learn how to recognize the possible triggers for stress and to practice effective coping techniques. Every individual has different triggers and coping techniques, hence it is crucial to learn what works best for them.

Triggers of Stress in Teens:

- **School:** academic pressure, homework, exams, college applications
- **Social Pressures:** fitting in, peer relationships, social media comparison
- **Extracurricular activities:** sports, clubs, jobs
- **Family expectations:** grades, cultural, household responsibilities
- **Basic care:** lack of sleep, diet, exercise, downtime activities
- **Global issues:** climate change, politics, social justice

According to a Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Paula Redmond, there are 5 stages of Burnout that individuals should be aware of:

5 Stages of Burnout

1. **The Honeymoon Phase: Drive to prove themselves** Individuals initially feel high job satisfaction, energy, and commitment. They feel optimistic and productive, often overcommitting themselves with lots of various activities. **Example:** Excited about advanced classes, joining multiple clubs, feeling optimistic about achieving goals.
2. **The Onset of Stress (or The Awakening): Optimism wanes** Stress begins to gradually set in. Individuals start to notice that some days are more difficult than others and feel more tired. They have less productivity and satisfaction. **Example:** Realizing the workload is heavier than expected, feeling tired more often, and occasionally even skipping a fun activity to study.
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5. **Habitual Burnout: Feeling trapped and hopeless** Burnout becomes embedded in life, leading to ongoing mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion. This stage can contribute to significant depression or anxiety. **Example:** Chronic absenteeism, complete disengagement from school and activities, persistent feelings of sadness or anxiety, significant impact on overall well-being.

Coping Techniques for Burnout:

- Sleep/Rest: 7-8 hours every night; short breaks while studying
- Talk: confide in someone you trust about your feelings and symptoms
- Calm Activities: listen to music, get outside in nature, or breathing exercises
- Get moving: daily exercise, walk, sports, or dance
- Hobbies: perform activities that have nothing to do with school or grades
- Screen detox: reduce your social media time

Remember, burnout isn't just being tired; it's syndrome that develops gradually over time!

Sources:

Dr Paula Redmond, Clinical Psychologist.

<https://drpaularedmond.com/the-5-stages-of-burnout/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/mental-health/index.html>