

**Seasons of the Therapist:**  
**Managing Burnout While Doing The Work**

Mark Luzader, LCSW  
Nurtured Hope Counseling



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**Agenda**

- Identify risk factors for burnout and compassion fatigue across career stages
- Recognize the signs of burnout and compassion fatigue
- Identify both personal and systemic methods for reducing burnout in the profession.

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**About Me**

- Serving in the field since 1999.
- 7 years of direct care work
- 20 years as a therapist, 15 in private practice.
- Have been a social worker in a variety of settings including: schools, residential programs (state and county funded), community mental health and group practice.
- Co-Founder of Nurtured Hope Counseling.
- AuPlay and EMDRIA Certified provider.



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### Why this Presentation?

- Anecdotal observations and personal experience
- What the research (NIH) says: Recent 2024-2025 reports show that **39% to 50%** of clinical social workers are currently experiencing active burnout.
- 75% of social workers will experience burnout at some point in their careers.
- More people are jumping into private practice without adequate preparation or support because of agency burnout and the promise of autonomy.
- Staying connected to your spirituality is requisite for survival in this work and we don't teach people about it.
- We are at a **breaking point** when it comes to burnout and we have to do better both for new social workers coming in and in maintaining ourselves as we do the work.

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### What is Burnout?

Job burnout is a state of *chronic* physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion from prolonged, unmanaged workplace stress, characterized by energy depletion, cynicism/negativity about the work, and a sense of reduced accomplishment, leading to lower productivity and negative impacts on overall well-being.



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### Symptoms of Burnout

1. How do you know you're getting closer to the edge?
2. Does your brain, body or spirit tell you first?



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### Symptoms of Burnout

**Emotional Symptoms**  
Includes feelings of helplessness, irritability, and emotional exhaustion. You may experience mood swings and a sense of detachment from the work (depersonalization). Vicarious trauma flare-ups can also occur.

**Physical Symptoms**  
Manifest as chronic fatigue, muscle/body aches, frequent headaches, and sleep disturbance.

**Cognitive Symptoms**  
Characterized by reduced concentration, forgetfulness/detachment, and difficulty making decisions. Persistent negative thoughts about work are common.

**Behavioral Symptoms**  
Includes withdrawing from colleagues, decreased performance, and increased call-outs. Can also include neglecting responsibilities or engaging in unhealthy coping behaviors (excessive etoh, caffeine, screen time or procrastinating tasks)

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**Who are you?**

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**Where does our profession fall compared to others?**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Chefs and Food Service Workers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Vets/Veterinary techs
- \_\_\_\_\_ **MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nurses (ICU/ER)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Air Traffic Controllers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Journalists
- \_\_\_\_\_ Surgeons
- \_\_\_\_\_ Law Enforcement officers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Firefighters

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**Who Among Us Is Most At Risk?**

- Front line workers (grassroots social workers)
- Child Welfare
- Government workers (Fed, State, County)
- Elder care (esp dementia)

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**When are you most at risk?**

- Beginning of your career (0-5 years)
- Mid-career (10-25 years)
- Late career (25+, ~10 years before retirement)

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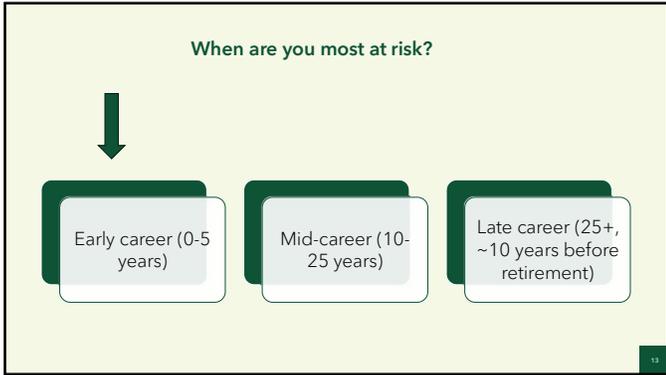
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### Why Mid-Career?

- Emotional toll of the work
- Reduction in consultation/supervision/social support (if you ever had it)
- Lower wages take financial toll
- Depersonalization factors
- Unresolved issues from Early Career transition

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### Why Early Career?

1. Poor supervision and support (generational trauma adjacency)
2. Vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue
3. High caseloads and administrative burdens
4. Perfectionism and high expectations (altruism gut check)
5. Limited access to tools, training and support to increase job efficacy
6. Struggles to disconnect from emotionally heavy work (work-life balance)
7. Inability to effect the systemic changes they were trained to expect.

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**Risk factors for late-career survivors**

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**Risk factors for late-career survivors**



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**Risk Factors in the Late Career Stage**

- Long-term Vicarious Trauma- chronic cynicism
- Boredom with the work (people are just case numbers)
- Complete detachment from the work
- The full-bucket effect (cumulative psychological burdens held for decades vs shock of newcomers)
- Organizational shifts to middle management
- Empathy Fatigue
- Systemic Hopelessness

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What do you notice first when you start to feel burned out?



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What don't you want to do?



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Where do you feel it in your body?



What about your spirit?

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What Calls to You When You're Feeling Burned Out?



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What Calls to You When You're Feeling Burned Out?



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What Calls to You When You're Feeling Burned Out?



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### What Calls to You When You're Feeling Burned Out?



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### Start with Connection

- Connection to Nature
- To co-regulating loved ones
- To yourself and your identity outside of being a therapist
- To your 'why' for doing this work



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### Take 5 minutes...

- What am I carrying that isn't mine?
- When I'm not a Therapist/Social Worker I am.....
- What is my spirit's smallest hunger?

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**Now Say To Yourself.....**

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The stories stay on the paper.

My spirit stays in my body.

I am more than the space I hold for others



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**Tap it in....**



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**Final Thoughts**

**01**

**Assess Yourself Regularly**

Use validated tools like ProQOL to spot early signs of compassion fatigue.

<https://proqol.org/proqol-measure>

**02**

**Find a Consultation partner or group**

To gain another perspective on difficult cases, new skills, or ways to reach ideal clients.

**03**

**Build a Healthy Balance**

Remember who you are, take your lunch, leave work at the office.

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