

# INCANDESCENT CENTRE

TRI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER OF



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| **September 2018**

Hi everyone,

In this issue of Incandescent, we continue to ride on the question of “Am I happy?” by delving into the issue of burnout. Burnout is becoming more prevalent in this present time. Its insidious nature makes it hard for early detection. It is only when we are drowning in the chaos of our day-to-day lives, constantly pleading for an opportunity for rest, do we realise: “Oh.. I’m burnt out”.

The effects of burnout can be rather shocking. It can take a bright-eyed, optimistic new employee who had believed he had so much to offer, and turn him into a tired, irritable and disillusioned man in over just a few years. What causes such a motivated resource to suddenly be drained of all passion and enthusiasm for work? We explore this in this issue of Incandescent.

However, burnout is not restricted to places of work (i.e. offices or schools), it can occur at home as well. Parental burnout is another area of concern affecting especially new parents. First-time parents transiting into a new phase in life and role as guardians of a tiny human face steep learning curves, financial stresses and constant lack of sleep. It can take an emotional, mental and physical toil on them. What happens at home affects what happens at work and vice versa. Thus it is important to

cover all our bases and ensure we notice signs of burnout in these different areas of our lives early before we get overwhelmed and shut down.

Human resource is one of the key assets of an organization. Ensuring the mental well-being of our co-workers is essential in creating a healthy and productive team that contributes to the company’s bottom line. Programmes such as EMCC’s Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) can assist by providing trained professionals who can intervene early and render the care needed.

May this issue of Incandescent share some useful insight on burnout and if you would like to find out more about EAP, please do contact us at [reachus@emcc.org.sg](mailto:reachus@emcc.org.sg). Let us work together to support the cornerstone of your company: your team.

Till next time, take care.

Pearl Pang  
Head, Corporate Services





# ~~WORK LIFE BALANCE~~ **BURNOUT?**

## **WHAT IS BURNOUT?**

Originally a term used by engineers, describing “a point of time or in the missile trajectory when combustion of fuels in the rocket engines is shut down ahead of its programmed time”. Fret not, rocket science is not the theme for this article.

Burnout, as defined in the Oxford dictionary, simply means “the failure of an electrical device or component through overheating”. It is also a popular clinical term in modern society from as early as 1970s, used amongst medical and social psychologists, academic researchers, and is defined in the same dictionary as the “physical or mental collapse caused by overwork or stress”.

## **ARE YOU EXPERIENCING BURNOUT?**

A career burnout has become a common phenomenon for the workforce of today. The cause of burnout can be due to a number of reasons such as societal pressure to achieve a certain level of unrealistic perfection at work, challenges of wanting to stay ahead in our jobs in a fast changing and dynamic environment, uncondusive work environment or a lack of work-life balance.

## **TRIGGERS OF STRESS LEADING TO BURNOUT**

Triggers of stress may occur very frequently at the workplace, creating a highly stressful and toxic work environment which over a prolonged period of time can cause the employee’s well-being to suffer, making them more prone to becoming sick and absent from work.

## **COMMON TRIGGERS OF WORKPLACE STRESS**

- Shorter deadlines
- Conflict with managers/co-workers
- Increased complexity/more challenging workload
- Increased expectation to do more than what is in your job scope
- New processes/skills needed in the job
- Uncertainty about future/stability of company

It is generally not easy to know when a person starts to suffer a burnout in their career. Career stress silently creeps in and accumulates, making it hard to recognize any damages or harm immediately.

“

***Unrealistically high workloads, low levels of job control, incivility, bullying, administrative hassles, low social support, poor organizational resources, stressed leaders, and negative leadership behaviors.”***

”

– **Monique Valcour**, an executive coach, keynote speaker, and management professor, on negative conditions at the workplace that lead to burnout

## BURNOUT VS MERE FATIGUE

Exhaustion, or feelings of being tired in the physical and mental sense, is but one of the tell-tale signs of a burnout.

Feeling burnout is essentially an experience of a state of chronic stress. Executive Coach Professor Monique Valcour characterised a burnout as these three components:

- ❑ Exhaustion (physical and emotional)
- ❑ Cynicism (loss of enthusiasm)
- ❑ Inefficacy (loss of self-confidence and capacity to perform).

The key difference between a burnout and fatigue is Rest. Being able to recover from feelings of tiredness after a good rest distinguishes fatigue from burnout. It takes more than just having rest to beat burnout. Symptoms of burnout, if left uncontrolled, can lead to a devastating effect on one's physical as well as mental health.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF A BURNOUT

Most people tend to dubiously brush off such warning signs thinking that they are nothing serious as it is "part of the job" or just "part of life". There are signs and symptoms which may co-exist to drive burnout. They are:

- Restlessness:** Feelings of unsettledness, unable to concentrate properly
- Compulsion:** An overwhelming urge to behave in a certain way without due consideration
- Irritation:** Feeling vexatious and bothered when situation is not within control
- Isolation:** General disinterest to connect with people, feelings of inadequateness
- Boredom:** Feelings of weariness, lack of care or concern over people or events

By spotting these red flags (the causes and effects of burnout), one is then able to seek the path to regain control of his/her life before a burnout manifests into a full fledged life crisis.

## COMBATING CAREER BURNOUT

Some tips for you to alleviate the symptoms leading to burnout are as follows:

**SLOW DOWN.** Allocate time to relax. Do something that is non-work related that can help you to destress and get your mind off work completely. Try walking slower to a comfortable pace and you might be surprised at how calm your mind and breathing becomes.

**GET SLEEP.** Poor quality sleep is not only a major risk factor for burnout, it will also cause you to be impaired in your mental functions, leaving you more susceptible to errors at work. Ensure that you get at least eight hours of sleep every night to replenish your body with energy that will benefit you at work.

**REDUCE DEMANDS.** Set boundaries. Say no to prevent a pile up on work demands. Set priorities and stick to it. Regaining control of your work by reducing the load of unreasonable expectations will relieve feelings of chronic stress.

**AVOID DRAMA.** Our mind sub-consciously absorbs vibes from the people around us. Surround yourself with colleagues whom you can joke and chat with during the day to help relieve stress from a mundane or demanding day at work. It gets better when pessimistic colleagues are not draining energy from you with their incessant complaints!

**MOVE ON.** There are times when there is nothing positive left for you to stay with the organisation, especially after you have engaged in communication with your manager or HR, but the stressful situation did not take a better turn. A change in one's work environment will significantly help to reduce or eliminate signs of a burnout.

## SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Understanding and learning to recognize the signs and symptoms of burnout is crucial to getting your life back together. Nevertheless, you may wish to seek professional help and treatment if your physical, mental and behaviour displays extreme signs and symptoms of burnout e.g. depression or suicidal thoughts by seeing a doctor and getting some counselling help.

Emerging from a state of burnout will take time and sacrifices such as changing your lifestyle or work environment so as to be able to recover from a burnout. Stay positive and do take time off to learn how to embrace yourself better.

## **An Open Letter to my Sanity, from a new parent:**

I never thought that my life would become topsy-turvy so quickly.

The conniving thief of life must have stolen away my vocabulary of daily-living, rendering me unable to engage in sensible conversations with others, having been caught tongue-tied on topics simply because I suddenly cannot hold a thought, find the right word or make any logical deduction at all.

My life got pared down to a perfunctory existence. Hollowed out, exhausted, stressed out, and yet ever hopeful that things will get better, as all the well-meaning people around me promised.

Becoming a new parent is quite mind-blowing in the sense that I feel love and despair all at once. Gutted, but loving it. That is parenthood in all its contradictions.

When my daughter, A, all but 16 months old, fell sick again earlier in June this year, my husband and I struggled to keep our sinking ship above water. We got through fever and nausea, spent nights in antiseptic halls, the adults plagued with insomnia accompanied with an earful of hacking cough.

June ran into July. I don't know how fatigue did it but those bodily pain makes me feel more lethargic than before when I was pregnant. Caring for an infant is like living out one's marriage vows in compressed time - for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. The intensity of daily living has gotten so nerve-wrecking for me...it breaks you down.

I started to wonder how I could change my life to better enjoy the joyfulness that was supposed to come with a new addition to the family. As a Christian, I told God, 'I am so broken, tell me what to do. I will just obey.' I felt like parenthood has caused me more moments of despair than the promise of a happy family.

I feel so broken inside me now.

-Y

**PROFESSIONAL HELP IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE**

If this account sounds familiar, call us at **6788 8220** or email us at **reachus@emcc.org.sg**



# WHAT'S BREWING AT HOME: PARENTAL BURNOUT

New parents, like Y, commonly experience general feelings of tiredness every now and then. Some will just blame it on the lack of sleep. They may attribute the feelings of exhaustion to the demands of a job and the competing commitment to balance out work and family life.

It is easy to brush off such a feeling of tiredness, yet we know deep down inside that something is not right as there is no real joy in your life. That constant feeling of exhaustion eventually leaves you feeling worn-out.

## HOW DO I KNOW I HAVE PARENTAL BURNOUT?

The symptoms of parental burnout may be mistakenly associated with other mental health issues, such as depression. Although they share a number of symptoms such as fatigue, social withdrawal and decreased performance, burnout can have equally, if not more, devastating effect on our physical wellbeing. It can cause one to develop mental health issues, such as post-partum depression, if left unmanaged.

## CAUSES OF PARENTAL BURNOUT

An excessive and prolonged stressful period without respite, especially after a new arrival in the family, is potential cause for parental burnout. This could be further exacerbated by new demands at work, compounding the physical, mental and emotional stress that one is already experiencing with the transition to parenthood. It often tips parents over, resulting in a loss of enthusiasm or motivation at home and in the workplace.

Stress is not necessarily bad. Some stress spurs us on to excellence in what we do. It is like a tension of a rubber band, which stretched enough, is extremely useful for holding things together. The ability for the rubber band to go back into its original shape shows its resilience. However, prolonged, or excessive stress can result in a sudden, and immediate failure. Like rubber bands, people can snap too. For people, a big resiliency factor would be pro-social support and interaction with people that alleviates some of these stressors parents, and especially new parents, face.

## COMMON TRIGGERS OF STRESS AT HOME

can be in the form of relationship disputes, sickness/bereavement, financial needs, or even environmental factors such as a noisy neighbour. The more the types of tensions at home, the more the mind is unable to relax, and sooner or later, the tense situation will take its eventual toll on the person's body.

You often hear about the sleep-deprived parents being joked about. It is one common scenario that would be far from funny for people going through it. A drastic change in sleep pattern, causes many to easily stress out. The adjusting to their baby's constant needs can place the parents in a state of constant stress as demands are continuous. Sleep-deprived parents may also start to feel unmotivated to perform at work simply because by the time they get to work, they are exhausted.

## IDENTIFYING DRIVERS OF STRESS AT HOME




To identify the drivers of stress, the first step is to identify some of your triggers.

- ❑ New mothers may be more prone to stress-induced emotional breakdowns due to hormonal changes in their body that affects them during the postpartum period.
- ❑ New fathers also experience more stress than before due to the need to also manage the physical and emotional needs of their spouse, themselves and newborn.

The next step is to take the necessary steps to prevent the stress from taking on a life of its own. It is imperative that we deal with burnout as early as the onset of the symptoms.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

These are some of the signs and symptoms to look out for:

<b>PHYSICAL</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Insomnia, exhaustion</li><li>• Frequent headaches or muscle pain</li><li>• Chest pains, shortness of breath, panic attacks</li><li>• Prone to falling sick more often</li></ul>
<b>EMOTIONAL</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of productivity, defeated sense of accomplishment</li><li>• Poor performance leading to self-doubt and sense of failure</li><li>• Pessimistic feelings of ineffectiveness and helplessness</li><li>• Dissatisfaction leading to a loss of motivation and frustration</li><li>• Cynicism</li></ul>
<b>BEHAVIORAL</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Isolation and wanting to disconnect from people</li><li>• Increased relational conflict</li><li>• Procrastination</li><li>• Forgetfulness, difficulty in focusing on task at hand</li><li>• Increased irritability and outburst of anger at minor issues</li></ul>

## TRY THESE PRACTICAL TIPS TO KICK OUT PARENTAL BURNOUT!

**START THE DAY RIGHT.** When you feel good, it reflects in the way you treat others. Sensing your relaxed demeanour, your family members will feel at ease too! Small actions make a big difference. Deepen your relationship with your spouse by tuning in with each other in the morning. Smile, studies show that smiling can have a positive effect on your mindset as your body releases “feel-good hormones” like oxytocin and serotonin.

**TAKE TIME OFF PARENTAL DUTIES.** Plan romantic dates at the movies or even just a quiet dinner at your favourite restaurant with your spouse. Taking a break from the daily grind provides you with the energy and motivation to deal with life’s stressful periods better.

**SLEEP.** Being a new parent can be overwhelmingly exhausting especially in the first year. While it is not possible to eliminate parental stress completely, you can reduce your risk of health problems that is caused by prolonged sleep deprivation by allowing your body to rest properly from time to time. Work out ‘shifts’ between you and your spouse if you need to wake for a night feed. Also, don’t just suffer alone, call on family or friends or even infant care to help take care of the baby for a day so that you can get some rest.

**HAVE A SUPPORT GROUP.** Gain support from other parents who share common interests or are new parents too. Joining such a group with someone more experienced facilitating some discussions will allow you to get practical and emotional support from other parents who are in similar situations as you.

**PROFESSIONAL HELP IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE** if you feel excessively overwhelmed or inadequate call or ask a doctor for help, or speak with a counsellor.

Meanwhile, to all parents, keep calm and carry on!





# Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Negative experiences at home affect one's performance at work. This Spillover Effect can be prevented through enrichment programmes that strengthen one role that in turn enriches the quality of the other roles. EMCC is able to provide such services in the form of couple/family counselling, family mediation, marriage and parenting-related workshops. Contact us to find out how we can help you better support your team.

## APPEAL LETTER

Dear Friends,

The business of reconciliation and repair cannot be made universally accessible to everyone without the generous support of our donors.

We continue our fundraising efforts in 2018 to fund our means testing and outreach work so that more people who need mediation and counselling, who otherwise cannot afford it, can come and have their needs met.

A conversation with a client this year reminded me about the need to ensure EMCC remains sustainable. He shared that he was at his wits' end with his marriage, and would grab on to 'whatever straws he could find'; only to come for pre-mediation in our Centre, because when he enquired, the fees, after means testing, financially met him where he was at.

In that 2 hours, the couple sat down and talked, shared and realised the marriage was not over; in fact, both parties had wanted badly for things to work. The end of the mediation session was the beginning of their marriage therapy at our Counselling Department.

Happy stories do not come often enough. Each time it happens, we are deeply grateful for your generosity in enabling services to be manned by professionals, accessible, and affordable.

This year, we are still short of \$200,000 that will enable us to afford the cost of staff and facilities, so that we can provide the people and place to reach out, to reconcile and to repair.

I seek your generosity and favourable consideration.

Sincerely,



Lai Mun Loon  
Head, Professional Services

**YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS**

This year, we will require \$200,000 to support our work in helping individuals, couples and families in crisis, through our integrative counselling and mediation services. We are constantly on the lookout for people who share the same passion as us and want to contribute in a tangible way.

If you would like to make a one-time or monthly donation, kindly fill up the form below and mail it back to us

**1. CHEQUE**

Please make your crossed cheque payable to "EMCC". Indicate your full name, NRIC and contact details at the back of the cheque (for tax-deductible receipt), and mail it to our address.

**2. ONLINE**

Please go to <http://www.giving.sg/EMCC> and follow the instructions there.

**DONATION FORM**

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Yes, I would like to donate based on the following arrangement: (Please tick to select an option)

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(Please note that for each successful deduction, a partial bank processing fee of \$0.80 will be charged to your account.)

**DONOR SIGNATURE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I understand that by signing this Donation Authorisation, I have read and understood the Terms and Conditions governing this authorisation as reflected overleaf. I also agree that my particulars can be used by EMCC (Eagles Mediation & Counselling Centre) and its appointed partners for the purpose of administration of this donation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Donor's signature as in bank record

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Date





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## **EMCC (Eagles Mediation & Counselling Centre)**

177 River Valley Road  
#05-19 (Level M5) Liang Court  
Singapore 179030

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### **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

#### **DEAR DONOR,**

Your commitment and support of EMCC through a regular donation will assist us in our mission to provide care and hope to the many families struggling to overcome difficulties and pain.

Please note that your full donation will be received directly by Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre

#### **DEDUCTION FREQUENCY**

The first deduction will be made within 3 working days upon signing of this Authorisation Form. Subsequently, your account will be debited in accordance with the frequency that you have chosen overleaf (Monthly/Half-yearly/Annually). On the 15th of every month, we will deduct your authorised donation. For unsuccessful transactions there will be a retry on the 28th of every month.

#### **TAX-DEDUCTIBLE RECEIPT**

You will receive your tax-deductible receipt at the beginning of every calendar year from us for all donations received in the previous calendar year. Monthly receipts will not be provided for your deductions. Please refer to your credit card statements from your issuing bank for confirmation of deductions made.

#### **CASH DONATIONS**

Those who wish to make a cash donation can contact EMCC at Tel 6788 8220 or email reachus@emcc.org.sg for details.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will keep all information (i) name, gender, nationality, date of birth; (ii) email address, postal address, telephone numbers; (iii) credit card number

and expiry date confidential. This Programme adheres to a very strict policy regarding donor privacy. We will use this information in order to: (i) administer your accounts with us; (ii) process donations made by you, orders or applications submitted by you; (iii) send you information and calling you in regards about our events, programmes, fund raising, products and services; (iv) verify your identity; (v) carry out donor profile analysis; and (vi) contact the winners of our competitions (if any) and to help us plan other fund raising and/or promotional activity. No information, in whole or in part, in its paper or electronic format, will be disclosed, used, modified or reproduced for any other person of organization, except in connection with these purposes stated.

Once again, thank you for your time and generosity in supporting EMCC.

