

# Burnout Training for Direct Support Professionals

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## 1 Overview

Hello! My name is Dr. Ben Theisen and I hope you find the following information useful. Today's lesson is all about taking care of you, the Direct Support Professional (DSP). Working in human services can be tiring, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Hence, DSPs need burnout training.

What is burnout? What does it look like? Is it dangerous? Can we test for it? Is there a treatment? This lesson answers all of these questions.

By the end of the training, you will be able to do the following:

1. Define burnout.
2. State why burnout is a problem for DSPs.
3. Describe “resources” that safeguard against burnout.
4. Describe signs of “resource depletion” that can lead to burnout.
5. Take a test for burnout.
6. Score the test for burnout.
7. Interpret the test score.
8. State what DSPs can do if they experience burnout.
9. Describe signs of burnout noticeable in other DSPs.
10. State how to report these signs to the supervisor.

Please allow me to thank you for starting to read this document. Thank you for being the kind of person who chose to work as a professional DSP. It is very important and difficult work. You have my respect as a colleague for what you do. It takes focus, patience, and cleverness to make it as a DSP. You have to be smart. Sometimes, the work is very frustrating. Knowing more about burnout can help you get through the tough times, back to more enjoyable days on the job. I hope you continue to enjoy the many benefits, personally and professionally, of helping individuals with developmental disabilities lead more meaningful lives.

## 2 Definition: What Is Burnout?

Traditionally, burnout is understood as a metabolic syndrome. If a person is burned out, they are burned out in their work and home lives. Exercise is more difficult. Decision-making is not as sharp. Sleep is not as restful and they may have insomnia.

Why is burnout a problem? For the DSP, burnout can lead to problems at work and at home. It is difficult to be a good team member when burned out. A DSP's work involves protecting people with developmentally disabilities from danger in vehicles and residential facilities. Patience, awareness, and quick decision-making skills are essential for protecting individuals.

Ordinarily, a DSP may be effective. But burnout impairs judgment and stress accumulates with time. Sleep is less restful. It becomes easier to become frustrated and harder to feel energized in a positive way. DSPs can be impulsive, quick to respond emotionally or take things personally, and may use more profanity when burned out. A burned out DSP has limited patience and energy for consumers.

There are things you would never do at work. But a "burned-out you" would do these things. It can be almost like being drunk, or some other form of intoxication. The human body and mind can only tolerate a certain amount of stress for a certain amount of time. As frustration builds, the DSP makes progressively worse decisions. Intervention is needed to reduce stress.

If the burnout condition does not improve, the DSP may not be able to perform the essential duties and responsibilities of the job. Burnout makes the DSP more susceptible to poor decision-making, which may lead to harm of a consumer. A serious, preventable incident is much more likely to occur. Depending on the incident, a DSP could be subject to investigation, termination, or criminal charges.

Burnout can be avoided. It is treatable without professional medication or therapy. Burnout can be helped in simple ways as we will talk about today. If you are curious, below is the way I understand burnout.

## 2.1 Definition of Burnout

**Burnout:** Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity (Maslach, 1982).

1. *Emotional Exhaustion* is a feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work.
2. *Depersonalization* is an unfeeling and impersonal response toward recipients of one's service, care, treatment, or instruction.
3. *Personal Accomplishment* is a feeling of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people.

## 2.2 Another View on Burnout

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) created a new definition of burnout that is much different. I do not like this definition for DSPs. They

treat it as something that happens only at work, not something that follows the DSP home. In my experience helping DSPs (and myself) fight against burnout, stress is really the issue. When that starts to interfere with sleep, burnout can be difficult to stop without taking some days off to rest.

What I dislike about the WHO burnout definition, for the DSP occupation, is that it denies the way work stress spills over into personal relationships. Think about a DSP who works hard all day, five days per week, helping individuals with developmental disabilities. The individuals are at risk of harming themselves or others at any given moment. They may destroy property and harm themselves on whatever they break. After work, it would be nice for that DSP to follow a relaxation routine that resembled what they just spent several hours helping an individual follow. After Day Program, the individual enters the house, relaxes, eats a nice meal, goes for a walk, takes a hot bath or shower, chooses a relaxing snack and beverage, and finds a leisure activity. If only DSPs could be so lucky.

That level of self-care is not a reality for most people. After clocking out, there is more work to do. Suppose that DSP picks up young children on the way home from work. Suppose the DSP has a spouse who works, too. The spouse expects the DSP to cook dinner for the family and wash the dishes. That takes one to two hours. Notice the DSP “clocked out” from work. They continue doing caretaker tasks – the same things they were paid to do at work – for friends and family. The nervous system needs a break. The DSP needs to set boundaries and take time to relax.

The schedule is beginning to get complicated. If the DSP gets off work at 4:00 PM and picks up the children at 4:30 PM, that DSP’s “leisure time” may not start until dishes are done at 6:30 PM. Then, children may need help with homework and the spouse may have other needs, too. It could be 9:00 PM before the DSP has leisure time. But something else may come up. The DSP may stay up at night to try and finish something, whether that be a workout or a non-fun task like paying bills.

What if the DSP’s family member gets sick and needs extra help? Can the DSP handle it? DSPs are kind and generous people, readily helping others without worrying if they are overextending themselves. DSPs may need to force themselves to rest. If not, the DSP’s judgment may be impaired progressively as the days pass.

Stress accumulates and the DSP returns to work with limited patience for individuals. It is understandable because the DSP worked 40 hours for the company plus the unpaid overtime hours of caretaking work when they get home. The stress makes it difficult to handle the serious problems of individuals, which can be annoying. Examples may include excessive and disgusting bodily fluids, moaning or yelling repetitively for no apparent reason, physically hurting others (including DSPs), etc. A burned-out DSP is less able to empathize with consumers.

As things get worse, abuse could result. Forms of possible abuse could

include yelling, posturing, stealing the consumer's money, threatening the consumer, abusing the consumer physically, emotionally, or sexually, neglect, withholding proper medical treatment, etc. If a DSP is found abusing a client, criminal charges may result. DSPs are mandated reporters, such that a coworker who fails to report suspected abuse may face one year imprisonment and/or a \$5,000 fine. (More information about abuse is covered in another training, on incident reporting and suspected abuse.)

For these reasons, it seems the WHO definition of burnout is too conservative for DSPs. The job of caretaker extends beyond caretaking performed on the job, into the personal lives of DSPs. As stress accumulates, the DSP progress along a chain of days involving metabolic stress and poor sleep. Burnout occurs at the end of the chain. The DSP's judgment has been impaired for some time, getting worse with time. The burned-out DSP exposes themselves and others to increased risk. Intervention is critical to protect the DSP and those for whom the DSPs provides care.

### 2.3 Workplace-Only Definition of Burnout

The World Health Organization defines burnout similarly to the previous definition.

“**Burnout** is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

1. Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
2. Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
3. Reduced professional efficacy.

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life.” (World Health Organization, 2020).

As mentioned above, the definition does not fully fit the DSP occupation when caretaking responsibilities extend to a worker's personal life. My best advice to the DSPs is to self-assess when they are doing unpaid work for friends and family. To avoid role overload, the DSP can experiment with relaxation routines until they establish a healthy sleep pattern and feel better.

In some occupations, workers must tolerate high levels of stress to prove themselves worthy of the next step of promotion. Medical doctors are familiar with the experience of late nights, where those who secured a good residency proved their ability to handle it. The DSP occupation has stressful aspects but is not meant to be a high-stress job.

When DSPs find themselves working round-the-clock in their personal and professional caretaking roles, it is usually because they face specific challenge that seems worth the sacrifice to them. Examples may include taking care of a parent who has fallen ill, raising young children, or picking up extra work to get out of financial debt in the short term. These types of challenges are noble. It is very important that the DSP finds a way to balance their responsibilities, as they could face serious consequences from problems that result from taking on more than they can handle.

### 3 Resources for Helping DSPs Avoid Burnout

What are “resources” for a DSP? This is a list I put together from experience and research.

1. *Energy Resources.* These include how much energy the DSP has at work. Is the DSP relaxed, not stressed? Is the DSP interested or perhaps excited about the work as they start the shift? The DSP should not be bored or tired.
2. *Schedule and Money Resources.* The amount of pay should make sense for the amount of work the DSP is asked to do. Pay should include enough dollars per hour to make the work worth doing. The assigned facility, DSP schedule, and the individual(s) the DSP is assigned to serve are resources in this category.
3. *Professional Development Resources.* Training is among the best resources for DSPs. By asking the supervisor for additional training, the DSP increases their knowledge and skills to better handle difficult situations on the job. For specific advice, DSPs can reach out to the behavioral consultant directly. These include moving toward promotion (or better Schedule and Money Resources as above). Gaining experience and training toward attaining a certification (e.g., Registered Behavior Technician, 40 Group Home Administrator Training, Direct Support Professional Year 2 Certification) is a resource. The DSP should have room to grow. DSP work should not be a dead-end job. The DSP should not feel “locked in” with nothing to look forward to achieving professionally. If the DSP invests in the effort needed to educate themselves professionally, there should be a way for them to get some recognition (or more) from their efforts.
4. *Team Resources.* The DSP should feel comfortable with the people at work, liking them well enough for work purposes. The DSP should have a comfortable relationship with their supervisor, hopefully respecting their supervisor.

5. **Safety Resources.** The DSP should feel they are not at risk of layoff or termination. Psychologically, the DSP should feel they can share their professional opinions without worrying about negative consequences (e.g., others will immediately shoot it down). Different opinions are healthy. Voicing a different view should be okay, as long as the reasoning reflects the values of the profession. If you suggest something that would not work, it can be a chance for you to learn.
6. **Clinical Success Resources.** To stay fresher longer, DSPs can get more involved in the IPP planning team. If the company allows opportunities to give more input on facility activities, DSPs should participate. An example from the DSP Year 1 Certification curriculum is a video about an individual who is very bad at basketball. The DSP knows the individual loves playing but the recreational center banned him from attending due to excessive fouling. The DSP called the center, convinced the administrator to give the individual another chance, and made it his personal mission to teach the individual how to play basketball correctly. It sounds like a nice story from a training video but this actually happened to me in real life. I taught a person how to play baseball and he made it onto a team. It was rewarding for both of us. If you see an opportunity to make change happen, go for it. The effort itself is a healthy resource for the DSP.

## 4 Measuring Burnout

The questions below are from a burnout measure. You are invited to answer the questions yourself and score your own test. Do not share your results with others. If you find that you have higher levels than desired, let this be an invitation to bring more resources into your life. I can chat with you about it confidentially. Just send me a text message at 424-744-0264.



## 4.1 Burnout Questionnaire

Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). (Copyrighted). The purpose of this questionnaire is to measure how you feel about your present job by asking 22 questions.

Instructions: Rate two responses for each statement based on how many times you have had that feeling using the following scale:

0 = Never

1 = A few times a year

2 = Monthly

3 = A few times a month

4 = Every week

5 = A few times a week

6 = Every day

Begin Burnout Questionnaire:

- 1. I feel emotionally drained from my work.
- 2. I feel used up at the end of the workday.
- 3. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.
- 4. I can easily understand how my recipients feel about things.
- 5. I feel I treat some recipients as impersonal objects.
- 6. Working with people all day is really a strain for me.
- 7. I deal very effectively with the problems of my recipients.
- 8. I feel burned out from my work.
- 9. I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work.
- 10. I've become more callous toward people since I took this job.
- 11. I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally.
- 12. I feel very energetic.
- 13. I feel frustrated by my job.
- 14. I feel I'm working too hard on my job.
- 15. I don't really care what happens to some recipients.
- 16. Working with people directly puts too much stress on me.

- 17. I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my recipients.
- 18. I feel exhilarated after working closely with my recipients.
- 19. I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.
- 20. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.
- 21. In my work, I deal with emotional problems very calmly.
- 22. I feel recipients blame me for some of their problems.

## 4.2 Scoring Your Results

1. Add your scores for the following items, which measure Emotional Exhaustion: 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 13, 14, 16, 20.
  - What is your score for Emotional Exhaustion?
2. Add your scores for the following items, which measure Depersonalization: 5, 10, 11, 15, 22.
  - What is your score for Depersonalization?
3. Add your scores for the following items, which measure Personal Accomplishment: 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 21.
  - What is your score for Personal Accomplishment?

You should have three scores now: one total score for each of the three variables above.

## 4.3 Interpreting Your Results

The basic formula for interpreting the results is to see if Emotional Exhaustion (EE) and Depersonalization (DP) are high, compared to Personal Accomplishment (PA) being low. (These variables are defined in an earlier section, "Definition: What Is Burnout?")

The range for Emotional Exhaustion is 0 to 54. A score of 27 is in the middle. Scoring above 35 may be cause for concern. If your score is above 42, it is time to get serious about finding more resources.

The range for Depersonalization is 0 to 30. A score of 15 is in the middle. Scoring above 15 is cause for concern. If your score is 15 or higher, it is time to get serious about finding more resources.

The range for Personal Accomplishment is 0 to 48. A score of 24 is in the middle. We like personal accomplishment, so *lower* scores are the concern. Scoring *below 24* may be cause for concern. If your score is *below 18*, it is time to get serious about finding more resources.

Now that you have scored your results, look at the pattern.

1. If EE is high but DP is low, you are not burned out yet. Watch your stress levels. Take time to relax. Do what it takes to get good sleep. You are at risk of burning out. Your PA is what buffers you against burnout. If you stop succeeding in your accomplishments (e.g., bad performance review, an individual you serve relapses in behavioral progress), you may burn out. Be careful. Talk to your supervisor about ways you can get more involved. Taking a more active role in decisions at the facility helps you connect positively to the work setting. It can help you avoid thinking about turning over to a different organization, which is stressful.
2. If EE and DP are above the middle while PA is lower, the test detected burnout. The DSP's resources are likely depleted. It is not likely that the DSP is exercising good judgment at work. Be careful. Making one mistake could potentially take away a career of good work. The DSP prioritize self-care. If you are the DSP, make time for yourself and do not let friends or family sucker you into doing unpaid DSP work before establishing a healthy sleep pattern.
3. If EE, PA, and DP are all above the middle, you may be in a weird situation. It seems like something strange happened while scoring the test. This pattern should not happen.
4. If DP is high and the others are low, you may be in a dangerous situation. I would recommend contacting me to go over your results. I may recommend that you talk to a professional QMHP.
5. If you find a different pattern than what I listed above, you may be at low risk of burnout. You are welcome to contact me to go over your results. I cannot cover all the combinations here in this document.

## 5 Burned-Out Behavior Management

How would a burned-out DSP intervene differently than, say, a DSP who was not burned out? Below are some fictitious scenarios depicting what you might see happen.

### 5.1 Case: Using Problem Behavior to Request Access

#### 5.1.1 Proactive Approach: Helping Individuals Relax

The DSP's goal is to help individuals relax. The DSP utilizes person-centered planning and positive communication.

1. **Follow A Routine: Burned-Out Version.** A burned-out DSP may not have the patience for planning. Too many sleepless nights make

it hard for the DSP to plan routines. The burned-out DSP does not have the mental and emotional bandwidth to help individuals follow a routine that works for them. They impose a routine that is most convenient for the DSP and use consequences to drive compliance. Suppose the individual protests, waving their hands in the DSP's face. The DSP yells, "Don't you *dare* test me!" This is not okay. Other DSPs would report the incident to the supervisor immediately.

**Pro Tip:** It does not matter *how* you notify your supervisor that a coworker may appear burned-out. There is no form to fill out. Use a text message or phone call. Remember that you are helping the team by reporting possible burnout. A burned-out DSP was impaired judgment, hence increased risk to service recipients and the rest of the team. If you see something, say something. Your supervisor will maintain confidentiality and may call you for more information. Burned-out DSPs are hard workers, so the most likely course of action is for the supervisor to check-in with the worker and offer some help (e.g., see if the DSP wants to modify their assigned person/facility/schedule, offer personal day, etc.).

For routines all individuals follow, like meals and oral health sessions, individuals have more success when DSPs offer specific choices (e.g., juice or water, red toothbrush or blue). A burned-out DSP may not have the patience to offer choices, reasoning, "If I offer them a choice, then I have to sit here until they decide. And who cares?" The burned-out DSP rationalizes further, saying, "It's just a toothbrush. Better to just tell them to open their mouth. If they hurry up and brush, I can rush them off to Day Program."

2. **Repeat the Words: Burned-Out Version** If the individual says, "Go to (name of store)," the DSP should say, "'Go to (name of store).'  
Yes, I hear you. Do you want to go to (name of store)?" The DSP should start a conversation about the topic chosen by the individual. The slightly-burned-out DSP may pretend not to hear the request. The fully-burned-out DSP says, "Enough about the store! Nobody wants to hear it. I told you already, *no store*."

When the specific thing an individual requests is not available, the DSP should give a reason at the individual's level of communication. What happens when an activity is not available? A burned-out DSP may not have the patience to talk this through with the individual. The burned-out DSP may tell the person "no" without explaining the reason *in a way the individual can understand*. A burned-out DSP may use too many words or speaks too quickly. They may say something like, "The answer is no. I would explain but you would not understand anyway. Deal with it."

If transportation is impossible because the vehicle is not available, the DSP should make that clear to the individual. The DSP can tell the individual they can drive by the requested location when the vehicle becomes available. The DSP should set realistic expectations, so the individual knows the store is likely to be closed.

When DSP's are of sound judgment, they have an intuitive awareness that individuals can read their nonverbal cues (e.g., DSPs tone of voice, volume, rate of speech, or body language). The individual may not understand complex reasoning but they can readily ascertain whether the DSP's communication expresses kindness or hostility. Burned out DSPs forget to see things from the individual's perspective.

Saying the same words back to the individual shows them the DSP is listening. The burned-out DSP does not have the patience to use the same words as the individual. Rather than showing the individual the DSP is listening, the burned-out DSP may take a shortcut to ending communication by paraphrasing. The burned-out DSP rationalizes their shortcut as harmless, saying the same information was exchanged. But the individual, who has more limitations in their cognitive abilities, may be a concrete thinker.

To some individuals, paraphrasing may not mean the same thing because the words are different. The individual may engage in problem behavior as protest or in hopes of getting their way. This is a low-quality interaction. If the DSP had more energy, they may have spent more time communicating with the individual and avoided the problem behavior. Ironically, the shortcuts a burned-out DSP takes can make their jobs more effortful.

**Pro Tip:** Sometimes, an individual asks a DSP for something they know they cannot have (and may not actually want). These situations are very confusing to DSPs. In this special case, the *real request is for your attention*. It may seem annoying to the DSP because the individual appears to be completely unreasonable.

But are they speaking on two levels? At Level One, the words say, "Give me (what I cannot have)." At Level Two, the words mean, "I would really like some genuine human connection right now... and I choose *you*." On their best days, experienced DSPs know how to tell the difference.

When an individual uses their behavior to spend time with you, it is a compliment to the DSP. For most people, being stuck at home is boring. They crave the human connection that comes from the usual routines, such as seeing people at Day Program and around the

community. When those routines are interrupted, individuals may look for a nearby person to help meet the need.

View the inconvenience as a compliment. The next time an individual seems to go out of their way “to annoy you,” remember they could have annoyed anyone else in the house and chose you. They *selected* you. Like it or not, you were *chosen* as the person who was most likely to understand their request.

The burned-out DSP does not take the individual’s communication as a compliment. The burned-out DSP takes it personally and seeks to regain control of the situation. Other DSPs may notice the burned-out DSP posturing, raising their voice at the consumer unnecessarily, walking quickly toward the individual to intimidate them, or using some form of punishment.

3. **Take Deep Breaths.** Ask other DSPs on-shift to help you know whether you look tense. Others are the first to notice changes in body language, posture, speed, and vocal tone. Humans are not good at self-assessing the appearance of distress, with the exception of people with special training such as actors. Take deep breaths and relax your shoulders, arms, and hands. Slow your movement. Communicate slowly.

**Pro Tip:** Burnout is serious. It can cost DSPs their jobs due to poor performance. It can be embarrassing for the DSP, who is trying to gain control over their lives and the individuals at work. As a consultant, I can give you practical advice toward helping you avoid a bad situation.

## 5.2 One of My Burnout Stories

People do dangerous things when they burn out. Some turn to drugs and alcohol. Others take it out on the people closest to them, at work or at home. A person’s health may suffer. They may overeat and gain weight. Others stop eating to control their weight, resulting in other problems. Burning out is different than hitting “rock bottom.” In this section, I will tell you a little bit about one of the times I burned out. The reason I choose this story is that I worked in behavioral services at the time, providing direct services.

How did burnout begin? I got kicked, hit, spit on, and yelled at daily at my job. The first time I felt human teeth on my skin, I was terrified. My job was a frightening place. After work, I wanted to blow off some steam. I went out to the local karaoke bars with my friends and coworkers. We would order what we called a “He-Man Cup,” which was just a pitcher of the cheapest beer. That was our drink for the night. No glasses, no class. Each of us carried our own pitcher. We were idiots but we did not hurt anybody or drive drunk.

At the time, I thought my trip to the karaoke bar was enough to restore my stress to normal levels. But somewhere along the line, it stopped being enough. It seemed like I lost time every day. Little by little, I gained weight and exercised less. My sleep was not as restful. Sometimes, I would wake up in the middle of the night and check my work emails.

Where did my positive routines go? In behavior analysis, “losing access” to what a person likes to do is a form of punishment. Part of a person’s individual identity relates to what they choose to do. When a DSP loses time for self-care, it is like a form of punishment. DSPs who face extra stress need more access to sleep, exercise, good food, and leisure time.

I should have taken a day off but I did not want to lose wages. It is better to lose a day’s worth of wages than to fall into a dangerous pattern and lose one’s job. My individuals did not know how much sleep I got. They did not know how lonely and overwhelmed I felt when I returned home from work.

When something in my life upset me, it seemed like I was the only person who knew. I thought I was good at hiding it. I did not know that others could detect my stress and think I was upset with them. But a coworker approached me one day and suggested that I take a personal day.

Fast-forward to my first personal day as an adult with a full-time job. I spend the day eating in bed and watching action movies. Throughout the day, I checked my phone and send texts or emails. I felt like my brain was going 90 miles per hour. After being in “go mode” for so long, my brain was not ready to relax. My personal day was more inconvenient than therapeutic.

My stress continued in an unhealthy pattern for several weeks. Then, a coworker took me aside and encouraged me to go to a day spa. At first, I was offended because I thought I had everything under control. Again, I was in denial that others could detect my stress. It turned out my coworkers had a series of conversations behind my back about how stressed out I seemed. They were trying to figure out how to help me.

Fast-forward to submitting my time-off request to human resources. I remembered my annoying personal day from a weeks ago. I remembered it as the day I was stuck at home (with no pay) while my mind was racing. This time, I figured one day would not be enough. The HR form I submitted asked for 5 days off work and two weekends for vacation pay. That was the longest work break I had ever taken in my adult life. I liked vacations but Los Angeles was expensive.

During vacation, people continued calling and texting me about work. My work emails piled up. It was as if my vacation did not exist at all. On Monday, I tried finishing work quickly in the hopes that nobody would bother me on Tuesday. When the emails continued on Tuesday, I decided to be rude. I referenced my vacation in emails and texts sarcastically to discourage coworkers from contacting me. Looking back, that was not a

mature way to handle my own problems. Had I slept better, I would have found a healthier way to communicate boundaries.

With my coworkers out of the way, I had several days to try to relax. Of course, relaxing did not work. I had trouble sleeping. My house needed to be cleaned and organized, since I let things fall through the cracks while I was burned out. I was out of touch with friends and family. When I wanted to “go out” for fun, I had trouble finding something fun to do. Nobody else was on vacation, so I did not have any friends to join for He-Man cups and karaoke. It was a frustrating week. I was so bored on the second weekend that I went to Ikea to listen to couples argue in different languages. It was therapeutic but there had to be a better way.

By the time my vacation ended, I realized that I needed to make changes in my life to handle stress. In the coming years, I worked on setting boundaries with work and family obligations. It was a struggle but I forced myself to make time for self-care. That meant attending to my diet, exercise, sleep, belief system, and relationships with other people.

Ultimately, the changes I made were small. But they were important to me. I went to my exercise classes, learned some recipes, and got some new bedding. To my surprise, people at work started to notice that I was doing something differently. They thought I had met someone because I seemed more relaxed. While my dating life was not something I cared to share with coworkers, I thought it was interesting that other people were affected positively by my positive changes. Previously, my negative changes affected them in a negative way but I was too stressed out to see it.

### 5.3 Why Are Routines So Important?

A person’s routines, activities, and habits define part of their identity. How does a person feel when they cannot do what makes them happy? How do they express themselves when they are required to stay home?

DSPs have high-stress jobs. They are more susceptible to burnout than many other occupations because they work with intellectually and/or developmentally disabled individuals. Under normal circumstances, DSPs have access to human interaction and activities through which they can “blow off some steam” or recuperate from stress on the job.

As a DSP, please remember that burnout impairs judgment. In any facility, things can go very wrong in seconds. There is no magic fix for a DSP to remain refreshed during these times. Please be good to one another and try to establish meaningful self-care routines outside of work. It may be difficult to get decent sleep under self-quarantine due to the many new sources of potential chaos. It is okay to ask for help or take a personal day. We are in this situation as a team. We will get through it as a team.

If burnout is hard to self-identify, what are signs that might suggest burnout? A common approach is to watch for the use of profanity/vulgarity,



anger, and inappropriate humor. If you see these signs in yourself or others, please communicate with the manager. The money lost from a well-timed personal day is lower than the cost of losing one's job for making a mistake due to burnout. Watch out for resource depletion, mentioned above. Come back to the burnout measure and interpret the score pattern.

**Pro Tip:** *Look for signs of burnout in coworkers. If you believe someone on your team may be burned out to the point where it interferes with their job duties, contact your manager before someone gets hurt.*

## 6 Conclusion

After burning out, you will recuperate. Life goes on. At some point, you may get burned out again. Mitigate risk by replenishing your own personal resources. It's all about sleep and stress.

Let others know in advance when you plan to take time for yourself. That could involve 20 minutes when you walk in the door. It could be one hour for a workout or a show. It could be more elaborate, like a personal day or vacation.

Always take care of your self. During your leisure time, enjoy it the best you can. Do not let friends and family sucker you into caretaking during your leisure time. That would mean you are working for free. By prioritizing self-care, you protect your most valuable asset: *your judgment*.

Thank you for reading this far along. Above all, thank you for the work you do.

Please allow me to congratulate you on making it to the end of this document. I would like to thank you again for being the kind of person who chooses to work as a professional DSP. It is very important and difficult work. You have my respect as a colleague for all that you do. It takes focus, patience, and cleverness to make it as a DSP. You have to be smart. Sometimes, the work is very frustrating and a DSP may want to give up. There are many jobs in the community but many are not professions. There is nothing quite like being a professional DSP. I hope you continue to enjoy the many benefits, personally and professionally, of helping individuals with developmental disabilities lead more meaningful lives.

### 6.1 Contact

To discuss this recommendation further, please contact me by phone at 424-744-0264 or by email at [benjamin.t68@gmail.com](mailto:benjamin.t68@gmail.com).