

CAUSES OF STRESS AND BURNOUT FOR OFFICERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Causes of Stress

- Handling some children with severe and profound disabilities to be habilitated and/ or rehabilitated.
- Being traumatized by the severe trauma experienced by some children with disabilities.
- High caseload which makes it difficult to give enough attention to each case.
- Insufficient resources (financial, protective devices & human) to help hence feeling of helplessness.
- Lack of enough knowledge and skills on how to handle different cases of disabilities.
- Lack of support mechanism in doing the work.
- Lack of time to take care of own needs.
- Lack of appreciation/motivation for work done
- Risks associated with handling children with disabilities and those with special needs e.g., beatings from children or caregivers
- Death, separation and regression
- Doing work without passion
- Stigma associated with the work they do

Signs and symptoms of stress

- Cognitive: poor focus and attention, limited concentration, negative self-talk
- Physical: trouble sleeping (insomnia), sweating, change of appetite, headaches, muscle tension, dizziness, heart palpitations, lack of energy, high blood pressure
- Behavioural/emotional: anxiety, depression, irritability, low self-esteem, indecisiveness, addictive behaviours, acting out, overspending, over/under-eating, panic attacks, low libido/underperformance, untidiness, withdrawal, Family conflicts

Stress management techniques

- **Deep Breathing:** Practice deep breathing exercises to calm the mind and reduce physiological stress responses. Breathe in slowly through your nose, hold for a few seconds, and then exhale slowly through your mouth.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):** Tense and then relax each muscle group in your body systematically. This technique helps release physical tension associated with stress.
- **Mindfulness Meditation:** Focus your attention on the present moment without judgment. Mindfulness can help reduce stress by shifting your focus away from worries and anxieties.

- **Exercise:** Engage in regular physical activity to help reduce stress hormones like cortisol and increase endorphins, which improve mood.
- **Healthy Lifestyle:** Maintain a balanced diet, get adequate sleep, and avoid excessive caffeine and alcohol intake. These habits support overall well-being and resilience against stress.
- **Time Management:** prioritize tasks, break them into smaller steps, and delegate when possible. Effective time management can reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed.
Social Support: Connect with friends, family, or support groups. Talking to others can provide emotional support and perspective on stressful situations.
- **Set Boundaries:** Learn to say no to additional responsibilities if you are feeling overwhelmed. Setting boundaries helps manage workload and prevent burnout.
Hobbies and Relaxation Activities: Engage in activities you enjoy, such as reading, gardening, listening to music, or painting. These activities can distract you from stress and promote relaxation.
- **Seek Professional Help:** If stress becomes overwhelming or chronic, consider talking to a therapist or counsellor. They can provide strategies tailored to your specific needs and help you develop coping mechanisms