

Dealing With Caregiver Burnout

If bereavement ministers forget to care for themselves, they may fall prey to burnout.

In his book *Death and Grief: A Guide for Clergy*, Alan Wofelt says those suffering from caregiver burnout typically find themselves more irritable and short-tempered. They may also experience headaches, backaches, long-lasting colds, or other physical complaints. It is important not to overlook these symptoms, but rather to recognize them as a sign that something is wrong.

Those most vulnerable to burnout feel that they are indispensable and that no one else can do the job they can. Yet, they are often unable to accomplish much because they can't focus on the present. This lack of concentration may have them feeling depressed where lethargy, difficulty sleeping, loss of appetite, and changes in their mood may take place. They may even wonder if the people even appreciate their services and think there's no point in getting involved.

If any of these symptoms sounds familiar to you, you may need to pull back, get in touch with your feelings, and talk with a trusted friend for support and guidance. (Refer to pages 262-263 for more stress busters.)

Dr. Richard Blue, a licensed psychologist specializing in stress management and worker burnout, recommends the following ten steps to prevent burnout:

1. Watch for negative thinking. It can distort your thinking and decrease your job satisfaction.
2. Dispute your negative thinking. Give yourself credit for the things you do right.
3. Practice assertiveness. Speak up in a tactful and diplomatic way.
4. Release your anger in a manner that is not damaging to you or anyone else such as exercising or a hobby.
5. Talk about your frustrations with someone who will listen.
6. Maintain your sense of humor.
7. Participate in a regular exercise program.
8. Develop outside interests.
9. Learn to "let go." Use positive self-talk.
10. Practice relaxation techniques.

(Adapted from Hospice of the RRV Newsletter, April 1994.)

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.