Burnout: a first-step plan

Making room for support when work is wearing you down



If you feel worn down, detached or unable to keep giving, you deserve support. You do not have to wait until you reach breaking point. Start with one pressure and one possible source of help.
This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes burnout in relation to prolonged workplace stress: exhaustion, distance or cynicism towards work, and reduced effectiveness. Its definition concerns work and does not classify burnout as a medical condition. Exhaustion from caring or other life pressures also deserves support. [1]

1 Name one pressure

What is taking most from you: workload, unclear priorities, long hours, conflict, little control, or too little support? You do not have to decide whether it is 'bad enough' to write it down. [2]

One part of work that is hardest to sustain

2 Identify one change to discuss

Could a task be paused, shared or made clearer? Could hours, deadlines, breaks or contact outside work be adjusted? Personal care can help, but workplace pressures may also need to change. You should not have to carry all of that responsibility alone. [2]

A change I would like help to explore

3 Begin a manageable conversation

Choose someone who feels safe to approach. You can describe how work is affecting you and what you need, without sharing every personal detail. This is suggested wording, not a script you have to follow.

Words you could adapt

Workload is affecting my health. Can we agree which tasks to pause or share, and a time to review how things are going?

If a workplace conversation feels difficult or unsafe, see overleaf for other support routes. You do not need to complete this sheet before seeking help.

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Support beyond this sheet

Your health matters alongside the demands of work

Choose support that fits your situation

A trusted manager, occupational health service, staff representative or employee assistance programme may help, where available. If your manager is part of the difficulty, consider another route. Your GP (family doctor) or therapist can help you think through your health needs. Self-employed people may need support to adjust commitments. [2] Someone outside work, such as a friend, partner or family member, can also help you think it through.

Make recovery practical

Protect space for meals, rest and supportive contact where possible. Agree a manageable change and a check-in; there is no fixed recovery deadline. Time off or changes to work may need planning with your clinician and workplace. Rest alone may not resolve ongoing pressures. [2]

Do not put everything down to burnout

Persistent, unexplained or disabling exhaustion needs GP assessment. Depression, sleep disorders, anaemia, thyroid problems and medicines can also contribute. Low mood, loss of interest or hopelessness deserve attention wherever they occur, including outside work. Different difficulties can exist together. [3, 4]

Seek urgent support if safety is a concern

If you have suicidal thoughts or are struggling to cope, contact your GP, an out-of-hours doctor or your mental health team promptly. If you may act on those thoughts, cannot stay safe, or there is immediate danger, call 112 or 999 in Ireland; elsewhere call local emergency services. [5]

A listening ear, day or night

Ireland: Samaritans 116 123, or text HELLO to 50808. UK: Samaritans 116 123. US and Canada: call or text 988. Australia: Lifeline 13 11 14. Elsewhere: findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country. These listening routes do not replace emergency care. [5]

Sources and further reading

Original prompts informed by the following independent guidance.

1. WHO: Burn-out as an occupational phenomenon (www.who.int)
2. WHO: Mental health at work (www.who.int)
3. NHS: Tiredness and fatigue (www.nhs.uk)
4. NIMH: Depression (www.nimh.nih.gov)
5. HSE: Get urgent help for a mental health crisis (www2.hse.ie)

Sources checked 3 October 2026. The organisations cited have not endorsed this resource. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

More free information and support routes

More about burnout and finding support

Scan for Find Help, or visit jonathanhaverkampf.com and choose Find Help.

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