

BURNOUT

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

A serious hurdle many high schoolers face but talk little about

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Exhaustion. Collapse. Fatigue. Weariness. Consumption. Stress.

According to author Lexi Wright, burnout is a state of mental, physical, or emotional exhaustion. Burnout in children happens when kids are faced with ongoing stress or frustration with no chance to relax and recharge.

"The name in and of itself is exactly how it feels: the flame of motivation is snuffed out, and you feel completely unable to do anything productive, sitting in a rut of laziness and mindlessness," junior Eshan Kabir, who plays in the band, participates in clubs, regularly volunteers and takes four AP classes said.

The dangers of burnout

Burnout can cause real physical and psychological problems such as headaches, insomnia and depression, which is why it is important to start taking steps to reverse burnout as soon as symptoms are recognized. Many students admit to currently experiencing burnout or having so in the past.

"In one of my classes, my teacher asked who is tired of school after exams, and almost every student in the class raised their hand," Kabir said. "When not only the majority, but almost every student in the class is feeling burnt out from school, it becomes apparent that it's becoming a problem."

A survey conducted between August 2020 and April 2021, found that 71% of nearly 1,100 Ohio State University (OSU) students said they battled burnout this past spring. That number was up

from about 40% back in the summer of 2020. So, how have high schoolers been affected?

Senior Neda Kadivar, who takes five APs and participates in clubs, some of which she leads in, experienced a damaging burnout her junior year that not only took a toll on her mentally, but physically. She lost almost half of her hair. Her mental health declined, causing her many doctor visits and medical tests relating to stress.

"Even now I don't have a diagnosis for everything. I just have a bunch more conditions I can list as a result of my stress. It's something I hope to never repeat but even in senior year I do feel myself slipping in and out of it," Kadivar said.

Mental health is a key part of the conversation when it comes to burnout. Whether it is extreme stress, anxiety or depression, students can get caught in a burnout, especially if they are going through it alone. What may lead to keeping students in a burnout relates back to expectations, and being afraid or embarrassed to reach out and tell someone about the struggle.

Why burnout happens

A leading cause of burnout is the constant pressure placed on students to perform well in order to succeed in a competitive world. This haunts students, especially as they move up through high school.

While demanding societal expectations can be unintentionally placed on students by their parents and peers, there is a divide on whether teachers also contribute to this workload.

"I feel like they don't understand that we have other things outside of school to do, and that's a really big problem when they

pile homework assignments," junior Alfonso Hilero, who plays varsity tennis, takes three APs and volunteers at the Dr Phillips Health Hospital every weekend, said. "I'm hurrying and making sure that I finish them but at the same time, I'm going to bed super late, because I'm balancing sports and academics."

While Kabir recognizes that teachers are just doing their job and are trying to prepare students for the workload they may see in college, the problem is still overwhelming.

"Granted, I don't think they are at fault for it, but the mounting pressure leads to a tipping point where you find that it is easier to stop working and relax than to keep pushing forward on the train that is education leading to college," Kabir said.

Teachers expect students to understand what they are signing up for at the beginning of the year when they decide to take rigorous honors and AP level courses. Students are strongly encouraged to pre-evaluate the workload they are getting themselves into, but some students slip into the misconception that everyone else is also pushing themselves to the limit.

"I did all these extracurriculars, all of these courses, all of these really tedious things, because I thought everybody else was doing them and I wanted them to think I'm equal and have good expectations for me," Kadivar said. "That was not true whatsoever. No one's doing everything at such a high level all the time. That's impossible."

Classes often become more involved during the third quarter because students are practicing an accumulation of their curriculum up to that point. This can cause burnout to flare up at an inconvenient time, as exams – both school and AP – rapidly approach. Each year, Kabir finds himself tired of homework and classwork assignments,

but knows there is more work to be done, so he does what he can to catch a break before preparing for exams starts. Kabir calls this time of the year "prep season" because not only does he have to study for big AP exams, but his regular class exams as well.

"I tend to throw myself into prep season hard, which leads to me not wanting to do any work before so I can keep a hold of the feeling of having fun without expectations," Kabir said.

How to deal with burnout

"Usually burnout is just too many things going on at once and I feel the best way to deal with it is to take a step back and take a deep breath," senior Jouseph Fontanez said. "Just evaluate the situation from a different perspective and maybe gain enough clarity to not overwhelm yourself."

Working past a burnout is difficult, and often a frustrating experience for students. Getting help from fellow students that may be feeling the same way is especially helpful in knowing they are not alone.

"I do feel like [my friends] help me manage my emotions and motivation when I feel like lying in bed all day and doing literally nothing," Kabir said. "They have given me things to look forward to, and when I'm in a massive rut, they pick me up and push me forward."

Kabir highly recommends taking a true break to escape a burnout. Working out a schedule that allots for free time and self-care is necessary to get back on track and feel productive. Starting with small, achievable activities will be most beneficial.

"Burnout can feel like a trench you can never escape from. But it isn't the end of the world. Approach it healthily and listen to what

"When I get out [of burnout] I look back on what I was able to accomplish during that hard time and use it as motivation to prevent future burnouts."
- Isabella Parron, 12

"I'm not as energized. I have removed myself from my friends and I am noticing it is starting to make me unhappy."
- Ruby Issacs, 11

"Writing music has gotten me out of my burnouts before. It serves as a way to be productive again without actually forcing myself to do the work."
- Eshan Kabir, 11

"It literally takes a toll on people. That's when you start understanding how you can recognize [burnout] in other people and recognize how you can help them, because everyone's going through it, just at different times."
- Neda Kadivar, 12

TEACHERS CAN RELATE

For every student swamped with homework and extracurriculars, there is a teacher struggling with a similar issue. Though they may seem responsible for all-nighters spent finishing homework, many teachers can sympathize with busy nights and school-induced burnout.

"It's exhausting, being tired all the time and feeling like no matter how much sleep you get, it's never going to be enough."
- Julie Duncan, History

"I get upset over the littlest things and I don't have patience. I get very discouraged to the point where it seems like nothing good comes from my efforts."
- Aglaia Christodoulides, Math

"When I see that I have no breaks coming up besides the weekend. It what makes me feel overworked."
- Steven Martinez, Career ED

"By the end of the day, I'm exhausted and more irritable than usual, and I have a hard time completing tasks."
- Heidi Grasso, Math

"In my class, I have people come in and talk about potential career aspects, so just to see that I'm helping a student figure out what they want to do for their future makes [burnout] worth it."
- Kaitlin Jones, Forensics

