





## Signs Your Child is Experiencing Burnout

2021 is nearing its end, and after almost two years of the COVID pandemic, changes in how we live, learn, work and more — it's no surprise that people of all ages are experiencing burnout.

When it comes to kids, today's burnout looks a lot different now than it did 18 months or 2 years ago, says Matthew Kadrach, clinical director and owner of [Nexus Behavioral Health in Troy](#). Before, if kids were overscheduled with school, sports practice, dance class, homework, chores and other obligations, burnout was sure to follow. That stress alone could lead right to it.

"Now with COVID, it's turned into a whole different scenario because a lot of burnout comes from the stress of situational things, so with COVID just continuing, it's kind of just an extended exposure," he says.

Burnout can also mirror depression, anxiety, ADHD or just plain teenage moodiness, he adds, which means it's hard to tell if your child is experiencing burnout. However, burnout has a stress factor or cause, whereas depression doesn't necessarily have a starting point, so that's a key difference.

"Pointing to the pandemic, it makes it a little trickier to split those two because we are in this constant state," Kadrach says. It's the anticipation of it continuing, stressors that haven't happened yet.

If burnout goes unnoticed, it can lead to increased conflict at home, higher levels of fatigue, worsening grades and other issues.

So, what are some signs to keep an eye out for and how can you help your struggling child? Read on for Kadrach's advice.

### Signs they're experiencing burnout — and help

Adults are dealing with their own stress and burnout, which can ultimately trickle down to their children. If you notice a shift in your child's behavior, pay attention.

Kids who are experiencing burnout can start to withdraw from friends and family, not seem to care about things, have trouble concentrating, seem irritated and more. They don't have the physical or emotional or mental energy to put into things, he adds.

"Once you start identifying that something has changed, first you try and talk about it," Kadrach suggests. But don't be surprised if you're hit with "I don't know" as a response.

If getting your child to open up isn't working and you're noticing these shifts, institute household changes, he suggests. Work on healthy schedules such as having a break

between school and starting homework. Give homework breaks, too. For every 30-45 minutes of homework, give your child a 10-minute break. Whether it's a sport, video game or 10-minute walk, give your child that time to decompress by doing something that they can enjoy for that time.

Solid sleep routines are key, he adds. Turn phones off an hour before bed, put on clean pajamas, brush your teeth and cozy up in bed.

Set realistic expectations for your child and realize that a child who is experiencing burnout might not be their best self when it comes to their attitude, so try to remain calm when you get reactions you don't love.

"Set the expectation — lead with compassion. Make sure the kids know that," he says. "If you have a kid who goes to school all day then goes to practice for two hours, maybe it's not the best thing to ask them to load the dishwasher. Speak to it: say 'Hey I know it's been a long day, so don't worry about the dishes, I'll take care of it.'" Show the kids that you see them and you're hearing them.

Have a conversation about mental health in general and be honest with your kid about your own mental health struggles. For example, it's OK to say, "I am really stressed at work. I'm sad about missing your basketball game." It normalizes these feelings.

If you think your child would benefit from professional help, don't hesitate to schedule an appointment with someone they can speak to.

### **Prioritizing self-care for burnout prevention**

When it comes to preventing burnout in the future, self-care is step one, he notes.

"I think the biggest thing that psychology is putting forth is just self-care. And again, it's that trickle down from the parents," he says. "If you're modeling self-care — so you're doing your yoga, you're reading your book, you're taking time for yourself and just stepping away from the work," you're modeling that it's OK to prioritize taking care of yourself.

Next, consider meditating. Breathe and learn how to listen to your body.

Finally, set up healthy boundaries with scheduling and people, so that you're not over-exerting or overcommitting. Give kids the ability to say it's not a good time and power to say "no" in a healthy way. That skill alone is something they can carry with them for life.

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