



Chapter 7: Toning Up Against Burnout

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MWO 7 Roster

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Prologue

••• In the past few years the Durites couple was caught up in a cloud of apathy. They were lacking in spontaneity and enthusiasm for their marriage. Joshua felt it was useless to bring up anything with Lois since she would clam up and walk away. Lois was discouraged about how things between Josh and she were going. Recognizing their mutual burnout, the Durites took what they thought was the right course of action when they decided to divorce •••

Burnout in marriage does not have to end in divorce. The exercises in this chapter are intended to assist you and your partner to identify signs of burnout which may be present in your relationship. The chapter also points out steps which partners can take to prevent and remediate burnout. Handling the bugs in a marriage is an excellent strategy to energize and revitalize sagging relationships.

	30. Desiring more reinforcement from spouse and/children
	31. Escaping into increase housework and/or job related work at home
	32. Desire to run away from home
	33. Using alcohol and/or drugs more often when home
	34. Continuous state of depression when home
	35. Victimizing my spouse or children – making things hard for them
	36. Being passive-aggressive with my spouse and/or children
	37. Feelings of being unappreciated by spouse and/or children
	38. Not willing to take off time. There is so much work to be done around the house and/or at work
	39. Escaping into paper work at night and on weekends
	40. Frustration with the marriage, its rules and standards
	41. Ready to “go to blows” with anyone, anytime when home
	42. Feeling like an underdog and powerless in the marriage
	43. Feelings of paranoia – “someone is out to get me, I’m sure” in this marriage
	44. My spouse and/or children expect more of me than I am capable of producing
	45. Not looking forward to coming home in the afternoon
	46. Lack of enjoyment at home or in the company of my spouse
	47. Daydreaming or fantasizing when home or in the company of my spouse
	48. Anger and hostility towards my spouse and/or children
	49. Sense of failure in everything I try in this marriage
	50. Sleep Difficulteis

_____ **My Score**
 _____ **My Partner’s Score**
 _____ **Our Couple Average Score**

Scoring: Add all of the ratings you gave the 50 symptoms and put your score in the appropriate blank. Then put down your spouse’s ratings and average the two scores for your couple average score.

Interpretation: The following is the interpretation for the scores obtained on the Marital Burnout Inventory:

Scores	Rating	Interpretation
50-150	Near Perfection	You are fully enjoying your role and function in your marriage. You find your marriage fulfilling and rewarding. Congratulations
150-200	Superior	You occasionally experience some stresses in your

		marriage but generally are able to deal with them as they arise. You feel supported by your partner. Use some preventive measures to continue to reduce the stress in the future.
201-300	Good	You are experiencing an increasing but not debilitating amount of stress in your marriage. This could be a warning signal. Set yourselves down to problem solve some of the areas from where this stress is coming. Do this now before it gets out of control.
301 or above	Fair	You are experiencing an increasing amount of stress in your marriage. At this point the stress may be so great that you and your spouse may want to seek out some outside assistance from family, friends, clergy or a counselor to mediate the issues causing this stress. GET HELP NOW! , before it is too late.

In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise

7-2 A Short Course on Marital Burnout

One or both partners in a marriage can experience a whole series of feelings and exhibit a series of attitudes and behaviors which are termed Burnout.

Burnout is a Loss of Focus in the Marriage

A. Factors in Marital Burnout are:

1. External Factors Contributing to Marital Burnout

- a) The state of the home or physical living condition of the couple
- b) The personality functioning of the spouses.

2. Internal Factors Contributing to Marital Burnout

- a) The motivation of the partners to reduce stress in their lives;
- b) The situational reaction to specific stimuli in the marriage and the stress which results.
- c) The mourning for the self-image of "being special" in this marriage resulting in:
 - Depression
 - Not being able to meet idealistic vision of self as spouse and expecting self to do too much in the marriage
 - Feeling of being more enlightened than partner and frustrated in not being able to see the results of such enlightened opinions or ideas in the marriage

3. Partnership Dynamics Contributing to Burnout in Marriage

- a) How the partners relate in the marriage
- b) The lines of authority and how strictly they are enforced in marriage
- c) Unrealistic expectations concerning the marriage
- d) The maintenance of one partner as underdog
- e) The exercise of control and power in the marriage
- f) The existence of supportive mechanisms in the marriage

4. Marital Roles and Behaviors

- a) The expectations for and resulting behaviors in fulfilling the role expectations
- b) The required time and energy to fulfill roles
- c) The requirements for appropriate dress or "uniform" one spouse expects of other
- d) The need to be "appropriate" in the marriage

B. Characteristics of the Burnout Partner as Victim:

Burnout Partners are Victims Who:

- a) Operate out of weakness rather than strength
- b) Have an idealistic vision of self and compare self to others
- c) Need to tell partner or be recognized by partner for both positive and negative actions in life

d) Are loyal to the institution of marriage rather than to themselves as persons

C. The Irrational Partner's Belief System Which Contributes to Burnout:

1. I should "be together" all of the time and should not experience problems like other people do in their marriages.
2. Personal satisfaction in helping my partner should be enough for me and should be rewarding enough in itself.
3. My efforts should always be appreciated by my partner.
4. There is status and prestige in being married to my partner.
5. I should be able to devote 100% of my time and efforts to doing things with my partner.
6. I think I can make dramatic changes in my partner's life through effort, love and the relationship itself.

D. Some Questions Partners Should Ask Themselves to Clarify Motivation so as to Avoid Burnout:

1. To what extent do I get vicarious gratification from my spouse's accomplishments?
2. What needs of mine are being met in this marriage?
3. Am I trying to use my marriage to meet needs that could or should be fulfilled elsewhere in my life?
4. How much does my sense of being productive depend upon my bringing about significant change in my partner?
5. To what extent in this marriage am I getting help for myself to resolve my own problems?
6. How much do I need to have contact with and be admired and loved by verbal, attractive people outside of this relationship?

E. Tips for Handling Marital Burnout:

1. Recognize the symptoms and admit burnout is a problem for you.
2. Learn to ask for help from your partner and others.
3. Be aware of limitations in yourself, your partner, your children, your family and friends.
4. Organize your time better so you can concentrate on vital tasks.
5. Distinguish between stressful aspects of your marriage that you can change and those you can't.
6. If too much time is being taken away from the satisfying aspects of your marriage by unimportant, trivial duties, establish a set of priorities for yourself and discuss it with your partner.
7. Try to view your contacts with your partner's family and friends as a challenge and an opportunity for self-growth, rather than as a source of stress.
8. Make a list of the things you hate doing most in the marriage and see if you can dispense with or delegate many of them.

9. Alternate major tasks in which results won't be seen for a while with those that will be immediately productive and gratifying, so that you have a sense of accomplishment in the middle of a long project.
10. Reach a clear awareness of your needs and motivation on remaining in this marriage.

F. Ways to Prevent Marital Burnout:

1. Have a clear understanding of your partner's and your own expectations, dreams, hopes and desires for this marriage.
2. Clarify goals and priorities for your partner and you.
3. Maintain personal growth as a goal for each other in the marriage.
4. Develop an active outside life with a variety of interests to bring back to the marriage to enhance it
5. Encourage good communications between you and your partner.
6. Sustain mutual encouragement in the marriage to try out new ideas.
7. Find your own "decompression techniques" such as meditation or exercise, which relieve tension and put you into a more relaxed state of being.
8. Build a support system for you two as a couple among your friends and family in which you both can discuss problems and look for solutions. Don't just air gripes but look for solutions.
9. View marriage as just one aspect of your life and not as the sole determinant of who you are. This can ease a lot of pressure and anxiety on you both.
10. Start out with realistic expectations of what you can hope to achieve in this marriage.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. What are the factors currently in our marriage which could lead one or both of us to Burnout?
2. What are some dynamics in our couple relationship which could lead to Burnout?
3. What are the role expectations in our marriage that could contribute to Burnout?
4. How can we identify if one or both of us are functioning as victims?
5. What are some irrational beliefs we both hold in our marriage which could lead to Burnout?
6. How clear to one another are our expectations and motivations in our marriage?
7. What are some ways we can assist one another to overcome Marital Burnout if it should occur?

8. What are some ways we can prevent Burnout in our marriage?
9. How do others in our life contribute to help us with Marital Burnout?
10. How does knowing about Burnout help us to make our marriage better?

In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise

7.3 What's Bugging You In the Marriage and A Debugging Plan

The following is a list of frustrations which others have listed as bugging them in their marriages. Please read over the items and then rank order them by what bugs you most. There are blanks for you to write in any frustrations not on the list which bugs you. Include them in your rank ordering. Do this independently from your partner at first. Compare results later.

Frustrations in Marriage	Rank Order
1. Not enough money	
2. My partner spends too many hours away from home	
3. My career is dead ended/my partner's career is dead ended	
4. My partner has too much paperwork which s/he must bring home	
5. I'm not sufficiently informed by my spouse of what is going on in her/his outside life	
6. I'm not appreciated by my partner	
7. I'm not appreciated by my children and/or spouse's family	
8. I get no support for important decisions from my spouse	
9. I feel powerlessness	
10. My partner is not responsive to my needs	
11. There is too much bickering in our relationship	
12. The sexist attitude on the part of my partner	
13. The lack of family support for our marriage	
14. My disappointment with in-laws	
15. My not accomplishing what I expected to in this marriage	
16. (name other not listed above)	
17. (name other not listed above)	
18. (name other not listed above)	
19. (name other not listed above)	
20. (name other not listed above)	

Now that you have rank ordered the frustrations in your marriage, for your top five frustrations, prepare an action plan by which you can lessen the stress they create for you. Use the following format. Read the directions which follows this outline before completing the Debugging Plan. Do this plan independent from your partner at first. Compare results later.

My Personal Debugging Plan

First Priority Frustration: _____

Action Steps I will take to overcome this frustration in my marriage by the following date:
_____:

1.

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Second First Priority Frustration: _____

Action Steps I will take to overcome this frustration in my marriage by the following date:
_____:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Third Priority Frustration: _____

Action Steps I will take to overcome this frustration in my marriage by the following date:
_____:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Fourth Priority Frustration: _____

Action Steps I will take to overcome this frustration in my marriage by the following date:
_____:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Fifth Priority Frustration: _____

Action Steps I will take to overcome this frustration in my marriage by the following date:
_____:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Directions for Debugging Plan

In planning steps to overcome these five priority frustrations be sure to first brainstorm alternatives. Write down on a separate sheet of paper as many alternative solution steps you can think of. Do not try to evaluate any of them initially. You will not be able to think of many solutions if you begin to be too critical of them before you get them down on paper. Quantity is the desired outcome; quality will follow in the next step.

When you have exhausted brainstorming your list of solution steps for a frustration, you then need to evaluate the items by putting each into one of the following categories:

Category	Description
Most Likely	Other things being equal, what do you think will happen? Usually the answer is "I'll go on complaining and nothing will change."
Most Desirable	The "magic wand" solution, where you indulge in any fantasy. For example, 'The offending party will change her/his ways immediately.'
50/50 Chance of Success	An example: "I'll write a letter to my spouse documenting my feelings about her/his conduct."
Less than 50/50 Chance of Success	This may include steps that have been tried previously without success. Example: "I'll have a talk with my spouse about the harm being done."
Least Desirable	An example: "I'll give up on the situation and get a divorce."

Once you have categorized your brainstormed list of solution steps, you hopefully have recognized that if you do nothing about it that the frustration will continue to occur anyway and it is about the worst thing that can happen.

Your next step is to decide on the action steps and record them in your plan to reduce a marital frustration. Weigh the probable costs and benefits of each solution step listed. What is likely to be accomplished? How unpleasant will it be to carry out? Is it likely to have consequences that you want to avoid (e.g., getting a divorce)? Use your value judgments here: Do I want to do this? Is it worth it? What consequences am I willing to risk in resolving this frustration?

Once your action steps are chosen, make a commitment to act within a definite period of time. Set realistic time limits that allow for no excuses. Now that you have read these directions, go back before these directions to complete your Debugging plan.

Caution Advisory

If there is something you can do about the top frustrations in your marriage that bug you and if you decide not to do it, then you lose your right to complain. You have chosen (whether explicitly or through subsequent failure to carry out the plan of action) to go on living with the problem. No excuses, please.

In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise

7-4 A Self Help Plan to Treat Marital Burnout

This is a three step process: observe, decide and plan. With this method, the burned-out spouse, with the aid of the marital partner, observes her/his own present behaviors, which may be characterized by omnipotence, fatigue and so forth. S/he writes them down in specific terms. Next s/he decides on opposite behaviors (goals) s/he wishes to adopt - behaviors characterized by reality, energy, and the like. Finally, s/he decides on a specific plan. An example:

Observe: Present behavior characterized by:	Decide: Goal Characterized by:	Plan: Specific Steps
Omnipotence	Reality	Today I will say "no" to you when you ask me to do something
Fatigue	Energy	After dinner I will take a ten minute walk
Suspicion	Trust	I will choose to believe my spouse next time s/he is late

To use the chart, the spouse needs to apply the following four pathways to success.

LOVE: The term love means involvement with people. This can be on a superficial or an intense level. A first step in combating burnout is to examine interpersonal relations. Some suggested questions are:

1. What is the overall state of my personal relations to my spouse, children, and friends?
2. Have I been curt with my spouse lately? In what way was I short with her/him?
3. How can I improve my relationship with my spouse? Specifically?

SELF-WORTH: The second pathway to success is involvement in activities that cause a feeling of success. Suggested questions are:

1. Have I consciously scheduled a "success" experience today? Or, did I instead attack only difficult and overwhelming problems?
2. Did I spend some time today doing something for myself?
3. Did I do one thing, no matter how minor, on which I have been procrastinating?

FUN: An essential component of burnout treatment is the successful identifying and involvement in enjoyable activities. Suggested questions are:

1. Did I schedule fun in any activities today?
2. Did I follow through on such activities?
3. Did I try to absorb myself in the activity or did I allow myself to feel guilty because of the time it takes up?
4. Did I have fun interacting with my spouse today?

SELF-DISCIPLINE: Caution is urged if the burned-out spouse is to avoid applying this pathway in a counterproductive way. The application of this pathway can easily be used as an excuse for more, rather than less failure. Suggested questions are:

1. Did I have a plan for using my time today?
2. Did I get all my housework done as planned?
3. Did I throw away any useless and outdated papers rather than keep them on the excuse that "they might be useful someday?"
4. Did I take any breaks, even brief ones, today? Or, did I work straight through?
5. Did I leave my job at work, or did I carry it home with me?

Burnout is a problem faced by many spouses. It is characterized by omnipotence, rigidity, feelings of depression and the like. With the above four pathways to success and its emphasis on specific plans an alternative to this painful experience is possible.

You and your partner can now proceed with a Burnout Treatment plan for yourself using the OBSERVE, DECIDE and PLAN model, utilizing the four pathways to success of Love, Self-worth, Fun and Self-Discipline.

In your Journal Record Your Personal Notes on this Exercise

7.5 Follow-up Work-Out Plan for Marital Burnout

As a result of our exercises, discussions, and efforts. in this chapter of our Marriage Work-Out, we have come up with this action plan to continue and follow up the health enhancing we have just completed.

I. Marital Burnout Needs

The following are needs which we still have to address to achieve full remediation or prevention of Marital Burnout:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

II. Strategic Steps towards Addressing Marital Burnout

The following are specific steps we will take to address to treat or prevent our Marital Burnout:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

III. Personal Responsibility Taking

The following are the things I will specifically do to ensure that we as a couple continue to remediate or prevent Marital Burnout:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10

IV. Evaluation of Action Plan for Marital

We will know we have achieved our goal to remediate or prevent Marital Burnout by the following measurable behavioral changes:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

We agree to the above Marriage Work-Out plans to address Marital Burnout.

My signature

My partner's signature

Date

Date