



Self-care and prevention of burn out among activists – tools for everyday life

My body had given me weeks worth of warning signs that it was not sustainable, but I still ‘powered’ through, feeling a sense of duty. A couple of months later I was hospitalised. I was in hospital for less than a week, but it took me another few weeks before I properly felt my energy levels get back to normal.’

Bakita Kasadha, Consultant – HIV, young people and women

Common signs of burn out

- Feeling burdened by responsibilities & pressures
- Having difficulties sleeping
- Working long hours
- Experiencing physical problems like exhaustion, stomach aches, headaches, lingering colds, general aches & pains
- Being absent-minded or forgetting appointments, deadlines & personal possessions
- Being easily annoyed by other people’s demands & stories about their daily activities
- Feeling “used” & unappreciated at work
- Feeling detached, & like you don’t really care about the problems & needs of other people
- Feeling both useless and as if things would go terribly wrong if you didn’t continue (over)working
- Feeling that you cannot afford to stop to eat and hydrate.

Examples of structural sources of burn out

- A culture or expectation to work beyond normal hours
- Continuous exposure to trauma without proper psychological support
- Bullying or disrespectful colleagues
- Uncertainty in the professional or personal future
- Lack of organisational procedures, and unclear division of responsibilities

Cautionary note

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it does not mean that something is wrong with you. Burnout is caused by organisational and structural factors rather than individual attributes. Your body and mind are simply doing you a service by asking you to slow down.

ABCD¹ of self-care for activists



Become **Aware** of what's getting to you and how those issues are affecting you

- ✓ The first and most important step here is to PAUSE.
- ✓ Breathe.
- ✓ Take a moment to notice your physical and emotional state.
- ✓ Be honest with yourself.



Seek **Balance** among work, rest, time with family & play; time alone & time with others; giving & receiving; physical, intellectual & spiritual; walking & sitting

- ✓ Listen to your body. Ask yourself – 'If my body were in charge, what would it do?' Then do exactly that.
- ✓ Introduce walking² meetings in your everyday routine.
- ✓ Switch off from communications and have untouchable days for strategising, writing, researching and general creative thinking.
- ✓ Say "no" or "not at the moment" to requests, set your boundaries.
- ✓ Forgive yourself for not finding the balance.



Connect with your resources – places and people (friends, family, co-workers) you trust, respect, care about (inside and outside of activism), who are fulfilling you with resources/energy and who inspire

- ✓ We recommend connecting with colleagues during this workshop so you can be in touch and support each other during and after the conference.
- ✓ Find someone who will ensure that you take enough rest and don't overwork.
- ✓ Dedicate time to hobbies that have nothing to do with work. If you don't have any hobbies, find one.



Personal **Development** is important and can be a way out of stagnation

- ✓ Find a mentor who you look up to professionally and personally.
- ✓ Think about areas of technical expertise that you want to maintain and develop new skills that you think will be relevant for your future.
- ✓ Ensure your work and your colleagues' work is also personally fulfilling and intellectually engaging.

¹ ABC framework has been developed by Headington Institute (2012) http://www.headington-institute.org/files/what-to-do-about-burnout_edited_82038.pdf
Workshop organisers added 'D' element to the framework and altered some elements of the framework with useful contribution from Bakita Kasadha and Vuyiseka Dubula, speakers of the workshop.

² Stanford researchers found a person's creative output increased by an average of 60 percent when walking.
<https://news.stanford.edu/2014/04/24/walking-vs-sitting-042414/>



Self-care among activists is a political strategy.
Activism without self-care is not sustainable.'

Bakita Kasadha



Personal worksheet

My current practice

New ideas

Aware

Balance

Connect

Development



Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare'

Audre Lorde, Writer and civil rights activist

Suggested resources

Bakita Kasadha. Activists, don't feel guilty about self-care and setting boundaries. 2018.

<http://www.gal-dem.com/activists-dont-feel-guilty-self-care-setting-boundaries>

Headington Institute. Handouts, videos and self-tests about managing stress and resilience.

<http://headington-institute.org/topic-areas/126/stress-and-burnout>

Dr. Gabor Maté. Video lecture – 'Self-care for caregivers: When the body says no...' 2013.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6lL8WVyMMs>

Prevention of professional burn-out effect among HIV services specialists; training module (developed in Russian)

<http://www.aidsalliance.org.ua/ru/library/our/infomat/Burn-out.pdf>

Checklist to see if you are showing signs of burnout

http://headington-institute.org/files/are-you-showing-signs-of-burnout-for-emerg-responders_48145.pdf

Download a copy of this workshop tool and share it with your colleagues

<http://www.aidsalliance.org/resources>

We want to know how you are taking care of yourself during the conference and beyond.

Let us know by using #selfcare #AIDS2018 @theaidsalliance

It will make our day and encourage us to practice what we preach too!

This workshop was developed by **International HIV/AIDS Alliance** and **Eurasian Harm Reduction Association** in the frames of the **Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV response (PITCH)**, a strategic partnership between the **International HIV/AIDS Alliance**, **Aidsfonds**, and the **Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.