

# Understanding Stress, Anxiety, Burnout and Trauma Responses

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING

# Coping Strategies for Stress, Anxiety, Burnout and Trauma Responses

SMALL STEPS CAN MAKE A MEANINGFUL DIFFERENCE.



## STRESS

Stress is your body's response to pressure, demands or challenges.

### Common Signs

- Feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities
- Irritability or frustration
- Muscle tension or headaches
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping

### Stress Often Improves When:

- The pressure reduces
- You take time to rest and recover
- Problems are resolved



## ANXIETY

Anxiety is persistent worry or fear, often about future events or uncertainty.

### Common Signs

- Excessive worrying
- Racing thoughts
- Feeling on edge or restless
- Difficulty relaxing
- Physical symptoms such as a racing heart, nausea or shakiness

### Anxiety Often Feels Like:

"What if something goes wrong?"

Anxiety can continue even when there is no immediate threat.



## BURNOUT

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress.

### Common Signs

- Constant fatigue
- Feeling emotionally drained
- Reduced motivation
- Cynicism or detachment
- Difficulty coping with everyday tasks

### Burnout Often Feels Like:

"I have nothing left to give."

Burnout is common among people balancing multiple roles, caregiving responsibilities, work pressures and emotional labour.



## TRAUMA RESPONSES

Trauma responses can develop after overwhelming, distressing or threatening experiences.

Trauma responses are not weakness—they are survival strategies developed by the nervous system.

### Common Signs

- Hypervigilance (constantly scanning for danger)
- Strong emotional reactions
- Feeling numb or disconnected
- Difficulty trusting others
- Avoidance of reminders
- Feeling unsafe even when things appear okay

### Trauma Often Feels Like:

"My body is still responding as though the danger is happening now."



## WHEN YOU'RE FEELING STRESSED

### Try:

- Prioritising the most important tasks
- Taking short movement breaks
- Reducing unnecessary commitments
- Practising realistic self-expectations

### Helpful Reminder:

You do not have to do everything today.



## WHEN YOU'RE FEELING ANXIOUS

### Try:

- Slow, steady breathing
- Grounding using your five senses
- Limiting excessive reassurance-seeking
- Focusing on what is within your control

### Helpful Reminder:

Not every thought is a prediction.



## WHEN YOU'RE EXPERIENCING BURNOUT

### Try:

- Scheduling genuine rest
- Delegating where possible
- Reconnecting with enjoyable activities
- Setting boundaries around work and caregiving

### Helpful Reminder:

Rest is productive when recovery is needed.



## WHEN TRAUMA RESPONSES SHOW UP

### Try:

- Grounding techniques
- Maintaining predictable routines
- Gentle self-compassion
- Connecting with safe, supportive people

### Helpful Reminder:

Your nervous system may be reacting to past experiences rather than present danger.

## NERVOUS SYSTEM GROUNDING EXERCISE

### Pause and notice:

- 👁️ 5 things you can see
- 👋 4 things you can feel
- 👂 3 things you can hear
- 👃 2 things you can smell
- 👅 1 thing you can taste



This can help bring attention back to the present moment.

## A QUICK COMPARISON



### STRESS

Pressure exceeds resources.



### ANXIETY

Fear and worry about what might happen.



### BURNOUT

Exhaustion after prolonged stress.



### TRAUMA RESPONSE

The nervous system remains in survival mode after overwhelming experiences.

Sometimes these experiences overlap. Many people experience more than one at the same time.

## WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Consider reaching out for support if:

- Symptoms persist for several weeks
- Daily functioning is becoming difficult
- Sleep is significantly affected
- Relationships are being impacted
- You feel stuck despite your efforts
- You are experiencing distress that feels difficult to manage alone



## REMEMBER

You were not designed to carry everything alone. Small changes, repeated consistently, can support meaningful recovery and wellbeing.