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Thoughts on Burnout and Self-Care

“Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.” ~ Helpguide.org

If the above quote rings true for you, an emotional check-in with someone could be beneficial. Burnout goes beyond day-to-day anxiety about deadlines or workload. Burnout is the experience of utter exhaustion and loss of motivation, and it can lead to strong feelings of detachment and/or depression. However, we can stay aware of our emotional states and respond with self-care to dips in mood or energy or elevations in anxiety. If you like data, try journaling or charting your moods. This is a simple but effective way for teenagers and adults to keep track of daily mood, anxiety, and energy levels. Burnout can happen on the job, while in school or while caregiving. Burnout, which develops over time, can result in emotional, physical, and behavioral changes that warrant attention.

In recent conversations with close friends, topics ranged from avoiding burnout, to finding happiness during a pandemic, to dismay at certain national leaders and their decisions, to the wonders of Ruby Donuts in Ayer (consider ordering ahead and going for a socially-distanced pick-up). We shared successes, stresses, and special moments. One friend described her son’s performance of the Barry Gibb song, “The End of the Rainbow,” played during a final virtual meeting of his senior year. Another friend described a socially distanced visit between her kids and her mother. A friend shared beautiful photos of her adopted teenage son who has Down Syndrome. And a friend and colleague sent me a [link](#) to Colt Clark and The Quarantine Kids playing *Let My Love Open The Door* (if you have not seen this adorable family yet, I encourage you to check out their YouTube page immediately).

Conversations with friends and family remind me of finding a lighthouse in a storm: these connections signal that the shore is near and that all will be well. I have always known that dear friends and family fill my life with happiness. They bring perspective and they reduce stress. People like this help prevent burnout.

Self-care comes in many forms. Talking with friends, hugging family members, game nights, naps, long walks on sunny days, music, listening to my kids laugh together about some show they are watching – these are all self-care for me. A friend recommends hiking, another makes jewelry to de-stress and another friend loves to cook. Meditation, reading, yoga, running, walking the dog, and biking are all ways to combat stress and re-energize for the next round. And if there is anything this pandemic has taught us, there will be a next round.

As I write this I wonder of any readers: what form of self-care works best for you?

Even when there is suffering, we must give ourselves permission to be happy, to find humor in life and to care for ourselves. Humor and laughter go a very long way toward healing life's problems. Self-care makes it possible to care for others. One friend noted about the school year that this is "end without end. How do you have closure when there's no closure?" The answer: I am not sure. Maybe we will not have a precise ending to this year. Maybe we will feel like the school year extends into summer and then into fall with no clear definition. While things are wildly different in our world right now, it will be okay. We will get through this time.

I always go back to places of certainty for grounding. I always go back to what I know. We know, for example, that on this Memorial Day weekend, we can pause for a moment, hearts full of gratitude for those who gave their lives for our country. We can fly a flag or place flowers on a grave at a cemetery. We can buy Dunks for the car behind us in line. We can be kind. We can put on our masks, knowing this is an act of loving kindness toward others, and not argue about it. We can hold each other close and be grateful for all that is going well in our lives.

For Barry Gibb fans, this is [*The End of the Rainbow*](#), the song played by my friend's son as he said goodbye to his high school years. I am sure students will find ways to get closure, mark this moment and say their goodbyes to 2019-2020 school year. Students are pressing forward in their work, with only days left of new assignments. We believe in their ability to succeed! In a previous note on my [school page](#) called *Thoughts on Grieving*, I made special mention of the spectacular Class of 2020. These students fought burnout fiercely, sometimes through tears and loss of motivation, and with senior project exhibitions now in full swing, they make us proud. The pandemic forced them to adjust project plans and chart a new course. They are resilient.

In fact, we are all resilient. We can stay engaged, stay positive and look for a lighthouse in the storm. I am certain that a lighthouse is there, just waiting to be found.

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