



SASLHA
South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association

0861 113 297

admin@saslha.co.za

www.saslha.co.za

P. O Box 1690 Umhlanga Rocks, 4320



Mental Health and Burnout 'Wellness and Professional Resilience' Resource for Community Service Officers

This resource is designed for Community Service Officers (Audiologists and Speech Language Therapists) entering the professional sphere. It aims to promote mental health awareness, reduce the risk of burnout and improve their overall well-being as they transition into their roles as early-career healthcare professionals.

As a Community Service Officer (CSO), you will be transitioning from academic training into full professional practice. This shift into a new professional environment often presents multiple challenges that can significantly impact your mental health and overall well-being. As a CSO, you are required to adapt to new roles, master unfamiliar responsibilities while you simultaneously navigate complex social and institutional dynamics. In addition, many CSOs relocate to unfamiliar environments and sometimes under-resourced or in rural settings where limited support structures and high service demands may intensify stress and a feeling of isolation.

In this new environment, you will encounter new challenges, including adjusting to workplace culture, learning new protocols, and managing expectations from your supervisor and peers. This transition also introduces new administrative and organisational skills to meet the reporting requirements, performance evaluation and procedural compliance. These added responsibilities may increase pressure, contribute to the feeling of being overwhelmed and heighten the risk of stress and burnout if not effectively managed.

Mental health and burnout are critical issues that can directly affect your well-being, performance and professional longevity as a healthcare practitioner and as a CSO. Addressing factors that affect our mental health is a priority for SASHLA as it ensures that professionals develop resilience and coping skills that are necessary to navigate the demands of the workplace effectively. Promoting mental health for healthcare professionals will not only safeguard the individual's wellbeing, but also strengthen service delivery, foster sustainable practice and uphold the integrity of the profession.

This resource, therefore, seeks to

- ✚ Increase awareness of mental health and burnout signs and symptoms
- ✚ Equip CSOs with practical stress management and self-care strategies
- ✚ Encourage help-seeking behaviour and reduce stigma around mental health



- ✚ Establish linkage to mental health support
- ✚ Hopefully build a culture of peer support and wellbeing



UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH



Picture by: Zahirah Lynn Eppard

The **World Health Organisation** defines mental health as “a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community” (WHO, 2025).

🎯 *It is a basic human right, it is an integral component of health and well-being, crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.*

🔍 *Mental health and well-being are dynamic and not static, it is more than the absence of a mental disorder, and it is different from person to person*

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>



Myths and Facts about Mental Health (Infographics)

<https://www.tricitymed.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Myths-and-Facts-Mental-Health-v3.png>



Quiz: True/False

- People with strong mental health never experience stress, anxiety or depression
- Talking about your mental health struggles is a sign of weakness
- Mental health is a fixed state that, once achieved, does not change



UNDERSTANDING BURNOUT

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-at-work>

<https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>

<https://youtu.be/VMbhM5>

OK SEO

Burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is a phenomenon that is specific to the occupational context and not experienced in other areas of life (WHO, 2019).

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged exposure to stress, especially in high-demand environments. It is a common condition for most healthcare professionals due to the combination of clinical responsibilities, administrative demands and emotional engagement with patients.

It is characterised by:

- The feeling of energy depletion and exhaustion
- Increased mental distance from one's job or feeling of negativism or cynicism that is related to one's job
- Reduced professional efficacy



SASLHA

South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association

0861 113 297



admin@saslha.co.za



www.saslha.co.za



P. O Box 1690 Umhlanga Rocks, 4320



Symptoms include

- Persistent fatigue
- Reduced motivation or loss of interest in your work
- Feeling of being overwhelmed or unable to cope with daily responsibilities
- Withdrawal from colleagues, patients and social activities
- Decreased job satisfaction
- Compromised quality of patient care
- Increased risks of making errors
- Feeling detached or cynical about work

Early recognition of burnout is important for preventing long-term consequences.



Quiz: Self-assessment quiz

- ☐ I often feel tired, drained or emotionally exhausted at the end of the day
- ☐ I feel detached towards my work or the people I serve
- ☐ I feel that my work performance has declined or less effective than I used to be
- ☐ I frequently experience headaches, sleep disturbances or stress-related physical symptoms
- ☐ I feel overwhelmed by workload, responsibilities or expectations and find it difficult to manage daily tasks.

Building resilience in the face of Burnout

Resilience is your ability to adapt and thrive in the face of challenges and stress. This is important for maintaining wellbeing, sustaining performance and preventing burnout.



SASLHA
South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association

0861 113 297



admin@saslha.co.za



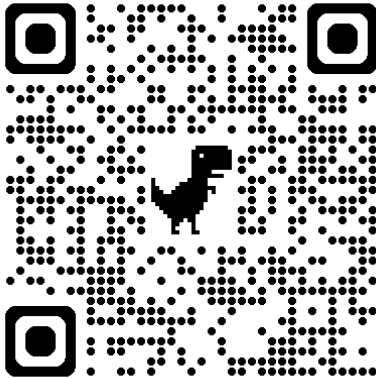
www.saslha.co.za



P. O Box 1690 Umhlanga Rocks, 4320



Self-care



What is Self-care and how to
make it part of your life



SELF CARE

Embracing holistic self-care

Boundary Setting

Setting the limits between work and personal life, a more balanced life

Why setting boundaries is important <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/setting-boundaries/>

The benefits of setting boundaries <https://worksheets.clipart-library.com/images2/setting-boundaries/setting-boundaries-9.jpg>



Resilience Toolkit

<i>Growth Mindset Strategies</i> - Reframe challenges - Reflect on success and setbacks - Set achievable goals - Celebrate progress At the end of each week, write down one challenge faced, one lesson learnt and one action of improvement	
<i>Self-care strategies</i> - Physical well-being - Social well-being - Hobbies and leisure At the end of each week, use a checklist to ensure that you meet your physical, emotional and social needs	
<i>Boundary setting strategies</i> - Define your work hours clearly - Learn to say NO – politely if tasks exceed your capacity - Share responsibilities to reduce overload - Communicate boundaries List tasks, determine which ones are essential, and identify what can be delegated or postponed	
<i>Stress management tools</i> - Breathing exercises - Mindfulness breaks - Progressive muscle relaxations - Coping reminders (motivational quotes, affirmations or calming images in your workspace)	
<i>Peer and professional Support</i> - Discuss challenges and share coping strategies with peers - Professional counselling – Employee wellness programmes - Hotlines and resources	
<i>Weekly reflection and monitoring</i> - Ask yourself, “What challenged me this week? How did I respond? What can I do differently?” - Burnout self-check - Resilience toolkit	

Compiled by Dr Nontoko Mbatha (SASLHA Public Sector Committee Member)

Mentorship

Mentorship is a supportive, developmental relationship in which a more experienced person (the mentor) provides guidance, knowledge, encouragement and advice to a less experienced person (the mentee).



SASLHA

South African Speech-Language-Hearing Association

0861 113 297



admin@saslha.co.za



www.saslha.co.za



P. O Box 1690 Umhlanga Rocks, 4320



SASLHA offers a mentorship program for all speech therapists and audiologists that need support and guidance in their career journey. Mentorship has the potential to improve and advance your knowledge and skills, while also helping you to grow and become a competent and confident professional!

Everyone needs support at some point - working your way through a complex patient, facing a dilemma or feeling overwhelmed – SASLHA's mentorship committee is here to help you! You don't have to figure it out by yourself.

There is a wealth of experience readily available to help you!

Send an e-mail to mentorship@saslha.co.za and we will gladly assist you.