

Beyond Avoidance: Eating Disorder Professionals and The Role of Acceptance in Burnout

Allison Willets, LCPC, CMHC



1

1

Who I am

- She/her
- Primary therapist at CFC Boise
 - BA: Art and Psychology
 - MA: Counseling
- Former art teacher and case manager
- Experience with SUDS, AUDS, college counseling, and EDs
- **Fun fact:** I have two cats named after psychologists!



Alyee Willets, human, LCPC, CMHC

2

2

Objectives

1. Attendees will understand signs and risk of burnout for providers working with clients with eating disorders.
2. Attendees will learn role of acceptance in burnout through an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy approach.
3. Attendees will learn ways to self-assess for their own burnout and be equipped with practical tools to help them respond.

3

3

'Old Demons,' New Stress and the Pandemic's Surge in Eating Disorders

Study finds link between dehumanization and burnout in first responders

Increased demand and burnout are driving many BIPOC therapists to 'the breaking point'

Eating disorders among teens more severe than ever

4 student suicides in less than two months send shocks through Boise schools. 'It's terrifying'

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, counselors at Sanford Health say suicide has become more prevalent

Feeling Burned Out? So Is Your Therapist.

This is why it's so hard to find mental health counseling right now

The Youth Mental Health Emergency Isn't Over. Government Must Act Now.

4

Burnout defined

- “Process of physical and emotional exhaustion, fatigue, detachment and self-doubt that people who work in caring and supporting roles can experience” (Freudenberger, 1974).
- “Occupational hazard”
- Unchecked stress
- Frenetic, under-challenged, worn out

“Stress is what arises when something you care about is at stake.”

–Kelly McGonigal

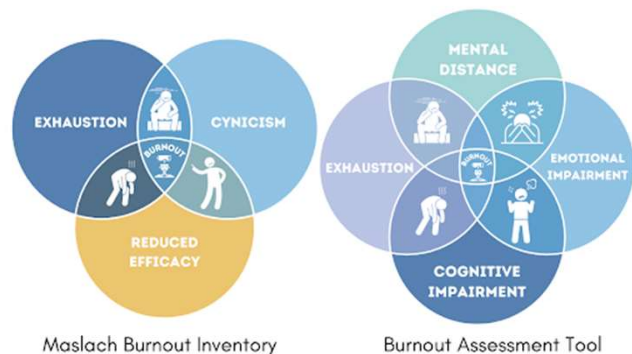


5

5

Biggest drivers of employee burnout

1. Lack of support or recognition for their work from leadership (31%)
2. Unrealistic deadline and results expectations (30%)
3. Consistently working long hours or on the weekends (29%)



(Deloitte, 2022)

6

6

Covid and burnout

% agree or strongly agree

I have not been able to meet the demand for treatment from my patients.



I feel burned out.



(Lin, Assefa, & Stamm, 2023).

7

7

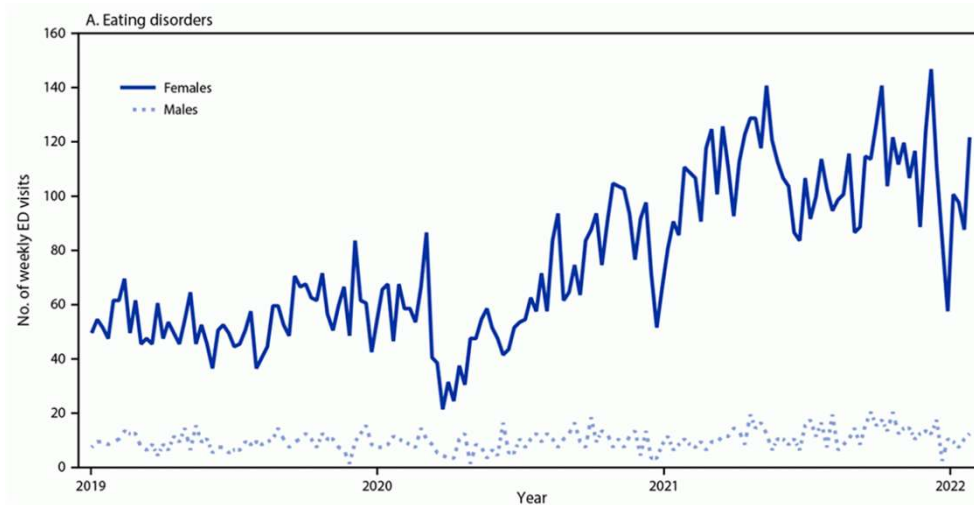


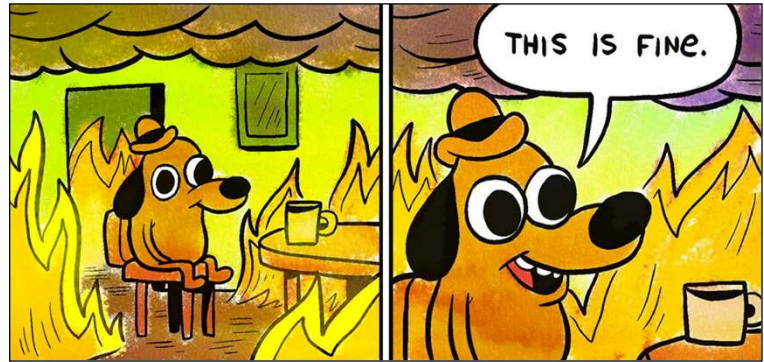
FIGURE 1. Weekly number of emergency department visits* associated with eating disorders among adolescents aged 12–17 years, by sex—National Syndromic Surveillance Program, United States, 2019–2022

8

8

What can burnout look like?

- Physical exhaustion
- Insomnia
- Alcohol and drug use
- Familial problems
- Irritability
- Increased absences
- Lack of empathy



9

9

Burnout to the extreme: around the world

- Japan
 - Karoshi
 - Karojisatsu
- China
 - Guolaosi
- Sweden
- Finland
- United States

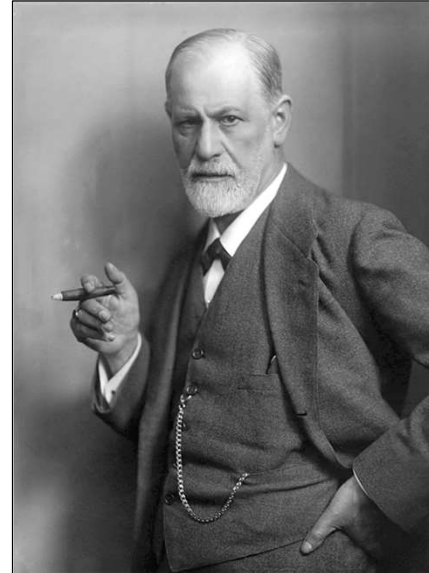


10

10

The business of burnout

- Freud
- “Human giver syndrome” (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019)
- Between 21-67% of mental health therapists report high levels of burnout (Morse et al., 2012).
- In 2021, 79% of employees had experienced work-related stress in the month before the survey (Work and Wellbeing Survey, 2021)



11

11

Do as I say, not as I do...

- **66%** of professionals say they often skip at least one meal a day due to stress and business from workload (Deloitte, 2018)
- **10%** of eating disorder providers reported some unhealthy behaviors to avoid burnout, including:
 - Drinking alcohol
 - Binge or emotional eating
 - Smoking cigarettes
 - Self-harm (Warren, Schafer, Crowley, & Olivadria, 2012)
- One study found that **59%** of professional psychologists did not seek therapy despite knowing it would be to their benefit (Bears et al. 2013).

12

12

What is our ethical standard?

“counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities” (ACA, 2005, p. 9).



“Social workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, legal problems, substance abuse, or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance or to jeopardize the best interests of people for whom they have a professional responsibility” (NASW, 1999, p. 23).

13

13

Acceptance and commitment

- Acceptance-based treatment may be beneficial for patients with more severe eating disorder pathology (Juarascio, et al., 2013).
- Psychological flexibility is associated with lower compassion fatigue and greater compassion satisfaction (Garner, E. V. & Golijani-Moghaddam, N., 2021).
- ACT has been helpful as an intervention for sexual minority employees struggling with work stress and burnout (Singh, S.R, Watford, T.S, Cotterman, R.E., O'Brien, W.H, 2020).

14

14

ACT: Third wave CBT

1st wave: conditioning (behaviorism)



2nd wave: thoughts and beliefs in understanding and changing emotions and bx (CBT)



3rd wave: mindfulness, emotions, acceptance, the relationship, values, goals, and meta-cognition (ACT, DBT, mindfulness, etc...)

15

15

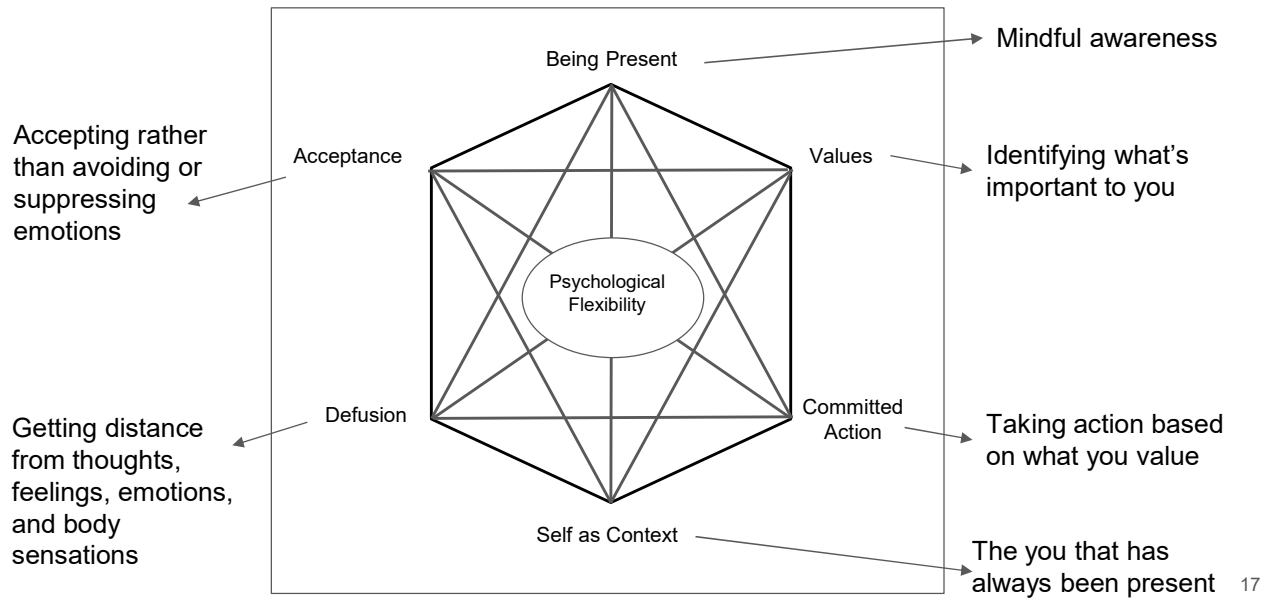
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

- Founded by Steven Hayes in 1982:
 - "...the primary source of human unhappiness is the way language and cognition interact with the circumstances of our lives to produce an inability to persist or make changes that are in the service of long-term valued ends." -Luoma, Hayes, and Walser, 2007, p. 9
- Inflexibility happens when we use language and tools in ways that are ineffective or problematic.
- The point of ACT is not to *feel* **BETTER** but to better **FEEL**.

16

16

ACT Hexaflex for Psychological Flexibility



17

Eating Disorder Professionals

Most frequently cited contributors to burnout:

- Nature of eating disorders
- Patient characteristics
- Work-related factors
- Therapist variables

(Warren, Schafer, Crowley et al., 2012)

93% of therapists reported worrying about their patients health



Almost ¼ experienced the death of a patient

18

18

Efforts to avoid burnout

- Self-care
- Unhealthy coping methods
- Theoretical orientation
- Etc....



What about acceptance?

19

19

How avoidance can make things worse

- Following your values increases meaning, interest, and adds fun to our lives, as opposed to going other directions to obtain approval from others or run away from feelings of discomfort.
 - Values are more associated with happiness and reduced stress (Creswell et al. 2005).
- Research shows that a less stressful life doesn't make people nearly as happy as they think it will.
- Stress challenges us to find meaning in our lives.

20

20

Practical application


- 1) Acknowledge stress when you experience it.
 - a) Notice how it affects your body
- 2) Welcome the stress by recognizing it is a response to something you care about.
 - a) Can you notice the positive motivation behind the stress?
- 3) Make use of the energy that stress gives you, instead of wasting energy trying to manage stress.
 - a) What can you do right now that reflect your goals and values?

21

21

Tips: Individual level

- Exercise- body movement
- Breathing
- Positive social interactions
- Laughter
- Affection
- Rest



“Hi body, what do you need?”

22

22

ED professionals: Questions for reflection

1. How do I expect myself to be perfect?
 - a. If I do expect myself to be perfect, how do I expect myself to react when I make a mistake?
2. How do I think in terms of 'good' or 'bad'?
3. How comfortable am I expressing negative feelings, asking others to do something for me, or refusing a request I do not want to do?
4. How comfortable am I with others when they are out of control?
5. What emotions do I rarely express?

(DeLucia-Waack, 1999).

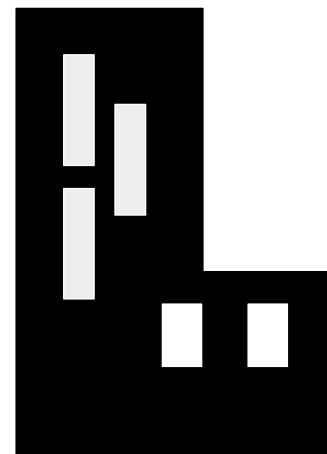
23

23

Tips: Organizational level

Most popular approaches:

- Flexible working hours (41%),
- Workplace culture that respects time off (34%)
- The ability to work remotely (33%)
- Four-day work week (31%)
- Workplaces that support mental health



(Posluns & Gall, 2020).

24

24

Ideas for the future

- Fulfillment
- Notice what is valuable in difficult situations
- Know ahead of time that you are entering a field that is difficult, and it's normal to struggle
- Create an environment where it is safe to discuss your feelings

What am I doing when I feel most powerfully that I am doing what I'm meant to be doing?

25

25



exercise

26

26

Further reading

- *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily Nagoski, PhD., and Amelia Nagoski, DMA
- *The Happiness Trap* by Russ Harris
- *The Upside of Stress* by Kelly McGonigal
- Warren, C. S., Schafer, K. J., Crowley, M. E., & Olivardia, R. (2012). A Qualitative Analysis of Job Burnout in Eating Disorder Treatment Providers, *Eating Disorders*, 20, 175-195.

27

27

Resources

Maslach Burnout Inventory: <https://www.mindgarden.com/312-mbi-general-survey>

Burnout Assessment Tool: <https://burnoutassessmenttool.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Test-Manual-BAT-English-version-2.0-1.pdf>

2022 COVID-19 Practitioner Impact Survey:

<https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2022-covid-psychologist-workload>

28

28

References

American Counseling Association. (2014). *2014 ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2014-code-of-ethics-finaladdress.pdf>

Bearse, J. L., McMinn, M. R., Seegobin, W., & Free, K. (2013). Barriers to psychologists seeking mental health care. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 38, (6), 603-612

Creswell, J.D., Welch, W., Taylor, S.E., Sherman, D. K., Grunewald, T., and Mann. T. (2005). Affirmation of personal values buffers neuroendocrine and psychological stress response. *Psychological Science*, 16, 846-851.

DeLucia-Waack, J. L. (1999). Supervision for counselors working with eating disorder groups: Countertransference issues related to body image, food, and weight. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 77, 379-388.

Freudenberger, H.J. (1974). Staff Burn-Out. *Journal of Social Issues*, 30: 159-165. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1974.tb00706.x>

Deloitte. (2022). *Workplace burnout survey*. Deloitte. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/burnout-survey.html>

Garner, E. V., & Golijani-Moghaddam, N. (2021). Relationship between psychological flexibility and work-related quality of life for healthcare professionals: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 21, 98-112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2021.06.007>

29

29

References continued..

Hartman-Munick, S. M., Lin, J. A., Milliren, C. E., Braverman, P. K., Brigham, K. S., Fisher, M. M., Golden, N. H., Jary, J. M., Lemly, D. C., Matthews, A., Ornstein, R. M., Roche, A., Rome, E. S., Rosen, E. L., Sharma, Y., Shook, J. K., Taylor, J. L., Thew, M., Vo, M., Voss, M., ... Richmond, T. K. (2022). Association of the COVID-19 Pandemic With Adolescent and Young Adult Eating Disorder Care Volume. *JAMA pediatrics*, 176(12), 1225–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2022.4346>

Juarascio, A., Kerrigan, S., Goldstein, S.P, Shaw, J., Forman, E. M, Butryn, M., & Herbert, J.D. (2013). Baseline eating disorder severity predicts response to an acceptance and commitment therapy-based group treatment, *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 2, (3–4), 74-78.

Lin, L., Assefa, M., & Stamm, K. (2023). Practitioners are overworked and burnout out, and they need our support: The tremendous impact of the pandemic era pushed many practitioners to their limits. *Monitor on Psychology*, 54 (3), 19.

Nadon, L., Beer, L.T., & Morin, A. J.S. (2022). Should burnout be conceptualized as a mental disorder? *Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 12, 82.

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). NASW code of ethics. Retrieved December, 15, 2023, from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

Malesic, J. (2022). *Burnout dominated 2021. Here's the history of our burnout problem*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/01/01/burnout-history-freudensberger-maslach/>

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W.B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 397-422

Morse, G., Salyers, M. P., Rollins, A. L., Monroe-DeVita, M., & Pfahler, C. (2012). Burnout in mental health services: a review of the problem and its remediation. *Administration and policy in mental health*, 39(5), 341–352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-011-0352-1>

30

30

References continued...

Posluns, K., & Gall, T. L. (2020). Dear Mental Health Practitioners, Take Care of Yourselves: a Literature Review on Self-Care. *International journal for the advancement of counseling*, 42(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-019-09382-w>

Rameer, V. M. (2022, December 19). 40+ statistics on burnout in the workplace you can't ignore. Science of People. <https://www.scienceofpeople.com/burnout-statistics/>

Singh, S.R, Watford, T.S, Cotterman, R.E., O'Brien, W.H (2020). , A pilot study of acceptance and commitment therapy for sexual minorities experiencing work stress, *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 16, 25-29.

Taylor, H. (2023, June 15). 50+ Burnout statistics that will shock you into action. *Runn*. <https://www.runn.io/blog/burnout-statistics#:~:text=in%20the%20workplace.,%27,%2C%20and%2075%25%20experienced%20burnout>

Warren, C. S., Schafer, K. J., Crowley, M. E., & Olivardia, R. (2012). A Qualitative Analysis of Job Burnout in Eating Disorder Treatment Providers, *Eating Disorders*, 20, 175-195.

31

31



Questions or comments?

Allison.Willets@uhsinc.com

32

32