

OVERCOME PARENTAL BURNOUT

I know first-hand that parental burnout comes with a whole array of symptoms, but you can learn to identify and effectively manage them – if you know how. In this eBook you'll learn:

- The differentiation between workplace and parental burnout
- How to identify the 4 main symptoms of parental burnout
- What striving for perfectionism really teaches children?
- Preventative strategies for parental burnout
- The five key steps to parental burnout recovery

This eBook gives you five simple steps you can implement right now to reduce parental burnout and boost your parenting confidence!



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Introduction:

Falling pregnant was the first miracle of my life. Giving birth to a healthy daughter was the second.

My name is Deborah Byrne and I'm a holistic therapist and parenting coach. My whole career has been based in helping families and all I wanted was to start a family of my own. Unfortunately, I suffer from a rare endocrine disorder called Cushing's disease which caused me to suffer a broad range of issues including insomnia, mood swings, weight gain and fertility issues. As if that wasn't enough, I developed a brain tumour as a result of my disorder, so having a baby was the last thing myself and my doctors expected.

The ups and downs of my life during my pregnancy would fill plenty of books on their own, but to cut a long story short, despite all my experiences as a parenting coach, despite a long career working with families in challenging situations, after my daughter Grace was born, I developed parental burnout.

It had taken years battling the medical system to get my diagnosis and the fight had worn me out – and that was on top of how draining Cushing's disease is. Going through a high-risk pregnancy was incredibly stressful, especially since there was nothing the doctors could do to guarantee my daughter's survival. All I could do was wait and hope she'd be okay, making it impossible to relax and enjoy what should be one of the most joyous times of my life.

I couldn't let myself become too attached to my unborn baby in case I'd never be able to hold her. As her birth approached, a confused mix of emotions was swirling through me, compounded by the fact that as soon as she was born, I would be taken away for the brain surgery I needed but couldn't have while pregnant. It would be a cruel irony if my daughter survived only to lose me when she was just a few days old.

As I write this book, I'm living in Melbourne Australia, the strictest city in the world as far as Covid restrictions are concerned. I wanted my daughter to be surrounded by the family who would love and care for her, building connections with the people who would be so important in her life. Instead, it was just the two of us, her father no longer around. As I held my child, all I wanted to do was cry. It felt like an impossible dream to be able to care for her in the way she deserved. I felt like a total failure and her life had only just begun.



It's hard to look back at that time. I was filled with self-recrimination. I was a successful parenting coach! Motherhood should have been easy and yet it was the hardest thing I'd ever done. I was stuck in a downward emotional spiral and the worse things got, the more I beat myself up for not being able to snap out of it.

On 8th November 2020, I underwent brain surgery. It was a frightening time. I was separated from Grace for five days when all I wanted to do was hold her all the time.

Now I'm incredibly grateful for that time. Stuck in a bed with nothing to do but stare at the ceiling, I was able to think about my life and why I'd had all the experiences I had.

This is when I turned a corner. I realised I could either continue to let parental burnout and overwhelm drag me down or I could start fresh. Being away from my daughter made this an easy decision. I knew how blessed I was to have been given the gift of motherhood and that time showed me that I was here for a purpose: to help parents who were feeling just like I was find their way out of parental burnout.

I know first-hand that parental burnout comes with a whole array of symptoms, but you can learn to identify and effectively manage them - if you know how. In this eBook you'll learn:

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- What striving for perfectionism really teaches children?
- Preventative strategies for parental burnout
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This eBook gives you five simple steps you can implement **right now** to reduce parental burnout and boost your parenting confidence! If that sounds good, turn the page and let's get started!



CHAPTER

#1

THE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKPLACE AND PARENTAL BURNOUT



Children do not need superhuman, perfect parents. They have always managed with good enough parents: the parents they happened to have
– Penelope Leach



THE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORKPLACE AND PARENTAL BURNOUT

Did you know that, according to the IIPB Consortium study, **up to 5 million U.S. parents experience parental burnout each year?**

And in the UK, Action for Children research shows a shocking **82% of parents** display at least one of the warning signs of parental burnout as a result of the pandemic? This is believed to be due to various factors including social isolation, children acting out and needing to spend more time parenting.

Scary stuff, huh? Now I don't want to alarm you even further, but it gets worse. Picture the scene: your boss calls you in the middle of the night, waking you up because he has an urgent project, he absolutely positively needs you to do right now! He gets so worked up about needing you to get up and do the work, he starts screaming at you. You'd hang up, right?

Now imagine your boss absolutely loves your work. He tells you you're the best employee in the world and nobody could possibly be as amazing as you. He's full of praise right up until the point where you do a project the same way you always have. You present him with your work only to have him throw it away, telling you that it's the worst project he's ever seen, and he can't think why you would have thought it would be good enough.

You'd quit, wouldn't you? You'd have to for the sake of your mental health.

Now consider having to put up with being treated like this, putting in long hours for no pay and with no idea what your project deadlines are or what your boss expects you to do at any given moment. It's basically slave labour, which I'm pretty sure is a breach of your human rights!

Yet this is a good representation of what parenting can be like. Your 'boss' is your child, and their wants and needs are changing all the time. This unpredictability is hard to deal with, but you've got no choice but to be on duty 24/7.

When you compare workplace and parental burnout, it's not difficult to see that parental burnout can be much harder to deal with. There's no walking away from it and finding another child!

WHAT IS PARENTAL BURNOUT?

According to the WHO's ICD-11, burnout is a condition which arises from chronic workplace stress which has not been effectively managed. It is characterised by three main symptoms:

- Feeling drained or exhausted.
- Feeling increasingly distant from your job or feeling negativity or cynicism towards your job.
- Reduced professional performance.



Now translate those feelings to your family. Parental burnout extends so much further than simply not wanting to do the household chores or tackle family responsibilities. The consequences on your physical and mental health are far reaching and impact on everyone in the family unit.

In the next chapter we'll dive deeper into the symptoms of parental burnout so you can identify it.



CHAPTER #2

THE FOUR MAIN SYMPTOMS OF PARENTAL BURNOUT



*There is no way to be a perfect mother and a million ways to be a good one
– Jill Churchill*



Society places so much pressure on all of us to be the perfect parent. Our social media feeds are filled with picture perfect families with big, happy smiles on their faces as they bake cakes or craft together. We don't see the moment a couple of minutes later where the children start squabbling over who gets to lick the spoon or they fingerprint all over the walls.

So we put more and more pressure on ourselves to live up to an impossible ideal, telling ourselves that we're doing the right thing by putting our children's needs first at the expense of our own. But are we really doing our children any favours by catering to their every whim? When you tie yourself up in knots trying to please your children all the time, what are you teaching them about how the real-world works? I'm not saying that you should go in the opposite direction and let your child go off and play in traffic either but finding that balance which supports your child but also meets your needs will improve all your lives immeasurably. What's more, it'll make sure you avoid the toll parental burnout takes. There are four main symptoms of parental burnout. If you recognise any of these in yourself, don't worry. I'll be going into what you can do to combat them later in this book, but before you can tackle a problem you have to know exactly what you're dealing with first.



1. EXHAUSTION

As a parent, it can sometimes feel like being physically and emotionally exhausted is a permanent state of being. When you have a perfect storm of sleep deprivation, too many responsibilities, and attempting to meet the (sometimes conflicting) needs of your children combined with very little to no time to take care of yourself, it's unsurprising that energy is a thing of the past. There was a time when you could stay up all night partying and go to work fresh as a daisy the next morning, but these days it's all you can do to sleepwalk through life.

2. EMOTIONAL DISTANCE

Another sign of parental burnout is feeling emotionally distant from your children. Where you once dreamed of a close bond with your little ones, now you'd rather do anything other than be with them. You've lost any joy you might have felt about parenting. When you do play or interact with your children, you're not really mentally or emotionally present. Instead, you feel utterly drained. You're going through the motions, but nobody's home.

3. FEELING INEFFECTIVE

When you know you're not performing at your best, you feel like you're completely ineffective. Some say that the cause of parental burnout is the difference between all the demands of being a parent compared to what may seem like precious few rewards for this thankless role. While I do think there is a lot to be said for this as a reason for developing burnout, there's a fourth factor at play as well.

4. FEELING GUILTY

Sometimes it feels like parenting is nothing but non-stop guilt. If you're anything like me, you can feel awful when you say no to your child. Taking time out for yourself feels like a guilty pleasure instead of a well-earned reward. Somewhere along the line we bought into the myth that being a parent meant you had to give and give but expect nothing in return. And as for complaining about how tough it is to be a parent? Forget about it! It's non-stop cupcake baking and fingerpainting, remember?! When you're struggling, you can feel an enormous amount of guilt for not loving being a parent. There's guilt in admitting you need help. You feel guilty because you're not perfect, you have fears, you make mistakes, you're vulnerable. Do you know what? You're human. But that can be little consolation when you're lost in the middle of parental burnout. This guilt is one of the leading cause of the emotional issues so many parents suffer and when you're burnt out, that guilt makes it almost impossible to ask for help. And so you push it to one side, feeling more and more isolated and alone.



THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL BURNOUT

If you recognise yourself in the symptoms listed above, then it looks like you're suffering from parental burnout my friend. And much as I don't want to worry you, the consequences of parental burnout can be severe, including:

- Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, addiction, emotional eating, etc.
 - Emotional issues, such as irritability, easily agitated and emotional outbursts
 - Insomnia
 - Emotional distance and disconnection from your children
-
- Marital difficulties. It is also possible that if one parent suffers from burnout, the other will also follow them into burnout. After all, if one parent is too overwhelmed to fulfil their obligations, they'll gradually step back from their responsibilities, leaving the other to pick up the slack so they both end up stressed.
 - An increased risk of violence or neglect
 - Your children may learn negative life lessons, such as love equals struggle and suffering, or you can only care for someone else if you martyr yourself. Children are sensitive creatures, so if they feel that your problems are because of them, they'll start trying to make themselves small so they're not more of a burden to you, setting themselves up for a lifetime of low self-esteem and self-confidence. They can develop an avoidant or perfectionist mindset, going on to repeat the same negative, self-destructive patterns they've watched their parents play out.

Nobody wants to experience any of this, and I don't want to frighten you, but it's important for you to understand just how serious the consequences of parental burnout can be. The most important thing is that you know there is hope – and we're going on to how you can avoid parental burnout in the very next chapter.





CHAPTER #3

CHAPTER THREE: HOW TO PREVENT PARENTAL BURNOUT



Parents are not perfect nor are they saints. Dads and moms make mistakes all the time. How you handle these situations will be an important life lesson for your children

– Bethany Bridges



In Western culture, we're not very good at being less than perfect. Discussing parental problems is still very much taboo and that's something which needs to change. If we're going to tackle parental burnout together, we all need to be comfortable talking about the tough times rather than ignoring them and hoping they'll go away.

THINK ABOUT YOUR PRIORITIES

It's great if you can lovingly prepare homemade cookies for your child's lunch. It's wonderful if your home is spotless. But if you've only got the energy to clean or cuddle your child, which do you really feel is more important?

I hate to say it, but when they said working parents could have it all, they lied. There's only so much of you to go round! And if you've been working hard all day, maybe juggling the stress of adjusting to homeschooling and working from home on top of that, it is absolutely okay to decide that you'd rather have fun with your kids than give the house a quick vacuum.

While it's not impossible to have a perfectly presented home when you've got children, unless you have a cleaner, keeping the house in show condition all the time usually involves sacrificing something – and if that something isn't quality time with your children then you can bet it's quality time spent on self-care.

Take a step back and ask yourself – are you pouring all your energy into keeping the practical aspects of family life going at the expense of a strong emotional connection with your children? Do you have any time or energy for your children? If you do, do you resent spending it with your kids because that's time you can't use to recharge your own batteries?

STOP TRYING TO BE PERFECT AND INSTEAD WORK ON BEING PRESENT.

A few months down the road your kids won't remember that cupcake with sprinkles you spent hours baking for them, but they will remember you taking them to the park or playing games.

Burnout doesn't develop because you don't have enough time or energy; it occurs because you're mismanaging your time and are putting your energy where it doesn't need to be due to misplaced priorities.

Take a moment to look at what your current schedule looks like and get organised about what you do with your time:

1. You know that you have to devote x amount of time to work. This is non-negotiable, so mark that time off your calendar.
2. You will also have regular family commitments, such as children's activities. Set that time aside – this is another non-negotiable. Eat your meals together – chatting about your day over the dinner table for half an hour is much better for family connections than passively watching TV for a few hours.
3. Now look at how much time you have left. Make sure you block off time for yourself so you can relax, recharge and reflect. This is also non-negotiable!

If you haven't been making regular time for yourself, it might feel really strange at first to actively schedule time to devote to yourself, but it's such a crucial habit if you're going to beat parental burnout. We all need time to recuperate from daily stresses and strains. Running yourself into the ground helps no one. There's a reason why air stewards tell you to put on your own oxygen mask before assisting anyone else. Self-care isn't selfish – it's essential!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE

Parenting can be a lonely role. It's easy to feel that you're isolated and there's no one who can help. In fact, there are a number of different ways in which you can get support to make things a little easier.

GIVE YOUR CHILD AGE-APPROPRIATE CHORES

Believe me, the earlier you can get your child involved in helping out around the home, the easier it becomes to maintain the habit. When they're little, doing chores is fun – your children just want to be like mum or dad!

When they're toddlers, be prepared to be on kiddie time. Chores will take longer but consider this an opportunity to spend quality time together. They can help you make the bed or pick up toys after themselves. They can help with mopping or dusting – try putting socks on their hands and see how much fun they have wiping dust off surfaces.

As they get older, you can increase the range of chores your children do. Preschoolers can help set the table, put away groceries and start helping out with preparing food. Primary school aged children can vacuum and mop, take out the rubbish and put away laundry. Tweens can wash dishes or load the dishwasher, clean the bathroom and do their own laundry. Teenagers can do pretty much any chores – just be aware that they'll be juggling chores with schoolwork so don't overload them.

Once you start spreading the household chore load, you'll realise that you really don't have to be doing everything yourself – and you'll be teaching your children important life skills in the process.

ASK FOR HELP OR HIRE A SITTER

Often, the reason why friends or family don't help out is because they have no idea you need help! Don't be afraid to ask for help. Ask people what you need them to do. You may be surprised by how willing people are to lend a hand.

If you don't have any family and you really don't know anyone who can help, budget for a sitter. Whether you're in a relationship or single, an evening away from the kids works wonders to lift your mood and give you new perspectives.

You might even want to really treat yourself and get a cleaner. Many parents' sanity has been saved because they got someone else to handle the chores, removing one less stress and giving themselves the treat of coming home to a clean house after work.

Another option is to work with a parenting coach who can help you identify the best ways to manage your time effectively and get your priorities in order. An objective outsider can make the difference between promising yourself you're going to do things differently and actually living up to that promise.

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Are you struggling to maintain the life you think you 'should' have because you have unrealistic expectations? We set ourselves up for failure if we're trying to achieve the impossible.

If you're expecting your children to do or behave in a way which they're simply not developmentally ready for, everyone's going to be disappointed. That's only going to add to the stress you're already under. Likewise, if you're putting pressure on yourself to meet impossible standards, you're only going to make yourself feel even worse, which will continue the negative cycle.

Be realistic about what you can ask of yourself and your children. Meet them where they are and not where you would like them to be and everyone will be so much happier.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Remember when I mentioned scheduling time for yourself? It's so important that I'm repeating the point here.

Self-care is one of the most effective ways in which you can combat parental burnout. It's entirely up to you what that looks like. Maybe you might like to sign up for an exercise class. Exercise is a great way of getting a release of endorphins, your brain's natural mood boosters. Arrange regular coffee meetups with good friends. Transform a bath into a home spa with candles, bath oils and soothing music. Do whatever makes you feel good and allows you a little escapism from the daily grind.

And above all, be kind to yourself. Become your own best friend and treat yourself the way you would if someone you cared about was going through your situation. What advice would you give a friend? Follow it for yourself and stop being so hard on yourself because you're not perfect.

It's okay to be human.





CHAPTER #4

THE FIVE STEPS TO PARENTAL RECOVERY



It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it
— Lou Holtz



If you find yourself suffering from parental burnout, there is a way out.

1. BETTER TIME MANAGEMENT

We've discussed the importance of managing your time and ensuring that you're devoting enough attention to what's truly important – which includes yourself. Remember, children may develop behavioural problems if they feel like you're not spending enough time with them, but if the time and attention they get from you is high quality, they'll be more understanding when you have to stay at work late.

It might feel a little strange at first, but make sure to schedule sit down meals with your children as well as time to play and read stories together. These will all help you build stronger bonds and when you make this a non-negotiable your children appreciate that you value them enough to give them the attention they need.

Schedule time with other important people in your life as well, such as your partner, family and friends. Adult relationships are critical in helping you maintain perspective and stay sane! Don't forget the most important person of all – you. Time for self-care is another non-negotiable and it should feature regularly in your schedule.

2. SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND SLOW DOWN TO SPEED UP

When you're feeling stressed, it's easy to get frustrated or impatient with your children. When a child ignores your requests, deliberately goes out of their way to annoy you or slams their bedroom door in your face, it's completely understandable for you to want to snap. However, being impatient with your child can make things worse. It certainly won't solve anything.

One of the biggest lessons I've had to learn as a mum is to slow down. Our children teach us to take our time and I find it fascinating how I get more done when I take a step back and breathe.

Make sure you have reasonable expectations of your child in line with their current age, ability and aptitude. It's unfair to expect a toddler to wait quietly for an hour while you finish that business call, so if you know that you're going to need your child to be patient, either prepare some activities in advance to entertain them (and don't expect the TV to be a babysitter for hours on end!), get someone else to spend time with them, or switch your schedule so you can do whatever it is at a time when you won't have to consider your child's needs.

When you are more aware of your child's current abilities, needs and wants, it becomes easier to fulfil them. When you have confidence in giving your child what they need, you lower the risk of burnout.

And don't be afraid to seek professional help. If you're finding it impossible to stop yelling and you feel it's the only way your children will listen, consider working with a therapist to find more effective, child-friendly ways of communicating.

3. FORGET KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES AND BUILD A NURTURING HOME ENVIRONMENT INSTEAD

Many parents fall into the trap of thinking that if they can buy their children everything they want, then their children will be happy. In fact, research carried out by the Center on Wealth and Philanthropy at Boston College found that wealthy families still had multiple concerns over their children's happiness, even though they could afford to buy them everything they wanted.

Your child's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing are determined by the positive nature of their relationships with the people around them, as well as how much compassion and affection they receive. This has absolutely no connection to how much money you make. Now I'm not saying you should just go and quit your job. We've all still got bills to pay! But if you've bought into the myth that you have to maintain a certain lifestyle, it's time to re-evaluate, my friend. Children want your time more than they want your money and by the time that changes, all the money in the world won't buy a stronger connection with your children.

Take a long hard look at exactly why you're doing what you're doing and see if there's a better way of achieving what you want. You may find that a lower paid job with fewer hours is far more fulfilling. Or, you may find that by changing the way you work you can get more done in less time with energy left over for your family. You'll find more suggestions on how you can restructure your work life and regain balance in the Focused Family Formula.

4. BECOME A CALM-ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATOR AND PRACTICE EMPATHETIC LISTENING

Calm-assertive communication involves expressing yourself in a way which is straightforward but also takes into account the other person's wants and needs. It can take a while to change how you communicate to be in alignment with calm-assertiveness, but it pays dividends once you've mastered it. You can't control how someone will respond to you, but you can control your reaction to them, so by keeping your cool when your child is screaming in your face, you make it easier for your child to develop emotional regulation.

Try asking your child questions rather than making demands of them. For example, instead of telling them to clean up the dishes after they've finished eating, you could ask "do you think you could clean up after yourself once you're done?"

If your child really doesn't want to listen or is determined to pick a fight with you, use the [broken record technique](#). No matter how much they try to take you off topic, you bring it back to the subject at hand. Keep doing it until you've sorted out whatever it is you needed to talk about.

Empathetic listening is probably the most crucial part of good communication. Sometimes the best thing you can do is simply listen!

When listening, be non-judgemental and give your child your complete attention. Listen to what they're saying without interruption and once they've finished talking, restate and paraphrase to confirm you understood what they were telling you. Let them correct you when necessary.

When your child feels heard, it makes a huge difference to how they interact with you.

5. LOSE THE PERFECTIONISM AND FOCUS YOUR MINDSET

Few of us were actively taught parenting skills. We've picked them up by osmosis, usually based on what our parents did – or didn't! – teach us. As I've discovered myself, parenting can be nothing but questioning your decisions and constantly worrying whether you're doing the right thing. Unfortunately, that worry is a direct route to parental burnout.

I promise you; you're doing a better job than you think you are. The very fact you're reading this book shows how devoted you are to your children. Lose your attachment to perfectionism and understand that doing your best will always be good enough, even on those days when it doesn't feel like it.

Talk about how you're feeling and the challenges you're facing. Talk to your spouse, parents, siblings, close friends, or a parenting expert, anyone who would help you to improve your self-esteem and self-confidence. This will help you know that you're always acting on your best judgment and making informed choices.

It'll also give you that much needed reassurance of hearing you're doing a great job. You really are!





CHAPTER #5

THE POWER OF ACT AND WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP



The best inheritance a parent can give his children is a few minutes of his time each day
-- O.A. Battista



One of the most effective ways of lowering any feelings of failure is by following the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). Your experiences have all brought you to this moment. What have you learned from them? How would you do things differently next time?



As you start to do things a different way, be aware that it's not going to be plain sailing. Trying something new is always going to need a bit of time to adjust. Set realistic expectations for your child – and yourself! – and don't be discouraged when things aren't perfect straightaway.

Keep going! There's always going to be some resistance to change, but if you can stay confident in yourself and your parenting abilities, you'll find things become easier over time.

Use the theory of coaching not controlling. This is often used within the workplace, but it works just as effectively in the home. When everyone feels like they're part of a team, relationships naturally improve as a consequence.

Traditional parenting styles followed principles like 'children should be seen and not heard' and 'do what I tell you to do without question.' It is now widely acknowledged that this approach is detrimental to your child's development. Transition from a 'command and control' approach by practising 'connection and direction' with empathetic listening and calm-assertive communication which will validate your child's emotional state and support them to grow into the amazing human being they were born to be.

By following the advice in this book, you should see an improvement in your family dynamics. However, you may still find yourself questioning whether you're doing the right thing or simply need a little external validation. Maybe the thought of trying to make a change by yourself is yet another thing adding to the overwhelm.

It's okay. It's perfectly normal to feel this way. And it's a sign that you may benefit from professional help.

You have a number of options. You might like to consult a therapist or a counsellor. Find one who specialises in your specific family dynamic and offers the type of therapy you need.

Alternatively, as a parenting coach, I offer a wide range of tried and tested tools and techniques in my Focused Family Formula to help you develop the strategies your family needs to conquer parental burnout once and for all.

Whatever option you choose, I wish you the very best. You've got this!

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

The Focused Family Formula:

<https://deborahbyrne.com>

Research on whether money really buys happiness for wealthy families:

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/07-08/money>

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

<https://positivepsychology.com/act-acceptance-and-commitment-therapy/>