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**Self-Care Techniques to Decrease Special Education Teacher Burnout**

Carrie Frost

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Science

### **Introduction**

The focal topic of my capstone project is special education teacher burnout and how self-care techniques can reduce the likelihood of chronic stress and burnout. The challenges of being a special education teacher include but are not limited to, various disabilities and behaviors, lack of classroom and administration support, and overall management. Research conducted by Emery and Vandenberg (2010) stated that special education teachers often experience burnout, which commonly leads to employee attrition. Burnout and the personal stress that comes with it are the biggest contributors to the shortage of qualified special educators throughout the United States. Their challenges involve the overall classroom size, various disabilities, lack of management skills, and overall support from administration, parents, and other teachers. This presents a need for self-care strategies and various services that help special education teachers deal with burnout and stress. To address this issue, I will present a workshop that teaches special education teachers various self-care strategies aimed at reducing job burnout. This one-time workshop will be presented to a group of six special education teachers who work at a nonpublic, individualized educational school; Brite Horizons in Scotts Valley, California. The children at this school have various disabilities. These students have often been expelled from public school due to the SPED programs not being able to handle their behaviors. In my workshop, I will first address why special educators experience burnout. Second, I will analyze the negative effects that special educator burnout has on the school, the children, and the teachers themselves. Third, I will discuss different self-care techniques that aim to decrease job burnout.

### **Needs Statement**

The special education field is a diverse and complex environment to work in. Special Education classrooms hold a range of students with various disabilities and disorders. These

students are at an increased risk for mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, as well as academic failure, low peer acceptance, and overall chronic stress compared to non-disabled students (Cancio et al., 2018). Those who professionally take on the responsibility of caring for these high-risk students are a high-risk group themselves. This issue is of great concern because SPED teachers are at higher risk of chronic stress and burnout in the teaching profession. This is due to the unique and complicated nature of their responsibilities (Brunsting et al., 2021). Yet, special education students need qualified and stable teachers to best support their needs and development. To mediate this problem, special education teachers need to manage their stress. First, they have to understand the reasons why their profession has a high burnout rate. Then, they should recognize the effects it can have on the students as well as the teacher. Finally, they should be conscious of how to support their well-being by implementing various self-care techniques. My capstone workshop will be presented to six special education teachers to showcase stress-reduction techniques that they can implement inside and outside of the classroom.

Burnout, in relation to jobs and careers, has been defined as a condition that develops over time in response to chronic and toxic stress (Marshall et al., 2023). Stress happens when someone encounters a challenge, problem, or threat. Although healthy in moderation, prolonged or chronic stress can be harmful to the individual (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). When chronic stress creates other challenges in the individual's functioning, it is known as toxic stress. When teachers and other professionals experience chronic and toxic stress in their work environment or profession, there is a higher probability for them to experience burnout. It comes on gradually and eventually makes work feel unfilling and unpleasant (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). The concept of burnout is commonly divided into three dimensions: feeling a

lack of accomplishment, detachment from the job, and exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001). These factors create the perfect recipe for burnout and often lead to individuals leaving their profession.

When it comes to the field of special education, burnout is prevalent and of high concern. Research has shown that special educators have been in short supply for over two decades (Canico et al., 2018). This statistic showcases the amount of stress that teachers in this field experience. It also exemplifies that those still teaching in this field have more weight on their shoulders due to the low number of teachers and overall lack of support. The United States Department of Education (2023) collected data from the 2021-2022 school year and concluded that there were 7.3 million school-aged children who received special education services in the public school system. There were about 429,486 special education teachers during the 2021-2022 school year. This means that there is about one teacher for every 16 students. Considering the various challenging behaviors and disabilities, there are not nearly enough special education teachers to successfully manage and help each student in need. Although the need for special educators is apparent, not much has been implemented to address or even solve this issue. According to Garwood (2022), “Approximately 13% of special educators leave the field every year and another 20% switch to general education, resulting in an annual attrition rate of 33%”. This high rate of SPED teachers experiencing burnout leads to attrition, ultimately leaving the children without the consistent care that they so desperately thrive on.

It is important to discover the potential causes of SPED teacher burnout to successfully combat this harmful trend. As we have determined, SPED teachers are essential workers and their drastic rate of burnout is concerning. Marilyn Kaff (2004) discovered three main categories that influence SPED teacher burnout and the ultimate decision to leave this field: Administrative Issues, Classroom Issues, and Personal Issues. First, administrative concerns

involve SPED teachers feeling under-supported by those above and around them. These teachers state that to fulfill their job responsibilities, they need administrators, general education colleagues, and family to support their efforts. The lack of understanding and support from those in the school system is also a main contributor to teacher burnout. This issue causes special educators to feel more stressed and therefore affects their overall success in teaching. Second, classroom concerns focus on the number of students per teacher and the wide range of disabilities, including Emotional and Behavioral Issues and Intellectual Disabilities. A study done by Garwood (2022), claimed that lack of self-efficacy for behavior management holds a strong weight to burnout. SPED teachers feel as though these classroom issues make it difficult for them to meet the needs of all of their students, leading to a lack of teaching efficacy. Third, the two previously stated concerns eventually create issues within the SPED teachers themselves. Lack of support, demanding workload, and various disabilities put a strain on the mental health of SPED teachers which then leads to burnout. SPED teachers lose confidence in their ability to manage their students' behavior. These feelings correlate to higher rates of emotional exhaustion and thus lead to burnout (Garwood, 2022).

SPED teacher burnout has negative effects on the students, the school's overall function, and on the teachers themselves. It has been discovered that teacher burnout that leads to attrition is a financial burden on the school (Garwood, 2022). Fewer SPED teachers are entering the field and even more leaving. This has, in turn, negatively affected the school's overall function and security. Studies have also found that a majority of burned-out teachers stay in the field. Their then burnt-out feelings project negative consequences on the students (Garwood, 2022). Teachers who are experiencing burnout tend to have worse communication and empathy for their students, this is especially crucial in the special education field. This ultimately hinders the student's

growth. They are less likely to achieve the expectations of their Individualized Education Program (Brunsting et al., 2021). These students who require focused, individualized, consistent care are unable to socially and academically advance due to SPED teacher burnout. In addition, a majority of teachers experiencing burnout suffer from various health problems, including chronic fatigue and depression (Garwood, 2022). These health issues can affect their overall mood and outlook which affects their teaching style. Teachers often begin to teach in a more authoritarian style when trying to manage the various behaviors. This leads to an increase in problem behaviors in their students, rather than the targeted goal of decreasing the undesirable behaviors (Garwoods, 2022). Overall, no one benefits from SPED teachers experiencing frequent and severe burnout. This solidifies the need to address this problem.

An effective way to mediate or even prevent the effects of SPED teacher burnout is to teach and implement various self-care strategies and stress-reducing techniques. These skills can be used in and outside of the classroom. Maslach's Theory of Burnout believes that those experiencing burnout often use depersonalization, or detachment from their job, to cope with their stress and feelings of burnout (Ruble et al., 2023). As one may imagine, this leads to less effective teaching. Instead of this, one positive self-care strategy that should be used is mindfulness. Mindfulness is described as nonjudgmental, attentive, and receptive awareness of the present moment (Benn et al., 2012). It makes one consider others' feelings, thoughts, and perceptions in the current situation to better understand what is needed to move forward. Various studies have discovered connections between increased levels of mindfulness and a reduction in psychological stress (Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019). Despite mindfulness being associated with improvements in health, only about 5% of the population practice this self-care strategy (Donahoo et al., 2017). This stress-reduction strategy can be used briefly inside the classroom in

times of need as well as more in-depth outside of the classroom to create long-lasting improvements. There are various ways to learn and practice mindfulness. One way to learn and practice mindfulness that has been proven to decrease burnout symptoms is an application-based intervention called Smiling Mind (Russell & Smyth, 2023). Psychologists and educators developed this application which gives users a wide variety of guided mindfulness meditation across hundreds of programs. I will use this intervention in my workshop by requesting my participants to download the application. I will then give them time to explore what the application has to offer. From here, we will choose one guided mindfulness practice and do it together. This will provide the participants with a basis of what mindfulness consists of and how it works.

It is important to also address coping strategies and stress management techniques that can be used during class so the teacher can efficiently regulate their emotions throughout their day. Although mindfulness can be of lengthy duration when used in meditation, other aspects can be used to recenter individuals in a shorter period. A program known as BREATHE-EASE (Burnout Reduction: Enhanced Awareness, Tools, Handouts, and Education: Evidence-based Activities for Stress for Educators) (Ruble et al., 2023) was developed to give skills and strategies to reduce teacher burnout. This intervention not only focuses on contemplative practices such as deep breathing and mindfulness but also cognitive practices such as reconnecting to the meaning and value of their job. It provided simplistic mindfulness activities such as setting intentions and boundaries for the day, music therapy, sitting quietly (control), and journaling. The development of this intervention and its implementation has shown improvement in the overall well-being of special educators. According to research by Salyers et al. (2011), a one-day workshop found "...large reductions in emotional exhaustion, moderate reductions in



depersonalization, and small but significant improvements in consumer optimism”. By learning, practicing, and implementing these provided strategies, SPED teachers can better avoid or change the path of SPED teacher burnout.

Undoubtedly, the issue of SPED teacher burnout is widespread. Research conducted by Billingsley and Bettini (2019) showed that 49 states reported a shortage of special educators in the United States. This is a problem that needs to be addressed immediately. Burnout syndrome is something that can be mediated or avoided completely. My capstone workshop will directly educate SPED teachers about this issue. I will inform them about the three dimensions of burnout identified in Maslach’s theory of burnout. We will dive into the issues causing SPED burnout through all levels: administrative, school, and teachers. We will then analyze how this issue translates into affecting both the students as well as the teacher. Finally, we will discuss numerous self-care strategies that have been proven through research to reduce burnout overall.

### **Theory**

My capstone project has been guided by the theory discovered and researched by Christina Maslach. Maslach believes that burnout is a psychological syndrome that responds to chronic job stressors (Taris et al., 2005). The theory focuses on three various responses that measure the dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Doherty et al., 2021). This theory claims that these subcategories predict one’s overall job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and rate of attrition. Maslach defined emotional exhaustion as feeling overextended and depleted. The reduction of personal accomplishment is developing or having negative feelings towards any accomplishments regarding work. Depersonalization is having a distant or cynical attitude towards people at work

or work itself (Taris et al., 2005). Experiencing any or all three of these feelings has been linked to burnout by the Maslach Burnout Inventory theory.

Maslach's Burnout Inventory theory applies to my capstone project because it addresses my topic of concern, burnout. Although this theory is not specific to any group of individuals, it can directly apply to SPED teachers. In aiming to reduce the rate of burnout in SPED teachers, it is crucial to understand what burnout is and its various symptoms. Maslach's theory brings evidence to my project that three categories are valid predictors in the process and completion of burnout. I will first start by defining these three responses to my participants. Then, I will use these responses to have my participants address their current stage of burnout. I will provide them with a self-assessment worksheet that addresses feelings and statements that correspond to these three dimensions. From here, I am better able to provide self-care, and stress reduction techniques to best combat these three feelings that forecast job burnout.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

My capstone workshop was conducted at my place of employment, Brite Horizons School, located in Scotts Valley, California. This is a nonpublic school that serves grades one to 12. This school provides individualized educational services for students with a variety of specialized needs. The teaching staff here consists of three full-time special education teachers as well as three special education student teachers. These teachers range from 24 years old to 47 years old. Our youngest student teacher has been teaching in schools for three years whereas our oldest teacher has been teaching for 25 years. Due to this, I had to take into consideration the large age range and various years of teaching experience in my workshop. I made sure to address this diversity in the group by making it a point of conversation in the workshop. Each teacher

was able to introduce themselves and their experience in teaching to provide a basis for others in the workshop.

Regarding race and ethnicity, the information presented was collected verbally from the participants. Two of the teachers are Hispanic males. The other teacher is a white female. The student teachers consist of two males and one they/them. Their ethnicities are Hawaiian, Native American, and white. To ensure that race and ethnicity were considered in my workshop, I allowed time and space for the participants to share their individual experiences with burnout and the effects it can cause. I wanted to be mindful that they each have their feelings regarding this topic and they can teach me and the others their side of the story. By being considerate of the diversity of my participants, I believe my workshop was more inviting and beneficial to those participating in it.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Special education teachers have a high rate of burnout. A one-time, hour-long workshop will be presented to a group of six special education teachers at Brite Horizons School in Scotts Valley, California to mediate this issue. This workshop will discuss research on burnout and various self-care techniques to avoid burnout. After this workshop, my participants will be able to...

1. Identify three reasons why special education teachers experience frequent job burnout.
2. Describe an adverse effect that teacher burnout has on them and their students.
3. Indicate which self-care strategy they will most likely use in the future to reduce burnout and why.

### **Method**

#### **Location and Participants**

My capstone workshop was conducted at Brite Horizons School in Scotts Valley, California. The purpose of this school is to have a specialized program that focuses solely on children with behavioral and emotional problems. The team uses Applied Behavior Analysis to decrease undesirable behaviors and replace them with positive behaviors. I presented this workshop to six individuals who currently work at this school. There were three special education teachers and three student teachers. Four of the six participants work in the elementary side of the school, two teachers, and two student teachers. The other teacher and student teacher work in the middle and high school classrooms. My participants' ages ranged from 24 years old to 47 years old. They also varied in how long they have been working professionally in this field. One of the student teachers has been teaching in special education for three years whereas the high school teacher has been working as a special educator for 25 years. The other teachers' experiences range between these two. There are three male teachers, two female teachers, and one they/them teacher. Their ethnic backgrounds vary quite a lot. Two of the participants label themselves as white. There is one Native American teacher, a Hawaiian teacher, and two Hispanic teachers. They all speak English, two of them speak fluently in Spanish, and one of them is fluent in American Sign Language.

### **Procedure and Materials**

The one-time workshop was approximately an hour long and detailed four topics and lessons that were each about 15 minutes long. In the end, there was a 5-minute long assessment (Appendix B) presented to the participants of the workshop to test their learnings on my three learning outcomes. Before presenting my lessons, I allowed the participants to introduce themselves and their teaching experiences. I then introduced myself and the work of my Capstone that had guided this presentation. Then, I presented them with a preliminary

assessment of teacher burnout (Appendix D). This assessment addressed the subcategories of teacher burnout including career satisfaction, perceived administrative support, coping with job-related stress, and attitudes towards students. The participants took this survey, answering each statement on a sliding scale from disagree to agree. This provided a basis for the individuals to assess where they are on the scale of burnout, or if they are experiencing burnout at all. After taking this survey for approximately 3 minutes, I provided group discussion prompts (Appendix B ) for the participants to talk about this assessment together and reflect on their status of personal job burnout.

The focus of the first part of my workshop was to gain a holistic understanding of what burnout is in relation to jobs (Appendix D). I presented them with the general definition of burnout and the three dimensions that have been discovered to create burnout syndrome. Next, I presented information on the specific area of special education teacher burnout. I provided statistics that showed just how prominent special educator teacher burnout is. I showed them how many students require special education and how frequently special educators experience burnout and ultimately leave the profession. Then, I stated to my participants, “We know that burnout exists. But why is it important to address special education Teacher burnout specifically?” I paused and waited for the participants to think. One participant raised their hand and stated, “Because it's hard”. Everyone laughed. I then said, “Yes, exactly.”

This provided a transition to my next topic and my first learning outcome (Appendix D). We began to discuss the topic of ‘Why do special education teachers experience burnout?’ Before presenting any information, I provided an opportunity for the participants to answer this question. Each participant had a thinking face on, but no answers were said aloud. I then went to my next slide which showed three different reasons: Administrative Issues, Personal Issues, and

Classroom Issues. I then asked my participants if they could provide any specific examples of issues that fall into one of these categories. One participant raised their hand and stated, ‘Personal issues could involve things happening at home with finances or relationships’. Another participant raised their hand and stated, “Administrative issues could be not having enough support in the classroom”. I praised them for their answers and then moved on to my next slide which went into specific detail about each category. My objective for this part of the workshop was for the participants to understand the three main areas that contribute to special education teacher burnout.

Next, we moved on to my second learning objective, ‘Why does special education teacher burnout matter?’ I stated, “Although this may seem obvious due to the statistics we learned earlier, to address this problem we have the effects that this syndrome has”. The next slide showed four areas where burnout takes effect including the school system, students, teachers, and families (Appendix D). The slide after that went into depth about how special education teacher burnout affects these four areas. I then asked my participants if they had noticed any of the effects in Brite Horizons School. I told them to discuss this topic as a group. As they began their discussion, I walked around the room and listened to what they were saying. I heard statements such as “I know that for the students it hurts them, their development, and goals when we are not fully present. I've noticed that when I have a bad day, the kids will often feed off my energy and have a bad day too”. Another participant stated, “Often I come home stressed and still in the mindset of handling behaviors which are not healthy for my relationship with my partner. It can be hard for me to turn off my special educator hat and feel relaxed at home. Sometimes I feel guilty for not doing enough in the classroom or thinking how I could have done things differently. This leads to me feeling down about myself and my abilities”. The

participants continued to tell their observations and feelings for about 8 minutes. Due to time constraints, I had to end their discussion but I observed them immersed in this topic. My goal from this section of the workshop was to have the participants understand the four main areas that burnout affects.

The last educational part of the workshop to address my third learning objective was addressing various self-care strategies and techniques to help mediate the process of burnout (Appendix D). The first slide provided statistics and research on how self-care techniques have helped with burnout syndrome. The next slides provided three strategies that help reduce stress that can be performed immediately. These three techniques included being active, writing down three things that you are grateful for, and taking deep breaths. The next slide provided more extensive practices such as using mindfulness and the BREATHE-EASE app. We watched a 3-minute and 53-second video that explained mindfulness and provided an opportunity to practice. Each participant, including me, practiced mindfulness during this video. After this, I requested each participant to download the BREATHE-EASE app. I prompted them to explore the app for 5 minutes to see what it entails. The purpose of this section was to inform the participants of various self-care strategies that can help reduce stress and that they can use in and outside the classroom.

After informing the participants of these self-care techniques, the educational part of my workshop was concluded. I asked the group if there were any questions about anything discussed in this workshop. No one raised their hand. After that, I told the group they would take a short assessment to assess their learnings from this workshop. The assessment was provided to them through their emails as a Google Forms quiz (Appendix B) and it included four questions, one

multiple-choice question, and three short answer questions that addressed my three learning outcomes.

### **Results**

I designed a one-time workshop that focused on self-care strategies to reduce special education teacher burnout. I aimed to address three learning outcomes. The first outcome asked my participants to identify three reasons why special education teachers experience frequent job burnout. I assessed this outcome through a Google Forms quiz at the end of the workshop. that asked this exact outcome in question form. It was a multiple-choice question with five possible answers but only three correct answers. This assessment was worth three points, one point for each correct answer. I concluded that a passing score would be choosing two out of the three correct answers. After each participant submitted their answer, I viewed their results and five out of six of the teachers (83.3%) were able to identify the three reasons why special education teachers experience burnout (Appendix C). The other participant was able to choose all three correct answers as well as one incorrect answer. Since they still chose the correct answers, they still passed this learning outcome. Overall, my first learning outcome was fully met because all participants passed the quiz question by identifying all three reasons special educators experience burnout.

My second learning outcome focused on the participants being able to describe an adverse effect that teacher burnout has on them and their students. This outcome was assessed through two Google quiz short-answer questions at the end of the one-time workshop. The first question asked them to describe an effect that burnout has on the teacher. The second question asked them to describe an effect that burnout has on the students. Each one of these questions was worth one point. If they were able to state an effect for both questions that were given in the



presentation, they earned the point and passed that question. To pass the learning outcome overall, they need both points. Six out of six participants (100%) were able to identify both an effect that teacher burnout has on the student as well as the teacher (Appendix C). My second learning outcome was successfully met with a perfect score.

My last learning outcome asked the participants to indicate which self-care strategy they will most likely use in the future to reduce burnout and why. This was another short-answer Google Forms quiz question given at the end of my one-time workshop. This question was worth two points, one point for identifying a self-care strategy presented in the workshop that they would likely use in the future, and the second point for explaining why they chose that strategy. A passing score for this question was earning both points. Five out of six participants (83.3%) were able to identify both a self-care strategy and a reason why they would implement it in the future. One participant was able to identify a self-care strategy but did not give a reason as to why they chose it (Appendix C). They earned one out of two points for these questions and did not pass. Overall, over 75% of the participants passed this quiz and therefore this learning outcome was fully met.

### **Discussion**

The focus of my capstone project was to discover the root causes of special education teacher burnout and then provide attainable solutions of self-care strategies to reduce job-related stress and burnout overall. Throughout the workshop, I experienced various successes. First off, all of my learning outcomes were met. I believe this is attributed to having participants who were fully engaged in the workshop. This goes hand-in-hand with another success I believe I experienced. Through the in-person workshop, my six participants expressed how important this topic is to their lives. They confided in me and the other participants that they had all felt burnt

out at one point in their teaching career. They praised me for giving this topic attention as well as providing solutions that they can begin right away. Finally, a success that I felt past my workshop was one of the head special education teachers asking me to help implement a daily mindfulness activity for both the teachers and students. We worked together to find the correct moment and activity for everyone to practice mindfulness, set their intentions for the day, and stay present in each moment. This made me feel like my workshop was of value to those I presented it to and it resonated beyond the workshop.

Although I experienced various successes in my workshop, there were also limitations. The main thing I struggled with was the allotted time for the entire workshop. The only time I could get all the teachers together was after our monthly clinical meeting. They all agreed that they could give me an hour of their time before they had other priorities. This, in turn, made me feel rushed during my overall workshop. I kept checking the time to ensure I was on track which took some of my focus away from them and what I was presenting. I believe having another 30 minutes with them would have allowed me to go further in-depth with my workshop and provide more moments for them to give me feedback, ask questions, and have discussions.

Overall, I believe that my workshop was successful. If I were to continue this workshop, I would love for my next participants to be special education teachers who currently work in the public school system. I am curious as to how their ideas and comments would vary from my original participants. Something else I would like to do is make this a more longitudinal study. I would like to have my participants commit to practicing the presented self-care strategies for some time. I would then like to check in on them by having them retake their original self-assessment on burnout. I would like to see just how effective the self-care strategies can be for special education teachers. These educators need to know that their profession, although

rewarding, can be taxing. Just as they care endlessly about their students, they have to do the same for themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A:  
Workshop Slides

## Self-Care Techniques to Decrease Special Education Teacher Burnout



Carrie Frost  
Human Development and Family Science



### Introduction

- Special education teachers have been in short supply for over **two decades** (Canico et al., 2018)
- Workshop that addressed the root causes of SPED teacher burnout and provides obtainable solutions.

Why SPED teacher burnout?

### Needs Statement

Problem:	Solution:	Participants:
<p>There is a shortage of special education teachers due to a high rate burnout.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom sizes</li> <li>• Various Disabilities</li> <li>• Lack of admin support</li> </ul>	<p>This problem can be solved by better understanding burnout and implementing various self-care strategies that aim to decrease job related stress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 special education teachers</li> <li>- 3 special education student teachers</li> </ul>

### Theory

Maslach Burnout Inventory Theory by Christina Maslach

**Burnout:** psychological syndrome that responds to chronic job stressors

Three various responses that measure the dimensions of burnout:

Emotional Exhaustion	Reduced Personal Accomplishment	Depersonalization
<p>Feeling overextended and depleted</p>	<p>Developing or having negative feelings towards any accomplishments regarding work</p>	<p>Distant or cynical attitude towards people at work or work itself</p>

### Theory Application

- Used the three responses to measure each teachers current level of burnout
- Provided a guideline to understanding SPED burnout and its symptoms
- Helped apply self-care strategies and coping mechanisms to address the three dimensions of burnout

### Learning Outcomes

I designed a workshop on self-care strategies to reduce special education teacher burnout for a group of six participants. It focused on the following learning outcomes...

<p><b>1.</b> Teachers will be able to identify three reasons why they experience frequent job burnout.</p>	<p><b>2.</b> Teachers will be able to describe a adverse effect that teacher burnout has on them and their students.</p>	<p><b>3.</b> Teachers will indicate which self-care strategy they will most likely use in the future to reduce burnout and why.</p>
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### Method

**Location:**  
Brite Horizons School  
125 Bethany Drive, Scotts Valley, CA 95066

**Participants & Demographics:**

- 6 SPED Teachers
  - o 3 SPED Teachers, 3 Student Teachers
  - o 4 males, 1 female, 1 they/them
- Age range, 24-47 years old
- Range of years of experience

### Method

- One-day workshop via google slides, in person
- One hour long

Procedures	Materials
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introductions</li> <li>2. Self-Assessment</li> <li>3. Burnout Definition</li> <li>4. Why SPED teachers burnout</li> <li>5. Why SPED teacher burnout matters</li> <li>6. Self-care strategies to reduce SPED teacher burnout</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Google slides presentation</li> <li>- 'Teacher Burnout Scale' Self-Assessment Handout</li> <li>- Various group discussion prompts</li> <li>- Mindfulness video</li> <li>- App download + exploration</li> <li>- Google Form Quiz at the end of the presentation</li> </ul>

### Assessment Results for LO #1

**LO:** Identify three reasons why Special Education teachers experience frequent job burnout.

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**Assessment:**

- Quiz question, choose all answers that apply to why SPED teachers experience burnout (3 correct answers, 5 possibilities given)

**Results:**

- 5 out of 6 participant were able to correctly identify the three causes of burnout
- 1 participant choose the three correct answers and 1 incorrect answer

**Learning outcome was fully met.**

### Assessment Results for LO #2

**LO:** Describe a adverse effects that teacher burnout has on them and their students.

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**Assessment:**

- Asked participants two questions. First was to describe an effect burnout has on students. Second was to describe an effect that teacher have when experiencing burnout.

**Results:**

- 6 out of 6 participant were able to correctly describe one adverse effect that burnout has on the students as well as the teacher

**Learning outcome was fully met.**

### Assessment Results for LO #3

**LO:** Indicate which self-care strategy they will most likely use in the future to reduce burnout and why.

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**Assessment:**

- Asked participants to identify a self-care strategy presented to them and explain why they may use it in the future.

**Results:**

- 5 out of 6 participants were able to identify a self-care strategy and explain why they may use it
- One participant identified a self-care strategy but did not give an explanation

**Learning outcome was fully met.**

### Discussion

<p><b>Successes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All learning outcomes fully met</li> <li>• Participants expressed how relevant this topic was to them</li> <li>• Helped implement a daily mindfulness activity for our students and teachers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Limitations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited time</li> <li>• One participant was over zoom</li> </ul>	<p><b>Future Directions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present to SPED teachers in the Public Education System</li> <li>• Teachers retake the initial self-assessment after some time to see if there is a decrease in burnout</li> </ul>
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“It’s not the load that breaks you down, it’s the way you carry it.”

— Lou Holtz

Breathe in

“It’s not the load that breaks you down, it’s the way you carry it.”

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Breathe in

**Appendix B:**

*Google Forms Assessment Quiz*

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11Axamj5oA\\_jYW-bQ4pjrPFG48kqG3SO559bJKmOq\\_D4/edit](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/11Axamj5oA_jYW-bQ4pjrPFG48kqG3SO559bJKmOq_D4/edit)

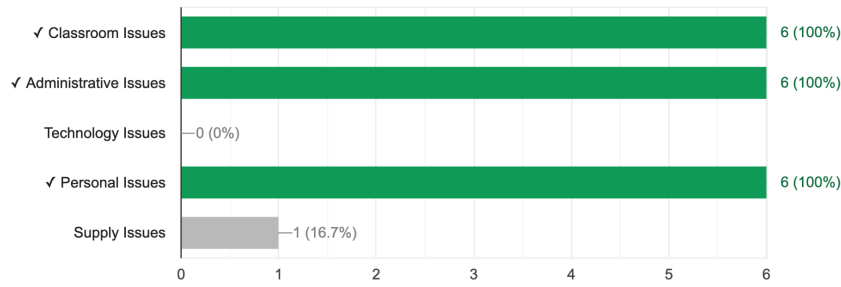
**Appendix C:**

*Google Forms Assessment Quiz Responses*

*Learning Outcome #1 Assessment:*



Why do Special Education Teachers experience frequent job burnout? Choose all that apply.  
5 / 6 correct responses



*Learning Outcome #2 Assessment:*

Describe one adverse effect that teacher burnout has on students.

6 responses

Restricts them from reaching their full potential

No change in their behaviors/worsen them

Hinders them from reaching their IEP goals

Less likely to reach their goal due to teacher being distract by their feelings of burnout

Effects a students learning and development

Teacher burnout affects students by not having a teacher who is preforming to the best of their ability. This then creates stops or slows the progress of the students development.

Describe one adverse effect that teacher burnout has on teachers.

6 responses

Effects their mental health

Depression

Health issues, i.e., fatigue

Taking the feelings of burnout home can lead to disassociation and conflict with their family or partner.

Created toxic stress which can turn into mental health problems such as anxiety or depression

Teacher burnout mentally, physically, and emotionally affects the teacher. A specific example of this is health problems such as chronic fatigue.

*Learning Outcome #3 Assessment:*

Indicate which self-care strategy you will most likely use in the future to reduce burnout and why.

6 responses

**Mindfulness**

'Write down three things you're grateful for'

I will use this self-care strategy in the future because it will help me stay present in stressful situations/days. Focusing on the positive rather than the negatives will keep me in a better mood.

I will use mindfulness as a self-care strategy in the future to help reduce the feelings of burnout. I chose this method because mindfulness is already something I do outside of the classroom. I am familiar with the practice and feel confident that I can integrate it into the classroom. I have the idea to have a mindfulness section of the day with my students where we all take a moment to breathe and focus on ourselves, our feelings, and our surroundings. Not only will this help me in my overall demeanor, but I believe it will help my students and their goals for the day.

Being active. I usually eat my lunch in my car for my 45-minute break and scroll on my phone. I think using this time to be active like taking a walk outside would be much more beneficial to my overall mood.

I like the idea of using the app shown in the presentation. This seems like a modern and accessible method to implement stress-reducing techniques into everyday life.

A self-care strategy I will most likely use in the future to reduce burnout is mindfulness. I think this technique is very applicable to SPED teachers and the classroom overall. It can be very difficult to stay present in the moment. This practice can help ground myself in times of stress.

**Appendix D:**

*Teacher Burnout Scale Self-Assessment*

Seidman, S., & Zager, J. (1987). The teacher burnout scale. *Educational Research Quarterly,*

11(1), 26–33. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ358718>

30 ERO, 1986-1987

TABLE 1  
Item Factor Loadings for the Teacher Burnout Scale

Subscale/Item	Factor			
	I	II	III	IV
<b>I. Career Satisfaction</b>				
1. I look forward to teaching in the future.	.79	.12	.22	.20
5. I am glad that I selected teaching as a career.	.83	.15	.16	.09
10. Teaching is more fulfilling than I had expected.	.75	.20	.20	.18
12. If I had it to do all over again, I would not become a schoolteacher.	.73	.14	.26	.13
19. I look forward to each teaching day.	.72	.13	.30	.31
<b>II. Perceived Administrative Support</b>				
3. I get adequate praise from my supervisors for a job well done.	.27	.69	.05	.00
8. I feel that the administrators are willing to help me with classroom problems, should they arise.	.19	.74	.01	.17
11. I believe that my efforts in the classroom are unappreciated by the administrators.	.18	.74	.19	.09
15. My supervisors give me more criticism than praise.	-.02	.72	.24	.04
18. I feel that the administrators will not help me with classroom difficulties.	.08	.79	.15	.18
20. The administration blames me for classroom problems.	.05	.58	.36	.10
<b>III. Coping with Job-Related Stress</b>				
2. I feel depressed because of my teaching experiences.	.30	.17	.55	.25
4. The teaching day seems to drag on and on.	.25	-.01	.48	.29
7. My physical illnesses may be related to the stress in this job.	.09	.15	.65	.00
9. I find it difficult to calm down after a day of teaching.	.18	.17	.73	.10
13. I feel that I could do a much better job of teaching if only the problems confronting me were not so great.	.25	.29	.66	.17
14. The stresses in this job are more than I can bear.	.28	.16	.69	.16
<b>IV. Attitudes towards Students</b>				
6. The students act like a bunch of animals.	.18	.13	.39	.61
16. Most of my students are decent people.	.09	.06	.04	.77
17. Most students come to school ready to learn.	.22	.16	.09	.74
21. Students come to school with bad attitudes.	.27	.17	.29	.53

\*Numbers indicate the placement of the item when the instrument is administered.

**Appendix E:**  
*One-Time Workshop Google Slides*

**SPED Teacher Burnout & Self-Care Techniques**  
Carrie Frost  
Capstone Workshop

Note: Breathe!

Remember to practice mindfulness!

**But first... Introductions!**

1. Name & Pronouns
2. Age
3. Race & Ethnicity
4. Teaching Experiences
5. Anything else about you!

**Table of contents**

- 01 Burnout  
What is it?
- 02 Why it Happens  
What causes burnout in the SPED teacher field?
- 03 Why it Matters  
Why is it important to address SPED teacher burnout?
- 04 Self-Care Techniques  
Learn self-care techniques to prevent SPED teacher burnout

Food for thought:

**Yes I'm a teacher. But today I was also a nurse, a psychiatrist, a mediator, a data analyst, a statistician, an IT specialist, a researcher, a problem solver, and a coach.**

**Self-Assessment Handout:**

Key:  
"I" = Disagree  
"II" = Somewhat Disagree  
"III" = Somewhat Agree  
"IV" = Agree

**Group Discussion:**

What stood out to you in this assessment?

What did you learn about yourself?

**Burnout**

Burnout, in relation to jobs and careers, has been defined as a condition that develops over time in response to chronic and toxic stress (Marshall et al., 2023).

**Three Dimensions**

- Lack of Accomplishment
- Detachment from Job
- Exhaustion (Emotional & Physical)

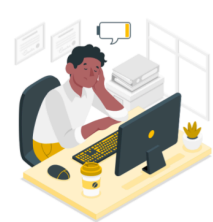
### Special Education Teacher Burnout

Special Educators have been in short supply for over **two decades** (Canico et al., 2011)

**5.5 million** school-aged children needed special education services in the United States.

“**13%** of special educators leave the field every year and another **20%** switch to general education, resulting in an annual attrition rate of **33%**”.

Why is it important to address special education Teacher burnout specifically?




### 02 Why do SPED Teacher Experience Burnout?

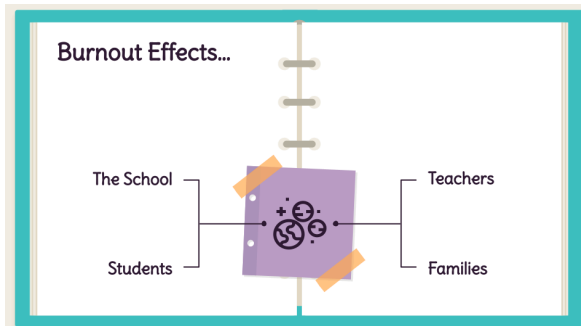
### Three main influences on burnout..

- Administrative Issues
- Personal Issues
- Classroom Issues

- Administrative Issues**
  - Unsupported by those around & above them
- Personal Issues**
  - Loss of confidence in ability to manage students
- Classroom Issues**
  - Classroom sizes and range of disabilities



### 03 Why Does SPED Teacher Burnout Matter?



- School System**
  - Financial burden
- Students**
  - Less likely to reach their IEP goals
  - Undesirable behaviors don't decrease or they increase
- Teachers**
  - Health issues
  - Depression
  - Chronic Fatigue
- Families**
  - Stress & feelings follow you home
  - Conflicts outside of the classroom

**Group Discussion:**

- Have these effects infiltrated the school?
- What, if any, affects have you noticed?
- Talk with your fellow teachers for about 5 minutes.

04

**Self-Care Techniques to Reduce Burnout**

**Does Self-Care Really Work?**

- Connection between increased levels of mindfulness and a reduction in psychological stress (Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019)
- Large reductions in emotional exhaustion, moderate reductions in depersonalization, and small but significant improvements in consumer optimism (Salyer et al., 2011)

**Strategies to use throughout the day...**

- Breathe!
- Write it all Down!
- Get Outside & Move Your Body!

**Long-term Self-Care Strategies**

- Mindfulness
  - Smiling Mind App
- Breathe-Ease Intervention & App

**Let's Learn and Practice Mindfulness!**

**Explore the Breath Ease App**

- Go to the app store on your phone
- Search 'Breathe Ease'
  - Should look like the picture over here ←
- Download! (It's free!)
- Explore!

**Thank you!**

Finally, You will take a short assessment quiz to test your learnings.

Please check your emails where you will have received a google forms link.