

# Dealing with parental burnout



BY REGISTERED COUNSELLOR AND PSYCHOTHERAPIST SHARON HINSULL.

For many parents, juggling around-the-clock childcare responsibilities with the competing demands of working life can often leave them feeling stretched to the limit, with little time or energy to take care of their wellbeing.

Whilst this may not come as news to most parents, the scientific concept of 'parental burnout' has been clinically recognised for decades.

**It was in the early 1980s that psychological researchers first identified a recognisable 'exhaustion syndrome' associated with the stresses and strains of bringing up children. Amongst a wide range of symptoms related to the condition, the three main features of parental burnout have been identified as being:**

- Overwhelming exhaustion related to parenting and your role as a parent
- Feeling emotionally distanced from your children
- A sense of ineffectiveness as a parent; feeling unsure of your ability to parent well

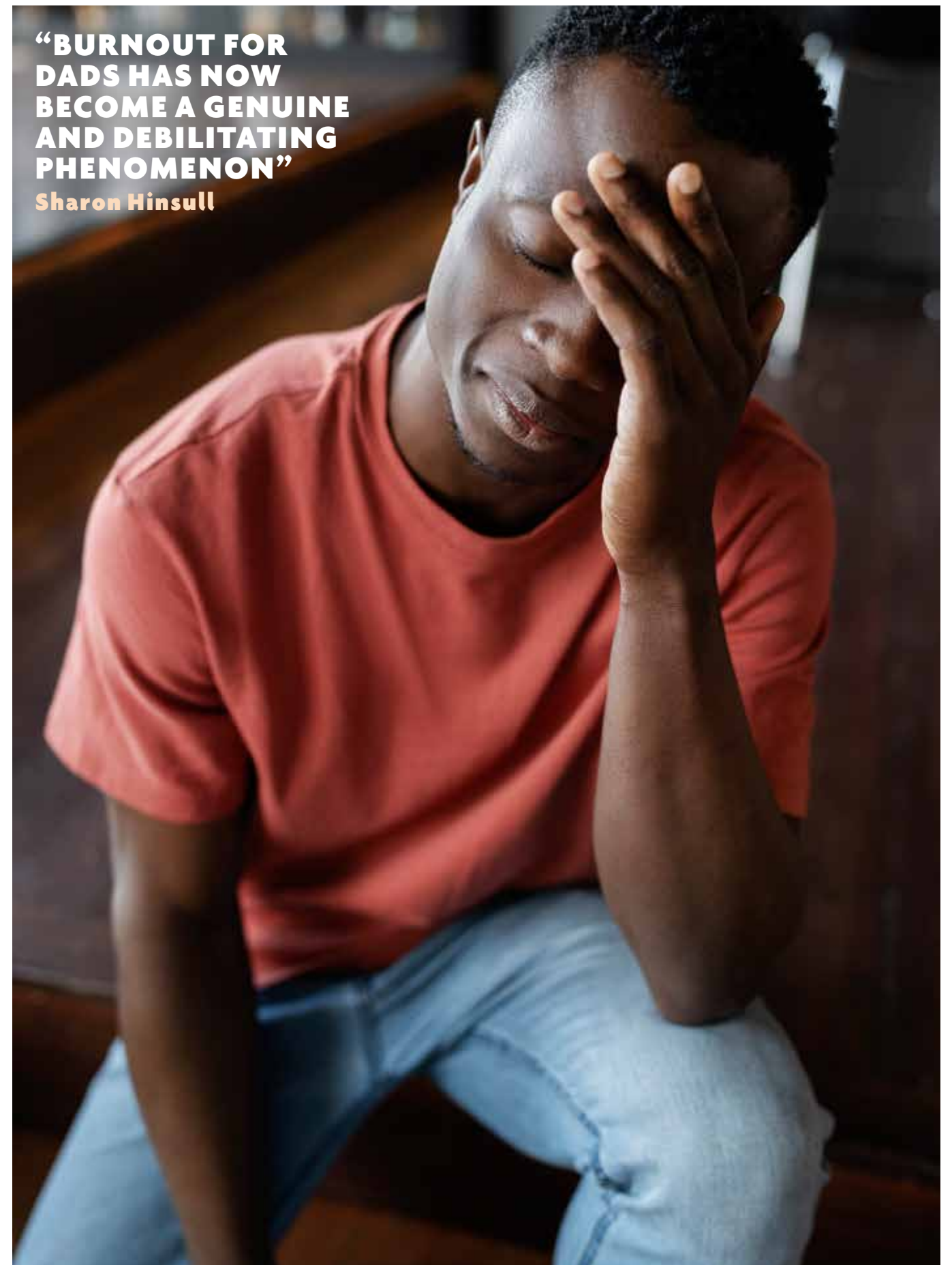
## DEPLETED FATHER SYNDROME

Although the majority of research undertaken on the subject of parental burnout has focused on the experience of mothers, a recent survey conducted in Finland looked specifically at the effects that chronic parenting stress can have on fathers. The research findings concluded that parental burnout for dads has now become a genuine and debilitating phenomenon, with many men admitting they have found themselves struggling with the day-to-day demands of parenting.

Traditional gender roles based on men going to work and women staying home to look after the children are increasingly becoming a thing of the past, with many couples now sharing much of the responsibility of raising a family. During the Covid pandemic, the amount of unpaid childcare carried out by men was found to be almost equal to that of women.

**“BURNOUT FOR DADS HAS NOW BECOME A GENUINE AND DEBILITATING PHENOMENON”**

Sharon Hinsull







With so many working dads now assuming more domestic responsibilities than they did in the past, maintaining a healthy work-life balance is often easier said than done. Fewer men than women have special childcare arrangements in place with their employers, further adding to the strain on fathers trying to meet the demands of work and home simultaneously.



**RECOGNISING THE SIGNS**

A recent YouGov survey revealed more than a third of employees have faced extreme pressure in the workplace within the past year. The charity Mental Health UK points out that, as common as it is, burnout is often a misunderstood and stigmatised condition which can harm employees' health and wellbeing, as well as their levels of productivity.

"Burnout isn't something which goes away on its own. Rather, it can worsen unless you address the underlying issues causing it. If you ignore the signs of burnout, it could cause further harm to your physical and mental health in the future. You could also lose the ability and energy to effectively meet the demands of your job, which could have knock-on effects on the other areas of your life."

**“PLANNING IS VITAL WHEN IT COMES TO ASSUMING A SENSE OF CONTROL”**

**Sharon Hinsull**

**Burnout can manifest itself in a multitude of ways; however, some of the more common signs might typically include:**

- Feeling tired or drained most of the time
- Feeling helpless, trapped and defeated
- Feeling detached/alone in the world
- Having a cynical/negative outlook
- Self-doubt
- Procrastinating and taking longer to get things done
- Feeling overwhelmed

**TACKLING THE UNDERLYING CAUSES**

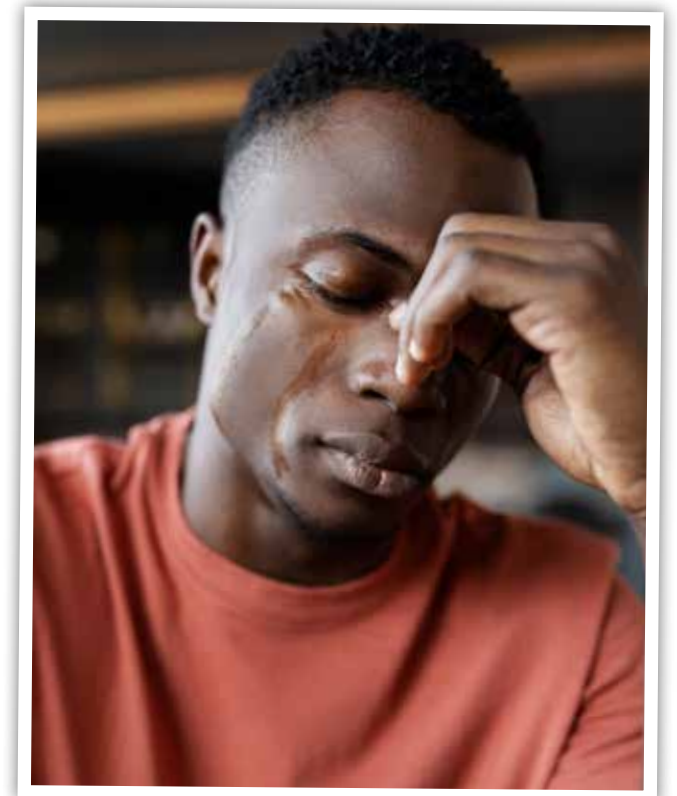
The first step in addressing burnout's effects is to identify the underlying sources of stress. When a combination of different factors is at play, problems can start to feel so overwhelming that it may be challenging to recognise which issues need tackling first. Sometimes, putting pen to paper can be a helpful place to start this process, simply writing a list of the key stressors involved and then prioritising the order in which they need to be addressed. For example, if finances have become a matter of concern, this will likely need to take precedence over more minor, manageable issues. For anyone struggling to pay their bills, free expert debt advice is available through Mental Health and Money Advice or by contacting the National Debt Line or StepChange.

**MAKING AN ACTION PLAN**

Another common source of anxiety for many working fathers these days is job insecurity. If you fear your current role may be at risk of redundancy, it's a good idea to draw up a plan of what you can do if you lose your job. Making an advanced plan of action can help you to:

- a) Take control of the situation, b) know your options, and c) reduce stress by knowing there are practical things you can do if you lose your job.

Being as prepared as possible before the event can go a long way towards helping you feel in control of a situation. Ensuring your CV is up-to-date and seeking out new job opportunities will put you in a position of advantage over other candidates who may not show as much initiative. Planning is vital when it comes to assuming a sense of control over the direction that your working life is taking you in.





**“FATHERS WHO WORK FROM HOME CAN FIND IT ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT”**

**Sharon Hinsull**



### MANAGING YOUR TIME

Effective time management at work and home is essential for your wellbeing and mental health. By managing your time efficiently, you can feel more relaxed and in control, helping you remain focused on your goals. When your time is poorly managed, you are more likely to feel stressed and generally less productive in your day-to-day life.

**One recommended way to better manage your time is to decide what you want to achieve, assess each task, make a plan and remain as flexible as possible in how you carry out the work. A valuable way of doing this is to think about the four Ds when scheduling your workload:**

- Ditch (does this task need to be done?)
- Defer (could it be done at a later date?)
- Delegate (could someone else complete it?)
- Do

### SELF-CARE

As well as ensuring you have a healthy, balanced diet and a sufficient amount of sleep and exercise, another fundamental component of self-care is remembering to put appropriate boundaries in place. Whether it's a case of learning to say 'no' more often or simply remembering to take regular breaks during the working day, it's essential that you give yourself as much mental breathing space as you possibly can. Fathers who work from home can find it especially difficult to maintain effective boundaries between their jobs and the daily demands of family life. Just physically distancing yourself from work for a few minutes can sometimes be enough to press the reset button. Similarly, remembering to turn off work phones and keep devices out of sight outside of working hours can go a long way towards creating a more relaxed home environment.

### ORGANISATIONS OF SUPPORT

#### **MIND**

**mind.org.uk** has 125 local service centres based across the UK, providing support and information for anyone struggling with their mental health.

#### **CALM**

**thecalmzone.net** is the Campaign Against Living Miserably for men aged 15 to 35. The organisation runs a free, confidential and anonymous helpline and a web chat service, offering help, advice and info to anyone struggling or in crisis.

#### **MEN'S HEALTH FORUM**

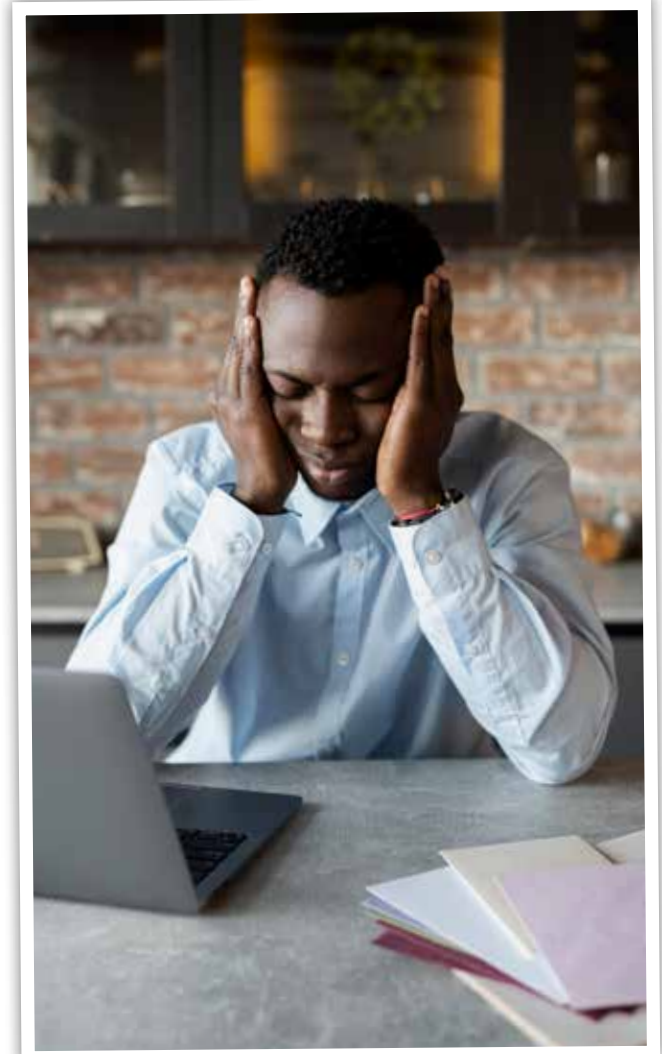
**menshealthforum.org.uk** gives round-the-clock stress support for men by text, chat and email.

#### **SAMARITANS**

**samaritans.org** provides free, confidential, around-the-clock support at 116 123.

#### **SHOUT**

**giveusashout.org** is a free 24/7 text service available to anyone in the UK. Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 and speak in confidence with a trained volunteer.



#### **MENTAL HEALTH UK**

**mentalhealth-uk.org** offers some useful suggestions for dealing with the effects of burnout, along with support and information on a range of accompanying mental health conditions.

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