

Sarah felt discouraged. From childhood she had always wanted to be a teacher. Lining up her dolls and her brother (the only live student), she would give them lessons in reading, math, and science in her bedroom. Throughout her teacher preparation program she envisioned herself as a master teacher who would revolutionize classroom instruction. But now, after three years of teaching, Sarah had decided to call it quits and take a job as a legal secretary.

Why did Sarah give up her cherished profession? Not because of the low salary. Not because of a lack of love for children. She did not quit because she particularly enjoyed secretarial work. Sarah left teaching because of a loss of energy and zeal for her profession. She was burned out.

Sarah's case is not unusual. A national poll indicates that 40 percent of teachers surveyed would choose a different profession if they had the opportunity to do so.¹

Teaching is tough. The pressures are often overwhelming. Increasingly, teachers encounter violence, disruptive students, oversized classes, reams of standardized tests, excessive paperwork, and lack of support from administrators and the community.² Across the United States teachers are as likely to leave the profession because of poor working conditions as for financial reasons.³ "Although teachers spend five or more years preparing for their profession, nearly a third quit teaching within the first five years."⁴

Adventist education is not exempt. When a random sample of elementary and academy teachers was asked to rank a list of about 15 problems, those perceived as most critical related to burnout. Teachers cited time management/work overload, coping with many ability levels, and keeping physically fit as real problems.

Furthermore, some Adventist teachers do not feel that they play a vital role in educational decision-making. A Project Affirmation report⁵ found that only 27 percent of SDA elementary teachers felt adequately included in making policies and decisions that may affect them. Another report found that only 18 percent of the secondary teachers felt adequate networks existed for teacher exchange and sharing.⁶

Teaching is a lonely profession. Results from a recent study showed that senior academy teachers rated teacher isolation as fifth in a list of 13 widely diverse teaching problems.⁷

Many Adventist teachers feel under-

paid and unappreciated. In a Project Affirmation report, 39 percent of teachers said they did not feel respected by Adventists. Thirty percent did not think they received a great deal of support from parents. The teacher turnover and dropout rate in Adventist schools has reached alarming levels. Thirty-seven percent of teachers and 51 percent of principals indicate they have been at their school two years or less.⁸

We hear a lot about teacher burnout, but just what does it involve? This rather vague term is used to describe feelings of dysfunction resulting from unremitting and excessive emotional pressure. The burnout victim feels helpless, hopeless, and unappreciated. This condition often results from disillusionment upon finding that teaching may not fit into the pattern like that imagined by Sarah in her dream world.

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Burnout is associated with low morale, absenteeism, high job turnover, and overwork. In spite of recent technological and vocational advances, educators still suffer from burnout and isolation.

Change is difficult. Hopelessness results when one feels defeated from repeatedly attempting tasks without apparent success. The problem is intensified if one takes on more ambitious goals than he or she can handle. For example, a third-grade teacher decided to rearrange her classroom, complete her grade cards, and rehearse for a major school program—all in the same week. These were all worthwhile tasks, but it was unrealistic to try to accomplish them all in such a short period of time.

Considering the human toll of burnout—on teachers, students, and the church—we must find ways to prevent this problem. However, this is not as simple as it might appear. Burnout prevention requires an intricate knowledge of the human condition, as well as complex changes in human

behavior and attitudes. Moreover, it is one thing to know what needs to be done, but quite another to do something about it!

Teachers *can* learn new ways of dealing with burnout. One such approach, outlined by Dennis Sparks, is known as "deliberate psychological education." It involves self-awareness and understanding of the cognitive sources of feelings.⁹

A wholistic approach to teacher burnout recognizes the complexity of the problem. "The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes."¹⁰ Using a wholistic approach allows one to attack the problem on several fronts simultaneously.

Burnout Management

A comprehensive burnout management program should include at least four goals:

1. *Reduce isolation:* Teachers spend a good deal of their day physically isolated from other education personnel. Ideally, educational superintendents should provide opportunities for teacher interchange. Many local conference calendars provide for a visitation day when teachers can visit other classrooms. Lacking this, teachers can develop a buddy system with others who have tackled similar problems.

2. *Restore perspective and balance.* Teachers sometimes develop a "red pencil mentality," concentrating on everything that is wrong in the classroom. Instead, try to focus on successes, satisfactions, and competencies—and encourage fellow teachers to do the same. Keep in mind Proverbs 15:13, "A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance."

3. *Maintain life-style balance.* Try stepping back from your daily routines to consider how life-style affects your physical and emotional well being. Find ways to balance high-stress and low-stress activities.

Teachers are often expected to perform similar roles in professional and private life. They may be asked to serve as Sabbath school superintendent or Pathfinder leader. This "loading on" of activities can produce stress and burnout. Try to find leisure-time activities as different as possible from those you perform on the job. For example, try mountain climbing, gardening, painting, or boating. If you teach Sabbath school, opt for an adult class, rather than one in the junior department. Participate in hospitality dinners or in crocheting baby sweaters for the community services center.

Although you may not be able to

avoid many sources of stress, you *can* learn to relax. Experiment with different ways of relieving stress. One teacher may choose to laugh and joke with students to reduce tension. Another may prefer to sing or create artwork with his or her students.¹¹ For example, two teachers in the Washington, D.C. area, with their students, spend their free time painting whimsical characters on fire hydrants. Be sure to choose an activity that fits your schedule, and then stick with it. But don't be afraid to experiment with new ideas or projects.

A number of healthful living programs are offered through churches, schools, and other community organizations. One simple device that many classroom teachers have found helpful is the N.E.W.S.T.A.R.T. personal record system. The format allows you to help apply the eight natural remedies outlined by Ellen White in *The Ministry of Healing*—nutrition, exercise, water, sunshine, temperance, fresh air, rest, and trust in divine power.¹² The N.E.W.S.T.A.R.T. list allows you to arrange a life-style that fits your schedule and preferences. Figure 1 shows the schedule of a teacher who followed this plan.

To use Figure 1 follow these simple steps: (1) Set life-style goals in advance for the week by writing a goal for each of the eight components in the blanks provided; (2) at the end of each day, circle the initials for each goal met. Cross out the initial for any goal not met. Try to reach each goal at least four days out of the week.¹³

Remember, it is not the occasional success or failure, but the trend that counts. You will be successful if you make the plan the subject of prayer and complete surrender to the Lord. After all, God has promised that all things are possible! (Mark 10:27).

4. *Increase personal awareness.*

Because each person's burnout symptoms are unique, watch for the warning signs in your own life. Symptoms may range from an inability to sleep to serious physical problems or chronic depression. Pinpoint sources of distress and make appropriate changes in life-style.

5. *Learn to delegate.* At school get your students to do some of the "busy-work" chores. Design tests that can be graded in class, or pay an older student to do some grading for you. Invite parents or senior citizens to volunteer for various tasks in the classroom, including supervision, teaching, and fundraising. At home get your spouse and children to pitch in, or barter your skills for some housecleaning help from a neighbor or friend.

6. *Identify long-range plans.* Think

Adventist teachers do not feel that they play a vital role in educational decision-making.

about your long-term goals. Visualize ways to achieve them. But don't try too many changes simultaneously. One or two strategies, carried out consistently, can markedly improve attitudes, feelings, and behavior.¹⁴

How Administrators Can Help

Administrators and superintendents can also play a major role in preventing teacher burnout. These suggestions can help to stem the tide of teacher dropout:

1. *Recognize the problem.* Before anything can be done, leaders must

first admit that burnout exists. Once the problem is acknowledged, administrators should devote sufficient time and resources to deal with it effectively.

2. *Pinpoint potential burnout victims.* Administrators should monitor the morale of their teachers. Teachers who are frequently absent may be prime candidates for burnout. Administrators should keep in mind that it is experienced, enthusiastic teachers, rather than beginning teachers, who are more likely to suffer from burnout.

Dedicated teachers often work too hard and receive little recognition, which creates the climate for discouragement. Just because a teacher has had a record of outstanding performance does not ensure continued success. The burnout is more severe if the teacher continues to work day in and day out.

3. *Establish a staff visitation program.* Meetings should be scheduled when teachers are not rushed or extra busy. Time can be profitably spent discussing

problems and concerns, even if the solution seems elusive. Teachers need a listening ear and the assurance that their opinions count.

4. *Develop a comprehensive stress-watch program.* This program should

involve every teacher and include the following activities:

a. Preservice workshop for new and experienced teachers. At this time the experienced teachers can tell new recruits about possible job-related

stresses. Additionally, experienced teachers can offer to be a support system for beginning teachers;

b. A teacher support group that continues throughout the school year. At these meetings the teachers can share ideas and solve common problems; and

c. Study ways to eliminate environmental factors that contribute to stress and burnout. Such factors may include inadequate classroom space, lack of materials, or excessive paperwork,¹⁵ and too heavy teaching loads, one of the most important causes of burnout.

Administrators should also provide materials to help teachers cope with their professional responsibilities. One excellent resource is the *Small Schools Survival Guide*, published by the North American Division Office of Education. This manual offers helpful hints about classroom management, curriculum planning, record-keeping, and other school activities.

Conclusion

Preventing and remedying teacher burnout can be a complex process. Teachers must try different strategies to enhance their own physical and emotional abilities to cope with everyday stress. Additionally, school administrators must make the school environment as stress free as possible. A

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FIGURE 1
N.E.W.S.T.A.R.T. Record
For (Name)

The N.E.W.S.T.A.R.T. record is designed to monitor your progress on a plan for better living.

1. Write on each line your goals for the **week**.
2. Each **day**, circle all the day-initials for each goal you met. Cross out each one not reached.

If you can attain your goals on at least **four** days of each week, you may consider yourself a "N.E.W.S.T.A.R.T. follower."

Remember it's not the occasional success or failure but the trend that counts. Make your progress the subject of prayer, and surrender your will to the Lord so that He can give you the power for victory.

(Sample)

GOALS for Week Beginning Sun. _____ 19__	
Nutrition	goal <i>no 2nd helpings; like 5pm</i> S M T W T F S
Exercise	goal <i>15-20 min. sustained</i> S M T W T F S
Water	goal <i>2-3 glasses on rising</i> S M T W T F S
Sunlight	goal <i>soak 3 min. if possible</i> S M T W T F S
Temperance	goal <i>Do 3 things on my "don't want to do" list</i> S M T W T F S
Air	goal <i>15-20 min. (with exp.)</i> S M T W T F S
Rest	goal <i>in bed by 11-11:15pm</i> S M T W T F S
Trust	goal <i>attitude; am + pm devotion</i> S M T W T F S

(every goal met Sunday except rest)

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cooperative strategy will benefit everyone involved in the learning program.

Finally, the most important resource for coping with stress and burnout is trusting in divine power. More than a century ago Ellen White penned these lines:

Teachers meet with many trials. Discouragements press upon them as they see their efforts are not always appreciated by their pupils...Satan strives to afflict them with bodily infirmities, hoping to lead them to murmur against God, to forget His goodness, His mercy, His love... But He lays on them no burden greater than they are able to bear. And He declares "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5.¹⁶

Even if all else fails, teachers have a Friend and Counselor in the Master Teacher. A life attuned to Him helps to banish burnout and bring encouragement to the soul. □

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² Members of the research advisory team include Bailey Gillespie, Won Kil Yoon, Gail Rice, Stuart Tyner, Jan Kuzma, Roger Dudley, Steve Case, Edwin Hernandez, Tom Smith, Melvin Davis, and Marvin Nygaard.

³ Search directors include Merton Strommen, Peter Benson, Michael Donahue, and others of national renown. Search has directed numerous studies of church youth, including studies of youth from Catholic, Lutheran, Southern Baptist, and other denominations. They have also conducted studies of public school youth.

⁴ Peter L. Benson and Michael J. Donahue, "Valuegenesis: Report 1—A Study of the Influence of Family, Church, and School on the Faith and Values of Adventist Youth," 1990, p. 1.

⁵ Search Institute, which collected the Valuegenesis data, reports a 55 percent response from the original 271 schools invited to participate in the main sample and an 86 percent response from the 73 senior academy oversample. The response rate is respectable, considering the national participation rate for studies of this type, which currently stands at about 60 percent.

Adventist schools can be proud of the number of minority teachers in their schools.

⁶ Unpublished report of the Seltzer Daley Research (Washington, D.C.: Board of Higher Education, North American Division, 1988).

⁷ Robert J. Yeager, Peter L. Benson, Michael J. Guerra, and Bruno V. Manno, *The Catholic High School: A National Portrait* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1985), p. 46.

⁸ Gifford, p. 402.

⁹ James S. Coleman and Thomas Hoffer, *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), p. 154; and P. Benson and M. McMillen, *Private Schools in the United States: A Statistical Profile* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, in press).

¹⁰ Statistics for Catholic and public schools are taken from Yeager and Benson, pp. 52, 53.

¹¹ Statistics on Catholic schools drawn from Peter L. Benson and Michael J. Guerra, *Sharing the Faith: The Belief and Values of Catholic High School Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: 1985), p. 17.

¹² Gifford, p. 405.

¹³ Statistics on Catholic schools drawn from Benson, et al., *Catholic High Schools*, p. 140; for public schools, from National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1989), p. 77.

¹⁴ Gifford, p. 405.

¹⁵ Statistics for Catholic high schools from Benson, et al., *Catholic High Schools*, p. 140, for public schools, from NCEs, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1989, p. 77.

¹⁶ Gifford, p. 411.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

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reached an apex on March 3, 1913, when the Puno-based bishop personally led a mob of 200 men, on horseback, to expel the Protestant heretics.³⁰ After wreaking havoc at the Camacho and Stahl homes (the inhabitants being away at the time), the mob lashed together eight Adventist believers with leather thongs and led them off to prison in the dead of night.

Fernando's account notes how these bound prisoners were repeatedly assaulted by man and beast as they stumbled the 21 miles to the prison on foot, "hatless and coatless."³¹ The subsequent acquittal and release of the prisoners does not end the story. Commentators on the history of religious liberty in Peru say this incident provided the impetus for a 1915 constitutional amendment guaranteeing freedom of religious expression.³²

De jure change does not, of course, translate immediately into *de facto* reform. As the Adventist schools multiplied, so did the opposition to them. On numerous occasions, the Stahls barely escaped with their lives. Scores of believers were murdered, schoolhouses were burned, Adventist teachers were assaulted, and at least one student was reported to have been beaten to death after enrolling in an Adventist school.

Conservative newspapers catalogued alleged misdeeds of the Adventists. The perceived threats to the social order presented by these schools are explicitly described in a *memorial* filed from Azangaro in 1923:

These false evangelical schools bring together daily large numbers of suggestible individuals of suspect social desires, and ignorant Indians attracted through false and fantastic premises.

At these schools they teach the most depraved and heretical practices, and preach a war of extermination against faithful Catholics and the Church itself.

At these schools they work a labor of dissolution. They spread doctrines of the most crimonism. They attempt to destroy patriotism and the spirit of the nation by inculcating the most extreme and dangerous socialist concepts of social organization, class and racial equality, and unbounded liberty in the ignorant masses...

At these schools, finally, they openly attack our property system.³³

Near the end of the Stahls' stay in the *altiplano*, Puno progressives called for a commission to investigate local abuses and institute reforms, a call that was