

# Looking after your Rebels

On the frontline of activism we are confronted with many feelings. The impacts of the events, both positive and negative, can have long-lasting and wide-reaching effects on the individuals involved. The action doesn't end when you leave the site and go home; there could be social implications with court cases with rebels requiring legal support, and the impact on family or work. Simultaneously, the emotional journey can unfold in subtle ways. A crash in adrenaline can make people feel isolated, alienated or estranged, filled with self-doubt or even shame. The extent of the impact may not be apparent in the immediate aftermath of the action, and often can build over time if it is ignored. Make sure to have support structures in place for your rebels in the days and weeks after rebellion. Drop-in lunch hours, full debriefs, making sure every rebel gets a phone call to check in, all these things and more!

- Individual Resilience
  - Burnout Awareness and Prevention
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- Group Resilience

# Individual Resilience

We all have our own tools and resources to help support us in these different areas. Part of taking care of ourselves is reflecting on our capacity and pre-existing physical, emotional, mental, lifestyle situation as we enter into actions.

# Burnout Awareness and Prevention

## WHAT IS BURN-OUT AND HOW TO AVOID IT?

'Burn-out' can be caused by..

- Taking on a lot of projects at one time,
- Being in a constant state of high-anxiety/stress,
- Loss of external control and experiencing/witnessing traumatic events.

After a prolonged period of a heightened state of stress, the body literally starts to work differently, changing your body's hormone systems. Burn-out is a natural response to all of the above. It can result in a range of symptoms such as exhaustion/fatigue, depression, insomnia, headaches, gastrointestinal problems (especially ulcers), frequent colds/flu, weight loss or gain, shortness of breath, hypertension, high cholesterol, coronary disease, impaired speech.

More info at: <https://solidarityapothecary.org/overcoming-burnout-part-5-the-biology-of-burnout/>

**Burn-out is your body telling you that you need to support yourself, get help where needed or take a break.**

Burn-out doesn't always occur straight after an incident or period of high-stress, sometimes it is a delayed response and will only be felt months later. This is why it is so important to have a sustainable, reliable, supportive culture in place.

Burn-out can occur for people who take on or support direct action, including both organising and engaging directly, because we often take on a lot or find ourselves in high energy or anxiety situations, and of course we take this stuff on because we really care.

Anyone who engages in Non-Violent-Direct-Action with Extinction Rebellion or independently, needs to think about the following elements.

Self-care How we take care of our own needs and personal recovery from this toxic system.

- **Also known as:** What we sometimes call the inner work
- **It's important because:** We are not machines. We need to look after ourselves in order to better look after each other and achieve what we want to achieve. Also, keeping the population subdued through stress, loneliness, sickness and anxiety is a feature of late-stage capitalism
- **Resources might include:** knowing our own limits/capacity, nature connection/being outdoors, hobbies/creativity/passions etc., in a stressful moment: practicing breath awareness/control, taking your attention out- what can you see/hear/smell/touch, replacing bad/scary stories/narratives with positive affirmations.
- **Regenerative Resources Guide:** First created in response to the Coronavirus crisis, Regenerative Cultures UK have designed a wellbeing guide full of top tips for staying healthy, both physically and mentally. See the guide [here](#).
- **Dedicated Mental Health Support:** Should you require further support, XR offers free, one-to-one phone sessions with trained emotional therapists and active listeners, through the **Trained Emotional Support Network (TESN)**. Please email the **Rebel2Rebel phone service** at [Rebel2Rebel@tesn.uk](mailto:Rebel2Rebel@tesn.uk) to arrange a session.

External to XR, should you require further support, please consider calling one of these mental health helplines, or contact the Climate Psychology Alliance, individual therapeutic support service [here](#). And if PTSD, mental health issues, or addiction have been part of your journey, please see this link for additional resources of emotional and mental health support.

## Action care

How we take care of each other whilst we undertake direct actions and civil disobedience together.

- **Also known as:** That which we do to prepare for, train for and recover from direct action, including trauma and resilience work.
- **It's important because:** Our bodies, minds and hearts are in a hostile situation, with institutions that want to target, manipulate and control us. Being able to care for our own needs helps us take care of each other and be more resilient.
- **Resources might include:** Snacks, rain gear and warm clothing, physical first aid, somatic first aid, welfare teams and HUGS!

## Interpersonal care

How we take care of the relationships we have, being mindful of how we affect each other, taking charge of our side of relationships.

- **Also known as:** This is the “intersectional work”, the decolonisation of the self, how we communicate, etc.
- **It's important because:** We are all the product of our environment. We all internalise the violence

inherent in our cultures. We have a duty to do the work that can undo those internalised prejudices and behaviours, so we can learn to interact in a healthier way.

● **Resources might include:** Non-violent communication, compassion, decolonisation (thinking about race dynamics in groups) training, resources for dealing with grief....

## Community care

How we take care of our development as a network and community, strengthening our connections and adherence to these principles and values.

● Extinction Rebellion's Online Program: Born out of the Coronavirus crisis, Extinction Rebellion and Regenerative Cultures UK have put together an online program of sharing and listening circles, workshops, webinars and trainings to grow our connections and shared knowledge. See the program [here](#)

## People and Planet care

How we look after our wider communities and the earth that sustains us.

# 'REBEL BURNOUT': A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW

**By Dr. Jonathan Mitchell**  
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Feeling like this?

You are not alone. Activism can be exhausting, mentally, physically and emotionally.

The term 'burnout' first came to prominence in a study by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974. He explored the impact on volunteers working in clinics in New York which offered free healthcare to those in need. The volunteers had little professional training and lacked a fixed work schedule, but had high levels of commitment and personal enthusiasm (sound familiar?). After 1 – 3 years, the volunteers tended to become considerably less motivated and less interested and involved in the work. In the years since, there has been a huge amount of research into burnout. Leading researcher Christina Maslach and her team have identified six key components that contribute to burnout:

- Workload

- Control
- Reward
- Community
- Fairness
- Values

Burnout is not just about stress, or having too much to do. Richard Gunderman, from Indiana University described the onset of burnout as “the accumulation of hundreds or thousands of tiny disappointments, each one hardly noticeable on its own”. It can creep up on you, but can have profound implications. Burnout actually changes the brain and how it deals with negative emotions. A 2016 summary by Alexandra Michel highlighted how burnout can manifest itself in multiple ways. She listed the following signs:

- Fatigue, ranging from a lack of energy to feeling physically and emotionally exhausted
- Problems sleeping
- Problems with memory, concentration and attention
- Physical symptoms, including pains, heart palpitations, headaches, tummy pains
- Increased illness, linked to a weakened immune system
- Loss of appetite (or wanting to comfort eat all the time)
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger and irritability
- Loss of enjoyment
- Pessimism and cynicism
- Isolation
- Detachment
- Apathy
- Hopelessness – feeling “what’s the point?”
- Reduced productivity

If any (or all) of these resonate with you or your fellow rebels, there are steps you can take. The first step might be to check out the extent to which you are affected by burnout. There are several ways of doing this. **The Maslach Burnout Inventory** (first published in 1981) has been used in thousands of studies and organisations, various versions including one for volunteers.

If this is hard to get hold of, try taking an online burnout test such as the one at:

[https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS\\_08.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_08.htm)

So what can you do if you are experiencing burnout?

Mindfulness and meditation can help. Psychologist Elena Touroni suggests a three minute mindfulness exercise to start the day (there are plenty available for free online, and a selection is offered on the XR Regenerative Cultures UK YouTube channel). But don’t worry if you find this hard to do – being bad at mindfulness should not become just one more thing to beat yourself up about!

Siobhan Murray, a Dublin based psychotherapist and author of *The Burnout Solution*, has some top tips: be kind to yourself. Prioritise. Say No. step back. Stop doing the thing that is burning you out, at least temporarily (or permanently if it is not in line with your values).

Reconnect with your reasons for doing what you are doing. Think about what really matters to you, and check that what you are doing is working towards this.

Talk to other rebels honestly and openly: chances are, others feel the same.

Take time away from social media and your phone.

Turn the damn thing off for a few minutes every day.

If you are still struggling, consider talking to a therapist. XR can put you in touch with its network of Trained Emotional Support Professionals (TESN) who have volunteered to support burnt out rebels.

One way I personally find helpful to think about it is this. Imagine you have a loved one who is very sick and who is not getting the best care. Imagine you spend all your time fighting for the best possible care for them, demanding that the hospital managers do more, asking questions of the doctors and nurses. Just as important might be to spend some time quietly with your loved one, talking, listening to them, or just holding their hand.

We are fighting for the life of our planet. As well as activism, campaigning, meetings, actions, we should spend time in quiet and loving enjoyment of nature. Plant something. Go for a walk in a bluebell wood, run barefoot along the beach, or lie in the fields listening to the skylarks sing.

# Introduction to Resilience

## What is a Regenerative Culture?

Creating cultures which are healthy, resilient and adaptable.

Regenerative cultures are present in every bit of Extinction Rebellion and on every level. We have several strategies including encouraging the buddy system within affinity groups, check-ins, and certain meeting practices designed to allow meetings to go well and support our whole selves. We also encourage emotional debrief after actions, and it's the responsibility of affinity group/regenerative culture coordinators to organise this and ensure it happens!

Because we're experimenting, we also allow for imperfection and mistakes, giving space to unfamiliar ideas, even if we think they might fail. Failure indicates daring – trying to push beyond our limits into spaces that appear to be impossible. We all get stressed and are all volunteers with lives outside of our activist organisations. As such, it's important to practice empathy, think and feel into other people's shoes, recognise there are multiple competing pressures on all of us.

It's also important for the community to be seen as having a legitimate process to make decisions, and as with complex networks that have lots of interlocking/interconnected parts, it can take time to go through a process with legitimacy. Therefore, we encourage patience for other people and groups.

NVDA + Extinction Rebellion + the living support of our Regenerative Cultures = “The most fun and meaningful thing we could do with our lives. Changing ourselves and our togetherness, as we change the bigger picture. Join us as we figure this out – our great adventure”.

The rest of this document signposts some tools and practices for ways to look after yourself, each other, and to embody Regenerative Cultures, and we encourage you to read this in your own time. Extinction Rebellion also offers training and tutorials in these areas.

## PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

We all have our own tools and resources to help support us in these different areas. Part of taking care of ourselves is reflecting on our capacity and pre-existing physical, emotional, mental, lifestyle situation as we enter into actions. To do this we need to take Personal Responsibility and continuously ‘track’ ourselves; being aware of our tendencies in regards to:



- How much do work we take on within our activist organisations? For example, Extinction Rebellion is built upon autonomy and holacracy (self organization and de-centralisation), so we get to choose our level of involvement.
- The feelings, judgements, desires, and expectations we bring with us. How do we project these onto our fellow activists.
- The effect of societal conditioning on us. For example, the school system can instil in us the idea that there is always someone else in charge of our autonomy (we may carry negative associations around people in “leadership” roles) - we need to own this, not be ashamed of it and not be dictated to by it.
- Our privilege. Getting to choose to engage in direct action/organising for system change is a privilege in itself. What other privileges do we have dependent upon our gender, where we come from, our class, the different colours and shades of our skin? As people who live in a nation that has accumulated wealth and resources through violence and oppression, how do we grieve this, sit with this and continue to bring awareness into our lives and actions.
- Get to know your ‘edges’. Where do you struggle? Where are you afraid? Then you can make an informed decision on how/when to challenge yourself.
- Get confident in your NO’s and slow down your YES’s. It can be easy to get swept up in the moment. Take your time, say you’ll think about it. No rush! You’ll be more sustainable if you are realistic about what you can take on.
- Don’t be ashamed if you do take on too much. Instead, let someone else know you anticipated being able to do more, and give the task back to the group or get someone else to do it.

We offer this document, as well as many others and various ‘signposts’ to other resources, in order to support its members in engaging sustainably and with awareness, however Extinction Rebellion has a culture of self-responsibility and ‘doing the inner-work’ and encourages constructive feedback across the board.

## NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

In order to feedback in the most worthwhile way some aspects of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) can be useful:

- Expressing how ‘I’ am without criticism or judgement.
- Receiving feedback empathically without jumping to the defence.
- Expressing observations instead of evaluations - what do you think you are hearing the other person say/do vs. what you think that person’s actions says about them.
- Owning how you feel in relation to your observations and the stories that are activated in your head when you experience them.
- Stating your own needs/values without asking something of others to make you feel better.
- Clearly requesting specific, concrete actions that would enrich your life, without demanding.

For example “When I hear ..., I feel ..., because I need/value ..., would you be willing to...?” And we can use these tools to mirror back to people in our network.

# Group Resilience

As groups and communities we need to make sure to have support structures in place for rebels in the weeks before and after rebellion. Think beyond Action Wellbeing! Drop-in lunch hours, full debriefs, making sure every rebel gets a phone call to check in, all these things and more!