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Burnout is when we become emotionally, mentally and physically exhausted from our activism. We feel 'burned', our ability to deal with things well is gone. We may have a hard time staying focused, we can become irritable, we may become resentful of others for 'not working as hard'. We may lose hope that change can happen.

We can suffer burnout when we overwork and do not take care of ourselves. We push ourselves and others with long hours of work, long meetings without breaks, expectations that we and others should do things we do not have the ability to do.

Avoiding burnout

Being an activist does not mean we need to sacrifice ourselves "for the cause." We need to take care of ourselves and each other. We cannot grow healthy movements if those of us involved are unhealthy. Who will want to get involved?

We need to take care of ourselves – eat right, exercise, make time for practices such as yoga, meditation, tai chi. Be a gardener. Get a massage. Take time to be with friends and relax.

Exercise

Here is a simple way to be mindful of balance in our lives. You can do this on your own or include it in a workshop where people can share their reflections after. Write down, one under the other, the words:

Work

Community

Ourselves

Next to each, write what that includes for you. In addition to your job, what is your work? How do you spend time with community and friends? How do you nurture yourself?

To show how much time you spend on each of these three areas of your life, draw a line in relationship to the others. You will probably end up with 3 lines of varying lengths. Can you join them together in a triangle, or is your life so out of balance that your work is a long line, and the others shorter and not able to connect?

Thanks to Ouyporn Khuankaew of International Women's Partnership for Peace and Justice for this exercise.

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