

# 60

## STRESS BUSTERS

for

## VOLUNTEERS



### Are You Headed for Volunteer Burnout?

Do you ever feel ...

- |                                      |                                     |  |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious    | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcommitted |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetful   | <input type="checkbox"/> Stressed   | <input type="checkbox"/> Tense         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unmotivated | <input type="checkbox"/> Tired      | <input type="checkbox"/> Disorganized  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Irritable   | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn     |

**YES?** You may be experiencing the negative effects of chronic stress. Too much stress, or stress that lasts for too long, can lead volunteers to “burn out” and give up their volunteering activities. The good news is that you can stop volunteer burnout from robbing you of the rewards of being a volunteer.

### 60 Stress Busters for Volunteers will show you:

- How to tell if you may be on the road to volunteer burnout;
- **Sixty** mental, physical, emotional, organizational, personal, spiritual, and diversionary Stress Busters that you can use to control your stress levels; and
- Easy first steps that you can take to burnout-proof your life.

*What are you waiting for?*

*Get started today and make your volunteer experience more enjoyable!*

*stress free zone®*

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**Dr. ck andrade**  
CARLA-KRYSTIN ANDRADE PhD PT

**60  
Stress Busters  
for  
Volunteers**



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**Dr CK Andrade**  
**Carla-Krystin Andrade PhD, PT**



Lois Tema

Dr. CK Andrade uses her extensive training in Counseling Psychology, Physical Therapy, and Education to transform complicated concepts into concrete and easy-to-digest presentations for audiences at all levels. The author of ***Beat the Stress of Helping***, she has been helping people worldwide achieve their goals through her books, seminars and articles on health and wellness since 1989. Dr CK Andrade is a sought-after speaker on wellness and personal development issues, an Associate Clinical Professor at the University of California – San Francisco, and a Course Instructor at San Francisco State University.

Carla-Krystin Andrade PhD, PT has lived through the rewards and stresses of being a volunteer. She began her life in volunteering when she was ten years old. Since then, she has volunteered in a variety of areas including: adult literacy, programs and camps for youth with disabilities, hospitals, track teams, elementary school classrooms, and Boys Scouts and Girl Guides.

She balances her life as a mother of a teenager, with her professional work and her current volunteer mission (a) to give teens the tools to cope effectively with stress and avoid suicide and (b) to help parents of teens and the professionals who work with teens to avoid burnout.

*60 Stress Busters for Volunteers*  
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## Enjoy the Rewards of Volunteering Without Facing Burnout

Being a volunteer is a rewarding and fulfilling experience. There are millions of ways in which we reap the rewards of being a volunteer whether these are rewards stemming from working with the youth and their families or our own personal growth through volunteering. Unfortunately, some volunteers give up these rewards because of 'burnout.'

*Burnout: "exhaustion of physical or emotional strength usually as a result of prolonged stress..."*  
(Webster's Dictionary)

Burnout can occur in volunteers when we find ourselves dealing with stress from (a) our work with the youth and their families in volunteering, (b) juggling the organizational tasks associated with volunteering, (c) the challenges of being a volunteer, (d) trying to balance activities our own personal lives, and even from (e) our own thoughts and behaviors. Fortunately, you can prevent burnout.

During my years as a volunteer, I created these Stress Busters to make my experience of volunteering more enjoyable. Now, I'm sharing them with you. My hope is that *60 Stress Busters for Volunteers* can help you reap the rewards of being a volunteer by helping you to burnout proof your life and avoid the negative effects of chronic stress.



*NOTE: Since I am not able to work with you personally, **60 Stress Busters for Volunteers** does not provide individualized health and wellness advice. Use the information contained in this booklet in consultation with a health care professional who is familiar with your particular health needs.*

## Are You Headed for Burn Out?

There are many warning signs on the road to burnout. Often we are just too busy to notice them until it is too late. Let's take a closer look at signs that tell us that we are under stress and may be heading for burnout.

Chronic stress is excessive or prolonged levels of stress that can cause physical, psychological, and behavioral problems. Each of us has own response to stress. Here are some common signs of chronic stress. Don't be alarmed if you notice that you have some of these; stress-related problems are preventable and, usually, reversible.

**Mental/Emotional Signs.** These are changes in your emotions and mental function. What emotions do you feel and how do your thoughts change when you are under stress?

- Forgetfulness
- Poor concentration
- Racing thoughts
- Anxiety
- Hopelessness
- Anger
- Depression

**Behavioral signs.** These are changes in your behavior. They are often the easiest signs of chronic stress to spot. What do you do when you are under stress?

- Experience poor decision-making
- Become short-tempered or irritable
- Become disorganized
- Sleep more or less
- Withdraw or have trouble with relationships

**Physical signs.** These are changes in your body that you experience. What do you notice happening in your body when you are under stress?

- Muscle tension
- Stomach problems
- Headaches
- Altered sleep patterns
- Change in energy level
- Frequent illness

*NOTE: Consult a health care professional if you are concerned about your signs of chronic stress or other symptoms.*

## Become a Burnout Proof Volunteer

Our goal during busy, stressful times is to decrease our levels of destructive chronic stress and maintain healthy levels of “good stress” or challenges that make our lives interesting. This strategy will help you to avoid burnout. Stress Busters can help you achieve this goal.

### What is a Stress Buster?

A Stress Buster is any activity that you can use to control your stress level. It doesn't have to be complicated. A successful Stress Buster can be as simple as eating a leisurely breakfast, mentally complimenting yourself on your performance, or taking a few deep breaths before you make a phone call.

I have developed seven types of Stress Busters for you:

1. **Personal Support:** Personal contact with living things -- people, pets, even plants -- helps you feel supported, enhances your self-esteem, and helps you lower your stress levels.
2. **Organizational:** These are activities that ease tension by building structure into your personal life.
3. **Physical:** Activities that enhance your physical well-being will give you more stamina, make you more resilient, and lift your spirits.
4. **Emotional:** Acknowledging and expressing your emotions will improve both your mental and physical well-being.
5. **Mental:** Because these are activities you do in your mind, they have the advantage of being portable and private.
6. **Diversionary:** Taking a break can restore your energy and help you to see your situation from a fresh perspective.
7. **Spiritual:** Tending to your spiritual life can help you maintain a sense of direction. Remember that spirituality goes beyond religion to embrace Nature and the things that inspire us in our lives.

### Choose Positive Stress Busters

Some Stress Busters offer short-term relief and long-term problems. Relying on drugs or alcohol are two obvious examples. Yet even seemingly harmless activities, such as exercise or daydreaming, can have negative effects on your personal life if you use them to excess.

### Use Stress Busters Appropriately

A good Stress Buster must be appropriate for the time and place you need to use it. For example, while chanting aloud may be relaxing at home, this may not be appropriate in public.

### Short-Term Versus Long-Term?

There is nothing wrong with using short-term Stress Busters. If, however, you find yourself facing the same problem repeatedly, a longer-term solution -- one that seeks and addresses the source of the problem -- may be more beneficial.

## The Core Stress Busters

*These Stress Busters are the core activities that you use to guide how you control your stress levels.*

- 1 **Learn to recognize your signs of chronic stress.** Become familiar with the changes in your body, behavior, thoughts, and emotions that tell you when you are experiencing too much stress. As you go through the day watch out for these signs of stress.
- 2 **Use the Quick Stress Buster throughout the day.** Boost your productivity and keep your stress levels in check with The Quick Stress Buster. These three simple steps are an easy way to lower your stress level a notch.

### The Quick Stress Buster

1. **Relax Your Shoulders**
  - Make small circles with your shoulders
  - Lower your shoulders and let the tension go
2. **Take a Deep Breath**
  - Take a slow deep breath in through your nose
  - As you sigh the air out through your mouth, tell yourself, “Let that tension go”
3. **Make Your Thoughts Positive**
  - Mentally say “Stop” to stop the chain of negative thoughts
  - Think of something positive or at least neutral. For example, count to 10.
- 3 **Use Stress Busters when you face difficult situations.** Choose a Stress Buster from any of the 7 types of Stress Busters and decide if you can use it before, during, or after the situation that you find stress-provoking.
- 4 **Evaluate Stress Busters before you use them.** Before you use a Stress Buster ask yourself the following questions:
  1. Is this Stress Buster a positive one, or will it cause further problems?
  2. Is this Stress Buster appropriate for the time, the place and me?
  3. Am I using a short-term Stress Buster when I really need one that is long-term?

## Personal Stress Busters

*Personal contact with living things -- people, pets, and even plants -- helps you feel supported.*

- 5 **Have someone on your side.** Feeling alone can increase your feelings of stress. Connect with at least one person in your life whom you can talk to or write to when you need support. This can be a friend, a relative, a co-worker, or a volunteer or professional counselor.
- 6 **Get guidance from someone in your organization.** Reach out to a volunteer or staff person in your organization. You may find that they have been in a similar situation to yours and can give you information or lend a friendly ear.
- 7 **Talk to, or spend time with, someone whom you care about.** Balance the amount of time that you spend helping people from your volunteer work or job by spending time with people whom you care about, and who care about you. Affection and understanding from people we care about can comfort us and reduce the feeling of isolation that intensifies feelings of stress.
- 8 **Make a gift or write a letter for someone.** Taking the time to make a small gift or write a letter to someone takes our mind off stress-provoking events. They get a thoughtful gift and you get a sense of satisfaction.
- 9 **Share a meal with someone.** Sharing food is a sign of friendship. Make a personal connection with someone over a shared meal. Give yourself a break from stress by making a promise to avoid talking about work during the meal.
- 10 **Allow someone to help you.** Take a break from being a giver and a helper by allowing someone to assist you. Stress-provoking situations can feel more manageable when you have someone giving you a helping hand.
- 11 **Nurture something.** Research suggests that the presence of friendly animals can lower our stress levels. In addition, there is something rewarding and comforting about caring for pets and plants and watching them thrive under your care. So enjoy your time with your pet, plant, or whatever you choose to nurture.
- 12 **Spend some time alone.** Escape the hustle and bustle of day-to-day life with some time alone. Use this quiet time to reflect, rest, and recharge.

## Organizational Stress Busters

*These are activities that ease tension by building structure into your personal life.*

- 13 **Clean your work area.** A clean work area can increase your sense of being in control and decrease your anxiety. Can't figure out where to start? Don't agonize about it. Just pick up a single object and take it from there.
- 14 **Know where you are headed.** When you feel as though you are being pulled in a million different directions, a long-term goal can be your anchor. Consider where you want to be in six months or even a year or two.
- 15 **Choose ONE important daily goal to work on.** It's easier to stay calm and be successful when you have a single goal to work on, rather than dozens. Every morning, take a good look at the things you want to achieve and pick ONE goal that will be your focus for the day. When you've achieved it, then move on to the next goal.
- 16 **Make a "To Do" list and prioritize it before you go to bed.** You'll have a more restful night if you take a moment before you go to sleep to list the things you have to do the next day and identify which of those tasks are the most important. You can check this list in the morning to get organized for the day ahead.
- 17 **Ask other people to help you complete tasks.** Spreading the load across several people can decrease your stress level and make activities run efficiently. Remember to step back and let people do the jobs you've assigned to them. You may also wish to give them lots of positive feedback when they finish their tasks.
- 18 **Create a back up plan.** Knowing that you have decided what to do if things do not go as planned will increase your confidence and reduce your anxiety in a situation. And you will be prepared if things do not go as expected.
- 19 **Set yourself a schedule.** Use your time wisely by writing out a schedule for your day or week. This will allow you to block in time to take care of the important tasks on your 'To Do' list. This small step can help you stay motivated and calm.
- 20 **Break large tasks into smaller parts.** It is easier to tackle small task than an overwhelming large task. So break large jobs down into small tasks and complete those smaller tasks one at a time. Before you know it, the big job will be done.

## Physical Stress Busters

*Activities that enhance your physical well-being will give you more stamina and make you more resilient.*

- 21 **Take a deep breath.** Taking a slow deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth will increase the amount of oxygen going to your brain and help you feel calmer. Remember to purse your lips slightly as you exhale to avoid hyperventilating.
- 22 **Perform a relaxation technique.** Relaxation is the most direct way to reduce the negative effects of stress. Imagine yourself somewhere peaceful. Meditate. Do yoga. Listen to a relaxation tape. There are a million ways to relax. Find one that works for you and use it!
- 23 **Eat a healthy meal.** Food is fuel. Our performance improves and we cope with greater ease when our bodies are well nourished. Replace junk food and caffeinated drinks with a healthy meal and lots of water to increase your energy for coping.
- 24 **Have a nap or a good night's sleep.** We make better decisions, communicate more effectively, and have more energy when our bodies and minds are well rested. Whether you need a full 8 hours or a cat nap, get the rest that you need.
- 25 **Exercise:** walk, stretch, dance, jog, cycle, anything goes. Find any activity that gets your heart pumping and your body moving and fit it into your daily routine. Exercise strengthens both your mind and body and counteracts the negative effects that stress can have on both.
- 26 **Play a game or sport for fun.** Forget about who wins or loses. Blow off steam and have fun playing a game or a sport. This can clear your mind and give your mood a lift.
- 27 **Massage Your Tense Areas.** Put the healing power of touch to work for you! You can massage yourself or get someone to massage you. However you choose to do it, find those areas in your body where you tend to hold your tension and massage them.
- 28 **Laugh!** The positive effect of laughter on stress is no joking matter. Laughter reduces levels of stress hormones, boosts the immune system, relaxes muscles, and lowers blood pressure. What are you waiting for? Find something to laugh about!

## Mental Stress Busters

*These are activities you do in your mind. They have the advantage of being portable and private.*

- 29 **Look for a silver lining.** Try to find something positive in the situation. A positive situation is easier to manage than a negative one. So focus on the positive aspects of the situation -- something good that will come out of it, something positive that you will learn, anything to counteract the negative side of the situation.
- 30 **Collect information.** Find volunteering resources, attend volunteer training, or locate other helpful information. Having more information can boost our confidence about our ability to manage a situation, give us a new perspective on issues, and build the skills we need to succeed.
- 31 **Use problem-solving.** Take the problem apart, examine your options, and develop a plan or response. Even the most intimidating situation can become more manageable when you write out the options and organize your answer in writing.
- 32 **Switch your thoughts from negative to positive.** Negative, self-defeating thoughts trigger the stress response and eat away at your self-confidence. When you notice yourself getting negative try to find a more positive interpretation of your situation.
- 33 **Rehearse in your mind.** Use mental rehearsal to your advantage by imaging yourself in the situation carrying out your planned response effectively. This will help you walk into the situation expecting a positive outcome.
- 34 **Boost your confidence.** Make a list of the skills that you have for handling the situation and read it out loud to yourself. This will improve your self-confidence, decrease your anxiety, and help you to believe in your ability to carry out your action plan.
- 35 **Learn by teaching.** Jumping in and teaching a skill that we've just learned to someone else is a great way to master that new knowledge. This will help you put this knowledge to good use in other situations.
- 36 **Pause to pull your thoughts together.** Not sure what to do? Stop for a moment and organize your thoughts. Ask for more information or confirm that you have understood the question or request correctly. Then, take your time responding.

## Emotional Stress Busters

*Acknowledging and expressing your emotions will improve both your mental and physical well-being.*

- 37 **Identify what you are feeling.** Sometimes, in the hustle and bustle of daily life, you may not even be aware that something is bothering you. Try writing in a journal or just sitting quietly and thinking about what is going on inside you.
- 38 **Let yourself feel your emotions.** Burying your negative emotions, or pretending that they don't exist, won't make them go away. Instead, they may cause chronic stress and a host of physical and mental problems such as ulcers, headaches, and anxiety attacks. Try writing in a journal or just sitting quietly and thinking about what is going on inside you.
- 39 **Vent your feelings.** When you notice that you have strong emotions let them out before they build up and feel overwhelming. For example, you can cry in the shower, yell in the car, or scream without making a sound. Experiment until you find something that works for you.
- 40 **Hold your tongue if you think you will say something you'll regret.** When you are feeling strong emotions, stop and think about what you're going to say before you say anything. This will reduce the stress of having to soothe hurt feelings caused by what you said.
- 41 **Write a letter expressing your feelings to someone who has upset you, but don't mail it.** You'd be amazed at how good it feels to get it out of your system. Write a letter telling that person exactly how you feel and then tear that letter into shreds.
- 42 **Talk to someone about the challenges that you are facing.** This is a great way to get things off your chest and hear someone else's views (if you want that). Willing listeners take many forms such as friends, fellow volunteers, family members, counselors, or online groups.
- 43 **Work off your strong emotions with vigorous physical activity.** Movement helps to release strong emotions. So pound a pillow, rake leaves, clean your house, or find some physical activity that will help you blow off steam.
- 44 **Apologize for something that you've done.** "I'm sorry." These two words can have a powerful healing effect for you and for the person on the receiving end of the apology. With practice you can learn to apologize in a way that leaves you feeling good about yourself.

## Diversionsary Stress Busters

*Taking a break can restore your energy and help you to see your situation from a fresh perspective.*

- 45 **Watch something relaxing:** Sunsets, birds, movies, plays, art ... Just sit back, watch, and unwind. Lose yourself in a visual experience and feel the tension slip away.
- 46 **Listen to something relaxing:** music, audiobooks, nature sounds, chimes ... Sound soothes us. Find a sound that is relaxing to you and treat yourself to 20 minutes of listening to it.
- 47 **Collect something:** stamps, leaves, books ... Collections allow us to express our individuality. Choose a collection that is interesting, affordable, and fun for you.
- 48 **Make or fix something:** furniture, crafts, jigsaws, food, cars ... It's an age-old secret that making things with our hands frees our minds and allows us to escape from our stress. Select an activity that you find enjoyable and undemanding.
- 49 **Pamper yourself:** A haircut, warm bath, massage, afternoon nap ... It's OK to be self-indulgent now and then. Treating yourself well can boost your self-esteem. And it will help you relax and reduce your stress levels.
- 50 **Do something familiar and comforting:** Read a book, work on a hobby ... We all have our emotional security blanket: a familiar activity or place that calms us. Think back to the times when you have felt secure and relaxed. What were you doing? Try doing that again.
- 51 **Do something you've never tried before:** Walk in the rain, try a new hobby, go somewhere new ... Sometimes we need to step out of our comfort zones to get ourselves out of a stressed-out rut. What is something you've always wanted to do but just didn't have the guts or the time to try? This could be the perfect time to do it.
- 52 **Take a mini vacation in your mind.** Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful, relaxing place (real or imaginary). Imagine the sights, sounds, and smells in that place. Then picture yourself stepping into that place and let yourself unwind.

## Spiritual Stress Busters

*Spiritual and inspirational activities can help you maintain a sense of direction.*

- 53 **Engage in a spiritual activity or ceremony.** Spiritual activities can inspire us and help us refocus our priorities. These take many forms depending on your beliefs such as a ceremony, an inspirational book, or praying.
- 54 **Go to your place of worship or any place where you feel peaceful.** Being in a peaceful and inspirational place can make it easier to feel calm and focus our thoughts to spiritual issues. Pick a place and go there when you are under stress.
- 55 **Pause to reflect.** Take a step back and think about your life and what you are doing with it. Sometimes our stress comes from losing track of what we want to get out of our experiences. Each day spend some time in quiet reflection.
- 56 **Enjoy nature.** Nature is inspirational. Being out in nature allows us to take a break from our daily challenges and enjoy the beauty and serenity of nature. So get outdoors, connect with nature, and unwind.
- 57 **Speak to someone who can offer spiritual guidance.** People who can give us spiritual guidance take many forms such as elders in your community, religious leaders, teachers, motivational speakers, counselors, and our parents.
- 58 **Give thanks.** Pausing to be grateful for what we have is a simple way to balance feelings of being stressed and overwhelmed. Look for any good things that have happened to you, your special gifts, or an unexpected positive outcome and say "Thank You."
- 59 **Put your the situation into perspective.** Allowing yourself to see the big picture can help you put your daily challenges into perspective. Take a step back and look at your situation as someone outside of the event might. This might give you some fresh ideas about what is happening and what you can do to succeed.
- 60 **Start Afresh!** Even if things don't go as you planned, it's important for you to leave the situation in the past. Replaying the event prolongs the stress associated with it. Allow yourself to put the situation behind you and resist the urge to keep thinking about it. Remember that tomorrow the sun will rise and a new day will begin.

## Things to Remember!

1. The situations that I find the most stressful are:
2. I can tell that I am getting stressed out when I notice the following changes in my:
  - Body:
  - Thoughts:
  - Emotions:
  - Behavior:
3. In the future I can control my stress levels and burnout proof my life by using the following Stress Busters:
  - Core Stress Busters
  - Personal Support
  - Organizational
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Mental
  - Diversionsary
  - Spiritual

## ***My Next Steps***

Before you put this booklet away, pause for a moment and make a promise to yourself to make a single change that will help you become a burnout proof volunteer.

**Today's Date:**

### **My Action**

What is one, small, achievable and realistic action that I will take immediately to put the information in *60 Stress Busters for Volunteers* to work in my own life and job search?

### **Positive Self-Talk I Can Use**

What positive things can I say to myself to encourage myself to follow up with this commitment?

### **My Support for this Action**

Who, or what, can I turn to for support in carrying out this action?

### **My Reward**

How will I reward myself when I complete this task?

### **My Outcome**

How did I complete this action and how did I do?

## ***Acknowledgements***

I would like to thank all of the volunteers who have attended my stress seminars and given me feedback and encouragement.



## **Id Love to Hear from YOU!**

Please feel free to tell me what you think about *60 Stress Busters for Volunteers*. I'd love to hear your success stories, your questions, and your comments.

You are welcome to contact me.

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Wishing you every success,



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