OPSEU/SEFPO

REGION 1

Mental Health & Burnout Toolkit

Supporting the people who support our members

Union leadership can mean carrying conflict, discipline, grievances, workplace trauma, difficult employers and the distress of people you care about.

Commitment to members should not require sacrificing your own mental health.

CHECK YOUR DASHBOARD

GREEN

I'm managing

I can disconnect • I still enjoy life outside union work • I can ask for help

YELLOW

Something is changing

Files follow me home • sleep or concentration is changing • I'm increasingly irritable or cynical

RED

I need support

I feel exhausted most days • I dread calls/messages • I'm isolating or feel unable to cope

IF YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE MAY BE IN CRISIS

Call or text 9-8-8, 24/7. If there is immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Burnout is not a personal resilience problem.

Workload, support, control, recovery time and organizational culture matter too.

Created by Hunter Barnes

Protect Your Capacity to Lead

Boundaries are not a lack of commitment. They help make leadership sustainable.

THE 24-HOUR RULE

Unless safety, an employment deadline, a grievance/legal deadline or an immediate rights issue depends on action tonight, it can probably wait.

CREATE UNION HOURS

Set predictable windows for routine calls, emails and messages.

Use Do Not Disturb outside your routine hours while keeping a route open for genuine emergencies.

DON'T BECOME THE ENTIRE LOCAL

Rotate grievances, member calls, investigations, communications and meetings.

Healthy unions develop more leaders instead of relying on one exhausted person.

USE A DIFFICULT-FILE BUDDY

Pair representatives on highly emotional files when possible.

Debrief afterward: What happened? What are we carrying? What needs action? What can we leave here?

PROTECT UNION-FREE TIME

Choose at least one regular evening or half-day with no grievances, employer correspondence, group chats or routine member calls.

TRIAGE BEFORE YOU REACT

Ask: Is this urgent? Is it mine? Does it need me specifically? What is the next useful action—not every possible action?

"Does this actually require my attention right now?"

Important and urgent are not the same thing.

Created by Hunter Barnes

Practical Reset Tools

Small tools for after a difficult call, tense meeting or overloaded day.

60 SECONDS

Physiological sigh

Breathe in through your nose, take a second small breath in, then slowly exhale completely. Repeat 2–3 times.

5–4–3–2–1 grounding

Notice 5 things you see • 4 feel • 3 hear • 2 smell • 1 taste.

Release the brace

Unclench your jaw. Drop your shoulders. Relax your hands. Put both feet down. Take one slow breath.

5 MINUTES — THE UNION LEADER RESET

1. Leave the screen.
2. Drink something.
3. Walk—even down the hall.
4. Slow your breathing.
5. Ask what actually needs attention next.
6. Choose one task.

WHEN YOUR BRAIN WON'T DROP THE FILE

CONTROL	What I can directly do.
INFLUENCE	What I can advocate for.
RELEASE	What I cannot control.

END-OF-DAY SHUTDOWN

Write down three (3) priorities for tomorrow • record anything you think you might forget • put deadlines in calendars • close the files • step away

Nothing else needs to be solved tonight.

Created by Hunter Barnes

Support Members Without Carrying Their Crisis

You can care deeply about a member without becoming their therapist, doctor or 24/7 crisis line.

NOTICE → ASK → LISTEN → CONNECT

NOTICE	“You haven’t seemed like yourself lately and I’m concerned about you.”
ASK	“How are you doing?” If suicide is a concern, ask clearly: “Are you thinking about suicide?”
LISTEN	Stay present. Avoid minimizing, debating or immediately trying to solve everything.
CONNECT	Help them reach professional support: EAP/EFAP, healthcare provider, crisis service, 9-8-8 or local mental-health resources.

KNOW YOUR LANE

UNION ROLE

- Empathy and listening
- Workplace advocacy
- Accommodation / grievance support
- Information and referrals
- Appropriate follow-up

NOT YOUR ROLE

- Therapist or diagnostician
- 24/7 crisis line
- Doctor or treatment provider
- Sole support person
- Keeping dangerous secrets

Repeated exposure to violence, suicide, harassment, termination and traumatic stories can affect representatives too. Confidential peer debriefing and professional support are legitimate leadership tools.

You don’t protect the movement by burning out the people who keep it moving.

Created by Hunter Barnes

Region 1 Help & Connection

Southwestern Ontario • London / Middlesex / Elgin / Oxford • Windsor-Essex • Sarnia-Lambton

ANYWHERE IN ONTARIO

9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline	Call or text 988 • 24/7
ConnexOntario	1-866-531-2600 • mental health, substance use & gambling treatment navigation
211 Ontario	Call or text 211 • community and social-service navigation
Hope for Wellness	1-855-242-3310 • 24/7 support for Indigenous people across Canada
Ontario Structured Psychotherapy	Free publicly funded CBT-based treatment; self-referral is available through regional networks.

REGION 1 LOCAL SUPPORT

London / Middlesex / Elgin / Oxford

CMHA Thames Valley — Reach Out 24/7
519-433-2023 • 1-866-933-2023

Mental Health & Addiction Crisis Centre: 648 Huron St, London
519-434-9191 • Walk-in support

Windsor / Essex

Mental Health & Addictions Urgent Crisis Centre
519-973-4435 • 24/7

Sarnia / Lambton

CMHA Lambton-Kent — Mental Health First Response
1-800-307-4319 • 24/7

SCAN FOR FAST ACCESS

9-8-8

211

Connex

Reach Out 24/7

Say “No." • ask for help • transfer a file • take vacation • turn off your phone • protect family time

Numbers verified September 2026. For life-threatening emergencies call 911; for suicide crisis call/text 9-8-8.

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