

WORKLOAD FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OVERWHELM

According to the ASHA Schools Survey, school-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) report large amounts of paperwork, high caseloads, and volume of meetings as the top three challenges they face.

These challenges—coupled with a range of roles and responsibilities, large and varied caseloads, administrators’ limited understanding of SLPs’ roles, and inadequate work conditions—**may lead to feelings of overwhelm.**

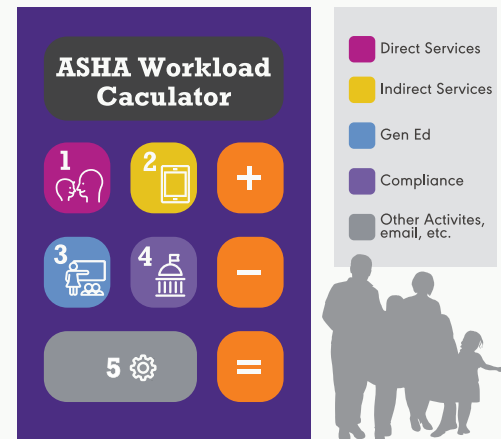
Typically, when experiencing overwhelm, a person may still be working toward—and even meeting—goals. They are encouraged by **observing the progress** that their students make and by **moving students through the continuum of services.**

It is important for an SLP to

- identify signs that contribute to feelings of overwhelm before they lead to burnout,
- recognize feelings of overwhelm, and
- identify tasks that may be contributing to this state.

School-based SLPs may want to **consider and adjust workload factors** that are within the SLP’s control as one way to address overwhelm.

Use the following *Workload Overwhelm Checklist* and priority-setting matrix to **identify the workload tasks** that contribute to feelings of overwhelm and **define some action steps** that you can take to address these issues.



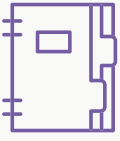
HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

1. Check the boxes next to your chosen top three workload tasks that you think contribute to your current feelings of stress/worry.
2. Identify one task that you want to address that causes overwhelm in your work.
3. Identify next steps on how to address this task (e.g., modify time management strategies, adapt a service delivery model).
4. List the individuals—for example, colleagues, administrators, union representatives—who will support your action plan.
5. Develop an estimated timeline for each task.
6. Use the information that you have compiled to (a) establish goals and (b) create action steps that will help address the areas of need.

REFERENCES/RESOURCES

For more information on this topic, please consult the following resources:

- [‘My Empathy Felt Drained’: Educators Struggle With Compassion Fatigue](#) *NEA Today* National Education Association (NEA) 2023
- [Testing a “Teacher Costs to Caring Resilience Model” \(TCCRM\) To Identify Burnout Mediators](#) *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies* ScienceDirect 2023
- [The Impact of Secondary Trauma on Educators](#) *EL Magazine (formerly Educational Leadership)* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) 2020
- [Ways to Wellness: Compassion Fatigue: A Systemic Concern](#) *California Educator magazine* California Teachers Association (CTA) 2021
- [When Students Are Traumatized, Teachers Are Too](#) *Edutopia* (an initiative of the George Lucas Educational Foundation) 2017
- [Tackling Burnout in the School Setting: Practical Tips for School-Based Speech-Language Pathologists](#) *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups* 2021



WORKLOAD OVERWHELM CHECKLIST



Workload Overwhelm Checklist

Workload Task	Description	✓
Limited understanding of my role	I receive unnecessary student referrals from teachers and staff, and/or I am asked to do things that are not within my scope of practice. I must continuously explain my role in staff meetings, response-to-intervention meetings, or IEP meetings. I often get left out of important decisions for students who are on my caseload.	
Large caseload	I provide direct speech-language services for lots of students, making it hard for me to keep up with my other caseload tasks (e.g., planning, paperwork, collaboration with teachers).	
Large amount of paperwork	I have to write many evaluation reports, IEPs, and emails, and I have to complete lengthy Medicaid billing and progress reports. My paperwork responsibilities often take time and energy away from my other responsibilities.	
Limited time for collaboration	I have little time to meet with classroom teachers, meet with other specialized instructional personnel (e.g., OTs, PTs), and plan strategically.	
Volume of meetings	I have many meetings—IEP, SLP-wide, grade-level team, school-wide, committee, and other—that interrupt other aspects of my job.	
Incorporation of optimal service delivery models	I find it difficult to use a variety of service delivery formats—in different settings and in the appropriate dosages—in my work environment.	
Inadequate workspace and facilities	I do not have an appropriate space to provide speech-language services.	
Limited family/caregiver involvement	I do not receive responses from caregivers to emails, and they don't attend meetings or seem to understand the speech-language services that their child receives.	
Limited support from administration	I can't convey to the principal and other administrators the importance of the speech-language services that I provide.	
Limited financial compensation	I feel that my pay scale and increases as well as reimbursement (e.g., for certification) are inadequate.	



SAMPLE COMPLETED PLAN OF ACTION



Plan of Action			
List the one workload task from the Workload Overwhelm Checklist that you will target. <i>Limited time to collaborate with colleagues</i>			
Working on _____ will help "future me" with the following stressors: reducing role ambiguity, ensuring appropriate referrals for speech-language services, and easing collaboration with teachers and staff.			
Step	Option A	Option B	Option C
1. Identify four possible strategies to address the task (e.g., develop time management strategies, adapt a service delivery model, collaborate with colleagues, present an in-service).	<i>Review my schedule with teachers and colleagues who support students in this class. Find a time we can meet once a week.</i>	<i>Create an email group for teachers and staff who work with these same students.</i>	<i>Ask the team lead if they can set aside time in our weekly team meeting for case discussion and collaboration.</i>
2. List colleagues, administrators, or other school staff who you will ask to help you address this task.	<i>OT, PT, sixth grade language arts teacher, sixth grade social studies teacher.</i>	<i>Same as Option A</i>	<i>Sixth grade team lead</i>
3. Identify an estimated timeframe for each activity.	<i>May take one email plus a follow-up with people who don't respond immediately. Can be accomplished in a week or two.</i>	<i>Send an email this afternoon to get OK from the teachers and staff. Set it up right after. Can do this by the end of the week.</i>	<i>Send an email to the lead today and, if approved, can start next week.</i>
4. Combine the information from the three steps above to write an achievable goal.	<i>I will schedule a weekly time to meet with teachers and staff who support sixth graders on my caseload by emailing the teachers and staff to coordinate our schedules.</i>	<i>By the end of this week, I will create an email group for teachers and staff who support sixth graders on my caseload for us to collaborate and plan.</i>	<i>I will send an email to the sixth grade team lead to see if they can set aside 10 minutes of our weekly team meeting for collaboration and planning.</i>



PLAN OF ACTION TEMPLATE



Plan of Action

List the one workload task from the **Workload Overwhelm Checklist** that you will target.

Working on _____ will help "future me" with the following stressors:

Step	Option A	Option B	Option C
1. Identify four possible strategies to address the task (e.g., develop time management strategies, adapt a service delivery model, collaborate with colleagues, present an in-service).			
2. List colleagues, administrators, or other school staff who you will ask to help you address this task.			
3. Identify an estimated timeframe for each activity.			
4. Combine the information from the three steps above to write an achievable goal.			