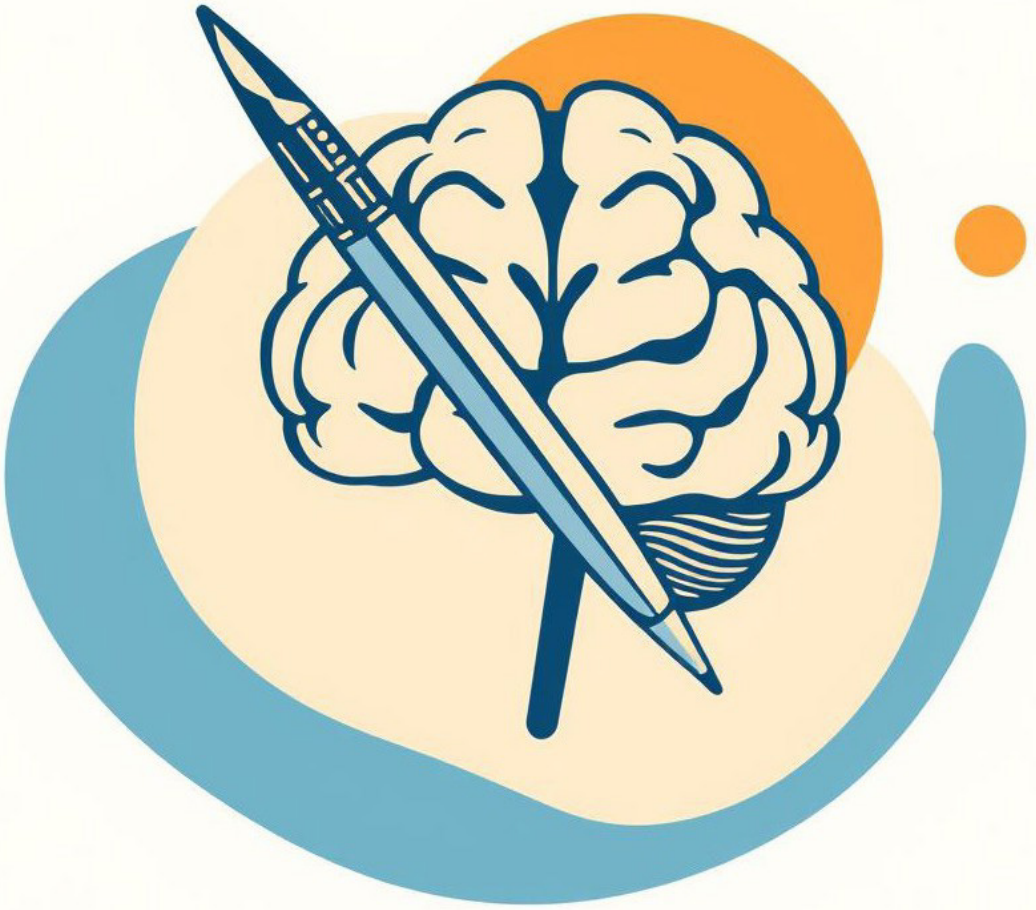




For Journalists A Guide to Psychological First Aid

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WHY THIS GUIDE?

Journalism is a profession that brings one face to face with life's most difficult moments, requiring one to keep one's own voice quiet whilst striving to be the voice of society. Years of economic uncertainty, a repressive environment, digital harassment and job insecurity are compounding the inherent challenges of the profession, creating conditions that place strain on journalists not only professionally but also personally.

Many journalists believe that 'to be good at this job, you have to be strong'. This is true — but being strong does not mean refusing help or refusing to admit when you are struggling.

Published by the Turkish Journalists' Union (TGS), this guide has been prepared with a focus on the reality faced by journalists working in Turkey. Its aim is to help understand risk factors, describe what it feels like to be under pressure, provide basic skills in psychological first aid, and make it easier to access support resources.

Who is it for?

For any journalist who feels overwhelmed, exhausted or alone whilst working. For anyone who notices a colleague is struggling and wonders, "What can I do?"

For anyone who, whilst bearing the weight of the news, cannot find time for themselves and feels their heart tightening as they tell themselves, "I must carry on."

This guide has been prepared to help you look after yourself, access your own resources and identify areas of support when the system falls short. It is no miracle — but a starting point to remind you that you are not alone.

This guide is not a prescription for individual resilience

The root cause of the psychological challenges faced by journalists lies primarily with the system.

Neoliberal economic policies, political pressure on the media, institutional arbitrariness and a lack of fairness are the main causes. The information in this guide is presented as a human support tool that every journalist can turn to in any environment, in circumstances where the system's preventive and protective functions fall short.

The real solution lies in structural change that enables a free, secure and ethical media environment.

CHAPTER 1

THE REALITY OF A JOURNALIST'S WORK IN TURKEY

The risks affecting journalists' mental health are not limited solely to the content of the news. These risks consist of interrelated factors such as the economic structure, working conditions, organisational culture and social pressure.

1.1 ECONOMIC INSECURITY AND STRUCTURAL PRESSURE

Journalism in Turkey is practised within an environment shaped by neoliberal economic policies and the political authorities' pressure on the media. This structure profoundly affects media organisations' ownership structures, news production processes and journalists' professional autonomy. Although institutions and individuals upholding an ethical and principled approach to journalism continue to exist despite these conditions, the aforementioned structural pressures are generally narrowing the scope of the profession.

Direct or indirect pressure on the media by state and government-aligned actors manifests itself not only through economic measures—such as the curtailment of advertising revenue, the threat of exclusion from public tenders for newspaper owners, and the revocation of broadcasting licences—but also through legal prosecutions and administrative sanctions targeting journalists. In this environment, practising journalism entails not only professional risks but also personal and legal risks.

- Low wages and contracts not updated in line with inflation
- Freelance and project-based working conditions
- Fear of dismissal or non-renewal of contracts
- The impossibility of making long-term plans
- The intertwining of media ownership with political and economic power centres
- Economic dependency structures that exert pressure on journalists' news selection and discourse

1.2 PRESSURE TO WORK CONTINUOUSLY AND WITHOUT INTERRUPTION

Journalism is a profession not confined to fixed working hours. However, in recent years, this has combined with the expectation of being 'available at all times', virtually erasing the boundary between work and private life. A person may remain mentally engaged with work whilst on holiday, sleeping at night, or eating a meal.

- The expectation of being available 24/7
- The inability to actually take holidays and rest periods
- The blurring of the boundary between private and professional life
- The increasing difficulty of mental rest

1.3 CORPORATE AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Changes in the ownership structures of media organisations and the deepening of their links with major economic actors are directly affecting news production processes. Within this structure, some journalists are compelled to consider not only news value but also potential organisational consequences when making professional decisions.

Managerial pressure is not always overt or direct. It sometimes manifests itself in the following ways:

- The explicit or implicit blocking of certain topics from being reported
- Requests to tone down the language of a news story or to change headlines
- Constant pressure to perform and criticism
- Exclusion from decision-making processes or being rendered invisible
- Unmerited appointments and unfair practices

What is self-censorship?

Over time, journalists may learn through experience which topics are 'risky' and which expressions are 'inappropriate'. Self-censorship is a reaction whereby a person restricts their own thoughts and expression, even in the absence of overt external pressure; over time, it becomes a permanent internal brake. It often arises out of necessity. To avoid losing their job or facing problems within the organisation, a person may feel compelled to restrict themselves.

Over time, this process can lead to: disappointment, a loss of professional meaning, a sense of worthlessness, internal tension and strained social relationships.

1.4 THE CHANGING MEDIA LANDSCAPE: TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION AND PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS

Over the past decade, journalism has had to contend not only with economic and political pressures but also with a profound technological transformation. Digitalisation, the proliferation of social media and artificial intelligence applications have completely reshaped the production, distribution and consumption of news. Whilst this transformation offers new opportunities, it also raises deep concerns regarding professional identity, job security and journalistic ethics.

- Algorithm-driven journalism: Content production based on click-through rates, viewing time and visibility metrics taking precedence over news value
- Downsizing, redundancies and forced migration to digital platforms within traditional press and media organisations
- The tension and debates over legitimacy arising from the journalism model established via YouTube, podcasts and social media in contrast to traditional journalism
- The use of artificial intelligence applications as a substitute for human labour in news production; journalists' fears of losing their jobs
- Concerns about falling behind new-generation digital tools and platforms; the pressure to constantly update and adapt
- Intergenerational differences: the difficulty faced by journalists trained in traditional journalistic values in adapting to the pace and format demands of the digital environment
- The deepening crisis of trust and uncertainty regarding the social role of journalism, exacerbated by the shift of news consumption to social media

Potential psychological effects

This transformation could pave the way for a crisis of professional identity among journalists. Suddenly feeling 'left behind' or 'made redundant' in a field where one has invested years of effort deeply undermines self-confidence and job satisfaction. Being forced to produce content approved by algorithms can become a source of pressure that conflicts with professional values. Journalists may begin to question both what they produce and why they produce it.

1.5 INSTITUTIONAL INSECURITY: ARBITRARINESS, INJUSTICE AND HARASSMENT

The organisations where journalists work are not independent of the broader social and political environment. In conditions where arbitrariness and injustice are openly practised across society, these patterns seep into the internal workings of media organisations. Concepts such as justice, ethics and meritocracy may begin to lose their meaning.

This situation leaves journalists not only facing external pressures but also grappling with uncertainty and a lack of trust within the organisations they work for.

In this environment, some journalists may experience the following:

- Appointment, promotion and decision-making processes where proximity and loyalty, rather than merit, are the determining factors
- The collapse of trust within the organisation; competition and suspicion prevailing over solidarity among colleagues
- The evaluation of performance and reliability based on non-objective criteria; a chronic discrepancy between an individual's own perception and the organisation's assessment
- Being subjected to investigations or attempts to discredit one's reputation due to institutional or managerial relationships, even when there is no direct connection
- Support meetings functioning as a mere formality or a tool for monitoring rather than creating a genuine atmosphere of trust
- The exclusion of those who express differing views or criticism, and their being targeted within the organisation through intimidating behaviour and gossip

Gaslighting

An individual's own perceptions and judgements are constantly questioned in a way that gradually leads them to doubt themselves. Questions such as 'Am I misunderstanding this?' or 'Am I being overly sensitive?' may become more frequent. Journalists working under these conditions for a long time may begin to doubt their own observations and professional judgements. This is not a personal weakness; it is the cumulative effect of an unfair environment on the mind.

1.6 ONLINE HARASSMENT AND TARGETING

The digital environment presents a new and ongoing threat to journalists. Online harassment is not merely a momentary annoyance; it is a systematic form of pressure that directly targets the journalist's professional identity, sense of security and presence in the public sphere.

- Coordinated harassment campaigns and messages containing intense hate speech on social media
- Unauthorised disclosure of personal information (doxing) and breaches of privacy
- Becoming a target of political or ideological polarisation; being forced to take sides
- Threatening messages — including threats directed at family members

Potential psychological effects

Although online harassment does not involve physical contact, it can cause real and lasting psychological harm. The individual may withdraw from the digital environment, narrow the scope of their topics or restrict their sharing — this is the digital form of professional self-censorship. A state of constant vigilance, sleep problems, social withdrawal and avoiding self-expression in public spaces are among the most common reactions.

1.7 LEGAL THREATS AND PHYSICAL SECURITY RISKS

Legal proceedings and physical threats are among the most severe risk factors that directly restrict journalistic practice. These threats profoundly affect not only journalism but also the individual's daily life, family relationships and perception of the future.

- Lawsuits, investigations and the threat of criminal prosecution based on news content
- The risk of arrest and detention; the sudden and unpredictable restriction of freedom
- Physical assault, being followed, or threats against one's family
- The obligation to work in conflict zones, crisis areas and high-risk regions
- Chronic uncertainty and financial burden caused by protracted legal proceedings

Potential psychological effects

Working under the threat of legal action can create a constant sense of impending danger and a state of heightened alertness (hypervigilance) in an individual. The protracted nature of legal proceedings wears a person down both financially and emotionally. Journalists are forced to bear not only the news itself, but also the potential legal consequences of everything they say. Over time, this situation can manifest as profound exhaustion, a sense of meaninglessness, and a desire to leave the profession.

1.8 EXPOSURE TO DIFFICULT CONTENT AND TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Journalism requires bearing witness to humanity's most harrowing experiences.

Reporting on death, violence, destruction and abuse is not merely a professional duty, but also an experience that profoundly affects the individual. This impact is not limited to a single news story; it deepens over time through cumulative and repeated exposure.

- Closely and repeatedly following news of death, violence, abuse and disasters
 - Being repeatedly exposed to distressing images, sounds and accounts as a professional necessity
 - Witnessing colleagues being detained, put on trial, singled out, or forced to leave the profession
 - Experiences of collective loss, such as the closure of institutions or the suspension of publications
 - The emotional burden created by the emotional bond formed with the person or community featured in the story

Potential psychological effects

Being repeatedly exposed to traumatic content can produce effects similar to primary trauma. Images or stories from the news may involuntarily resurface in the mind (flashbacks). Whilst the individual bears the human weight of the news, they simultaneously feel compelled to maintain professional distance — this conflict eventually lays the groundwork for emotional burnout. At the same time, the normalisation of events — or desensitisation — is also a warning sign: the individual may believe they are no longer affected, yet this lack of reaction is itself a sign of wear and tear.

1.9 CHALLENGES AND RISKS FACED BY TRADE UNIONS

Whilst striving to protect their members and defend their professional rights, journalists' unions must themselves confront similar structural pressures. In conditions where the right to organise is restricted and trade union activities are met with political or institutional pressure, trade unions may encounter serious legal, financial and organisational difficulties. This situation weakens the protective function of trade unions and may leave journalists even more vulnerable.

- Trade union activities being targeted by legal pressure, investigations or administrative sanctions
- A shrinking membership base and difficulties in organising due to the rise in precarious and freelance journalists
- Union workplace representatives being singled out through attempts at dismissal, exclusion or discrediting
- Financial constraints and the narrowing of the scope for independent action; the fragility caused by dependence on external funding sources
- The breakdown of solidarity networks; the weakening of trade union ties due to mistrust among colleagues
- Barriers to international connections and joint advocacy work

Potential psychological effects

Trade union leaders and representatives bear a double burden: they not only face their own professional risks but also take on their members' problems and act as their advocates. Over time, this role can pave the way for intense emotional burnout, a sense of helplessness and the weight of responsibility. Being in a position of constantly providing support without receiving sufficient support in return can give rise to one of the quietest forms of burnout.

CHAPTER 2

DEALING WITH STRESS: UNDERSTANDABLE REACTIONS

Working under challenging conditions affects people in many ways; a significant portion of these effects can be experienced as intense and negative emotions. Although these experiences may sometimes feel like a sign of weakness, they are actually natural reflections of difficult circumstances. Recognising and making sense of what is happening is the first step towards continuing to live with the capacity to carry these emotions.

2.1 STRESS AND CHRONIC TENSION

Working under prolonged pressure can cause the body and mind to remain in a constant 'alert mode'. It becomes increasingly difficult to relax, rest, or 'switch off'. A person may find it impossible to disconnect from work-related thoughts, even whilst on holiday or at the weekend.

- Difficulty concentrating, frequent forgetfulness
- Sleep problems — difficulty falling asleep or waking up too early
- Irritability, impatience, disproportionate reactions to minor issues
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension and palpitations

2.2 BURNOUT

Burnout is not merely fatigue. It is a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion resulting from the accumulation of prolonged stress. Burnout, which is particularly common among journalists, has three key dimensions:

- Emotional exhaustion: Feeling drained, as if one's emotional reserves have been depleted
- Desensitisation: Distancing oneself from news, people and issues; becoming indifferent
- Diminished sense of personal accomplishment: The feeling that 'no matter what I do, I can't seem to make a difference'

“

Burnout is not an inevitable consequence of the profession. To a large extent, it is influenced by working conditions, a lack of organisational support and structural issues.

It is not a result of personal weakness, but of a systemic burden.

”

2.3 SECONDARY TRAUMA (INDIRECT TRAUMATISATION)

Just as experiencing traumatic events directly can affect a person, so too can closely following these events, witnessing them, or processing the news. This is known as secondary trauma or vicarious traumatising.

- Images or stories from the news one has followed frequently returning to the mind
- An intense sense of bearing the pain of others
- One may experience either desensitisation or hypersensitivity towards the subject of the news
- It can be difficult to share these things — thinking ‘It wasn’t really that bad’ and downplaying how you feel

2.4 LOSS OF PROFESSIONAL MEANING AND ISOLATION

The gap between the journalism a person wants to practise and the journalism they are forced to practise can widen over time. This discrepancy can create a deep sense of loneliness. Facing responses such as ‘You chose this profession’ or ‘That’s just how this job is’ when you say you’re struggling can further deepen that loneliness.

- A decline in commitment to the profession, a reluctance to go to work
- Frequently asking, ‘Am I making a difference?’
- Lack of trust in colleagues or the organisation
- Reluctance to express difficulty, fear of ‘appearing weak’

CHAPTER 3

IN SPITE OF THE CHALLENGES: WHY JOURNALISM?

Despite all the weight, pressure and wear and tear discussed in the previous sections, the vast majority of journalists continue in the profession. This is not a case of blindness or helplessness. It is, for the most part, a conscious, value-driven and meaning-based choice. The burden journalism places on the individual is real — but the meaning, satisfaction and sources of strength the profession offers are just as real.

This chapter has been prepared to highlight the strength that exists alongside the hardship. Accepting the hardships does not preclude believing in the profession's value; on the contrary, being able to bear both is the essence of professional resilience.

3.1 MEANING AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

For many people, journalism is not merely a job; it is a public service carried out with a deep sense of responsibility towards society. This sense of responsibility is one of the strongest sources of motivation that makes it possible to persevere even under difficult conditions.

- The sense of meaning and purpose derived from bringing the truth to the public
- The sense of contributing to social change, justice or accountability
- Listening to the unspoken voices, bringing overlooked issues to light
- Seeing the tangible impact of the news — a policy change, the rectification of an injustice — with one's own eyes

3.2 THE HONOUR OF BEING A WITNESS

Journalists bear witness to the course of history. This witness is as much a heavy burden as it is a unique distinction found in no other profession. To be present at humanity's most critical moments, to record and convey that moment — this experience can be a profound source that sustains commitment to the profession, despite the challenges.

- Witnessing history's turning points first-hand

- Bringing to light stories that would otherwise never be heard
- Seeing the complexity and depth of the human experience up close

3.3 COLLEAGUE SOLIDARITY AND A SENSE OF BELONGING

Working shoulder to shoulder with people united by a common purpose is a powerful protective factor for journalism. Solidarity is not merely about receiving support in difficult times; it is about existing alongside people who share the same values and take the same risks.

- The sense of strength and belonging created by working with a team that believes in a common purpose
- Colleague relationships that support one another in difficult times and share experiences
- The sense of security provided by trade union organisation and professional solidarity networks

3.4 PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND SELF-EFFICACY

Surviving under challenging conditions fosters a unique resilience and sense of self-efficacy in journalists over time. Remaining calm in times of crisis, making complex information understandable, and seeking the truth under pressure — these are skills acquired through the profession that empower the individual.

- The ability to work under pressure and remain functional during crises
- The satisfaction derived from the process of research, inquiry and the search for truth
- The sense of meaning, purpose and self-confidence provided by one's professional identity

Protective factors: Where does strength come from?

Research highlights some common elements that nurture journalists' professional resilience:

Strong professional values and ethical principles — knowing what one is working for
Trustworthy professional relationships and support networks

Professional autonomy — the freedom to make one's own journalistic decisions

The existence of areas outside work where meaning and connection are found

Knowing that you can ask for help and receive support when under pressure

These factors not only strengthen individual resilience but also form the foundation of professional sustainability when supported at an organisational level.

CHAPTER 4

THE LIMITS OF INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE LIMITS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STRUCTURAL SUPPORT

Strong professional motivation, a sense of purpose and personal resilience are valuable resources that enable one to persevere in challenging conditions. However, these are not sufficient. The structural conditions of journalistic practice — time pressure, a demanding management approach, constant expectations of high performance, and the chronic tension between speed and accuracy — can create a burden far exceeding individual capacity. Attempting to bear this burden solely through personal strength paves the way for resilience to erode over time.

4.1 SPEED, ACCURACY AND THE PRESSURE TO PERFORM

With digitalisation, the news cycle has accelerated dramatically. Journalists often feel compelled to produce news that is the fastest, the most accurate and the most comprehensive. Achieving all three at the same time is often structurally impossible — yet failure is attributed to the individual.

- The conflict between the pressure to be first and the time required for verification
- The constant pressure created by the fear of making mistakes and concerns about professional reputation
- The necessity of tracking, producing and publishing multiple stories simultaneously
- The high and sometimes conflicting expectations of managers or editors
- The constant measurement of performance — the pressure of click-through, share, and reach data

4.2 PERFECTIONISM AND BURNOUT

Journalistic ethics demand high standards regarding the accuracy and completeness of news. These standards are valuable — yet perfectionism can, over time, become the most exhausting pressure a person imposes on themselves.

This pattern becomes particularly pronounced among journalists who are left to bear the cost of mistakes alone, especially when institutional support is lacking.

- Failing to strike a balance between maintaining news quality and sustaining a manageable pace
- Viewing the refusal to acknowledge fatigue as a professional virtue
- Viewing the setting of boundaries as conflicting with professional commitment; the belief that ‘a good journalist never stops’
- Environments where mistakes are viewed as individual rather than institutional failures

4.3 THE ERODING OF INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCE WITHOUT INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Research consistently shows that individual resilience eventually wears thin without a supportive working environment. No matter how strong or motivated a person may be, resilience ceases to act as a protective shield in the face of chronic stress, insufficient resources and institutional indifference.

- The realistic limits of the self-management capacity expected of an individual when institutional support mechanisms are lacking
- The risk of approaches that merely convey the message ‘be more resilient’ placing the burden of responsibility on the individual
- The necessity of supporting individual effort with organisational conditions for long-term sustainability

Individual resilience and organisational responsibility cannot be interchangeable

Personal strength and a sense of purpose remain a vital resource in challenging circumstances. However, the sustainability of this resource depends on safe working conditions, a fair management approach and accessible support mechanisms. Substituting one for the other — delegating institutional responsibility to individual resilience or prioritising personal empowerment over structural change — renders both ineffective.

CHAPTER 5

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (PFA): BASIC INFORMATION AND PRACTICES

The structural pressures, institutional burdens and limits of individual resilience discussed in previous chapters create the conditions for journalists to experience intense strain not only during acute crises but also in their daily working lives. Knowing what can be done in the midst of this strain — both for oneself and for a colleague — is a concrete and accessible source of support.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-based support approach developed by the World Health Organisation and international humanitarian organisations. The WHO's guide, titled "Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers", defines PFA as follows: a humanitarian, supportive form of assistance provided to people experiencing severe stress, designed to support their well-being and reduce potential long-term negative effects. This approach is not therapy; it does not involve diagnosis or treatment. Its primary aim is to ensure the safety of the person in distress, help them stabilise emotionally, address their practical needs and, where necessary, refer them to appropriate resources.

PFA was originally designed in the context of natural disasters, armed conflicts and mass trauma response. However, journalism is a profession that faces not only sudden and acute shocks, but also chronic, cumulative and, over time, normalised wear and tear. Ongoing economic pressure, the erosion of professional meaning, long-term legal threats or institutional insecurity — none of these are single events; yet all can leave deep and lasting psychological scars. For this reason, this section presents the PFA framework adapted to the specific conditions of journalistic practice. As a guide that can be used both in times of crisis and amidst the daily weight of chronic burnout...

Psychological First Aid (PFA) – Summary

According to the WHO definition, PFA is a form of humanitarian, supportive assistance provided to people experiencing severe stress. It is not therapy, it does not involve diagnosis, and it does not require specialist expertise.

Five key objectives: ensuring safety — helping the person to calm down — supporting their confidence in their own capabilities — strengthening their social connections — keeping hope and the possibility of change alive.

For journalists, PFI offers a valid framework not only in acute crises but also in cases of chronic fatigue, accumulated stress and long-term burnout.

5.1 THE FIVE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF PFA

According to the World Health Organisation, PFA is based on five core principles:

SAFETY

Ensure the person's physical and emotional safety. Create a safe space first.

CALMING

Help reduce intense emotions and physical reactions. Stabilise and calm.

EMPOWERMENT

Support the person's confidence in their own ability to cope. Reinforce the feeling that 'you can get through this'.

CONNECTION

Connect the person with their social support networks. Make them feel they are not alone.

HOPE

Nurture the belief that change is possible. Direct the individual to appropriate support resources.

Why is it hard to ask for help?

Journalism brings with it a culture that places strength and resilience at the very heart of one's professional identity. Admitting that one is struggling — particularly in environments dominated by insecurity and unfair competition — can position the individual as 'problematic' or 'weak' in the eyes of colleagues or managers.

Yet the need for psychological support is not a weakness; it is a human right. Moreover, work environments characterised by incompetence, arbitrariness and unfair competition place individuals in a far more psychologically vulnerable position — under such conditions, struggling is inevitable and is not a personal failure. Asking for help does not undermine professional credibility; on the contrary, it is an expression of self-awareness and courage.

5.2 “WHEN YOU NEED TO HELP A FELLOW JOURNALIST:”

Not knowing what to do when you notice a colleague is struggling often leads to doing nothing at all. Yet the most valuable support is usually the simplest: being there for them, listening genuinely, and accepting them without judgement. The following suggestions are not a checklist. They are intended to remind us of the foundations of a relationship based on trust. Trust between people comes before the words spoken — “which is why it is important to protect it first.”

HELPFUL SUPPORTIVE RESPONSES:

- Make time, don't rush — make them feel you're truly there
- Ask 'How are you, really?' and create space for the answer
- Listen before speaking — do not interrupt, do not pressure them to respond
- Use affirming phrases that show you understand their situation, such as “Feeling this way in such circumstances is very natural and human”
- Ask, 'What do you need most right now?' — sometimes the answer isn't to talk, but simply to be there quietly.
- If necessary, consider suggesting professional support — present this not as an imposition, but as a gentle option
- Keep letting them know you're there for them — check in again a few days later to show you care and haven't forgotten

RESPONSES THAT MAY CAUSE HARM:

- Empty assurances like ‘Everything will be alright’ — they trivialise the pain
- ‘There are people who’ve been through worse’ — invalidates what they’ve experienced
- Jumping straight to offering solutions — they need to be heard first
- Failing to maintain confidentiality — support is impossible if trust is broken
- Putting one’s own experiences or opinions before the person’s feelings
- Implying that struggling is a sign of weakness — even if unintentionally

5.3 WHAT TO DO IN A CRISIS?

If a colleague or you yourself suddenly find yourself experiencing intense stress or a crisis, the following steps may help:

- Move to a safe place — get away from crowds and noise
- Feel the points where your body touches the ground: feet, back, hands
- Breathe slowly: (count to 4 as you inhale, hold for 4 counts, and exhale slowly while counting to 6)
- Name five things around you: things you can see, hear, and touch
- If the person in distress is a colleague, do not leave them alone — stay quietly by their side
- If the situation does not improve or the person is at risk of self-harm, seek emergency support

5.4 FOR YOURSELF: PRACTICAL SELF-REGULATION TECHNIQUES BREATHING EXERCISE (4-4-6 TECHNIQUE)

To calm the nervous system during moments of stress or panic:

- Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4
- Hold your breath for 4 counts
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 counts
- Repeat 3–5 times

ANCHORING TO THE PRESENT – THE 5-4-3-2-1 TECHNIQUE

When your mind gets stuck in the past or future, these questions can help you focus on ‘the here and now’:

- SEE 5 things — count 5 objects your eyes are drawn to around you
- FEEL 4 things — feel 4 things touching your skin (chair, clothes, air)
- 3 things to HEAR — notice 3 sounds you can hear right now
- 2 things to SMELL — name two things you can smell around you
- 1 thing to TASTE — notice something you can taste in your mouth or nearby

BODY AWARENESS – BODY SCAN

To spot tiredness and tension early on, spend a few minutes each day scanning your body from the soles of your feet to your head. Where do you feel stiffness, heaviness or tension? Just notice it; don’t try to change it.

WRITING PRACTICE

Writing freely for 10 minutes after a difficult day or news can lighten the burden on your mind.

Writing down whatever comes to mind—without holding back, filtering, or feeling the need to share it with anyone—while reflecting on questions like “What did you experience? How did you feel?” can make it easier to make sense of and process what has happened.

CHAPTER 6

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE: WAYS TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Psychological resilience is not about remaining unshaken. It does not mean not crumbling when faced with difficulties, but rather being able to crumble and recover, and carry on. This chapter has been prepared with the structural pressures, professional burdens and human realities discussed in previous chapters in mind.

The suggestions here do not say ‘be stronger’, but rather ‘make space for your human needs’. Journalists are ordinary people too — people who need sleep, who want to form connections, who seek meaning, who sometimes get tired and sometimes need support... Meeting these needs makes it possible to do the job better; it does not weaken it.

Resilience is not a character trait

Research shows that psychological resilience is largely shaped by relationships, working conditions and accessible support mechanisms. “One cannot expect a person to be ‘more resilient’ on their own — such an approach places the burden of responsibility on the individual and renders structural issues invisible.”

6.1 MAKING ROOM FOR ONESELF

In journalism, ‘being available at all times’ is often regarded as a sign of professional commitment. Yet constantly yielding to this expectation stems not from dedication to the profession, but from failing to carve out space for oneself. Making space for oneself is not a luxury — it is the true foundation of sustainable work and an ordinary human life.

- Making a conscious decision to postpone messages and notifications received outside working hours and putting this into practice
- Using rest and holiday time to truly disconnect from work
- Being able to stand up to excessive workloads, out-of-hours demands and endless expectations — doing so either by speaking out or quietly, but consciously
- Clearly demonstrating this attitude to colleagues; thereby shattering the illusion that everyone must pressure

6.1 B ENGAGING WITH LIFE OUTSIDE WORK

Existing outside of work — exploring, creating, resting, connecting — is essential not only for the sustainability of working life, but for a full and humane life.

Journalism can, over time, become a profession that consumes one's entire world; this lays the groundwork for both professional burnout and personal stagnation.

- Maintaining an interest in an area outside journalism that nourishes you: art, music, literature, nature, sport, crafts — whatever it may be
- Setting aside time for activities that clear the mind, away from news-following — and not filling that void with concerns about productivity
- Nurturing close relationships: family, friends, loved ones, close connections — without talking about work, simply being together
- Joining non-professional communities; connecting with circles outside the journalism profession that offer different perspectives
- Not judging the things you enjoy by a 'productivity' yardstick — some things are enough simply because they make you feel good

6.2 LISTENING TO YOUR BODY

Chronic stress manifests itself in the body first — often without the person realising it. Recognising the warning signals your body sends is critical for both early intervention and self-care.

- Maintaining a sleep routine: Not accepting sleep disturbances as an inevitable part of chronic fatigue
- Regular movement: Short walks, stretching, breathing exercises — not major changes, but sustainable small habits
- Maintaining meal times and routines; using mealtimes as an anchor point rather than skipping meals under stress
- Taking physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle tension, sleep problems and digestive issues seriously by linking them to 'emotional needs'
- Body awareness practices: Body scans, breathing exercises, grounding techniques — these are not just for moments of crisis, but for everyday use

6.3 MAINTAINING THE CONNECTION TO MEANING AND VALUES

Working under prolonged pressure can, over time, distance a person from the reason they entered this profession. Keeping the connection to meaning alive serves both as a protective factor and as the source of the sustainability of professional identity.

- Taking the time to ask: ‘Why am I doing this job? What values keep me here?’
- Recognising and documenting the tangible impact journalism creates — however small
- Consciously maintaining a distance between content driven by algorithms, ratings or corporate pressure and one’s own professional values
- Remembering that a loss of meaning may be a temporary phase — and that recognising this phase is healthier than getting lost within it

6.4 SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND SOLIDARITY

Journalism is a profession that, whilst seemingly bustling, can be isolating at its core. Social connection is not merely a nice-to-have; it is one of the strongest building blocks of psychological resilience.

- Maintaining regular contact with colleagues you trust — not just to talk about work
- Ensuring you have at least one person with whom you can share experiences, anxieties and fatigue
- Joining professional solidarity networks, trade unions and peer support groups
- Nurturing “meaningful relationships outside work” — family, friends, communities — and not allowing your profession to completely fill these spaces
- Creating pockets of trust even in untrustworthy environments: a single colleague or a single space may be enough

6.5 SEEKING PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Seeking psychological support is not a last resort; it is a normal part of self-care. Just as “visiting a healthcare provider for physical reasons” is not seen as a sign of professional weakness, neither is seeking psychological counselling.

Some signs that may prompt you to seek support: persistent fatigue, sleep problems, a sense of detachment from your profession, tension in personal relationships, and feelings of meaninglessness and hopelessness. These signs are not a sign of weakness, but an indication that the burden has become too much.

- If you are a TGS member, you can make use of the individual psychological counselling service offered by the union
- Instead of putting off seeking support, start with a small step: getting some information, having a chat
- Reframe psychological counselling not as something for ‘people who have broken down’, but for ‘those who want to look after themselves’

Resilience is built together—not alone!

Recognising personal boundaries, expressing needs, listening to the body, maintaining a sense of connection, building trustworthy relationships and seeking support when needed; these are all practices that feed into one another. None of them is a miracle; together, they form a sustainable foundation for remaining resilient.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE ORGANISATIONAL AND TRADE UNION LEVELS

Protecting journalists' mental health is not only about enhancing individual resilience but also about creating healthier and more supportive working environments. The following recommendations have been prepared for both media organisations and trade unions.

7.1 CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND STRUCTURAL PREVENTION

- Psychosocial risks should be included within the scope of occupational health and safety
- Excessive workloads must be limited, and a policy of fair pay and equitable task distribution must be implemented
- Every team should conduct regular risk assessments; mental health should be treated as a corporate responsibility on a par with physical health
- Workplaces should collaborate with mental health professionals, and access to short-term psychotherapy and low-threshold psychological support services should be provided
- Regular one-to-one meetings with journalists; structured meetings to assess workload, burnout and support needs should be organised at least twice a year
- A zero-tolerance policy against bullying and harassment should be developed
- Managers should be trained to identify structural and systemic risks, recognise protective early warning signs without individualising issues, and provide guidance on support

7.2 COLLEAGUE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- Peer support groups should be established; safe spaces for sharing should be provided for journalists experiencing burnout
- Multidisciplinary support teams comprising human resources, psychological counsellors/mental health professionals and managers should be established
- Regular team meetings focused on sharing experiences and fostering solidarity should be organised

7.3 TRAINING AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

- Preventive and protective mental health initiatives, awareness and psycho-educational programmes
- Training on burnout, stress management and psychological resilience
- Psychological first aid workshops — for journalists and editors
- Raising the profile of the issue through podcasts, conferences and public events; publicising demands for systemic changes

7.4 THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS

- Psychological support hotlines should be established
- Guides and resources for journalists should be prepared
- Developing policies to reduce job insecurity and drafting collective agreements
- Protecting members against rights violations and providing legal support

CONCLUSION

Journalists' mental health is shaped not by individual resilience or personal choice, but primarily by their living and working conditions. This guide does not aim to increase individual resilience, but rather to provide journalists with a framework to make sense of their own experiences and to serve as a human tool they can turn to in any situation where the system's preventive functions fall short.

The real solution lies beyond individual coping skills: the way to repair the damage caused by the neoliberal media structure and political pressure is through structural transformation towards a free, independent and ethical media environment. The agents of this transformation are the journalists themselves, their unions and solidarity networks.

This guide is a small but meaningful step in that direction. Asking for help when you are struggling is not a sign of weakness — it is an expression of respect for the profession and for yourself.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Note:

These are the sources consulted in the preparation of this guide and to which the reader is directed for more detailed information. It is recommended that relevant databases be consulted to verify the full bibliographic details of academic publications.

KEY REPORTS AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

- European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) / Stronger Minds, Stronger Media: Mental Health and Well-being in Journalism. (2025) / Stand Up for Journalism Project.
- World Health Organization & War Trauma Foundation / Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers (2011).
- Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma / Journalist Safety and Mental Health Resources / Columbia University / dartcenter.org
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) / Journalist Security / cpj.org/reports/
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF) / Press Freedom Index and Journalist Support Resources / rsf.org

ACADEMIC SOURCES

Deuze, M. (2007). *Media Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Feinstein, A., Owen, J., & Blair, N. (2002). A Hazardous Profession: War, Journalists, and Psychopathology. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 159(9), 1570-1575.

Hobfoll, S. E. et al. (2007). Five Essential Elements of Immediate and Mid-Term Mass Trauma Intervention: Empirical Evidence. *Psychiatry*, 70(4), 283-315.

Newman, E., Simpson, R., & Handschuh, D. (2003). Trauma Exposure and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Among Photojournalists. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 10(1), 4-13.

Reinardy, S. (2011). Newspaper Journalism in Crisis: Burnout on the Rise, Eroding Young Journalists' Career Commitment. *Journalism*, 12(1), 33-50.

SOURCES RELEVANT TO THE TURKISH CONTEXT

P24 Independent Journalism Platform. Reports on Press Freedom in Turkey. p24.org.tr

Reporters Without Borders. World Press Freedom Index — Turkey. rsf.org/en/country/turkey

Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS). Press Freedom and Journalists' Rights Reports. tgs.org.tr