

## CHAPTER 5

### Moderator Wellbeing & Avoiding Burnout

Moderating in Aotearoa New Zealand communities means holding space for others, and sometimes, holding grief, anger, and trauma. Over time, that can drain even the most committed volunteers. This chapter is about protecting your energy, supporting your team, and knowing when to step back.

*“If you’re in a day job and you’re doing that as a volunteer group, it [the burden] is huge”*

- anon, NZ mod

#### Spotting the signs of mod burnout

Moderation burnout doesn’t always look like collapse. Sometimes it’s slow, subtle, and cumulative.

##### Common signs:

- Feeling dread every time you check the group
- Becoming overly subjective, reactive or detached in decisions
- Avoiding inboxes or keyword alerts
- Arguing more with fellow mods
- Feeling guilt after muting/banning someone
- Replaying distressing posts or comments
- Losing empathy for members
- Feeling like you’re “holding it all alone”

#### Protective practices for moderators

##### Set boundaries with the work and model “step-back” culture:

- Don’t moderate your group in bed or during mealtimes
- Rostered off time is essential, share the mod duties with others and stay off when it’s not your time
- Rotate harm-handling duties among mod team
- If a post triggers you, don’t handle it alone
- Have a “tap-out” system: “Hey team, I’m not in a good place to moderate today”
- Affirm rest as a valid mod decision
- Encourage others to do the same

##### Regular team check-in:

- “What’s one thing that was hard this week?”
- “Any decisions you’re unsure about?”
- “Do we need to reset on tone, rules, or trust?”
- “Anyone need time off modding?”

##### Use your mod chat channel for peer support:

- Not just logistics, a safe chat to say “that post rattled me”
- Normalise saying “That really got to me”

## Debriefing after harmful posts:

- What happened, and how did it affect us?
- Was our response aligned with the kaupapa?
- What would we do differently next time?
- Is there anything we need to clarify publicly?
- Does anyone need to tap out or take space?

## When to pause or step away

Moderators (mods) don't need to be heroes, you might need to take a break if:

- You're regularly dreaming about or reliving harm you moderated
- You're constantly fearing you'll 'get it wrong'
- You're snapping at people who aren't doing anything wrong
- You haven't had a break in over a month

## When mods and members are targeted

Sometimes harm doesn't just happen inside the group, it gets directed at you or your members personally. Mods can be doxxed, harassed, or accused of bias, and group followers may also be targeted just for belonging or as a reaction to something they post or comment.

*“Some people have developed a real hatred toward me – they’ve gone out of their way to spread false claims, attack me online, and even make threats, including death threats.” - anon, NZ mod*

## What to do if it happens:

- **Act fast:** Hide/remove abusive posts, mute or ban the offender. Screenshot everything before removal.
- **Escalate:** Report to [netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz) (0508 NETSAFE) or Police (105) if threats are violent. Treat doxxing as a serious privacy breach.
- **Protect yourself:** Use your moderator/admin role (not your personal profile) when possible. Keep personal details private.
- **Lean on your team:** Share the emotional load. Use “The mod team” in official posts to reduce individual targeting.
- **Support members:** If group members are harassed, remind them where to report safely and reassure them the group does not tolerate targeting.

### TIP

You are not expected to absorb abuse as “part of the job.” Protecting your own safety is part of protecting the community.