

# Autistic Burnout

The idea of autistic burnout has come from the autistic community as it continues to expand our self-advocacy. While there is 'some' mention of Autistic Burnout in scientific literature, there is very little research. Lack of research is why it is SO important to seek out authentic voices on autistic subjects. Wherever possible, information in this resource will come from authentic autistic voices.

**The National Autistic Society uses the work of Dora Raymaker to define autistic burnout as a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic life stress and a mismatch of expectations and abilities without adequate supports. It is characterized by pervasive, long-term (typically 3+ months) exhaustion, loss of function, and reduced tolerance to stimulus.**

## COMMON FEATURES OF AUTISTIC BURNOUT

- Pervasive exhaustion encompassing physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects.
- Heightened sensory sensitivities.
- A decline in various skills, including executive functioning, daily living activities, and communication abilities.

*Source: Autistic Burnout Guide to Spotting and Recovering from Autistic Burnout by Dr. Megan Anna Neff*

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND AUTISTIC BURNOUT

### DEPRESSION

- Behavioral Activation
- Elevated Worthlessness
- Depressed Mind
- Depressed Mood
- Sleep Changes
- Anhedonia (loss of pleasure in previously enjoyable activities)
- Suicidality (thoughts and behaviors related to the desire to end one's life)

*Source: Neurodivergent Insights - Misdiagnosis Monday: by Dr. Megan Anna Neff*

### OVERLAP

- Food and Appetite Changes
- Social Withdrawal
  - in depression this is typically harmful
  - in Autistic Burnout this is typically helpful
- Influences interpersonal decision-making
- Emotionally upset more easily
- Executive Functioning Difficulties
- Sense of Emptiness
- Fatigue

### AUTISTIC BURNOUT

- Behavioral Activation and Burnout
- Sensory Sensitivities
- Benefits from Rest and Unmasking
- Loss of Ability to Unmask
- Loss of Skills
- Non-Existence Ideation (A longing for demands and sensory input to stop, sometimes leading to daydreams of non-existence)

**DEPRESSION AND AUTISTIC BURNOUT ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE**



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## Why It's Important to Understand Autistic Burnout in Terms of PDA

Because autism is an invisible disability coupled with a high percentage of PDAers presenting a-typically, autism can be overlooked.

Families and individuals in crisis not only are supporting an individual with PDA, but an autistic in deep burnout.

It must be **understood** that before a family can experience a more regulated PDAer, autistic burnout **MUST** be addressed.

## Supporting Someone in Autistic Burnout

Dr. Neff

(NeurodivergentInsights.com)

suggests

- Provide and encourage the use of Sensory Supports
  - Visual
  - Tactictile
  - Lighting
  - Smell
  - Temperature
  - Environment
  - Gustatory (Oral)
  - Clothing
  - Sound
  - People
  - Proprioception

Dr. Alice Nicholls

(dralicenicholls.com)

suggests

- Avoid making changes to plans or routines
- Communicate in a calm and measured way
- Ask closed questions with yes or no answers
- Avoid unnecessary small talk or questions
- Texting may be helpful

Using declarative language may help to communicate with someone in autistic burnout. It reduces threat responses and helps to break down communication barriers. Declarative language offers choices rather than directives. You can find more information about declarative language on our website [JourneysWithPDA.com](http://JourneysWithPDA.com) under the Resources Tab.



## CONTACT US

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