

Based on the research into "Energy Accounting," "Stay Interviews," and the specific behavioral markers of AuDHD (Autism + ADHD), here is a workplace toolkit.

This is designed for managers to identify neurodivergent energy patterns **without** needing a medical diagnosis. It shifts the management focus from "managing time" to "managing energy."

Part 1: The "Energy Audit" Question Bank

Use these questions in 1:1s or "Stay Interviews" to uncover neurodivergent friction points. These questions bypass medical labels and focus on "Mana Cost" (Executive Function load).

Category A: The "Spoon" & "Mana" Assessment

Goal: Identify if the employee is running out of "Spell Slots" for basic functioning.

- "If you started the day with 10 'energy coins,' which single task takes 5 of them before lunch?"
- "Do you feel you have to 'recover' from our weekly team meetings? If so, is it the duration, the noise, or the social demand?"
- "Are there tasks that you can do for 4 hours straight (Hyperfocus), but other simple tasks (like email) that feel like wading through mud?"
- "When you hit a 'wall' in the afternoon, is it a need for *rest* (sensory quiet) or a need for *stimulation* (change of pace/novelty)?"

Category B: Sensory & Environmental Friction

Goal: Identify sensory drains that cause Autistic Shutdown.

- "On a scale of 1–10, how much 'background processing' are you doing just to ignore the office lights/noise/slack pings?"
- "Do you do your best thinking when you are entirely alone, or do you need the 'body doubling' pressure of others working nearby?"
- "Would you function better with a 'camera-off' policy during internal meetings to save energy on facial expressions (masking)?"

Category C: The Novelty vs. Routine Conflict (AuDHD)

Goal: Identify the 'Boredom = Pain' threshold.

- "Do you find yourself exhausted by the *chaos* of a project, or by the *monotony* of it?" (Distinguishing Autism need for routine vs. ADHD need for novelty).
 - "Does knowing exactly what you have to do every day make you feel safe, or does it make you feel trapped?"
 - "Do you struggle to *start* a task because you don't know the first step, or because the task feels physically painful to do?"
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Part 2: The Observation Checklist (The "Silent" Diagnosis)

Use this checklist to notice signs of Neurodivergent Burnout before it becomes a resignation letter. Check marks in multiple categories suggest a "Systemic Crash" rather than standard employee disengagement.

1. Signs of "The Wall" (Executive Function Collapse)

- **The 3 PM Crash:** The employee is highly active/verbal in the morning but becomes non-verbal, glazed over, or irritable by mid-afternoon (indicative of medication wearing off or masking stamina depletion).
- **Inconsistent "Sprints":** They deliver a week's worth of work in 2 days (Hyperfocus) but then produce almost nothing for the next 3 days (Recovery/Burnout).
- **The "Mud" Walk:** You observe them staring at a screen for extended periods without typing or clicking (Task Paralysis/Freeze Response), distinct from "slacking off" (scrolling phone).
- **Skill Regression:** They suddenly cannot perform a task they did easily last month (e.g., a fluent speaker stumbling over words, an organized person missing simple emails).
Crucial indicator of Autistic Burnout.

2. Signs of "Mask Decay" (Social Battery Depletion)

- **Camera Fatigue:** An employee who used to be on camera suddenly keeps it off, or seems physically pained/exhausted by maintaining eye contact.
- **Tone Shift:** A normally polite employee becomes "blunt," "rude," or flat in tone (monotone). *Note: This is often not attitude; it is the loss of energy required to perform "politeness" (Masking).*
- **Social Withdrawal:** They stop joining "fun" optional chats or lunches. For ND people, social interaction is often a high-cost "Level 9 Spell," not a break.
- **Scripting Failures:** They struggle to answer open-ended questions ("How's it going?") but can answer specific ones ("Is the report done?").

3. Signs of Sensory & Regulation Overload

- **Proprioceptive Seeking:** You notice increased fidgeting, rocking, sitting in "weird" positions (knees to chest), or pacing during calls.
- **Sensory Shielding:** Wearing noise-canceling headphones even when no audio is playing, wearing sunglasses indoors, or working in the dark.
- **Startle Response:** Visible physical "jump" or irritation when interrupted (Slack pings, shoulder taps). Breaking hyperfocus causes physical pain/distress.

Part 3: Differential Diagnosis Model: Burnout vs. "Laziness"

Managers often mistake "Freeze State" for laziness. Use this model to distinguish them.

Observation	Neurotypical "Disengagement" (Laziness/Boredom)	Neurodivergent "Shutdown" (The Wall)
The Trigger	Employee doesn't care about the result or dislikes the work.	Employee cares deeply (often anxious) but <i>physically cannot initiate action</i> .
Energy State	Low energy due to lack of interest. Can "snap out of it" for a reward.	High internal energy (anxiety/panic) but body is frozen. Rewards add pressure, increasing paralysis.
Consistency	Consistently avoids work they dislike.	Inconsistent: Could do the task perfectly yesterday, cannot do it today (Skill Regression).
Distraction	Distracts self with fun things (social media, chatting).	Dissociation: Stares at wall, organizes files needlessly, or "doom scrolls" without enjoyment to numb anxiety.
Response to Pressure	Pressure usually forces compliance.	Pressure triggers PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) -> Fight/Flight/Freeze -> Immediate decline in performance.

Recommendation for Managers:

If an employee hits ≥ 3 checkpoints on the Observation Checklist:

1. **Stop asking "Why haven't you done X?"** (This increases shame/paralysis).
2. **Start asking "Energy Audit" questions:** "Is this task draining your battery faster than usual?" or "Do we need to switch from a 'Novelty' task to a 'Routine' task for a few days to recover?"

3. **Offer "Silent Days":** Allow a day with zero meetings (no masking required) to regenerate "Mana."