

UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

A gentle,
 printable
 resource
 series

UNDERSTAND. SUPPORT. RECOVER. GROW.

This printable series explores autistic burnout – what it is, how it can show up, and how understanding, support and the right conditions can help recovery and growth.

You matter. Your experience matters.
 Your healing matters.



Autistic burnout is real. Recovery is possible.
 With the right support, understanding and time, healing can happen.

THIS SERIES INCLUDES:



1. INTRODUCTION

What autistic burnout is, why it happens and what recovery involves.



2. ADULT VERSION

Information, validation and support for autistic adults.



3. TEEN VERSION

Practical guidance and support for autistic teens and young people.



4. CHILDREN'S VERSION

Age-appropriate information and support for autistic children.



5. PARENTS, CARERS & TEACHERS GUIDE

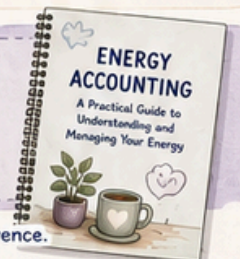
Guidance for the people who support autistic individuals.



Together, we can create the conditions for healing, growth and hope. ♥



Preventing burnout matters. Learn how to manage your energy and protect your capacity with our Energy Accounting resource. Find it on our website in the Resources section.



You don't have to do this alone. Understanding, support and small changes can make a life-changing difference.

You matter. Your experience matters. Your healing matters. ♥

WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?



This resource will help you understand autistic burnout, recognise the signs and explore ways to support recovery.

Autistic burnout is a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion caused by prolonged overwhelm and an ongoing effort to cope with demands, expectations and environments that are difficult to navigate.

It is not the same as being tired.
It is not laziness, a choice or a behaviour.

It is your nervous system's way of saying: "I've been coping for too long without enough rest and support."

WHAT CONTRIBUTES?

Burnout builds up over time. It can be caused by:

- ♡ Too much, for too long
- ♡ Masking or pretending to be "okay"
- ♡ Sensory overload
- ♡ Chronic stress and anxiety
- ♡ Unmet needs and lack of support
- ♡ Pressure to fit in or meet expectations
- ♡ Not enough rest or recovery time
- ♡ Difficult or unpredictable environments
- ♡ Life changes and uncertainty



HOW IT MAY PRESENT ♡

Everyone's experience is different. It may include:

- ♡ Extreme exhaustion (mental, physical and emotional)
- ♡ Loss of skills or abilities
- ♡ Increased anxiety, overwhelm or shutdowns
- ♡ Difficulty with daily tasks
- ♡ Needing much more support
- ♡ Withdrawal or isolation
- ♡ Irritability or emotional sensitivity
- ♡ Trouble thinking clearly
- ♡ Feeling numb, empty or hopeless
- ♡ Changes in sleep, eating or self-care

This is your nervous system overloaded and running on empty. ♡

THIS IS NOT...

Autistic burnout is often misunderstood. It is not:

- ♡ Laziness
- ♡ Defiance
- ♡ A choice
- ♡ Attention seeking
- ♡ Bad behaviour
- ♡ A sign of weakness

It is a real, serious and valid response to prolonged stress and overwhelm. ♡



WHY IT MATTERS ♡

When autistic burnout is misunderstood, it can lead to more pressure, more expectations and more harm.

Understanding autistic burnout helps us:

- ♡ Respond with compassion, not judgement
- ♡ Reduce pressure and create safety
- ♡ Support the nervous system to recover
- ♡ Prevent burnout from becoming deeper or longer lasting
- ♡ Create the conditions for healing, growth and hope



RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE ♡

Recovery from autistic burnout takes time, support and the right conditions.

It is not a quick fix. It may involve:

- ♡ Rest and nervous system recovery
- ♡ Reducing demands and pressure
- ♡ Rebuilding skills slowly
- ♡ Reconnecting with what feels safe and supportive
- ♡ Being met with understanding, not judgement
- ♡ Allowing the person to lead the pace

With the right support and understanding, healing and growth can happen. ♡



PREVENTION MATTERS ♡

Burnout is easier to prevent than to recover from. Learning to notice your limits, manage your energy and build in rest can help prevent burnout.

Our Energy Accounting resource can help you understand your energy, plan with more balance and protect your capacity.



Find it on our website in the Resources section: themoreyouknow.org.au



You don't have to do this alone.
Understanding, support and small changes can make a life-changing difference.
You matter. Your experience matters. Your healing matters.



UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

Adult Version

Burnout is not failure. It is your nervous system saying it has been carrying too much for too long.

Autistic burnout can happen when we are under too much stress, for too long, with not enough time, support or rest to recover.

WHAT AUTISTIC BURNOUT CAN FEEL LIKE

It can build slowly (or hit suddenly) and may look different for everyone.

- ♥ Exhaustion that rest doesn't fix
- ♥ Feeling empty, numb or disconnected
- ♥ Overwhelm, even from small things
- ♥ Less able to cope with everyday life
- ♥ Feeling like you've lost yourself a little
- ♥ Needing more time, space or quiet
- ♥ Shame, guilt or the belief you're failing



THINGS THAT CAN BECOME HARDER

- ♥ Managing daily tasks
- ♥ Executive functioning
- ♥ Sensory tolerance
- ♥ Socialising or talking
- ♥ Emotional regulation
- ♥ Motivation and interest
- ♥ Decision making
- ♥ Self care and hygiene
- ♥ Memory and concentration
- ♥ Sleep (too much or too little)



SIGNS I MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING BURNOUT

- ♥ I feel completely drained most days
- ♥ I need much more rest than usual
- ♥ I feel easily overwhelmed
- ♥ I have less patience and more meltdowns or shutdowns
- ♥ Things that used to be easy now feel impossible
- ♥ I feel detached or disconnected
- ♥ I'm masking more or, suddenly, can't mask at all
- ♥ I feel hopeless, anxious or low more often
- ♥ I cry more or feel numb
- ♥ I've lost my spark



WHAT MY BRAIN AND BODY MIGHT NEED

- ♥ More rest and downtime
- ♥ Less pressure and fewer demands
- ♥ Predictability and routine
- ♥ Quiet, low stimulation time
- ♥ Space to unmask
- ♥ Gentle, nourishing food and drink
- ♥ Movement that feels good
- ♥ Support without judgement
- ♥ Time to process and recover
- ♥ Compassion and self-kindness



THINGS THAT CAN MAKE BURNOUT WORSE

- ♥ Pushing through and ignoring my needs
- ♥ Overcommitting or saying yes too much
- ♥ High pressure, constant change or uncertainty
- ♥ Too much sensory input
- ♥ Lack of rest or downtime
- ♥ Masking for long periods
- ♥ People not understanding my limits
- ♥ Feeling like I have to be "fine" or "coping"
- ♥ Shame and self-criticism



THINGS THAT HELP ME RECOVER GENTLY

- ♥ Listening to my body and taking rest seriously
- ♥ Saying no and setting boundaries
- ♥ Cancelling or reducing plans
- ♥ Doing less (and that's okay!)
- ♥ Gentle routines that support me
- ♥ Spending time in safe, comfortable spaces
- ♥ Special interests and joyful things
- ♥ Nature, fresh air and movement
- ♥ Talking to people I trust
- ♥ Therapy or autistic-affirming support
- ♥ Allowing time - recovery is not linear



SUPPORT THAT HELPS

- ♥ People who listen and believe me
- ♥ Understanding and patience
- ♥ Practical help and flexibility
- ♥ Check-ins without pressure
- ♥ Respecting my need for rest and space
- ♥ Clear communication
- ♥ No judgement
- ♥ Encouragement, not pressure
- ♥ Someone to share the load with me



THINGS I CAN LET GO OF FOR NOW

- ♥ The pressure to be productive
- ♥ Comparing myself to others
- ♥ Perfectionism
- ♥ Guilt about resting
- ♥ Expecting myself to cope like before
- ♥ Explaining my needs to everyone
- ♥ Things that drain me
- ♥ The idea I should be "over it" quickly



GENTLE REMINDERS DURING RECOVERY

- ♥ Autistic burnout is real.
- ♥ I am not lazy or weak.
- ♥ Doing less does not reduce my worth.
- ♥ Rest is part of recovery.
- ♥ My nervous system deserves care.
- ♥ Recovery may take time, and that is okay.
- ♥ I am allowed to need support.
- ♥ I am allowed to take up space exactly as I am.



ABOUT RECOVERY

Recovery is not a straight line. There will be good days and hard days. Be gentle with yourself. Small steps count. You are not going backwards - you are healing.



YOU ARE NOT BROKEN.

You are human.
 You are autistic.
 You are allowed to rest and recover.
 You matter.



YOUR NEEDS ARE VALID. YOUR FEELINGS ARE VALID. YOU ARE ENOUGH.

Take care of you.

UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

Teen Version

You are not failing.
 You're not lazy.
 Your brain and
 body are just
 really tired.

Autistic burnout happens when we've been trying to cope with too much for too long. It's not just feeling tired – it affects your mind, body and everyday life.

♡ Burnout is real. Recovery is possible. You deserve support and understanding.

SIGNS I MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING BURNOUT

- ♡ I feel exhausted most of the time
- ♡ I have less energy for the things I usually enjoy
- ♡ I feel overwhelmed by small things
- ♡ I struggle to start or finish tasks
- ♡ I withdraw or need more alone time
- ♡ I feel irritable, anxious or low more often
- ♡ I feel like I can't keep up no matter how hard I try
- ♡ I'm harder on myself than usual



THINGS THAT CAN BECOME HARDER

- ♡ School or study
- ♡ Socialising or talking
- ♡ Keeping up with routines
- ♡ Looking after myself (showering, eating, sleeping, etc.)
- ♡ Concentrating or remembering things
- ♡ Coping with noise, lights or crowds
- ♡ Managing emotions
- ♡ Knowing what I need or what I'm feeling



WHAT MY BRAIN AND BODY MIGHT NEED

- ♡ More rest and downtime
- ♡ Less pressure and demands
- ♡ Predictability and routine
- ♡ Quiet and less stimulation
- ♡ Time to do things at my own pace
- ♡ Gentle, nourishing food and enough water
- ♡ Movement that feels good
- ♡ Compassion (especially from myself)



THINGS THAT CAN MAKE BURNOUT WORSE

- ♡ Pushing myself to "just get through it"
- ♡ Saying yes when I need to say no
- ♡ Trying to mask or pretend I'm okay
- ♡ Too much sensory stuff or chaos
- ♡ Not enough rest
- ♡ Comparing myself to others
- ♡ Feeling like I have to be productive
- ♡ Not getting the support I need



THINGS THAT HELP ME RECOVER

- ♡ Resting without guilt
- ♡ Spending time on my special interests
- ♡ Time in calm, safe spaces
- ♡ Listening to music
- ♡ Being in nature
- ♡ Gentle routines
- ♡ Talking to people I trust
- ♡ Doing things that bring me comfort



THINGS I CAN LET GO OF FOR NOW

- ♡ Perfectionism
- ♡ People-pleasing
- ♡ Extra commitments
- ♡ Keeping up with everyone else
- ♡ Explaining myself all the time
- ♡ Comparing myself to others
- ♡ The idea that I have to be "fine"

It's okay to do less right now.

SUPPORT THAT CAN HELP

- ♡ People who listen and believe me
- ♡ Understanding and patience
- ♡ Check-ins without pressure
- ♡ Space when I need it
- ♡ Help with tasks when I'm overwhelmed
- ♡ Encouragement, not pressure
- ♡ Respecting my need for rest and alone time

You don't have to go through this alone.

GENTLE REMINDERS FOR RECOVERY

- ♡ Burnout is not laziness.
- ♡ I am allowed to rest.
- ♡ Doing less does not reduce my worth.
- ♡ My nervous system deserves care.
- ♡ Recovery can take time – and that's okay.
- ♡ I am allowed to need support.
- ♡ I matter.



You are allowed to slow down. You are allowed to take up space. You are allowed to put your wellbeing first. You matter.



UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

If you are feeling like this, it is not your fault.

You are not alone.



Children's Version

Autistic burnout happens when your brain and body have been trying too hard for too long. It can make everything feel really big and hard.

You are not bad. You are just very tired.



SIGNS I MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING BURNOUT

- ★ I feel very tired most of the time
- ★ I get overwhelmed by small things
- ★ I need more time alone
- ★ Things I used to enjoy don't feel fun anymore
- ★ I feel grumpy, worried or upset more easily
- ★ I find it hard to start or finish things
- ★ I might cry or feel like I can't cope



THINGS THAT CAN BECOME HARDER

- ★ School or homework
- ★ Being around people
- ★ Noise, lights or busy places
- ★ Changes in plans
- ★ Talking or finding the right words
- ★ Looking after myself (showering, eating, getting dressed)
- ★ Remembering things
- ★ Staying calm



WHAT MY BRAIN AND BODY MIGHT NEED

- ★ More rest and sleep
- ★ Quiet and calm
- ★ Time to do things slowly
- ★ Less pressure
- ★ Gentle, healthy food and enough water
- ★ Movement that feels good (stretching, walking, etc.)
- ★ Time to process how I'm feeling



THINGS THAT CAN MAKE BURNOUT WORSE

- ★ Doing too many things
- ★ Not getting enough rest
- ★ Too much noise or chaos
- ★ Being told to "just try harder"
- ★ People not understanding
- ★ Having no time for me
- ★ Comparing myself to other people



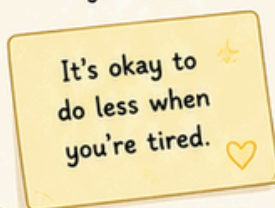
THINGS THAT HELP ME RECOVER

- ♥ Resting without guilt
- ♥ Spending time on the things I enjoy
- ♥ Being in nature
- ♥ Listening to music
- ♥ Gentle routines
- ♥ Time in my safe space
- ♥ Talking to people I trust



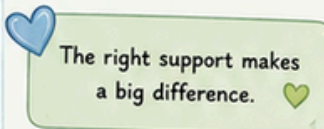
THINGS I CAN LET GO OF FOR NOW

- ♥ Being perfect
- ♥ Doing everything
- ♥ Saying yes to everything
- ♥ Comparing myself
- ♥ Worrying about what other people think
- ♥ Rushing or doing things too fast



SUPPORT THAT CAN HELP

- ♥ People who listen
- ♥ Kindness and patience
- ♥ Help with things that are hard right now
- ♥ Check-ins (not too many!)
- ♥ Understanding that I need more rest
- ♥ Space when I need it
- ♥ Encouragement, not pressure



GENTLE REMINDERS

- ♥ Burnout is not bad behaviour.
- ♥ I am not lazy.
- ♥ I am doing my best with what I have.
- ♥ It is okay to need more help.
- ♥ I am allowed to rest.
- ♥ My feelings are valid.
- ♥ I matter. Always.



☀️ **YOU ARE DOING ENOUGH.** 💜
 Burnout does not last forever.
 It can get better with rest, support and time.
 Be kind to yourself. You deserve it. 💜



UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, CARERS & TEACHERS

Understanding autistic burnout, recognising the signs,
reducing pressure and creating the support
that helps recovery and growth.



Understand
the experience



Recognise
the signs



Reduce
pressure



Support
recovery



When we understand, we can create the conditions
for healing, growth and hope. ♥



UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

An introduction for Parents, Carers & Teachers




Autistic burnout is a real, serious and often misunderstood experience. It is not laziness, a choice or simply "being tired". It is a state of prolonged overwhelm that affects a person's nervous system, mind, body and ability to cope with everyday life.

WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?

Autistic burnout happens when a person has been trying to cope with too much for too long.

It builds up slowly over time and can be caused by a long period of:


- ♥ High demands and expectations
- ♥ Masking or pretending to be "okay"
- ♥ Sensory overload
- ♥ Chronic stress and anxiety
- ♥ Unmet needs and lack of support
- ♥ Not enough rest or recovery time
- ♥ Pressure to fit in or "keep up"

 Anyone can get tired. Autistic burnout goes much deeper.

HOW IT MAY PRESENT

Autistic burnout can look different for everyone, but may include:

- ♥ Extreme exhaustion (mental, physical and emotional)
- ♥ Loss of skills or abilities
- ♥ Increased anxiety, overwhelm or shutdowns
- ♥ Difficulty with daily tasks
- ♥ Needing much more support
- ♥ Withdrawal or isolation
- ♥ Irritability or emotional sensitivity
- ♥ Trouble thinking clearly
- ♥ Feeling numb, empty or hopeless
- ♥ Changes in sleep, eating or self-care


It is not a behaviour problem. It is nervous system overload. 

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO IT?

Burnout doesn't happen overnight. It usually builds up over weeks, months or even years when life feels like "too much for too long".

Common contributing factors include:

- ♥ Too much, for too long
- ♥ Not enough recovery time
- ♥ Pressure to mask or fit in
- ♥ Sensory overwhelm
- ♥ Unrealistic expectations
- ♥ Changes, uncertainty or instability
- ♥ Lack of understanding or support
- ♥ Difficult environments

 It is the environment + expectations, not the person.

WHY UNDERSTANDING MATTERS

When we understand autistic burnout, we stop asking:


"Why aren't they trying harder?"

"Why can't they just cope?"

"Why are they so sensitive?"

"What's wrong with them?"

and start asking:

 "What has been too much for too long, and how can we help?"

Understanding creates safety.
 Safety creates the space for healing.

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

Recovery from autistic burnout takes time, patience and the right support.

It is not a quick fix. It may involve:

- ♥ Rest and nervous system recovery
- ♥ Reducing demands and pressure
- ♥ Returning to what feels safe and supportive
- ♥ Rebuilding skills slowly
- ♥ Being met with understanding, not judgement
- ♥ Allowing the person to lead the pace



- WHAT HELPS ≡



BELIEVE THEM
 Listen. Validate. Take it seriously.



REDUCE PRESSURE
 Lower demands. Remove what isn't essential.



PROVIDE REST
 Rest is not a reward - it is a need.



RESPECT THEIR NEEDS
 Sensory needs, routines, interests and boundaries are important.





COMMUNICATE GENTLY
 Use kind, clear and low-pressure communication.



BE PATIENT
 Recovery is not linear. There will be good and hard days.



You don't need all the answers. You just need compassion, patience and willingness. Your understanding can make a huge difference.

Together, we can create the conditions for healing, growth and hope.  

UNDERSTANDING AUTISTIC BURNOUT

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS, CARERS & TEACHERS

Your support
 can make a
 huge difference.

Autistic burnout is real, disabling and exhausting.
 With the right understanding and support, recovery is possible.

WHAT IS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?

Autistic burnout happens when an autistic person has been coping with too much demand, stress, masking or pressure for too long. Their nervous system becomes overwhelmed, and everyday life becomes much harder.

It is not laziness, defiance or a choice.



SIGNS YOU MIGHT NOTICE

(These can vary for each person)

- ♥ Sudden difficulty with things that were previously easy
- ♥ Extreme tiredness or needing more rest
- ♥ Low motivation or withdrawal
- ♥ Increased meltdowns, shutdowns or shutdown-like behaviour
- ♥ More anxiety or visible overwhelm
- ♥ Less able to communicate or needing more time
- ♥ Struggling with self-care, hygiene or routines
- ♥ Changes in eating or sleep
- ♥ Loss of skills or regression



Behaviour is communication.

WHAT MIGHT BE HAPPENING BENEATH THE SURFACE

- ♥ The person has used up all their energy just coping
- ♥ Their nervous system is in overload
- ♥ Masking may have become unsustainable
- ♥ They may feel ashamed, confused or frightened
- ♥ Basic needs can feel impossible to meet
- ♥ Their brain and body are saying: "I need help"



WHAT CAN HELP

(Supportive adjustments make a big difference)

- ♥ Reduce demands and expectations
- ♥ Offer more rest time (No need to earn it)
- ♥ Provide predictable, calm routines
- ♥ Allow extra processing time
- ♥ Offer sensory support and quiet space
- ♥ Support communication in any way that works for them
- ♥ Celebrate small wins
- ♥ Be patient – recovery takes time



WHAT CAN MAKE BURNOUT WORSE

- ♥ Pushing for "normal" or more
- ♥ Ignoring their limits
- ♥ High pressure or constant changes
- ♥ Too much noise, sensory input or unpredictability
- ♥ Punishment, threats or ultimatums
- ♥ Dismissing their feelings or experiences
- ♥ Comparing them to others
- ♥ Expecting masking or perfection



HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT RECOVERY

- ♥ Create a safe, accepting environment
- ♥ Listen without judgement
- ♥ Let go of non-essential tasks or expectations
- ♥ Help them protect their energy
- ♥ Encourage things that bring comfort and calm
- ♥ Respect their need for space
- ♥ Support their identity and self-worth
- ♥ Work together – not against them

Connection helps more than fixing.



COMMUNICATION TIPS

- ♥ Use calm, simple and clear language
- ♥ Check in gently: "Do you need anything?"
- ♥ Offer choices where possible
- ♥ Accept non-verbal communication
- ♥ Give them time to respond
- ♥ Respect "I don't know" or "I need time"

Gentle curiosity builds trust.



THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND



Recovery is not a straight line.



It can take weeks, months or longer.



Rest is not wasted time.



Relapses can happen – it's not failure.



Your understanding can be a place of safety and healing.



THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THEIR SUPPORT TEAM.

When we reduce pressure and increase understanding, we help autistic people not just survive – but heal, grow and thrive.

