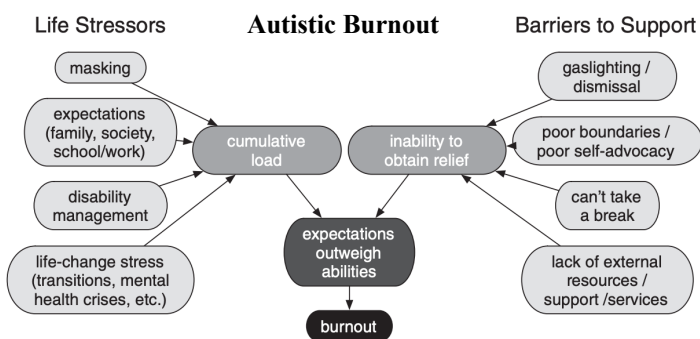


The A, B, C, D & E's

OF DEALING WITH COUPLE BURNOUT

- A ANXIETY** - partners in relationship who are *Neurotypical* (NT) often experience emotional anxiety due to abandonment and loneliness when their undiagnosed *Neurodiverse* (ND) partner has a “meltdown” or goes off by themselves to escape from stressors such as workloads, relationships, family gatherings, chores, parenting, or dealing with problems or conflicts, etc.
- B BURNOUT** – partners who are undiagnosed or suspected ND individuals are often unaware of what is happening to them as they begin to falter in their ability to function emotionally, mentally, physically and relationally (see diagram below.) They focus on self-care, not others. This feeds the estranged loneliness of the NT. In time, they both experience “couple burnout.”*
- C CONFLICT** - if both the NT and ND are in the counter-productive stress-modes of anxiety and burnout, their ability to step back and build effective communication and learn to resolve conflicts is undermined by the pain they both feel. They are each aware of their own distress but unable to understand or compensate for their partner’s distress. Trying to fix each other makes things worse.
- D DISENGAGED** - both the NT and ND need to recognize the “death spiral” relational dynamic they are in and *stop it*. Each partner needs to take responsibility for their part in the dynamic and for finding ways to heal and practice their own self-care. Things can’t get better until each partner begins to decompress and recover. Only then can effective skills-training begin.
- E EDUCATION** - both the NT and ND need to educate themselves about the strengths and challenges of NT/ND relationships, and identify what they feel and why they feel it; next they need to try and understand what their partner has been feeling and why they feel it. *Understanding* can help end the cycle of taking each other’s behaviors personally, and can lead to insights, compassion and even forgiveness. Such thoughts and feelings provide the best foundation for building new expectations and ways of relating to and encouraging one another.



(Above diagram is from the *Adulthood in Autism* journal: “Having All of Your Internal Resources Exhausted Beyond Measure and Being Left with No Clean-Up Crew”: Defining Autistic Burnout. 2020. <https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/aut.2019.0079>)

* **Couple burnout**, first proposed by Pines (1996), is physical, mental, and emotional fatigue that occurs as a result of the intensification of emotional demands in a long-term relationship and caused by the difference between expectations and reality. Burnout is seen as a result of the frazzle caused by the difference between expectations and facts. A general state of unhappiness and malaise prevails in the relationship, and when the relationship is about to end, couple burnout is intensely observed. Giving yourself to work and marriage or getting away from them is experienced differently for men and women. Traditionally, while women try to realize the meaning of life through their relationships, men try to do this with their jobs (Pines, 1996). Fathers whose children diagnosed with ASD may have a sense of occupational burnout as well as couple burnout.¹

¹ Excerpted from Mustafa Guler, in the *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 92, (2021) 359-376.

