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Understanding Autistic Burnout

This section examines autistic burnout which is one of the most important factors to consider when understanding the specific mental health needs of autistic girls and gender diverse young people, especially when they are beginning to struggle and their mental health is in a state of decline.

Autistic burnout is a state of intense mental and/or physical exhaustion, and is usually a direct result of masking and feeling completely overwhelmed from navigating a world not designed for autistic people. Autistic girls, who are more likely to mask, may also be more likely to end up in burnout. During an autistic burnout, the mind is so completely overwhelmed and tired, that it is no longer able to cope with even the basics of life. For some, it is a complete shutdown of all physical and mental abilities.



Signs of Autistic Burnout²⁹

- ✦ **Extreme exhaustion**
- ✦ **Increased meltdowns/shutdowns**
- ✦ **Constant/increase in anxiety**
- ✦ **Disinterest in things that brought joy**
- ✦ **Loss of skills including difficulties in communication**
- ✦ **Reduced memory capacity**
- ✦ **Decreased self-care**
- ✦ **Quickly overstimulated**
- ✦ **Heightened sensory activities**

It is important to distinguish between autistic burnout and depression. Many autistic women speak of being misdiagnosed with depression when in fact they are experiencing burnout. Much of the advice relating to depression is not applicable to burnout – for example the recommendation to get regular exercise as a treatment of depression does not apply to the experience of burnout where complete rest is required as a necessity.

Strategies to Help Someone Through Autistic Burnout

Allow them to rest

Autistic individuals in a burnout state need significant time to rest and recover.

Reduce all demands

This may include a break from activities, school, work, etc.

Do not force communication or socialisation

Often these are the reason a burnout has occurred in the first place.

Encourage stimming

Stimming is an autistic individual's way of self-regulating.

Encourage self-care

But do not force self-care.

Safe and accepted

Try to stick with foods that you know are safe and accepted.

Encourage going outside/into nature

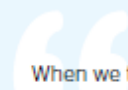
But only when ready.

Special interests and activities

Encourage engagement.



Tips



When we talk about reducing demands, including taking a break from school, we need to break down the stigma that we're 'reinforcing the behaviour of school avoidance' and instead, see this as a necessary mental health option, to allow our children to recharge enough to be able TO go to school

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Neuro-Affirming Perspective