

Module 29

Burnout

Flourish



ADHD and Burnout

🔥 Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion.

Neurodivergent burnout isn't the same as occupational burnout in neurotypical people.

Burnout is a consequence of trying to function in a world designed for neurotypical individuals without accommodations which puts stress on you.

In neurodivergent people, **chronic stress** eventually catches up with their mind and body. We see this manifest in their **autonomic nervous system** and **mental functioning**.

Dora M. Raymaker, expert and researcher on autistic burnout, defines it as "... a state of physical and mental fatigue, heightened stress, and diminished capacity to manage life skills, sensory input, and/or social interactions, which comes from years of being severely overtaxed by the strain of trying to live up to demands that are out of sync with our needs".



ADHD and Burnout

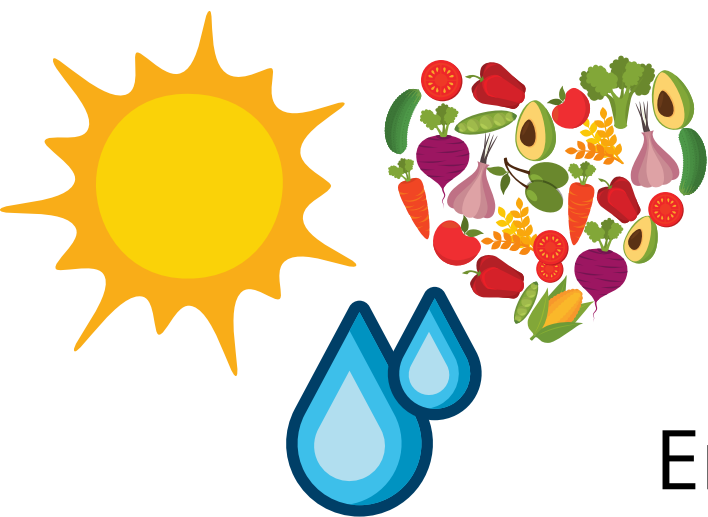
To truly understand burnout, we need to go back to the beginning and look at how we treat ADHD children.

From an early on, girls with ADHD are frequently instructed to **conceal** their emotions, **dissociate from their physical selves**, and **adhere to the norms** of a neurotypical society. As a result, they tend to create coping mechanisms, such as masking their true selves, and behaviors, such as perfectionism, to avoid experiencing shame and self-criticism.

Training these behaviors lays the groundwork for burnout.

Tailoring support to individual needs, especially for girls with ADHD, is more effective than standard expectations. Like unique plants, neurodivergent children thrive with personalized care.

Optimally, as parents, teachers, and others in charge of their well-being, we would **watch for signs of distress and protect them rather than encourage masking**.



Nourished with: Emotional Attunement

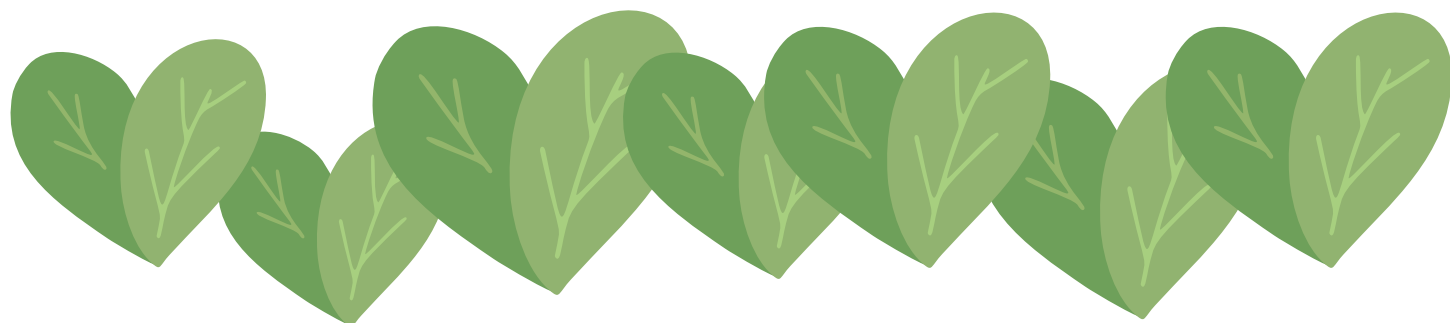
Masking leads to
burnout

Acceptance leads to
self-determination,
empowerment



- The right level of stress
- Understanding of their differences
- Accommodations
- Friends that fit them
- The skills to understand their feelings and express them

What ADHD GIRLS NEED



ADHD and Burnout

Understanding and Managing Burnout in Neurodiverse Children

Signs we are pushing neurodivergent children beyond their comfort levels.

Meltdowns: Often having strong emotional reactions because of feeling too much all at once or being overwhelmed by things happening around them.

Increased Reactivity: Having much stronger reactions than usual to things or changes that didn't bother them much before.

Regression: Finding it hard to do things or behave in ways that they used to manage well.

Physiological Responses: Experiencing things like feeling numb, disconnected from what's happening, or like they're not there.

Sympathetic State Activation: Showing signs of wanting to fight or run away when they feel scared or too much is happening.

Recognizing these signs allows caregivers to adjust the child's environment, reduce expectations, and provide the necessary support. Interestingly in adults, these are also signs of stress beyond your capacity to manage it or burnout.

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Understanding and Managing Burnout in Neurodiverse Children Strategies to Manage and Reduce Burnout in children:

1. Rest and Recovery:

- Sensory Rest: Provide quiet or alternative spaces or noise-canceling headphones.
- Emotional Rest: Allow expression of feelings without judgment.
- Physical Rest: Ensure adequate sleep and relaxation.

Why it helps: Rest helps the child reset and recover, reducing the risk of burnout.

2. Decreased Expectations:

- Reduce academic pressures.
- Offer flexibility in routines.
- Understand their current participation limits.

Why it helps: Reducing demands prevents overwhelm and allows the child to operate within their comfort zone.

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3. Environmental Accommodations:

- Create sensory-friendly spaces.
- Use visual schedules for predictability.
- Minimize exposure to triggers.

Why it helps: A tailored environment minimizes stressors, making coping easier for the child.

4. Communication: Keep open lines with teachers, therapists, family, and peers.

Why it helps: Understanding and collaboration from all parties ensure consistent support.

5. Therapeutic Interventions: Engage in therapies to process feelings and develop coping strategies.

Why it helps: Professional guidance can equip the child with tools to manage their emotions.



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6. Routine and Structure: Maintain a balance of flexibility and predictability.

Why it helps: Predictable routines reduce anxiety and provide a sense of security.

7. Co-regulation: Be calming, helping the child navigate their emotions.

Why it helps: Emotional support and understanding can prevent emotional escalation.

8. Educate and Advocate: Promote understanding of neurodiversity and advocate for the child's needs.

Why it helps: Awareness ensures the child receives the necessary accommodations and support.

9. Value and Affirmation: Celebrate the child's strengths and provide continuous affirmation.

Why it helps: Positive reinforcement boosts the child's self-esteem and resilience.



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Co-regulation Defined: Co-regulation refers to the process where one person helps another person regulate their emotional state. It's a dynamic interaction between the caregiver (or another supportive individual) and the child, where the caregiver provides external support to help the child return to a calm and regulated state. This is especially important in early childhood when children are still developing their internal self-regulation skills, but it remains relevant throughout life, especially for individuals who might struggle with self-regulation due to neurodiversity or other factors.



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Significance of Co-regulation in Managing Burnout:

- **Emotional Safety:** Co-regulation provides a sense of emotional safety. When a child is overwhelmed, the presence of a trusted adult who can remain calm and offer support can be grounding.
- **Skill Development:** Consistent co-regulation can help children develop self-regulation skills over time. Through modeling and experience, they learn how to manage their emotions and responses.
- **Reduction of Stress:** Immediate co-regulation can help reduce the physiological stress response. Helping the child calm down faster reduces the potential negative impacts of prolonged stress on the body and mind.
- **Strengthening Relationships:** Co-regulation fosters a deeper bond between the child and the caregiver. It builds trust, as the child knows they can rely on the caregiver for support during challenging times.
- **Understanding Triggers:** Through the process of co-regulation, caregivers can often identify specific triggers that lead to dysregulation. This knowledge can be used to make proactive environmental or routine changes to prevent future overwhelm.
- **Promotes Recovery:** For children experiencing burnout, co-regulation can be a vital part of their recovery process. It ensures they don't remain in a heightened state of stress, allowing them to rest and recover more effectively.

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Significance of Co-regulation in Managing Burnout:

- For neurodiverse children, who might experience the world more intensely or differently, having supportive figures who can co-regulate with them is invaluable.
- Understanding your own emotions is crucial in supporting your child's emotional regulation.
- Utilizing resources such as the emotions wheel, timer check-ins, and body scans can be incredibly beneficial. Identifying and labeling your emotions and becoming familiar with your stress levels can contribute to your ability to recognize and manage your emotions.

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Acceptance

Why is acceptance crucial for neurodiverse children to decrease masking?

- **Reduction of Masking:** At its core, acceptance reduces the need for neurodiverse individuals to "mask" or hide their neurodivergent traits. Masking can be mentally and emotionally exhausting. When individuals feel accepted, they are more likely to be their authentic selves, decreasing the stress and fatigue associated with constant masking.
- **Emotional Relief:** Acceptance provides emotional relief. Knowing that they are understood and accepted for who they are can alleviate feelings of being "different" or "out of place." This emotional validation can be deeply comforting.
- **Empowerment and Self-Esteem:** Acceptance empowers neurodiverse children. It boosts their self-esteem, allowing them to embrace their neurodiversity as a part of their identity rather than seeing it as a deficit.

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Symptoms of Burnout in Adults

There isn't much research on burnout in ADHD, and only a little more on autism, so we will extrapolate from what is known about autism.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that ADHD burnout is similar.

Symptoms include:

- Exhaustion
- Heightened autistic or ADHD traits
- Withdrawal
- Diminished functioning

While neurodivergent burnout shares similarities with occupational burnout, they are distinct phenomena.

Women with ADHD who are experiencing burnout might:

- Be more sensitive to environmental sensory cues
- Prefer solitude over socializing
- Find that their Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD) worsens (burnout seems to amplify sensitivities)
- Struggle more with focus and attention, especially in bustling work environments
- Forget commitments more frequently, leading to more apologies

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Short-Term (Acute) Neurodivergent Burnout

Causes: This occurs typically after a day or a period of intense mental, sensory, or emotional exertion. For neurodivergent individuals, activities that demand continuous focus, social interaction, or sensory processing can be particularly draining.

Symptoms: At the end of such a day or period, one might experience overwhelming fatigue, a significant drop in cognitive functions (like memory and concentration), emotional dysregulation (such as irritability or heightened sensitivity), or a complete shutdown, where the individual feels unable to engage in any activity.

Management: Short-term recovery often involves immediate rest, withdrawal from stimulating environments, engaging in comforting routines or hobbies, and possibly sleep to recuperate.

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Long-Term Neurodivergent Burnout

Causes: This form of burnout develops over time, usually as a result of prolonged exposure to stressors without adequate recovery periods. It can be the cumulative effect of repeatedly experiencing short-term burnouts without sufficient recovery, constant masking of neurodivergent traits to conform to societal norms, or chronic stress from navigating a world designed for neurotypical individuals.

Symptoms: Long-term burnout can manifest as persistent fatigue, chronic anxiety or depression, a feeling of being emotionally 'drained' or numb, and a decline in performance at work or school. In some cases, there may be a regression in skills or coping mechanisms.

Management: Addressing long-term burnout often requires a more comprehensive approach. This may include seeking therapy or counseling, implementing long-term changes in lifestyle and work or school environments, finding supportive communities, and learning new coping strategies tailored to the individual's needs.

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Burnout versus Depression

Depression is a mood disorder characterized by persistent sadness, hopelessness, sleep disruption, and other symptoms. If depressed, socializing might be recommended.

On the other hand, ADHD burnout often results from environmental stressors exceeding one's capacity. It's marked by profound physical and mental exhaustion due to an overloaded nervous system.

Exhaustion is an intense feeling of tiredness, possibly accompanied by physical symptoms like muscle weakness.

Advice given if you are misdiagnosed by a professional as depressed may not be helpful. For example, if you're experiencing burnout, being encouraged to socialize might not be beneficial.

ADHD and Burnout

Causes of Burnout

Risk Factors for Autistic/ADHD Burnout include:

- "Masking" neurodivergent traits
- Undergoing stressful life events
- Alexithymia
- Facing stigma and discrimination due to being neurodivergent

Sensory overloads and challenging social interactions can be constant for neurodivergent women. Some describe both chronic and acute episodes of burnout, with shorter ones leading eventually building up from sensory overloads and social interactions. Many report the need to distance themselves from others and avoid environments that aren't friendly to them.

To combat burnout:

- Build your ability to recognize stress
- Practice unmasking
- Advocate for oneself

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Preventing Burnout

Strategies include:

Self-care: Engage in activities promoting physical and emotional well-being, like exercise, meditation, and therapy.

Energy Management: Understand and manage physical, emotional, and cognitive energy throughout the day. This includes:

- Recognizing energy drains and peaks
- Prioritizing tasks
- Taking scheduled breaks
- Managing sensory input
- Setting boundaries
- Practicing self-awareness and self-advocacy
- Engaging in regular physical activity
- Prioritizing sleep hygiene
- Maintaining a balanced diet
- Practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques
- Incorporating hormonal cycle awareness



energy management

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Timer Check-ins and Self-accommodation are also essential. These involve:

- Regular reflection and task adjustments
- Taking breaks when needed
- Practicing body scans for mindfulness
- Adjusting one's environment for comfort
- Using tools like fidget toys or weighted blankets
- Setting boundaries for energy management

Remember to:

- Understand personal triggers
- Recognize activities or situations that are particularly draining or energizing.
- Be aware of hormonal cycles and their impact on energy and mood

Engaging in special interests can be a crucial recovery tool from burnout and can function as an energy management strategy.

Accommodations include:

- Self-accommodation and workplace accommodations
- Making environmental or situational changes to better suit individual needs

Advocacy involves:

- Speaking up for oneself and others to promote understanding and acceptance of neurodivergent individuals

Building Support Networks and maintaining a Work-life Balance are also crucial for preventing burnout.

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Healing from Neurodivergent Burnout

Burnout is more than just feeling tired; it's a deep-rooted condition that affects the nervous system, often stemming from chronic stress. It's serious. Unmasking is a key to healing.

1. Prioritize Stimming:

- Stimming is essential for neurodivergent individuals. It helps regulate the nervous system and provides relief.
- Suppressing this natural behavior can be harmful. Embrace stimming as a way to heal and protect against burnout.

2. Rest is Essential:

- Healing from burnout requires deep and extensive rest.
- If work is demanding, it's crucial to reduce those demands. Focus only on essential tasks and give your brain the break it needs.

3. Connect with Like-minded Individuals:

- If you seek company during your healing process, connect with fellow neurodivergent individuals.
- Their understanding and shared experiences can provide comfort during challenging times.



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Healing from Neurodivergent Burnout

1. Reflect on the Causes:

- Understand what led to your burnout. Recognize the triggers and patterns.
- This reflection is essential to prevent future episodes and to build resilience.

2. Build a Support Network:

- Having a support system is invaluable during the healing process.
- Connect with those who offer genuine understanding, especially fellow neurodivergent individuals.

3. Tread Lightly Back into the World:

- As you venture back into daily routines, do so with caution. A gradual return can help prevent a relapse into burnout.

4. Engage in Joyful Activities:

- If you're able to, engage in activities that are special interests or bring you joy. These can be therapeutic and rejuvenating during the healing process.



ADHD and Burnout

Workplace Help

As you navigate burnout, it's crucial to understand the importance of appropriate workplace accommodations. Sometimes, the most effective form of reset for ADHD burnout may require a complete break from work. However, we know this isn't always possible.

When a complete break from work isn't feasible, the following accommodations can be vital lifelines. They're designed to create a supportive environment that acknowledges the unique challenges you face with ADHD burnout:

- **Work from Home:** If possible, seek the option to work from home permanently. It can significantly reduce stress by allowing you to work in a familiar, comfortable setting.
- **Quiet Workspace:** If working from home isn't an option, advocate for a workspace that is quiet and free from frequent interruptions.
- **Noise-Cancelling Headphones/White Noise:** Consider using noise-cancelling headphones or white noise to minimize distractions and help maintain focus.
- **Scheduled Uninterrupted Work Time:** Try to arrange your schedule to include uninterrupted work periods, free from meetings or other distractions.

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Workplace Help

- **Focus on Essential Job Duties:** Limit your tasks to essential responsibilities, and if possible, delegate or eliminate extraneous activities.
- **Deadlines and Prioritization Assistance:** Request help from your supervisor with setting realistic deadlines and prioritizing tasks, especially during times of high stress.
- **Recording Meetings:** If attending meetings is challenging, ask if they can be recorded for you to review later.
- **Partial Work Days or Leave:** Explore the possibility of working part-time or taking leave for rest and recovery.
- **Strength-Based Job Focus:** Aim to focus on tasks that play to your strengths and minimize those that cause undue stress.
- **Personalized Adjustments:** Consider what specific adjustments might be helpful for you, like taking short, frequent breaks or spending time outdoors.

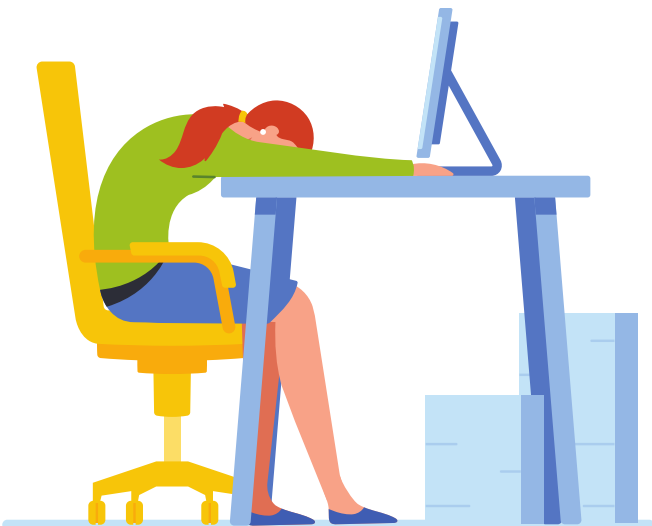
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Workplace

Get Help From Your Therapist

In my role, I often assist in drafting formal recommendations for workplace accommodations. Similarly, you might ask your therapist, counselor, or a trusted advisor to help you prepare similar documentation. These recommendations can be crucial in communicating your needs to your employer and ensuring your workplace supports your mental health and productivity.

Please note that these procedures and their acceptance can vary significantly from one workplace to another and across different countries. It's important to understand your rights and the specific regulations in your region regarding workplace accommodations for mental health.



ADHD and Burnout

Reminders

Simplified Guide to Our Stress Model

The Four States of Being:

Rest: A calm and relaxed state where actions are conscious and chosen.

It's marked by feelings of contentment, clear thinking, and a sense of spaciousness. Muscles are loose, and breathing is free. Recognizing and appreciating this state is crucial.

Challenge: This state involves using resources effectively for growth and aligning with personal values. It's characterized by alertness, curiosity, engagement, and mild irritation but with an overall sense of excitement and learning. Recognizing signs of being challenged helps manage stress without distress.

Approaching Overwhelm: When choices start to feel out of control and things happen too fast, one might start feeling panic. Signs include worrying, nausea, racing heart, fuzzy thinking, busy mind, negative thoughts, and muscle tension. It's crucial to be aware of these signs to prevent slipping into full overwhelm.

Overwhelm: This is a natural response to excessive stress, where one might feel disconnected, numb, desperate, indecisive, or have the urge to hide or run away. Recognizing personal signs of overwhelm is important for self-care.

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Reminders

Timer Check-Ins, Feelings Wheel, and Alexithymia

Timer Check-Ins

Setting a timer several times daily to check in with yourself can help build awareness of your current state. During these check-ins, you can assess your physical sensations, thoughts, and feelings, and determine if any action is needed for self-care.

These questions are designed to help you tune into your emotional state and respond to it in a way that supports your well-being. They are:

1. What do I feel?

- This question prompts you to identify your current emotional state. It's about recognizing and acknowledging your feelings without judgment.

2. What do I need?

- Here, you consider what you require in the moment to manage your emotional state. This could be something like a break, emotional support, or a change in your environment.

3. What can I do?

- This question focuses on actionable steps you can take to address your needs and feelings. It involves thinking about practical solutions or coping strategies that you can implement.

These questions are vital in the process of self-awareness and self-regulation. They encourage you to be mindful of your emotions and needs, and to take proactive steps to manage them, thereby preventing overwhelm. This approach aligns with core principles of self-compassion and emotional regulation, emphasizing the importance of tuning in to your own experiences and responding to them with kindness and understanding.

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Reminders

Alexithymia and the Feelings Wheel

If you struggle to recognize and articulate your emotions, the feelings wheel acts as a guide to understand better and express your internal emotional landscape. It bridges the gap between physical sensations and emotional language, aiding in emotional regulation and self-awareness.

Why the Feelings Wheel Helps

The feelings wheel is an effective tool for several reasons:

1. **Enhances Emotional Literacy:** It aids in identifying and naming emotions, which is the first step in emotional regulation.
2. **Supports Self-Reflection:** Encourages you to reflect on your emotional state, promoting deeper self-understanding.
3. **Aids Communication:** It helps you to figure out what you might want to communicate

