

# Burnout in ADHD and Neurodivergent Women

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NEURODIVERGENT-AFFIRMING THERAPY

Burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. For neurodivergent women, it is often not only about working too hard – it is the result of living with too much stress for too long in environments that do not fit your brain, body, sensory needs, or pace.

**Burnout is not a character problem. It is a sign that your system has been overloaded.**

## Burnout can happen when you are:

**Masking for long periods** – suppressing your natural neurology to appear neurotypical

**Pushing through overwhelm** – ignoring body and nervous system signals

**Living without accommodations** – navigating environments that don't fit your needs

**Carrying too many demands** – with too little recovery time built in

**Managing chronic stress** – alongside sensory strain and emotional load

## What Burnout Can Look Like

- Deep exhaustion – feeling drained even after rest
- Shutdown, numbing, or emotional disconnection
- Irritability or increased reactivity
- Less tolerance for noise, light, people, or demands
- More difficulty with focus, memory, and follow-through
- Worse RSD, more shame, increased self-criticism

## Why Burnout Happens

### Chronic Stress

Burnout builds over time through accumulated stress, perfectionism, and people pleasing.

### Masking

Sustained effort to appear neurotypical is exhausting and erodes reserves over time.

### Sensory Overload

Navigating sensory-hostile environments continuously depletes energy without recovery.

### Lack of Support

Missing accommodations and stigma force repeated pushing past natural limits.

### Early Conditioning

Many girls are taught to hide distress, suppress emotions, and work harder instead of seeking support.

### Demand Overload

Life demands that consistently exceed available energy leave no room for recovery.

## Burnout vs. Depression

Burnout and depression can overlap, but they are not the same thing. Misidentifying burnout as depression can lead to unhelpful advice – like pressure to socialize or perform when what is actually needed is less demand and more recovery.

### Burnout Often Includes

- Overload and exhaustion
- Reduced capacity
- Sensory and social strain
- Strong need for rest and fewer demands

### Depression Often Includes

- Persistent low mood
- Hopelessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Broader mood changes not directly tied to overload

## Signs in Children



Burnout can begin in childhood. Children need support, not pressure to mask.

- More meltdowns or increased reactivity
- Regression in previously managed skills
- Shutdown or dissociation
- Fight, flight, freeze, or fawn responses
- Increased distress with tasks they handled before
- More fatigue after school or social situations

# What Helps & Prevention

## Reduce Load

More rest, lower expectations, fewer demands, and permission to do less. Recovery starts here.

## Sensory Relief

Noise-canceling headphones, softer lighting, reduced social demands, easier meals, quieter environments.

## Flexible Routines

Visual schedules, planned breaks, gentler pacing, and more recovery time after stressful events.

## Less Masking

Reducing masking wherever possible lowers ongoing energy drain and supports nervous system recovery.

## Know Your Signs

Learn your early overload signals, identify personal triggers, and track energy drains before you crash.

## Co-Regulation

A calm presence, reduced demands, emotional validation, and relational safety support recovery across all ages.

## The Empowerment Model:

**Self-Awareness** – learn your early signs of overload and what drains you fastest.

**Self-Compassion** – burnout is not laziness, weakness, or personal failure.

**Self-Accommodation** – design your life around your actual neurological needs.

**Self-Advocacy** – name your limits and ask for support from partners, employers, and providers.

**Self-Care** – Focus on Needs rather than pushing through

**Acceptance** – when neurodivergent people feel truly accepted, they mask less, stress decreases, and recovery becomes more possible.

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