

SIKON

Autistic Burnout



Programme

1. The **causes** of Autistic Burnout
2. **Signs** of burnout
3. **Assessment** instruments
4. **Research**
5. **Ending** Autistic Burnout

Causes of Autistic Burnout

- **Lack of autism awareness and accommodations** at school, home or work
- Being autistic in a **non-autistic world**
- **Double empathy**
- Coping with **social expectations** (Gore et al. 2024 *Neurodiversity 2*)
- Negative **evaluation and social rejection**

Causes of Autistic Burnout

- Lack of **social connection**
- **Camouflaging**: Not the authentic self (Tomczak and Kulikowski 2023 *Current Psychology* 43)
- **Multiple roles** in the family and work/study (Mckinney et al. 2024 *JCPP Advances* 4(4))

Causes of Autistic Burnout

- **Sensory** experiences
- Coping with **change**
- Coping with **anxiety**
- More **demands** than coping abilities
- High **personal expectations**
- **Lack of progress** academically and at work



Signs of Autistic Burnout

Higgins et al. (2021) *Autism* 25,

- 1: Significant **reduction** in social, occupational, educational, academic, behavioural, or other important areas of **functioning**
- 2: Difficulties with **executive function** and/or dissociative states
- 3: **Increased intensity of autistic traits** and/or **reduced capacity to camouflage/mask** autistic characteristics

Signs of Autistic Burnout

There can be associated features such as:

- **Low self-esteem** and not knowing **what to do** to restore mental energy levels
- Confusion as to whether the signs are indicative of **clinical depression** (personally and professionally)
- Loss of **self-care and daily living skills**, speech (situational mutism) and ability to **regulate emotions**

Signs of Autistic Burnout

- More shutdowns and inertia (frozen)
- *“I just come home and then I just sit at my computer for a few minutes not knowing what to do”*
- *“It feels like my mind is struggling to do anything”*



Signs of Autistic Burnout

- **Need for withdrawal and downtime for recovery**
- Can include complete social isolation- a **recluse**
- Frontal lobes 'closed' awaiting recovery – brain 'fog'



Characteristics of Autistic Burnout

- The **prevalence** of autistic burnout is unknown
- Can **last months or years**
- May start during puberty and the **adolescent years**
- Can be triggered by **life changes** such as starting at a new school or job, achieving a promotion or the end of a friendship/relationship

Characteristics of Autistic Burnout

- May affect **physical health** (chronic fatigue) and **mental health** (despair and negativity)
- Contributory factor for **dropping out** of university and periods of unemployment
- Withdrawal will increase a feeling of isolation
- Difficulty reporting emotional exhaustion (alexithymia) and **asking for help**
- May **precede and precipitate** a diagnosis of autism

Assessment Instruments

- Arnold et al (2023) *Autism* 27 1933-1948
- **Autistic Burnout Severity Items (ABSI)**
- 141 autistic adults
- The exploration of a potentially unique **autistic burnout syndrome**
- A four-factor solution

1: Exhaustion



Assessment Instruments

2. Cognitive Disruption

- Memory problems and confusion

3. Heightened Autistic Self-Awareness

- Increased sensory sensitivity and self-awareness of autistic characteristics

4. Overwhelm and Withdrawal

- Across the sample, very high rates of depression were evident.
 - 98% were above the cut-off for clinical depression

Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 1

- **Recognising** being in a state of burnout – potential denial
- Requires **self-awareness** and **interoception**
- Disclosing fatigue, stress and despair - **alexithymia**
- Another person may recognise the signs before the autistic person
- **Temporary withdrawal** from social and **externally imposed demands**



Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 1

- A temporary **retreat** or asylum from the non-autistic world
- Could a retreat be created for and run by autistic individuals to assist in recovery from autistic burnout?

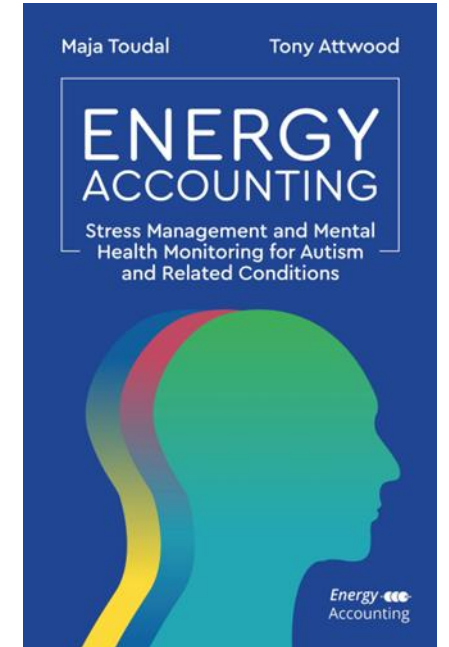


Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 1

- Make a **list** of your personal situations and experiences that contribute to burnout
- Consider ways that you can **manage or avoid** these situations and how to **communicate** this to others in your life
- **Explain the daily challenges using speech or a typed document**
- **Include** accommodations and adjustments needed to reduce stress
- Make a list of activities that **re-energise** you and ensure that you regularly engage in these (Energy Accounting)

Energy Accounting



- Maja Toudal: Concept of an **energy bank account**
- Energy **withdrawals and deposits** throughout the day
- Risk of **energy depletion** leading to burnout and depression
- *When I am emotionally depleted, I need to be disconnected to look after myself*

Energy Bank Account: Withdrawals and Deposits

Withdrawal

- Socializing
- Change
- Making a mistake
- Sensory sensitivity
- Daily living skills
- Coping with anxiety
- Over analysing social performance
- Sensitivity to other people's moods
- Being teased or excluded
- Crowds
- Government agencies
- Body shape
- Perceived injustice
- Certain people

Deposit

- Solitude
- Special interest
- Physical activity
- Animals and nature
- Computer games
- Meditation
- Caring for others
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Reading Harry Potter books
- Mental health vacation day
- Information on the Internet
- Being with pets
- Certain people

Energy Accounting

Currency: numerical measure or value of how much an activity or experience is energy draining or refreshing from day to day

Energy range rated from one to 100 for each activity or experience in the withdrawal or deposit columns

On some days, socializing can drain energy at a value of around 20 but on other days could be 100



Range of Energy Depletion and Refreshment: 15-Year-Old Autistic Girl

Withdrawals

- Late to school 10-40
- Crowds 20-60
- Mum being cranky 30-100
- Friends not being nice to each other 20-30
- Friends' own problems 20-90
- Noise in class 20-30

Deposits

- Reading Harry Potter 30-80
- Dancing freestyle in bedroom 30-50
- Talking to boys at school 10-30
- Quiet time in bedroom 20-80

Range of Energy Withdrawal and Deposit

Autistic Adult

Withdrawals

- Sensory sensitivity, loud noises, flickering light 80-100
- Anxiety and worries 20-80
- Seeing people socialising 20-50
- Meeting new people 50-90
- Having to go somewhere 20-40
- Reminder of being disabled 20-40
- Appointments 20-40
- PTSD triggers 90-100
- People being angry 70-100
- Masking 20-80

Deposits

- Stimming 20-60
- Arts and crafts 10-50
- Being with animals 10-60
- Noise cancelling headphones 30-70
- Finding and collecting fossils 30-40
- Thunderstorms 50-70
- Music 10-60
- Museums 20-40
- Reading 20-40

Carer Burnout

Energy Accounting

Withdrawals

- Staying calm during a meltdown 80-100
- Fear for the future 40-80
- Conflicting advice 30-70
- Strained relationship 70-100
- Home 'police'-conflict and rules 50-70
- Feeling isolated 60-90
- Being an advocate 20-40
- Support for daily living 40-80
- Coordinating therapy 40-60
- Government agencies 30-90

Deposits

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Partner support | 80-100 |
| Professional support | 40-60 |
| Support from other parents | 50-90 |
| Time alone | 70-90 |
| Yoga and mediation | 60-90 |
| Meeting up with old-school friends | 40-60 |
| Arts and Crafts | 60-80 |
| Reading novels | 50-70 |
| Gardening | 60-80 |
| Running and swimming | 60-90 |

Energy Account Form

Withdrawals		Deposits	
Activity/Experience	(0-100)	Activity/Experience	(0-100)

Balancing the Books

- Add all the numerical values in each of the two columns to see if the energy bank balance at the end of the day is in **debit or credit**
- If needed, schedule more energy-infusing activities into the next day or week
- www.energyaccounting.com



Energy Accounting

Add all the numerical values in each of the two columns to see if the energy bank balance at the end of the day is in **debit or credit**

If needed, **schedule more energy-infusing activities** for the next day/week

Colour coding system

- Neutral
- Recharging
- Physical
- Social
- Draining
- Other

August / September 2015				Uge 36				
	Morning	8-12	12-15	15-18		18-20	Evening →	Mærkedage
31 Mandag	Make lunch Walk dog	Classes/ School	Classes/ School	Homework Dance/yoga			Walk dog TV/Gaming	Steak & potatoes
1 Tirsdag	— 11 —	— 11 —	— 11 —	Homework Work out			Walk dog TV/Gaming	Spaghetti & meatsauce
2 Onsdag	— 11 —	— 11 —	— 11 —	Homework Dance/yoga			Walk dog TV/Gaming	Chicken & curry
3 Torsdag	— 11 —	— 11 —	— 11 —	Shop for party Work out		Homework Homework (catch up)	Walk dog TV/Gaming	Veggie lasagne
4 Fredag	— 11 —	— 11 —	— 11 —	Shop for party Work out		Homework/ write assignment	Walk dog TV/Gaming	Tuna salad
5 Lørdag	Sleep in	Walk dog	Start cooking	Walk dog Get ready		Birthday party	Birthday party	29! Big dinner Cheesecake
6 Søndag	Sleep in	Walk dog	Time off	Walk dog Dance/yoga		Time off	Time off	Noodles

Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 2

- Time spent re-integrating self with the external world in a **graduated manner**
- Gradual return to daily activities and routines at school or work but at a **reduced level**
- **Embracing autism**



Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 2

Empathy and practical suggestions from the **autistic online community** and an **autistic mentor**

Create a **social support network**

Sharing experiences and strategies to end burnout

Be in nature, with animals, engaging in arts and crafts, mindfulness and physical activities

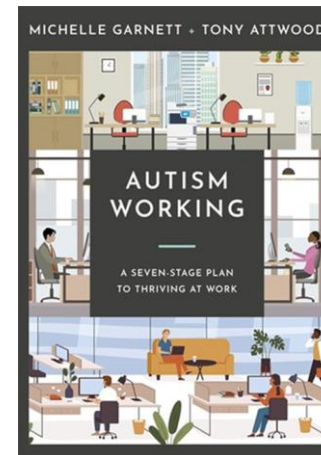
Be the **authentic self** and only occasionally use masking



Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 2

- Becoming a **self-advocate**
- Increase teacher skills in creating an **autism-inclusive culture**
- Appropriate **accommodations**, such as social and sensory
- Increasing employers, line managers and colleagues' knowledge of autism
- Appropriate accommodations



Ending Autistic Burnout and Recovery

Stage 3

Review the effectiveness of new understanding and accommodations for autism

Recognition of **personal limits and needs**

Consider '**pruning**' work commitments and part-time employment or reduced workload

Consider a change of employer/career/course



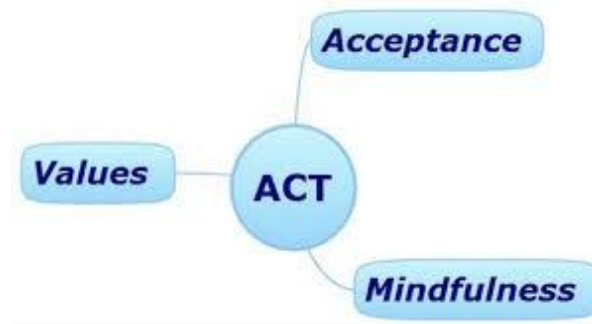
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Autistic Burnout

- Genuine need for **withdrawal and downtime** (avoidance) for recovery
- Impaired executive functioning and energy depletion will affect the cognitive dimensions of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Question using CBT (and medication) to encourage the person to tolerate an environment that is toxic to mental health
- Need **environmental and attitude modification**

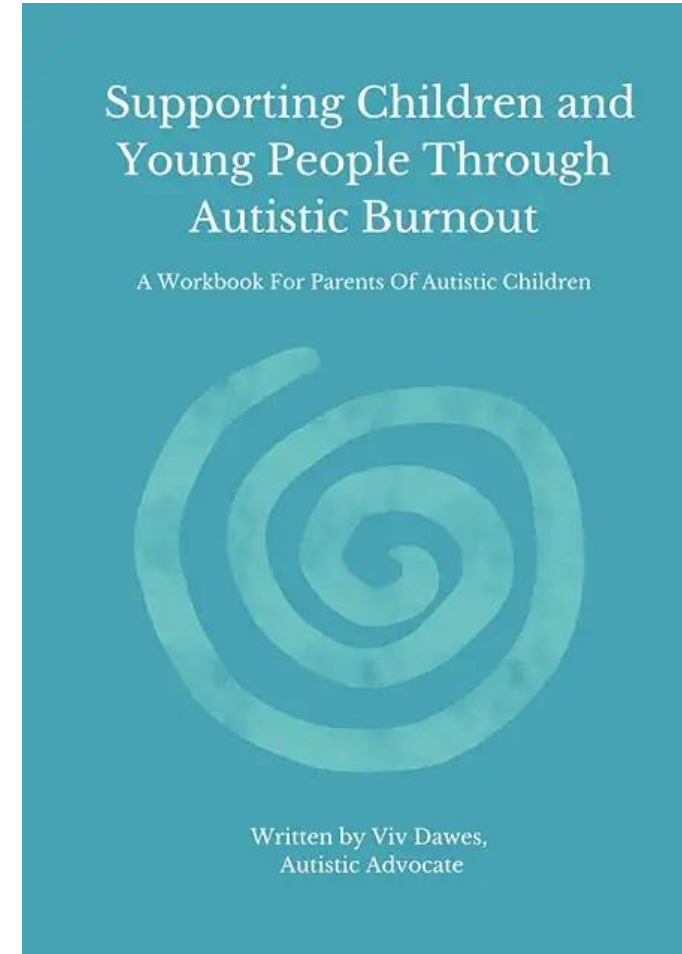
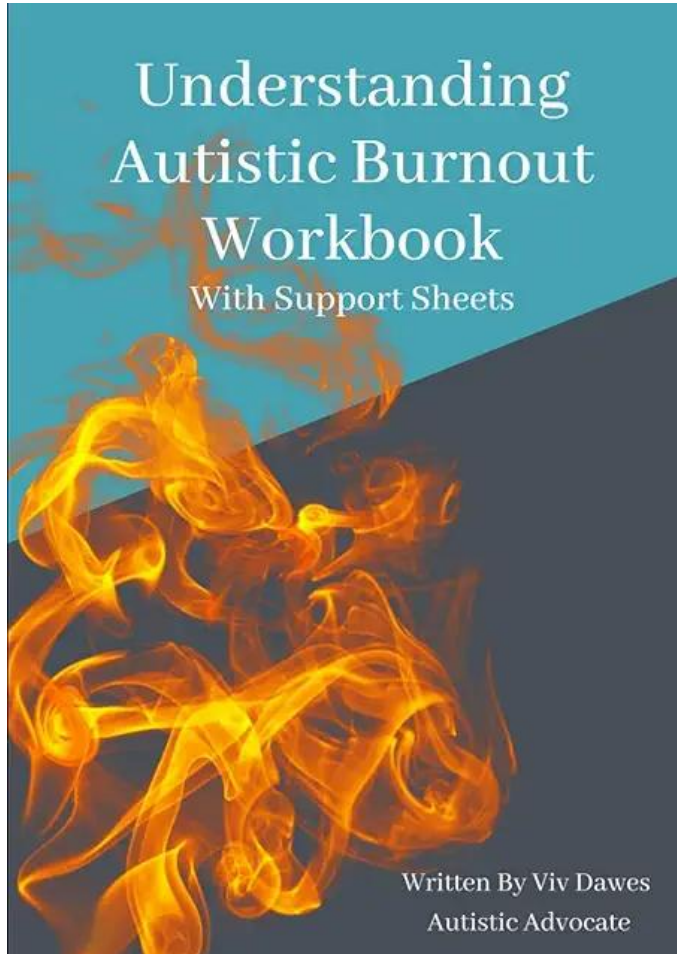


Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and Autistic Burnout

- **Need to address social issues and sensory environments** to reduce stressors that can lead to autistic burnout or suicidal ideation
- Regularly review energy levels and physical and mental health
- Consider Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and mindfulness and relaxation strategies
- ACT explores an individual's values and moving in a direction that is important to oneself



Resources



Resources

