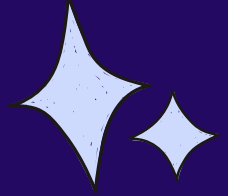


SIGNS OF BURNOUT IN NEURODIVERGENT TEENS



A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS TO RECOGNISE AND RESPOND TO EMOTIONAL OVERWHELM

What is Neurodivergent Burnout?

Neurodivergent burnout is a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion experienced by many autistic and ADHD individuals. It's often caused by prolonged masking, high demands, sensory overload, social stress, or trying to keep up with environments that aren't set up for how their brain works.

Burnout can look different in neurodivergent teens than in neurotypical peers, and it's often misunderstood or misdiagnosed. This guide will help you spot the signs early and offer the right kind of support.

Common Signs of Burnout in Neurodivergent Teens

- Increased Shutdowns or Meltdowns - More frequent emotional outbursts, or withdrawing completely. These can happen more easily and take longer to recover from.
- Loss of Skills - Your teen may temporarily lose abilities they previously managed well, such as speaking fluently, managing daily tasks, or regulating emotions.
- Chronic Fatigue or Sleep Issues - Struggling to wake up, falling asleep during the day, or staying up all night.
- Avoidance - Pulling away from school, friends, or activities they used to enjoy. They may resist any demand, even low-pressure ones.
- Increased Sensory Sensitivities - Sounds, lights, textures, or smells may suddenly become overwhelming when they weren't before.
- Negative Self-Talk - Expressing frustration with themselves, calling themselves "lazy" or "a failure" — often internalised from trying to meet expectations that don't fit them.
- Irritability and Mood Swings - Quick to anger or tears, often seeming "on edge" or overwhelmed by small things.
- Physical Symptoms - Headaches, stomach aches, or other body complaints with no clear medical cause.

How You Can Support Them

- Adjust Expectations - Lower the pressure — even well-meaning encouragement can feel overwhelming during burnout. Allow them to rest without guilt.
- Make Space for Recovery - Create a calm, safe, sensory-friendly environment at home. Let them cocoon if they need to.
- Limit Demands - Prioritise the absolute essentials. Help with routines, meals, hygiene — but avoid over-prompting.
- Reassure, Don't Rush - Burnout recovery can take days, weeks, or even months. Let them know you understand, they're not broken, and it's okay to slow down.
- Offer Predictability - Use visual timetables, gentle routines, or checklists if they help your teen feel more in control.
- Celebrate Small Wins - Acknowledge effort, not outcomes. Let them know it's okay to do things their way.
- Seek Support - A neuroaffirming counsellor can help your teen rebuild their confidence and explore ways to prevent future burnout.

A Note for Parents

Seeing your child struggle is hard — and it can bring up stress, confusion, or even guilt. Be kind to yourself too. You don't need to have all the answers. Showing up with empathy and openness goes a long way. If you're feeling overwhelmed, reaching out for your own support is a strength, not a weakness.

You're not alone.

