SOLA
A SOFT LANDING SPACE

WORKBOOK · NEURODIVERGENT BURNOUT · WEEK 1

It's Not Just Tired

Understanding neurodivergent burnout

A gentle workbook for noticing what burnout is, how it builds, and what it might be asking of you. Go at your own pace. Skip anything that doesn't fit today.

UNDERSTAND · SUPPORT · CONNECT · BUILD

Welcome to October.

In September, we looked at executive function: how your brain manages demands, and the supports that help. This month, we look at what can happen when the demands outrun those supports for too long. That's burnout.

You don't need to be in burnout to use this workbook. Understanding it early is one of the kindest things you can do for your future self.

UNDERSTAND	What burnout is, and how it builds
SUPPORT	What helps, and a kinder story
CONNECT	Who knows when you're running low
BUILD	This week's small practice

LOW ON ENERGY TODAY?

Try just three things: the three signs on page 3, the circle map on page 8, and your one small step on page 10. That's plenty.

"Your capacity changed. Your worth didn't."

UNDERSTAND

Three signs to know.

Research led by autistic adults describes neurodivergent burnout as a long-lasting exhaustion that happens when life's demands outweigh capacity for too long, without enough support. Three signs show up again and again.

1

Chronic exhaustion

Deep tiredness in body and mind that sleep or a weekend off doesn't fix.

2

Loss of skills

Things you could usually do, like talking, planning or self-care, get much harder or stop.

3

Lower tolerance

Sounds, light, touch and people feel louder and harder to be around.

Have you noticed any of these, now or in the past? What did they look like for you?

- [ ] **Exhaustion**

- [ ] **Loss of skills**

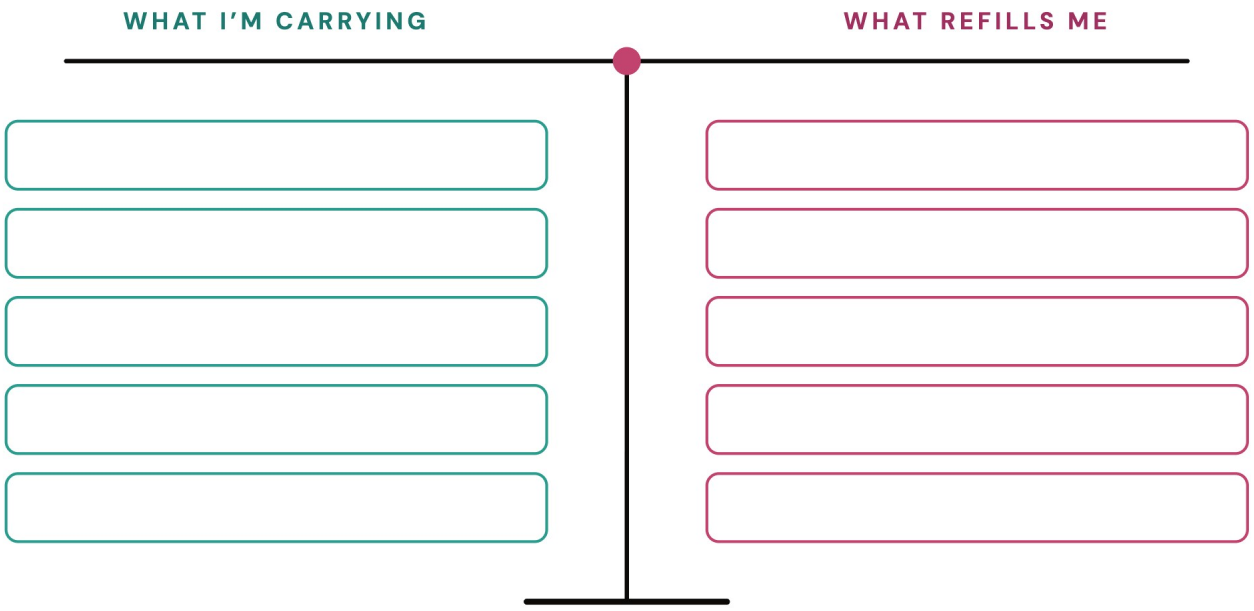
- [ ] **Lower tolerance**

Which skill tends to slip first for you when your energy is low?

UNDERSTAND

Your scale, right now.

Burnout usually isn't one bad week. It builds when the demand side stays heavier for months. Fill in your own scale. Write what you're carrying on the left, and what refills you on the right.



Ideas for the left: masking at work, noise, a move, caregiving, money stress, health, a big change. Ideas for the right: alone time, a special interest, a person who gets it, sleep, nature, quiet.

Looking at your scale, which side feels heavier? How long has it felt that way?

Is there anything on the left you didn't realize was costing you energy?

UNDERSTAND

Tired, or burned out?

Everyone gets tired. Burnout is different in a few important ways. Read each row and tick the column that sounds more like you lately. There's no score, just information.

WHEN I'M TIRED…	ME?	WHEN I'M BURNED OUT…	ME?
A good night's sleep or a quiet weekend helps.	☐	Rest helps a little, or not at all.	☐
It lasts days.	☐	It lasts weeks or months.	☐
I can still do my usual things, just slower.	☐	Things I could usually do become hard or impossible.	☐
My senses feel about normal.	☐	Noise, light and people feel like too much.	☐
I want to see people, maybe later.	☐	I need to pull away just to get through.	☐
I know what would help.	☐	Even choosing what would help feels hard.	☐

A NOTE ON DEPRESSION

Burnout and depression can look alike, and they can happen together. If low mood, hopelessness or losing interest in everything are part of what you're feeling, please talk to a doctor or therapist you trust. You deserve real support, not just a worksheet.

What did you notice as you read the two columns?

SUPPORT

What helps.

When autistic adults were asked what helped them recover from burnout, three things stood out. None of them is "try harder." For each one, write the smallest version that could fit into your life right now.

Acceptance & support

Being around people who believe you, and who make room for how you are.

My smallest version:

Fewer demands

Lowering expectations, and taking real time off where you can.

My smallest version:

Being yourself

Less masking. More time and space where you don't have to perform.

My smallest version:

Which of the three feels hardest to give yourself? What gets in the way?

SUPPORT

A KINDER STORY.

Burnout often comes with a harsh inner voice. It tells you you're lazy, dramatic or failing. Those stories add to the load. Try rewriting a few of yours.

THE OLD STORY	A KINDER, TRUER STORY
"I'm just lazy. Everyone else can do this."	"My capacity is low right now. I've been carrying more than people can see."
"I used to be able to handle this. What's wrong with me?"	"Losing skills is a known sign of burnout. It's information, not a verdict."

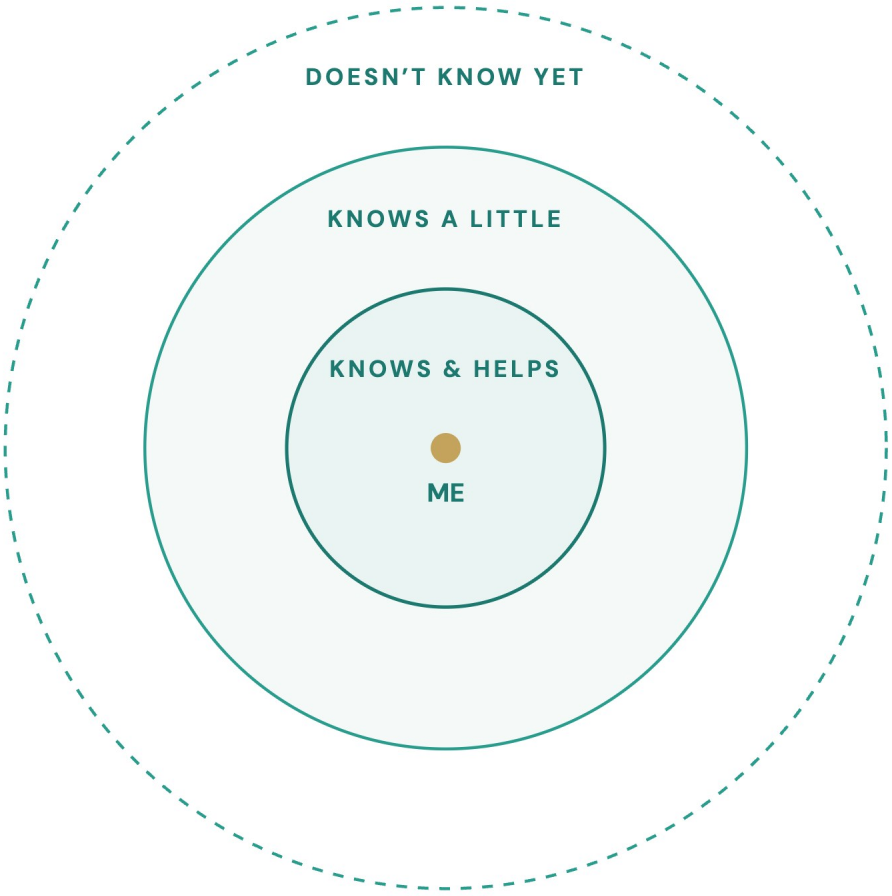
Now try yours:

If you can't believe the kinder story yet, that's okay.
Try reading it out loud anyway.

CONNECT

Who knows when you're running low?

Burnout often makes us pull away, right when connection helps most. Map the people in your life by how much they know about your energy. Write names or initials in each ring.



Is there one person you could move one ring closer? What would they need to know?

CONNECT

Saying "I'm running low."

It can be hard to find words when your capacity is low, so it helps to prepare them ahead of time. Use the SOLA communication formula to draft a message for one person on your map.

When I have three late meetings in a row, **I think** "I can't keep up with this," **I feel** drained and on edge. **I need** a quieter evening with no plans. **I will** tell you when I'm ready to talk, probably tomorrow.

what happened, or what I sensed

When I...

the thought that showed up

I think...

the emotion or body sensation

I feel...

what would actually help

I want / need...

what I'll do, my part

I will...

Who would I send this to? How would I send it: text, in person, a note?

If I only have energy for one sentence, I could say:

● BUILD

This week's practice.

No big plans this week. Just three small moves that help you see your pattern and lighten the load a little.

Notice
Each evening, take ten seconds with the Early Warning Signs Tracker. Just notice. Don't fix anything.

Set one thing down
Choose one demand you can lower, pause or hand off this week, even a small one.

Add one thing back
Choose one small thing from the right side of your scale that you'll give yourself on purpose.

End-of-week check-in: What did I notice about my pattern?

What did setting one thing down feel like?

Before you go.

Burnout is real
It has a shape: exhaustion, lost skills and lower tolerance. Naming it is not making excuses.

It builds over time
When demands outweigh capacity for months, and support is out of reach.

It's not a character flaw
Low capacity is a state, not who you are.

Small signs come first
Learning your early signs gives you more room to respond.

One thing I want to remember from this week:

Come as you are. Learn at your pace.
You belong here.

If you're in crisis or thinking about ending your life, please reach out now. In the US, call or text 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline). Outside the US, contact your local emergency or crisis line.

Sources: Raymaker et al. (2020), "Defining Autistic Burnout," *Autism in Adulthood*; Higgins et al. (2021), "Defining autistic burnout through experts by lived experience," *Autism*. Most burnout research so far centers autistic adults; research on ADHD and burnout is still emerging.