SOLA
A SOFT LANDING SPACE

WORKBOOK · NEURODIVERGENT BURNOUT · WEEK 3

Running on Empty

Your nervous system in burnout

A workbook for the days when there's almost nothing left. You'll map your window, name how your body protects you, and gather small, low-cost ways back to steady ground. Go at your own pace. Skip anything that doesn't fit today.

- Map your window
- Name how your body protects you
- Budget your spoons
- Pack a kit for low days

UNDERSTAND · SUPPORT · CONNECT · BUILD

Welcome back.

You've named burnout's shape and counted the hidden load that feeds it. This week is about what burnout does inside your body: how your alarm system works harder when the tank is low, and how to find steadier ground without spending energy you don't have.

UNDERSTAND	What happens to your alarm system in burnout
SUPPORT	Low-demand ways to regulate
CONNECT	What helps your body feel safe
BUILD	A kit for your lowest days

LOW ON SPOONS TODAY?

Try just three things: your window on page 3, your low-demand menu on page 8, and your kit in Practice Lab.

"Your body isn't failing you.
It's protecting you with what it has left."

UNDERSTAND

My window.

Your window is the range where you can think, feel and choose. Write what each zone looks and feels like for you: in your body, your thoughts, and what you do.

TOO MUCH
racing, flooded, snappy

MY WINDOW
I can think and choose

TOO LITTLE
numb, foggy, offline

What tends to push me out the top of my window?

noise, crowds, conflict, deadlines, too many questions…

What tends to drag me out the bottom?

long days of masking, no breaks, skipped meals, being alone too long…

The "window of tolerance" is an idea from psychiatrist Dan Siegel. In burnout, most people find their window gets narrower.

UNDERSTAND

How my body protects me.

Fight, flight, freeze and fawn are automatic ways your body tries to keep you safe. None of them is a flaw. Mark how often each shows up, and what it looks like for you.

Fight

OFTEN ◯ SOME ◯ RARELY ◯

snapping, irritability, arguing with every demand

For me, this looks like:

Flight

OFTEN ◯ SOME ◯ RARELY ◯

avoiding, cancelling, scrolling, needing to leave

For me, this looks like:

Freeze

OFTEN ◯ SOME ◯ RARELY ◯

stuck, blank, can't start, words won't come

For me, this looks like:

Fawn

OFTEN ◯ SOME ◯ RARELY ◯

saying yes, masking harder, keeping everyone happy

For me, this looks like:

Which one shows up most when I'm running low? What usually sets it off?

What would I like to say to myself when I notice it?

"Fawn" was named by therapist Pete Walker.

UNDERSTAND

My meltdown & shutdown plan.

Meltdowns (the system overflows) and shutdowns (the system goes offline) aren't choices. A plan made on a calmer day means you don't have to think in the moment. Fill in what you know; leave the rest.

	MELTDOWN	SHUTDOWN
Early signs *what I notice first*		
What helps *during, if anything*		
What doesn't *what makes it worse*		
After *how I recover*		

Who could I share this plan with?

Autistic adults in burnout research described more meltdowns and shutdowns (Raymaker et al., 2020).

UNDERSTAND

My body signals.

Interoception is noticing what's happening inside you. For many neurodivergent people, signals come through quiet, late, loud, or mixed up. Mark how each one tends to arrive for you, then add a gentle cue that could help.

Signal	Quiet	Late	Loud	Mixed	A cue that could help
Hunger	○	○	○	○	
Thirst	○	○	○	○	
Tiredness	○	○	○	○	
Too hot / cold	○	○	○	○	
Bathroom	○	○	○	○	
Pain or tension	○	○	○	○	
Needing a break	○	○	○	○	
Big feelings	○	○	○	○	

Cue ideas: a water bottle you can see, a phone reminder to eat, a snack by the bed, checking in with your body when you change rooms.

Which signal do I most often miss until it's urgent?

One cue I'll try this week:

SUPPORT

My spoon budget.

Spoon theory, from writer Christine Miserandino, pictures energy as a handful of spoons. Circle how many you woke up with today. Then list what spends spoons and what gives a few back.

SPOONS I WOKE UP WITH TODAY

WHAT SPENDS SPOONS	SPOONS

WHAT GIVES A FEW BACK	SPOONS

What's one spoon-spender I could shrink, skip or share on a low day?

SUPPORT

My low-demand menu.

When you're low, choosing is hard, so choose now. Write what helps your senses settle at each cost. Start with the cheapest thing that works.

Zero spoons *I can do this lying down*

NO SPOONS

e.g. dim room, earplugs, heavy blanket, a familiar show

One spoon *small and close by*

e.g. stim on purpose, cool water on my hands, a warm drink

Two spoons *when I have a little more*

e.g. a slow walk, a warm shower, texting a safe person

What should I avoid when I'm very low, even if it usually helps?

SUPPORT

Talk to my system, not at it.

An overloaded nervous system doesn't respond to orders. Rewrite a few of the things you say to yourself when you're flooded or frozen.

INSTEAD OF	TRY
"Calm down."	*"My system is overloaded. Less input first."*
"I'm overreacting."	*"This is a protective response, not a choice."*
"Just push through."	*"Pushing through is how I got this empty."*

A kinder voice is a lower-demand voice.

CONNECT

What helps my body feel safe.

Co-regulation is when being near a calm, safe person helps your own system settle. Think about who does that for you, and what you'd want them to know.

WHO	WHAT THEY DO THAT HELPS

WHEN I'M OVERLOADED

My signal (a word, emoji or gesture): _____

Please: _____

Please don't: _____

It helps if you: _____

What helps my body feel safe when everything is too much?

this week's Community Circle question

● BUILD

This week's practice.

Three small moves, so help is ready before you need it.

Notice
When things tip, name the response that's showing up: fight, flight, freeze or fawn. No judging.

Choose small
Pick one zero- or one-spoon option from your menu on page 8.

Keep it close
Build your Low-Spoon Regulation Kit in Practice Lab. Where will it live?

End of the week: when did I notice my window shrinking?

What was the smallest thing that actually helped?

Before you go.

Your window shrinks
In burnout it takes less to tip into too much or too little.

Protection, not failure
Fight, flight, freeze and fawn are your body trying to keep you safe.

Regulate with less
When spoons are short, the cheapest thing that helps is the right thing.

Safety can be shared
Quiet company and a simple signal can help your body settle.

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, D. M. et al. (2020), "Defining Autistic Burnout," *Autism in Adulthood*; Williams, Z. J. et al. (2023), "Characterizing Interoceptive Differences in Autism," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*; Siegel, D. J. (1999), *The Developing Mind*; Walker, P. (2013), *Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*; Miserandino, C. (2003), "The Spoon Theory," butyoudontlooksick.com.