

# AUTISTIC BURNOUT

The Royal College of Psychiatry describes Autistic Burnout as "a state of exhaustion, associated with functional and cognitive deterioration and an increase in autism symptomatology, as a consequence of coping with social interaction (including masking) and the sensory environment. It may be a short-lived state (as at the end of a working day), relieved by a relatively brief withdrawal from the stress. However, longer and more severe stress can produce a more sustained state (which entails some form of innate change) which has to wait on its natural remission. It overlaps symptomatically with anxiety and depression, and there may be a heightened risk of suicide.

Its anecdotal basis and the lack of systematic research mean that burnout does not have the status of a formal syndrome or disorder. Nevertheless, the concept captures the **need to consider the effect of adjusting somebody's setting, support, and style of life before assuming their malaise to be a recognised psychiatric disorder.**" (Royal College of Psychiatrists, The psychiatric management of autism in adults.)

Some of the main characteristics of Autistic Burnout are:

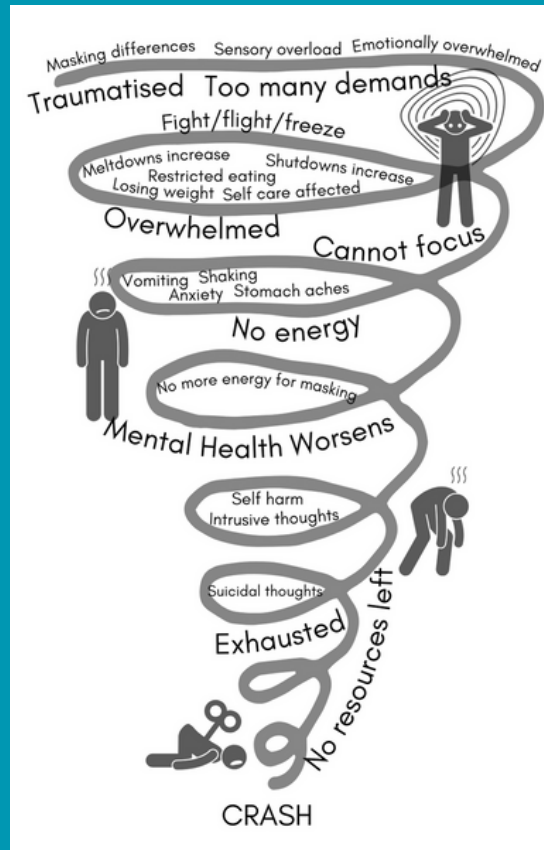
- Exhaustion (mental, emotional, physical)
- Increased sensory overload
- Loss of executive function skills (inc emotional regulation)
- Increased meltdowns and shutdowns (meltdowns are NOT tantrums)
- Increased anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Stop talking/communication
- No more resources

"Autistic Burnout is a severely debilitating condition with onset preceded by fatigue from camouflaging or masking autistic traits, interpersonal interactions, an overload of cognitive input, a sensory environment unaccommodating to autistic sensitivities and / or other additional stressors or changes. Onset and episodes of autistic burnout may interact with co-occurring physical and / or mental health conditions".  
S.Arnold, J.Higgins et al, (2021) "Defining autistic burnout through experts by lived experience".

For more information inc downloads go to the Extreme Burnout Crisis page on my website [www.autisticadvocate.co.uk](http://www.autisticadvocate.co.uk)

In a crisis you can call **Samaritans** 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling [116 123](tel:116123)

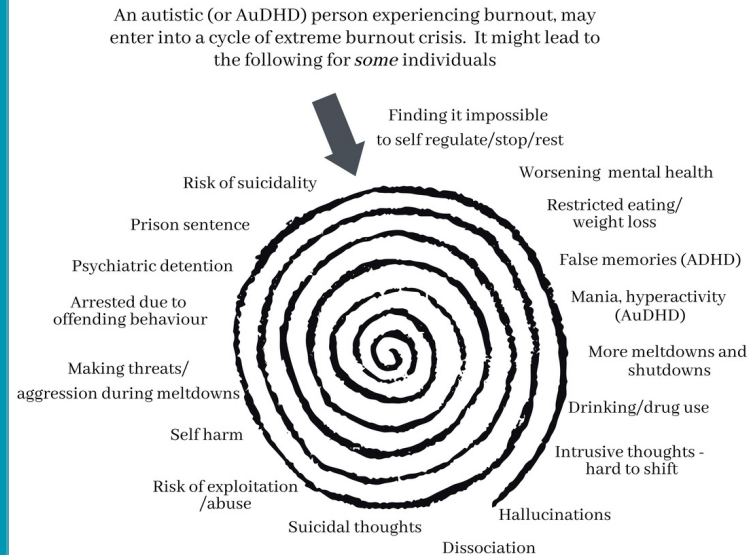
Or you can call **Papyrus** if you're under 35 and struggling with suicidal thoughts & feelings, [0800 068 4141](tel:08000684141) or text [07786 209 697](tel:07786209697).



Remember not all Autistic (or ADHD) people have an official diagnosis and many have received misdiagnoses of EUPD or BiPolar etc.

# EXTREME BURNOUT CRISIS

For some Autistic people (who may also be ADHD 'AuDHD') their experience of burnout can present differently and they may experience Extreme Burnout Crisis; this can have severe consequences. Their presentation may include hallucinations and they may seem manic. It's not uncommon for Autistic Burnout to be misdiagnosed as depression, Bi Polar or EUPD. 50-70% of Autistic people are also ADHD and some are prescribed ADHD medication.



In 'Extreme Burnout Crisis', the Autistic individual can present as manic, hypervigilant and paranoid, struggling with intrusive thoughts and hallucinations (hallucinations can be due to sensory overload, intrusive thoughts and exhaustion); they may also have suicidal thoughts and make attempts. They might have Alexithymia and not have the words to understand or describe how they feel including experiencing exhaustion.

They might in some cases be self medicating with alcohol and drugs, which will increase anxiety, paranoia and chances of drug induced psychosis in some.

It is very common for meltdowns and shutdowns to increase significantly (as the individual has no more energy to mask their differences) and when experiencing meltdowns the individual may say things they do not mean and this may feel very threatening. These are an indication that the individual is highly distressed and in a fight/flight/freeze loop. They need significant help and support to stay safe, emotionally regulate, reduce their sensory overload and high levels of anxiety.

**Any Autistic person experiencing burnout may need significant help to feel safe, rest, reduce sensory overload, regulate emotions and lower demands.**

