

Burnout

Exhaustion or Fatigue and Burnout can happen in anyone, but can occur more frequently in people with Autism, due to everyday pressures such as social situations and sensory overload. Trying to deal with these pressures over an extended period of time can lead to extreme exhaustion or burnout. Burnout can also occur from making or camouflaging Autistic traits, suppressing stimming, not meeting expectations and changes in routine.

For people with Autism, burnout can look like:

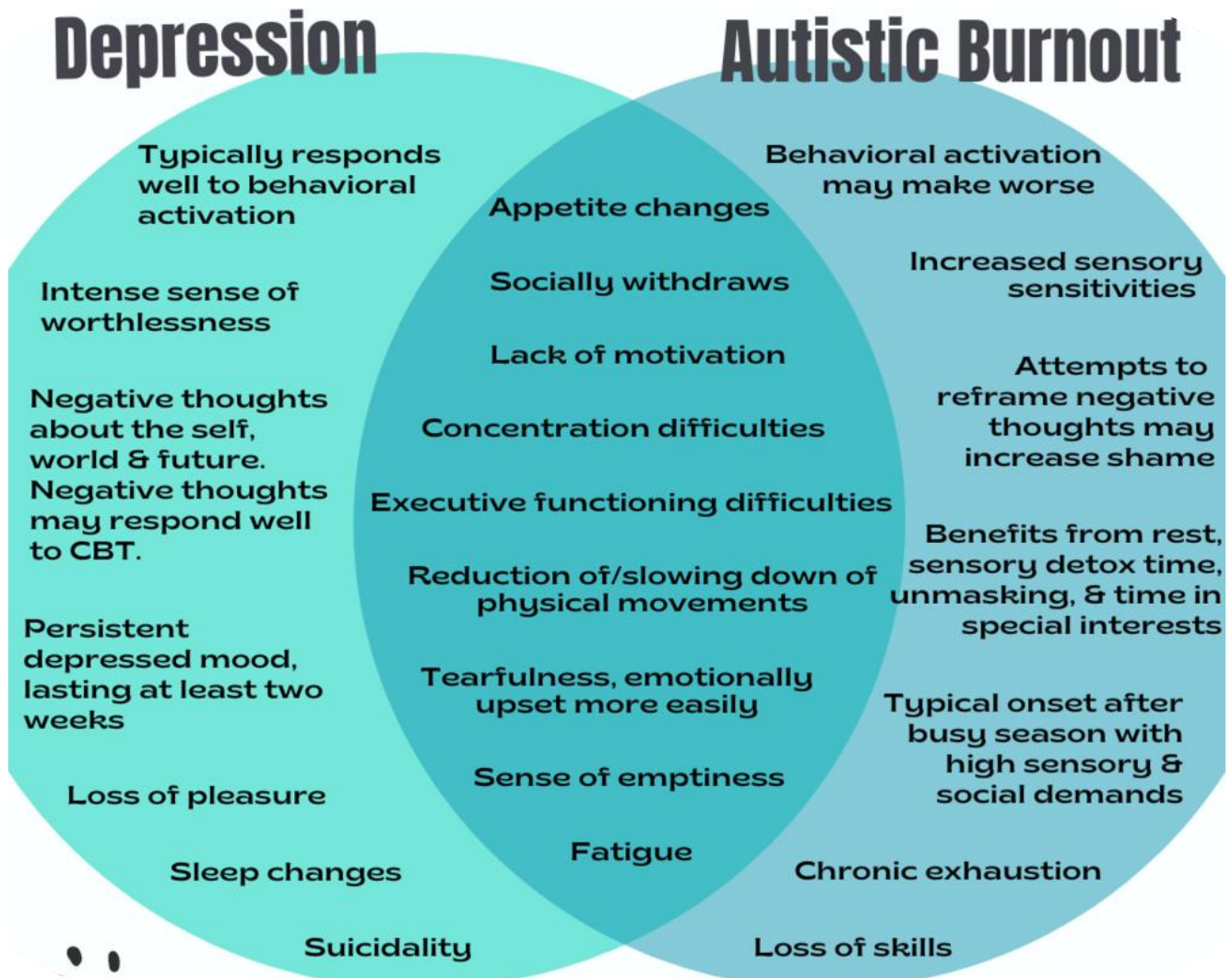
- Increased meltdowns and sensory sensitivities
- Reduced tolerance to stimulus
- Physical pain and headaches
- Physically shutting down, including loss of speech
- Chronic exhaustion
- Feeling they can no longer cope
- Struggling to function and loss of skills
- Difficulties in school/work/relationships
- Effects to mental and physical health
- Suicidal thinking

"So this combination [of stress, masking, social isolation, loss of an important support person], along with the overwhelming confusion of what was 'wrong' with me, why I couldn't really connect with anyone, why people singled me out or played tricks or used me ... just kept hitting this wall over and over again, was what led me to crash and burn out - my physical body and mind started shutting down. I could feel each system in my body closing off as gravity got heavier than it had ever been. I didn't know what to do - did not understand what was happening to me - I had no way to communicate this. It was like a switch had gone off, my verbal ability to convey what was going on in my mind and body was gone. I did not want to die, I've never wanted to die. I needed to step out. I needed to remove myself from the environment and take myself elsewhere; I needed to escape."

Kieran

Autistic Burnout vs Depression

Although there are numerous differences between Autistic burnout and depression, some signs and symptoms overlap, such as feelings of worthlessness and exhaustion. Although they are distinct from one another, Autistic burnout can lead to depression.



Burnout recovery

- **Acceptance and support** – this can come from family, friends, and communities.
- **Unmask** – allow yourself to do what you enjoy and engage with your special interests
- **Formal support** – have reasonable adjustments put in place at work or school, psychical adjustments such as someone getting your shopping, and mental health support
- **Reduce load** – take time off, have breaks, reduce stressful activities
- **Self-advocacy** - learn to set healthy boundaries and expectations, and ask for help
- **Self-knowledge** – learn to recognise your triggers and early signs of burnout, understand your own patterns of behaviour and feelings.

Spending time unmasking
 Stop Suppressing Stimming
 Resting
 Alone time
 Basic needs supported
 Using AAC
 No social demands
 No talking
 Sensory regulation
 Inner circle interaction only
 Drop unnecessary demands
 Set Boundaries
 Sensory safe environment
 Nourish the body
 Incorporate sensory soothers
 Movement
 Engaging with special interests

Recovery Supports



Acceptance



Social Support



Leaning into Autistic Strengths



Formal Supports



Reducing Load



Self-Advocacy



Self-Knowledge



Autistic Community

