



# IS THIS AUTISTIC BURNOUT?



Autistic burnout can look like “refusal,” “regression,” or “worsening behavior.” Often, it reflects a nervous system capacity collapse after long-term mismatch, masking demands, sensory overload, and chronic stress.

If you notice several changes below, consider approaching with curiosity:  
“Could this be Autistic Burnout?”

**The following list contains some observable changes that may indicate Autistic Burnout. This is not a comprehensive list as it can be different for each person. Check any recent changes:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased difficulty completing everyday tasks (ADLs/IADLs)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reduction in communication (less speech/text/initiation; reduced response)    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced stamina or endurance for school/work/home demands    | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased difficulty expressing needs or explaining what is wrong             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to attend school or work                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased difficulty with planning, starting, organizing, or making decisions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased need for rest, downtime, or time alone             | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased sensory perception (noise/light/touch/crowds)                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased shutdowns, withdrawal, or “going quiet”            | <input type="checkbox"/> Regulation strategies previously used are not effective                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased overwhelm, meltdowns, tearfulness, or irritability |  |

## When these signs appear: What helps next

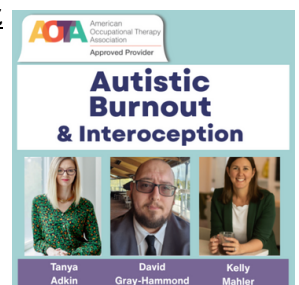
- ✦ Rule out medical concerns (new or sudden changes should always be reviewed by a medical professional)
- ✦ Advocate and educate: this is not a lack of motivation or purposeful behavior. Protect from compliance (avoid forced participation, reinforcement systems, and withheld supports; provide non-contingent access to comfort/regulation; replace behavior plans with nervous system and co-regulation support plans).
- ✦ Reduce demands, but keep routine and predictability (less demand, not less structure)
- ✦ Collaborate with the person (find supports with them, not for them)
- ✦ Reduce painful sensory input and increase regulating sensory input

## Learn More About Autistic Burnout

### **On-Demand Course: Autistic Burnout – Understand It, Support It, Prevent It**

Taught by Tanya Adkin, David Gray-Hammond, and Kelly Mahler

A 6-hour training grounded in the lived experience insights of 300+ autistic individuals who have experience autistic burnout, with practical strategies for recovery and prevention.



*This checklist is educational only. Not medical advice or diagnostic.*