



AuSM's highly trained, certified therapists have committed their careers to helping individuals with autism understand their diagnosis and address both the challenges and gifts that it can bring. The AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team sends out a monthly email to answer questions submitted by our community. Register to receive this monthly column via email at www.ausm.org.

Dear Therapist:

I am a single, child-free, 51-year-old female diagnosed with ASD over a year ago. I am unable to work due to autistic burnout, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Major Depressive Disorder. I was denied SSDI because they think since I had 14 jobs over the course of 35 years that I can just find another job. But working is what caused my burnout and worsening mental health overall. It's not the specific jobs that were the problem; it was having a job in general.

I tried working for myself by creating the perfect online business for me, but I got burnt out on that as well and it proved to be too much for me to handle.

I am in therapy as well as receiving a weekly visit from an ARMHS worker, but I don't feel they are helping enough. I am going further in debt and my mental health is getting worse, despite the professional support I am getting. I feel like thriving in this world as an autistic person is impossible, and surviving is getting impossible as well.

What advice would you have for autistic people who cannot work and cannot get Disability, and state-funded programs and support don't seem to help?

Struggling and Out of Options



Dear Struggling,

Thank you for reaching out!

You've described an experience many autistic adults relate to. There, of course, is no one absolute answer to navigating autistic burnout and the complex systems of "support." While we live in a state that has more supports than others, they're by no means easy to navigate or, these days due to many factors, to guarantee the supports a MNChoices assessment determines as being warranted.

One thing I always support is appealing the Social Security denials and, honestly, using an experienced lawyer to do so. While it can be hard to prove to a judge just how impacted one of by ASD, anxiety, and depression, the more supporting documentation the better.

For example, if you haven't already, getting a Vineland Adaptive Behavioral Assessment as part of the documentation can support just how much your functioning level is impacted by your diagnoses. It looks at what you are able to do in your daily living tasks and gives more data to support where the challenges are.

In exploring how to cope with and, ideally, recover from autistic burnout expert* advice recommends building a recovery plan that includes assessing your immediate needs, balancing accommodations and formal supports, and leaning on any strengths you may have due to autism such as functioning routines. Details and suggestions can be found here: <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/blog/autistic-burnout-recovery>.

*advice from actually autistic adults



Part of addressing autism burnout too is knowing that it tints the lens through which we see the world. Burnout often includes a lot of depression or, at least, depressive thoughts. During burnout, a lot of autistic people have a really hard time feeling hopeful about their needs or seeing possible solutions. This is where having support is supposed to be helpful.

An open conversation with the ARMHS worker about what you need, or possibly seeing if you can get waiver services to cover a life-coaching service (they tend to have more flexibility in how they can be supportive) may be beneficial.

Beth Pitchford, MA, LPCC
Autism Society of Minnesota
Counseling and Consulting

If you would like to submit a question for the AuSM Counseling and Consulting Services team, please email autismcounseling@ausm.org or contact us at 651.647.1083.