



Getting Through the Hard Days

(For parents navigating burnout, overload, and impossible days)

How to Use This Guide

This is not a self-care checklist.

This is a practical guide for:

- Moments when you're barely holding it together
- Reducing how often those moments happen

Use what fits. Skip what doesn't.
Nothing here requires perfect conditions.



PART ONE: Right Now (Crisis Mode)

When Everything Feels Like Too Much

When your body feels overwhelmed and one more thing might push you over:



Try a 3-Minute Reset

- Step out of the room if possible (even a hallway helps)
- Lean your back against a wall
- Breathe out longer than you breathe in
- Notice one physical sensation (wall, floor, your hands)
- Pause decisions for 3 minutes

If You Can't Leave

- Turn away or close your eyes
- Place a hand on your chest
- If your child is safe, pause responding for 60 seconds

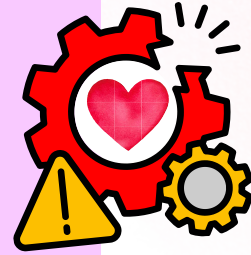


After You've Already Lost It

If you yelled, shut down, or reacted in a way you regret:

In the First 10 Minutes

- Don't fix it immediately
- Take space
- Drink water
- Move your body if you feel activated



When You're Ready

- Keep repair simple:
"I got overwhelmed and I shouted. I'm sorry."
- Avoid over-explaining or spiraling

Important Reminders

- One moment does not define your parenting
- Having a hard moment does not make you a bad parent. Repair and safety matter.
- Repair matters more than perfection
- Guilt means you care, not that you failed



When Everything Feels Like Too Much

If the sensory load becomes overwhelming:

Quick Adjustments

- Use headphones or earplugs
- Wear sunglasses indoors if needed
- Reduce visual clutter (even temporarily)
- Use cold water on wrists or neck
- Step away for 5 minutes if your child is safe

You're not "too sensitive."
Your nervous system is overloaded.



When You Can't Think Straight

Burnout makes even small decisions feel heavy.

Make It Easier

- Choose the first "good enough" option
- Delay decisions that can wait
- For low-stakes decisions, flip a coin if stuck
- Ask: Will this matter in a week?

Simple Script

- "I don't have the capacity to decide right now."

You don't need to justify your limits.



PART TWO: The Long Game

Protect Your Energy

Start small. Pick 1–2, not everything.

Daily Basics

- Eat something (especially protein) before noon
- Add a buffer around your most overwhelming time of day
- Drop one task on purpose
- Take 10 minutes with no demands

If this feels like too much:

Start with just eating something. That's enough.



Reduce System Fatigue

You can't fix systems, but you can reduce their impact.

Practical Strategies

- Create a one-page summary of your child's needs
- Batch calls, emails, and paperwork
- Bring simple notes instead of over-preparing
- Use scripts from other parents
- Say: "We don't have capacity for that right now."



Lower the Bar at Home (On Purpose)

This is about energy, not failure.

You are allowed to:

- Serve simple meals
- Keep a “good enough” home
- Delay non-urgent emails
- Skip constant teaching moments
- Use screen time as a tool

The goal: a home where you can function.



Build a Minimum Viable Routine

Not ideal. Just enough to hold things together.

Ask Yourself:

- What must happen daily?
- What can be weekly?
- What can be dropped?

Example

- Everyone eats something
- Medication happens
- Child has structure for the day
- One load of laundry (folding optional)
- Bedtime happens roughly on time

That counts as a complete day.



Find the Right Support

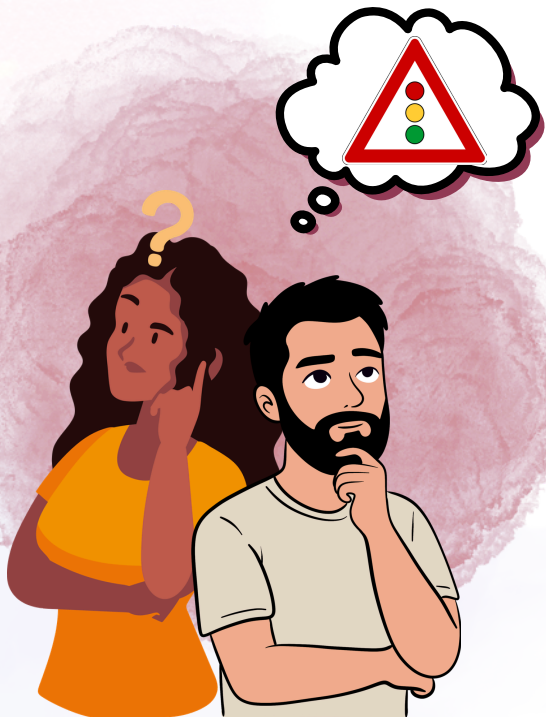
Not all support helps.

Look For

- Parents with similar experiences
- Neurodivergent-friendly spaces
- Professionals who understand your reality
- One safe person to talk to

Avoid

- Spaces that increase pressure
- Advice based on ideal situations
- People who respond with constant fixes



Know Your Warning Signs

Burnout builds gradually.

Common Signs

- Dreading the day ahead
- Small tasks feel overwhelming
- Increased irritability
- Loss of motivation
- Feeling disconnected
- Wanting to escape everything

If several apply:

This may be burnout, not failure. If you feel at risk of hurting yourself, your child, or someone else, call the National Center for Mental Health crisis line at 1553, call 911, or go to the nearest emergency room.

When to Ask for Help

You don't need to wait until things become a crisis.

Helpful Scripts

- *"I need help this week. I'm not okay."*
- *"Can you decide this for me?"*
- *"I need someone to listen, not fix."*
- *"I need help but don't know how."*

Running on empty is reason enough to ask.



Final Takeaway

You don't need to hold everything together.

You need:

- Enough structure to keep going
- Enough honesty to ask for help

That is more than enough.

