

Before Burnout

How are you doing? Are you ok, like actually ok? Or have you just become really good at functioning when you're not?

Let's do something to loosen that knot of tension you've been carrying around for far too long.

Find out where you are in the burnout cycle, and let's make a plan to disrupt it.

Jill Harper-Hill

INTEGRATIVE THERAPY & COACHING

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How long have you been ‘just getting through this week’?



Pushing on through is never a successful strategy for those of us with busy brains, but it’s often the first thing we try. Sometimes it’s all we know. “I’ve just got to keep going for now, and once I get through this… get to the end of the week… finish this project (whatever it is)… then I’ll be able to get things sorted out.”

NOOOOOOOOO

We all know how that story ends. One minute we’ve just got to push on through January, then things will all ease off – and before you know it, it’s November and we still haven’t had a minute to do the thing we’d really like to be doing.

Burnout doesn’t always look like suddenly falling apart. For lots of us it’s more like a cycle we move around, and in and out of, over a long period of time – so much so that it can feel pretty normal. As though everyone is living like this.

We stretch ourselves. We compensate. We override the signs that something needs to change. Things begin to fray. Eventually we become depleted enough that we have to pull back.

Then we rest just enough to feel a little better… and off we go again.

From the outside, we can look as though we’re coping brilliantly throughout much of this cycle. We’re working, parenting, meeting deadlines, caring for everybody else and getting things done. But coping isn’t the same as thriving enough to enjoy life and feel joy in the things we do.

If you’ve lived this way for long enough, it’s very easy to assume that this is simply what life feels like. You might have that feeling that there’s permanently something just out of reach that you really should be getting on with, or wake up in the morning feeling like you’re already behind. I know, because I lived for years with a constant knot in my stomach. We can feel as though we’re always on the brink of getting into trouble or forgetting something unforgivable.

Understanding all of this, and how to make it better, is the work I do with clients in Your Self-Portrait, my 1:1 therapeutic ADHD coaching. Here’s a little taster you can work through to make a start straight away.

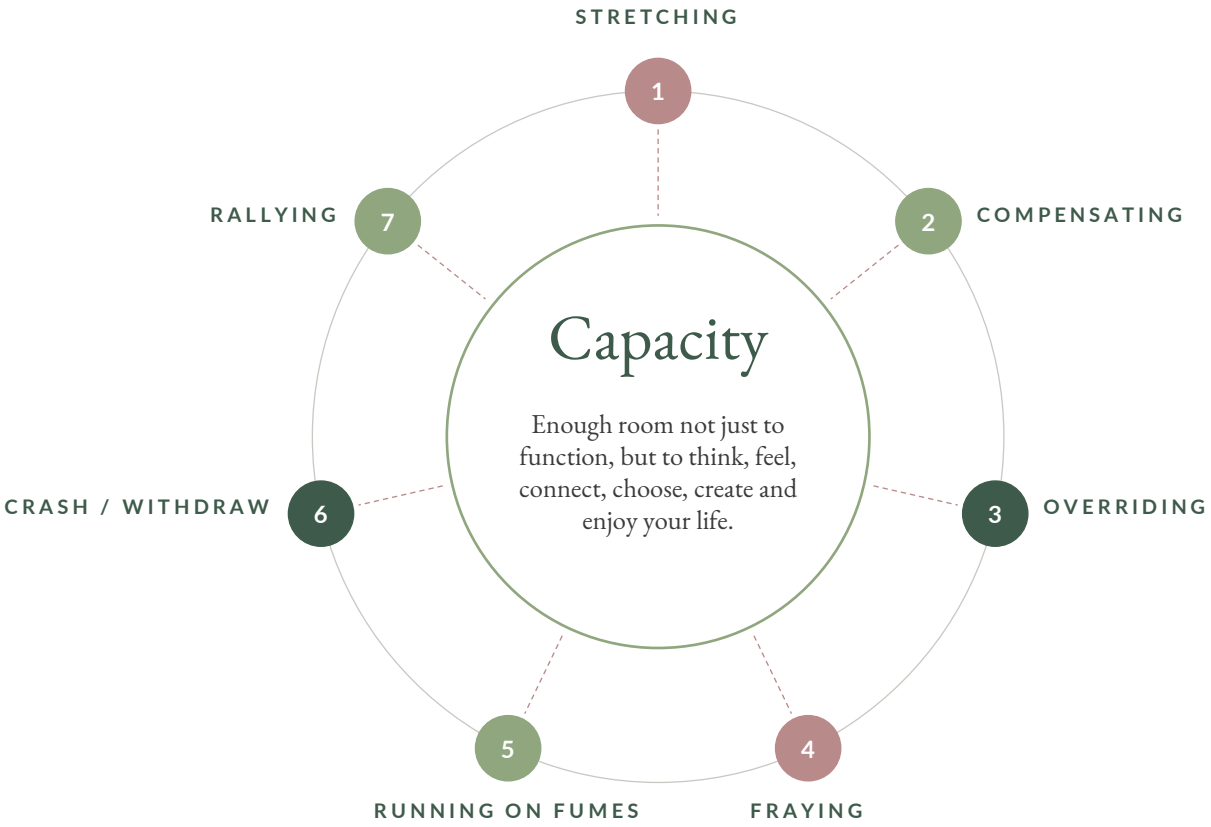
Slow down, take some slow, deep breaths, and spend a moment with you.

Jill x

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The Hidden Burnout Cycle

Where are you right now?



1 STRETCHING
"I'm just about managing, but it's taking more out of me than it should."

2 COMPENSATING
"I can keep everything going if I just try a bit harder."

3 OVERRIDING
"I know I need to stop or change something, but I don't feel able to."

4 FRAYING
"Why am I suddenly finding everything so hard?"

5 RUNNING ON FUMES
"I'm still functioning, but there's almost nothing left to give."

6 CRASH / WITHDRAW
"I can't keep going in the way I have been. I have no choice now but to stop and rest."

7 RALLYING
"I feel a bit better. I should be able to get back to normal soon."

However, relief doesn't necessarily indicate recovery.

You might...

- move backwards as well as forwards
- hover between two positions
- skip one completely
- spend most of your life in the same part of the cycle

The aim here isn't to label yourself. It's to notice where you're at sooner so you can disrupt the cycle with strategies designed by you, for you.

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Where am I in the cycle right now?

Burnout is easier to interrupt when you know your own early warning signs. Don't wait for the crash for something to count as evidence.

Emotional

e.g. irritability, crying, impulsivity, spiralling

Cognitive

e.g. racing thoughts, forgetfulness, procrastination

Physical

e.g. sleep issues, fatigue, head or gut problems

Behavioural

e.g. doomscrolling, withdrawal, clutter building up, overwhelm

What's usually the first clue that I'm heading towards burnout or overload?

How does stress show up in my body or behaviour?

Which phase of the cycle feels most familiar today? What tells me that?

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A · ASSESS

What's costing me? What's keeping me in the cycle?

Instead of asking yourself how to carry everything better, pause and ask what is costing you capacity – and think about what you actually need.

Body

e.g. rest, hydration, food, meds, movement, hormones

Mind

e.g. structure, quiet, information processing, decision making

Heart

e.g. soothing, connection, reassurance, compassion

Life logistics

e.g. clear priorities, time off, delegation, practical help

What is costing me the most capacity at the moment?

If I could pause, reduce or outsource ONE thing, what would it be?

What would my kindest self do for me right now?

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What *actually* helps me restore?

The best strategies are almost always the ones you already know work. This page is your restoration menu: circle, tick or add the things that genuinely help you shift gear.

Soothe & stabilise

e.g. weighted blanket, music, going offline, nature, bath or shower, breathwork, meditation, grounding

Mobilise & motivate

e.g. body doubling, timers, reminders, getting-going rituals, planning micro-steps, ADHD-friendly planning

Repair & reconnect

e.g. text someone, ask for help, journal, gratitude, self-compassion, creative tasks

Unique to me

The specific little things that I know help me get back on track and feel like me again

What's one small thing that helps me shift gear when I'm stuck?

What's worked for me on hard days before?

Am I using this to genuinely restore myself? Or just to give me enough relief to carry more for now?

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E · ENLIST SUPPORT

What am I carrying alone?

Not everyone can meet every need we have. The most useful question is not simply "Who supports me?" but "Who is good for this particular kind of support?"

WHO?	WHAT DO I NEED HELP WITH?	HOW DO THEY HELP BEST?

ROLES YOU MIGHT NEED

good listener · practical helper · reassuring friend · body-doubler · wise perspective · professional support · accountability buddy · straight talker · motivator

HELPFUL SCRIPTS TO BORROW

> *"Hey, I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed and trying not to go into a spiral. Can I give you a ring for five minutes to go through my to-do list?"*
>
> *"Could you body double me for 30 minutes this afternoon?"*
>
> *"Just checking in to say hi. I just need a kind word at the moment – I'm feeling a bit stuck / down / overwhelmed."*

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What to do with what you found

C

NOTICE SOONER

WHAT YOU FOUND

Signs that tell you when you're off-balance - zoning out, irritability, forgetfulness, emotional spikes, or whatever yours look like.

TRY NEXT

Name what's happening without making it your identity, there's a difference between "I feel stressed" and "I am stressed". Track yourself briefly for three days. Make a tiny 'red flag' list of your earliest signs.

A

REDUCE THE COST

WHAT YOU FOUND

Unmet physical, sensory, emotional or cognitive needs, and the things that are quietly draining your capacity.

TRY NEXT

Pick one need to work on first. Start very small: rest, food, water, movement, quiet, connection. Ask yourself: what can I reduce, pause, simplify or get help with?

R

RESTORE CAPACITY

WHAT YOU FOUND

Some coping patterns help; some only numb or buy time. You probably already have strategies that soothe, energise or calm you.

TRY NEXT

Keep what works. Make wise swaps where you can. Create a 'When I feel ___, I can ___' list. Put supportive things in place while you have the capacity to do it.

E

ASK THE RIGHT PERSON

WHAT YOU FOUND

Support works better when you know who to ask, what they're good at, and what you actually want from them.

TRY NEXT

Map your support network. Create a few scripts in advance. If you tend to disappear when things get tough, consider setting up a regular check-in before you need it.

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Next time you're thinking...



Is this it? Why does everything take this much effort?

I've got so much to be grateful for, so why don't I feel better than this?

Why am I permanently waiting for life to calm down a bit before I can actually enjoy it?

Remember – the opposite of burnout is not 'coping'.

TRY THIS 3-MINUTE CARE RESET

1	CHECK	What am I noticing right now in my body, thoughts, emotions or behaviour? (What might the people who love me be noticing?)
2	ASSESS	What is costing me most? What do I really need?
3	RESPOND	What could reduce the load for me right now, or at least restore some capacity?
4	ENLIST	Do I need another human here? And what exactly could I ask them for?

Ready for more?

Want some help putting this into practice? This is exactly the kind of work we do together in Your Self-Portrait, my 1:1 therapeutic ADHD coaching - making peace with the past, finding contentment in the present, and building a future that truly fits.

Book a free 30-minute call: jillharperhill.com/therapeutic-adhd-coaching

Jill x

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