



**Autism and the Mum
Identity Crisis**

**Finding the Path Back
to YOU**



About the author

Natalie is a wife and mother of two beautiful children. She thought she had life all figured out—until the day her paediatrician diagnosed her son autistic. With an almost two-year-old son and a six-week-old daughter, she felt completely unprepared for what lay ahead. She grieved the future she had envisioned and had to find a way to embrace a new path—one that led her into the world of autism.

Now, nearly a decade later, Natalie has not only found her footing but is thriving. She wants you to know that you can too. These steps will help you navigate your own journey with confidence, clarity, and hope.

Natalie Karras

Step 1: Acknowledge the Shift



“Who you were before your child's diagnosis does not disappear—you are evolving, not vanishing.”

Step 1: Acknowledge the Shift

Your world has changed overnight and now you feel like your spiraling - here are the most common signs you may be experiencing the autism mum identity shift.

- You don't recognise yourself anymore.
- You feel emotionally exhausted but can't explain why.
- Your entire personality feels consumed by appointments, therapies, and advocacy.
- You miss the old version of yourself and feel guilty for admitting it.
- You feel isolated from friends who "don't get it."
- You're constantly in survival mode.
- You don't know what you enjoy anymore.
- You feel resentment, grief, guilt, and love all at once.
- You've become hypervigilant and can't switch off.
- Your menstrual cycle has been off.
- You seem to be arguing more than usual with your partner.
- No matter how much sleep you get, you're still exhausted.
- You've lost your spark for life.

I remember when...

Grief shows up differently for different people. Some people can take it in their stride, push through, have a positive approach and others recoil inwards. They struggle with the information, their energy dwindles, simple things feel hard, and flippant comments become spiraling thoughts.

I was the latter. I struggled with who I was, how I was going to parent and what life looked like now that I was a mum to an autistic child.

I remember shortly after the diagnosis, I was having a shower, knowing the hot water would disguise my gut wrenching sobs.

I begged the universe, why? Why him? Why me? Why us?

The thoughts that swirled in my head wouldn't stop -

“you're a bad mother.”

“You caused this.”

“This is your fault.”

“He'll never talk.”

Eventually I covered my ears pleading for the voices in my head to silence.

It has only been through self awareness that I've been able to control these thoughts and take control of what thoughts come up in my mind.

Step 2: What This Can Look Like in Real Life



“You cannot pour from an empty cup. Prioritizing yourself benefits both you and your child.”

Step 2: Reconnect with Your Own Needs

It's far too easy to lose yourself in meeting your child's needs, but you matter too. Prioritizing yourself isn't selfish—it's essential, especially because this is a marathon not a sprint.

What reconnecting with yourself might actually look like:

- Sitting in your car for 10 minutes in silence before school pickup and just breath.
- Listening to music that lights up your soul.
- Buying clothes that make YOU feel good again. Be sure to buy the right size, not the size you were before the diagnosis.
- Going for a walk. No phones, no podcasts, no music. Just be in nature.
- Laughing without guilt. Find a funny meme, movie or show and laugh until you cry.
- Saying no to things that drain you.
- Make it a priority to meet up with your girlfriends for coffee.
- Do something for you - get a manicure, get your hair done, get a massage.
- Don't continue to live in your leggings. What you wear has a direct reflection on how you feel.

Step 3: Why So Many Mums Feel Burnt Out



“You may be exhausted, but you are never defeated.”

Step 3: Burn Out is Real

**Because Mums often think:
“why am I coping so badly?”**

You’re not failing. Your nervous system has been put under extreme pressure for years and is finally giving up.

As a carer and a parent, when you’re chronically stressed about something you can’t control, you lack sleep, you’re making big decisions multiple times a day and you’re in hyper-vigilance, you will inevitably burn out.

Your nervous system can only hold it together for so long, but once that string has reached its end point you will find that your body will begin to show you signs it’s not coping.

- Crying all of the time
- Exhausted even after you’ve had a good nights sleep.
- Lack of appetite.
- Feeling dull, sad or angry.
- No libido.

It’s your job now to allow your nervous system to come back online and tell it that it’s safe.

Our brains are are so primitive that they (the brain) doesn’t understand if your stress is from the diagnosis or sabre tooth tiger trying to eat you.

Step 4: What Nobody Tells You



“The hardest part of an autism diagnosis isn’t just managing the behaviors—it’s navigating the sudden, isolating shift in your social world.”

Step 4: The Unspoken Word

When parents are faced with an autism diagnosis for their child it can sometimes lead to friendships ending and an increase in social isolation.

Things that nobody told me at the beginning of our autism journey:

- You can deeply love your child and still grieve.
- Acceptance is not linear.
- Your nervous system changes after diagnosis.
- Friendships may shift.
- Your marriage may feel pressure.
- You may become the “default parent.”
- You may lose confidence in yourself before rebuilding it stronger.
- You don't need to become a perfect autism parent.
- You will probably become “that parent” at school because you're so busy advocating for your child.
- You may feel resentful that your partner gets to go to work and you are the stay at home carer.
- You may feel resentful towards your friends raising typical children and how “easy” they have it.
- You may turn to something as a coping mechanism eg) alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, prescription drugs, social scrolling, sex, porn, shopping, etc.

Step 5: What Helped Me



“Your child can only thrive to the level of resources you’re willing to find.”

Step 5: Finding The Right Resources

Motherhood—especially parenting an autistic child—can feel isolating. But you are not alone. Finding the right people and resources can make all the difference.

Coaching - Talking to someone who has actually walked this path can make all the difference. Having support from someone who truly gets it helped me feel less alone and overwhelmed.

Podcasts - Podcasts became a lifeline for me. Whether it was autism, therapies, mindset, regulation, or parenting strategies, they reminded me that I wasn't alone.

Boundaries - Learning to protect my energy was essential. I had to become intentional about who I spent time with, what I said yes to, and how I used my emotional capacity.

Finding the Right Therapist - Don't be afraid to shop around. The first therapist may not always be the right fit for you or your child, and finding the right support can make a huge difference.

Step 5: Finding The Right Resources Continued

Learning How to Fill Your Cup - Reconnecting with yourself matters too. That might look like exercise, hobbies, rest, or creating small weekly rituals that help you reset.

Regulate Yourself Before Regulating Your Child - This is easier said than done, but our children often co-regulate through us. Learning what helps you feel calm and supported is incredibly important.

Building the Self Awareness Muscle: This takes time and intentionality. But having self awareness allows you to stop making bad decisions, it helps increase your intuition and make you a better parent and partner.

Join The Seen Collective Membership - One of the most powerful things you can have on this journey is community. The Seen Collective is a space for parents raising autistic children to feel supported, understood, and less alone.

Step 6: Redefine Your Purpose



“You are not just your child’s advocate—you are a whole person, worthy of joy, growth, and fulfillment.”

Step 6: What's Your Purpose?

This journey can feel like it's you and your child against the world - but it doesn't have to be.

The autism journey can see you walk through some seriously hard challenges, but it also brings some of the biggest high's you could imagine.

The day my son told me that he loved me will be a day that I will replay in my mind over and over again.

I know right now you might be feeling like this is all too hard, that you're not equipped for this or that you don't have what it takes. But I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt - no one loves that child more than you do. No one will fight harder than you will and no one will continue to look, research and find therapies for your child to thrive more than you will.

Join The Seen Collective Membership where you can speak with experts from around the world to help you and your autistic child thrive.

You are not alone.

You never were alone.

This community will continue to walk this journey along side you for as long as you need.

Remember,

You Are Seen.

You Are Loved.

Step 7: Reflection



“Life is only a reflection of what we allow ourselves to see.”

Step 7: What Are You Reflecting?

Use this part of the guide to reflect on the answers you provide. Sit with the questions - whatever comes first is usually correct.

1. What expectations have I placed on myself since the diagnosis?

Type your answer here...

2. What guilt am I still carrying?

Type your answer here...

3. What would compassion toward myself look like right now?

Type your answer here...

The Identity Rebuild Exercise

Be as honest as you can be.
These answers are for you and you alone.

What have I lost?

What have I learned?

What I want to
rediscover?

Final Thoughts

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