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# HOW TO UNSTUCKIFY YOUR LIFE

**A 5-Day Autistic Transformation**

By Taylor Heaton

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# INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Taylor. I received my autism diagnosis in 2020 at the age of 31. Pre-diagnosis, I experienced chronic burnout, constant sensory overwhelm, and let my people-pleasing tendencies dictate my (often unhealthy) relationships. On top of that, I was working a job that left me utterly depleted and operating in "survival mode." Looking back I'm not sure I registered much pleasure or pain. I was a floating ghost, **stuck** in a loop I had no words to describe. I just knew I was living far beneath my potential, and ready to unlock my life.

Since my diagnosis, I've spent years researching, developing ideas, and learning directly from the autistic community to create a framework for getting "unstuck."

I've used this framework in my own life to redefine unhealthy relationships, create a career I'm incredibly passionate about, heal from trauma, and develop a loving relationship with myself.



I've even wondered if I'm somehow "less autistic" now. The truth is, I'm just WAY better at accommodating myself, setting healthy boundaries, and communicating my wants and needs. I guess you could say I'm **unstuckified!**

Here's the good news: You can **unstuckify your life**, too, and I've eliminated all the guesswork for you with my step-by-step process. I'm here as your gentle guide, but remember YOU hold the true power.

If you're ready to **unstuckify your life**, let's begin.

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is broken down into 5 sections. I recommend you go through them in 1 of 2 ways:

1. Complete one section a day. This option is best for individuals who have fewer commitments and more available spoons (energy).
2. Complete one section a week. This option is best for individuals with more commitments and fewer available spoons (especially working parents, people managing chronic illness, etc.) If you choose this route I would recommend that you set the same day aside each week to create a predictable routine. Add a reminder on your calendar and maybe an alert on your phone.

**The most important thing** to remember is *you are your own best guide*. I've done my best to take the guesswork out, but if you find yourself wanting to ask different questions, explore different possibilities, or go at a different pace, *trust your intuition*.

You can add more to any exercise or skip exercises altogether. Pay attention to your flow of energy and what you have the capacity for in this moment.

If you find yourself having a hard time answering *any* questions, you may be in a pretty deep state of burnout. Try visiting the Emotional Regulation page first, engaging in large stims, resting as much as possible, and revisiting the guide when you have more capacity.

**The second most important thing** is that you *write your answers down* (or perhaps dictate them verbally or electronically if you are differently-abled). There is something powerful about writing out your thoughts rather than just thinking them. I always love getting a new journal for endeavors like this. Find something that makes you happy when you look at it, and record your thoughts there. (Regular notebook paper is also a wonderful option).

**Pay special attention to the next section over Emotional Education**. Invest your time and attention here to ensure a successful outcome during this process.

Lastly, this guide is designed to be revisited. Growth is a lifelong process. Each time you visit this guide, my hope is that you will find new ways to **unstuckify your life**.

There is no right or wrong way to do this. Trust that wherever you are in this moment is exactly where you are supposed to be.

# BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

# EMOTIONAL EDUCATION

## APPROXIMATE TIME TO COMPLETE: 30 - 60 MIN

*Please complete this preliminary section before you begin Section 1. It will serve as a foundation for future coursework.*

Many autistic people describe the experience of feeling like an alien in one's own body, or being a "floating head." We tend to spend a lot of time in our mind - ruminating, analyzing and identifying patterns. This can leave us feeling disconnected from our bodies.

We might also feel disconnected from our bodies due to prior trauma, abuse, and/or masking. In these types of situations, we downplay signals our body gives us in order to adapt to our environment or survive (fight/flight/freeze/fawn).

Also many of us grew up hearing that we're "too sensitive," "overreacting," or just generally "too much." This type of messaging teaches us to downplay our intuition and the very real feedback our body gives us.

The way forward is to re-cultivate our relationship and connection to our body, and emotions play a large part in communicating the information our body receives.

Sometimes autists experience "alexithymia," or the inability to recognize or describe one's own emotions.

Emotional regulation is key in establishing healthy patterns in our lives. By putting words to our emotional experiences we can learn how to move forward after stressful events. We can also help our loved ones better understand our experiences, leading to more support. Most importantly, we can rekindle our relationship to our body and learn how to trust our intuition.

We will explore two external resources to learn more about emotional regulation.

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this section before we begin our coursework. Emotional education is vital for autistic individuals, and having this information will accelerate your growth!**

### Resource 1

Click this link for a resource from NPR that will help us understand what emotions might feel like inside the body. (https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2013/12/30/258313116/mapping-emotions-on-the-body-love-makes-us-warm-all-over)

With this resource open on your computer, consider the image under the title of the article which shows different emotions expressed in thermal energy body scans.

In your journal, explore these questions:

- Which emotion(s) do I feel on a regular basis?
- Which emotion(s) feels foreign or unknown to me?
- Have you ever noticed a feeling of warmth or coldness inside your body or on your skin? Do you have any emotions associated with this experience?

### Resource 2

Click this link for a resource by Lindsay Braman called the **Emotion Sensation Wheel**. We will use it to help us understand what emotions might feel like in terms of bodily sensations. (https://www.instagram.com/p/CvsSBcLqiKQ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA%3D%3D)

With this resource open on your computer, pay particular attention to the outer circle of information. These are bodily sensations related to the corresponding emotions listed at the center of the wheel.

In your journal, explore these questions:

- Which sensations from the outer wheel of information feel familiar to me? (Just list some of the most prominent ones that are speaking to you)
- Are there any sensations listed that I have never experienced or experience infrequently?
- Based on these sensations, which emotions do I resonate strongly with?

**Bonus resource**: If you enjoyed this resource, you might also enjoy the Emotion Behavior Wheel by Lindsay Braman. You can revisit the exercises on this page and answer the same questions using this secondary resource for further exploration (just replace the word “sensations” with “behaviors”). (https://www.instagram.com/p/Cw0KjI7I2vG/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA%3D%3D)

# A NOTE ABOUT SELF ACCEPTANCE

There is so much freedom and “unstuckness” that comes from accepting one’s own patterns and no longer comparing them to others.

You might find you can accept some of your challenges as they are without wanting to change them. This is wonderful!

The aim of this guide is to pick up where self acceptance drops off; where you notice your quality of life becoming negatively affected by the challenges you are facing, rather than society’s judgment against them.

Please consider approaching this guide from a place of **radical self acceptance** which may come slowly at first, but here’s a trick: pretend like you’re good at it. Even if it feels fake, it will eventually become believable. You can “pretend” by using mantras that support self acceptance (I am worthy. I am seen. I am whole.) You can also think of a person in your life or in the media that embodies self acceptance, reflect on how that person behaves and emulate that behavior.

Over time, these patterns become more intuitive.

Inhale. Wherever you find yourself today, you’re in the right place. Exhale.

Let’s go.



# SECTION 1: IDENTIFY CHALLENGES

## ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 HOUR

Autistic individuals experience many unique challenges. Oftentimes these challenges are invalidated by others, and we are made to believe that either they shouldn't be an issue or we should be able to handle them better than we are able to.

But our struggles are real, our concerns are valid, and our experiences matter. Learning to make peace with our unique patterns is crucial for living a satisfying and rewarding life.

Our goal in Section 1 is to identify our biggest challenges and put words to how they affect us.

We will do this through the following process (to be explained in greater detail as we proceed):

1. Familiarizing yourself with common autistic challenges
2. Putting the list of challenges in order from most disruptive to least disruptive
3. Listing your top three challenges and providing a real life example for each

SECTION 1 STEP 1

# LIST OF CHALLENGES

Read over the list of common autistic challenges below and make notes in your journal about which ones resonate the most.

Some headings include an active link you may click for more information.

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## BURNOUT

"A state of physical and mental fatigue, heightened stress, and diminished capacity to manage life skills, sensory input, and/or social interactions, which comes from years of being severely overtaxed by the strain of trying to live up to demands that are out of sync with our needs." (autism.org.uk)



## COMMUNICATION

Autists may experience communication differences such as selective mutism, being "non-verbal", info-dumping about special interests, auditory processing difficulties, dyslexia, dysgraphia, and more.



## DELAYED PROCESSING

Autists tend to take in a great deal of information through our senses/nervous system. Taking in too much information at once may cause us to feel overloaded, like a computer that starts whirring loudly. Oftentimes we need time and space away from social settings to decompress and figure out how we truly feel about a situation.

## DEMAND AVOIDANCE

“Autistic people may avoid demands or situations that trigger anxiety or sensory overload, disrupt routines, involve transitioning from one activity to another, and activities/events that they don’t see the point of or have any interest in.” (pdasociety.org.uk)

## DIFFICULTY WITH TRANSITIONS

Once an autist becomes acclimated in a certain environment, we want to remain in that environment. Transitioning into a different environment requires a great deal of cognitive energy.

## HYGIENE/SELF CARE

Oftentimes basic hygiene practices such as showering or brushing one’s teeth seem daunting for autistic individuals. This can also apply to practices like rest, nourishment, and exercise.

## MASKING

Autistic masking is the act of concealing or downplaying personality traits, personal needs, and/or forms of self expression in order to be deemed socially acceptable or appropriate.
One of the main goals of masking is to NOT stand out from the crowd.

## PARENTING

Autistic parenting can be especially difficult as we are more easily overstimulated, emotionally dysregulated, and require a considerable amount of rest/alone time.

## REJECTION-SENSITIVE DYSPHORIA

“People with RSD have such a strong emotional reaction to negative judgments, exclusion, or criticism from others that it sends them into a mental tailspin, leading to rumination and the pit-of-the-stomach malaise that won't let them move forward with their day. They feel like failures, disproportionate to what has actually occurred.” (psychologytoday.com)

## SLEEP

Autistic people commonly experience trouble transitioning into a bedtime routine, falling asleep, staying asleep, and managing nighttime sensory overwhelm.

## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING DIFFERENCES

Executive functioning includes planning, organizing, task initiation, self control, flexibility, working memory and time management. Autistic people who struggle with rigidity of mind or staying organized may want to prioritize this challenge.

## ANXIETY

Anxiety is a common (sometimes daily) experience for autistic individuals. Autists who struggle with constant worry, hyper-fixations, and nervous fidgeting may want to prioritize this challenge.

## AUTISTIC INERTIA

Autistic inertia is the idea that once an autistic person is in motion or involved in a task, they want to remain doing that thing. Conversely, if an autistic person is at rest, they want to stay at rest and may have trouble transitioning into a new activity.

## UNDERSTANDING EXPECTATIONS

Autistic people may have difficulty interpreting what is actually being asked of them unless given explicit instructions.

## COMORBIDITIES/CO-OCCURING CONDITIONS

Autistic people often have multiple mental and/or physical health conditions they are managing. Common co-occuring conditions include: OCD, OCPD, ADHD, Ehler Danlos Syndrome, sleep disorders, connective tissue disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, and eating challenges. This list is not exhaustive.

## RECOVERY

The nervous system of an autistic individual is often in a hyper-vigilant state which can lead to burnout. Autists require a significant amount of recovery time to stay well-regulated.

## NUTRITION/EATING DISORDERS

“70% of autistics have atypical eating behaviors, while up to 30% of us have an eating disorder.” (embrace-autism.com) One commonly experienced challenge is Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder. Autistics may struggle with nutrition due to selective eating and food aversions.

Gut health plays a significant factor in mental health. Many autistic people have digestive issues/food allergies. When managed, improvement in this area can lead to better overall mental health.

## ISOLATION

Autistic individuals tend to need more alone time or time in isolation than others. While this can be greatly beneficial, it can also cause stress in relationships.

## STRESS MANAGEMENT

Autists tend to experience a great deal of day-to-day stress sometimes to the point of overwhelm, where stress management seems almost impossible. Autists may become accustomed to living with high levels of stress and be unaware of how managing this stress can improve their quality of life.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships may be particularly challenging for autists due to our social differences, sensory needs, directness of communication, need for alone time, and more. Areas potentially affected: friendships, marriages/partnerships, sex life

## SELF CONFIDENCE

Masking and other common autistic practices like people-pleasing can lead to a decrease in self-confidence and feelings of shame and/or worthlessness.

## SENSORY OVERWHELM

An autist's nervous system may feel like it is constantly on high-alert or hyper-vigilant. This can cause information taken in via our senses to feel overwhelming. Lights may seem too bright, noises too loud, textures too upsetting, etc.

## SOCIAL DIFFERENCES

An autist most likely communicates differently than their allistic (non-autistic) peers. Some different communication styles include: being blunt, info-dumping, focusing on one specific topic, waiting patiently for an opportunity to join a conversation that might never happen.

## WORKPLACE CHALLENGES

Navigating the workplace is one of the most common autistic challenges. Common areas of concern include: disclosing an autism diagnosis to an employer, setting healthy boundaries, interacting with co-workers, meeting deadlines, and understanding expectations.

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**Set a timer for 3 minutes and journal your response to this question: "What other autistic challenges do I face on a regular basis?" You may consider these answers for future sections.**

## SECTION 1 STEP 2

# RANK YOUR CHALLENGES

Using the previous list plus any you added, rank your challenges from most to least disruptive in terms of how they affect your day-to-day life. There is no right or wrong answer, and you can always come back and make changes. The most important thing here is to narrow down the top three challenges you want to focus on. Don't worry too much about the rest of the list.

It might be helpful to either 1) re-write each challenge on a notecard or 2) print out this guide and cut each challenge intro a strip that you can re-arrange as you decide on your ranking.

(List provided on next page)

# LIST OF CHALLENGES

Anxiety

Autistic inertia

Burnout

Communication

Co-morbidities/co-occuring conditions

Delayed processing

Demand avoidance

Difficulty with transitions

Executive functioning differences

Hygiene/self care

Isolation

Masking

Nutrition/eating disorders

Parenting

Recovery

Rejection-Sensitive Dysphoria

Relationships

Self confidence

Sensory overwhelm

Sleep

Social differences

Stress management

Understanding expectations

Workplace challenges

There is an extra spot provided in the list to the right. And remember, don't worry too much about the order of the bottom of the list.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
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11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
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18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____
25. _____

## SECTION 1 STEP 3

# SELECT TOP THREE CHALLENGES

Identify the top three challenges on your list and use them to complete the exercises below.

## CHALLENGE #1

**One challenge that causes a significant amount of disruption in my life is (re-list #1 challenge here):**

_____

**Write a few sentences about a time in your life when you were negatively affected by this challenge, paying particular attention to how it made you feel.**

*(Ex: One challenge that causes a significant amount of disruption in my life is delayed processing. I was negatively affected by delayed processing at work last year when one of my coworkers told an inappropriate joke. I laughed because it was what everyone else was doing, and I hadn't yet processed the punchline. I felt humiliated and embarrassed that I seemed to tolerate that type of behavior. My face felt warm and I had a shaking feeling in my chest).*

_____

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## CHALLENGE #2

**One challenge that causes a significant amount of disruption in my life is (re-list #2 challenge here):**

_____

**Write a few sentences about a time in your life when you were negatively affected by this challenge, paying particular attention to how it made you feel.**

*(Remember to use the "Emotional Education" resources from the beginning of the guide to help you find words for your emotions. If you have difficulty connecting to bodily sensations or identifying behaviors, it's ok to write about how you are not feeling much of anything. That is important information. Be gentle with yourself here and know that there is no right answer. It is ok to feel numb. Becoming aware of this numbness is the first step toward healing.)*

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## CHALLENGE #3

**One challenge that causes a significant amount of disruption in my life is (re-list #3 challenge here):**

_____

**Write a few sentences about a time in your life when you were negatively affected by this challenge, paying particular attention to how it made you feel.**

_____

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_____

**You finished Section 1!**

Take some time to regulate by stimming, going outside, drinking some tea, or maybe taking a bath, whatever helps you feel centered.

In Section 2 we will visualize and define what it looks like to be successful in each of the three challenges listed in Section 1, learning about possible accommodations along the way.

You may find that your mind continues to work through questions brought up in this section for the next day or so. Journal any lingering thoughts/ideas that come up from now until you come back for Section 2.

# SECTION 2: VISUALIZE SUCCESS

## ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE: 30 - 60 MIN

Sometimes when we live with chronic invalidation and lack of support, we get used to living small. It might be difficult to visualize what it looks like to live a full and satisfying life.

In this section we will define what it looks like for you to be successful in each of the three challenges listed in Section 1.

We will do this through the following process:

1. Becoming familiar with hallmarks of a fulfilling life.
2. Learning about accommodations.
3. Envisioning a better outcome for our three challenges.

SECTION 2 STEP 1

# HALLMARKS OF A FULFILLING LIFE

Read over the list of common hallmarks of a fulfilling life below. Please keep in mind that this is a very subjective topic and not everyone will resonate with each list item. Let this list serve as a guide/inspiration. There is a space provided for you to list your own ideas at the end. (Several of the traits are hyperlinked for more info.)

- Spending time on activities that interest you
- Saying “no” when you want to say no
- Spending time alone to reflect/rest/heal
- Connecting with nature
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating a diet that makes your body feel good
- Sharing things you create with others
- Mindfulness practices like yoga/meditation
- Ability to communicate wants/needs
- Ability to make decisions that support your life

Positive self worth

Genuine connection with people/animals

Emotional regulation

Accepting negative emotions

Exercising/ moving your body

Helping others

Managing stress when it comes up

Finding satisfaction in your work

Celebrating others' successes

Appreciating the small things

Setting goals and accomplishing them

Smiling often

Creating your own happiness

Accepting of your differences

Being present in the moment

Is there anything else you would like to add to the list? Please include your ideas here:

Did you notice any feelings or bodily sensations as you read over the list? Did anything upset you as you read it? Did anything bring a sense of relief? Set a timer for 3 minutes. Take a few deep breaths and ask yourself how the list made you feel. Journal your thoughts here:

## SECTION 2 STEP 2

# POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

In order to create successful situations for ourselves, it is important to become familiar with accommodations. The possibilities are endless, especially when you bring your personal expertise and creative problem solving into play. Some of the ideas might seem out-of-reach, but you never know until you try!

Consider the list below then add your own suggestions.

---

- Setting and communicating boundaries
- Wearing/using sensory supports (comfortable clothes, earbuds, weighted backpack. etc.)
- Asking to meet at a less busy/less noisy location
- Revisiting a conversation after the event has passed to more clearly communicate your ideas after you've had time to process
- Stimming
- Taking some personal space/time to decompress
- Asking for more time to make a decision
- Giving a "non-answer" ("Let me get back to you about this. I'm not ready to make a decision yet." Or "I'm not sure how I feel about that yet.")
- Visualizing what the experience could look like (google image search, locate on a map, read reviews, check out social media profiles, etc.)
- Asking others who have been through the experience to share what it was like/reading or watching videos about this type of experience
- Leaving the event/situation
- Communicating your patterns to others ("I'm a delayed processor. I might need some time to think over this." OR "I'm experiencing sensory overwhelm right now. Would you mind lowering your voice?")
- Using emotional regulation techniques as you experience overwhelm/anxiety (diaphragmatic breathing, stimming, counting to 10, etc.)

- Asking for feedback so you have a better idea of what is happening/expected
- Making checklists, setting or asking for clear expectations
- Communicating nonverbally
- Removing distractions/reducing sensory input
- Engaging in positive self talk
- Asking for information before a meeting or event (looking over the presentation early)
- Naps
- Coming up with pre-written statements to use in stressful situations (doctor appts, etc.)
- Having difficult conversations when walking or being active together (walking meetings)
- In some situations, maybe you don't need to change anything other than practicing self acceptance of your differences

What would you add to the list of accommodations?



## SECTION 2 STEP 3

# ENVISIONING A BETTER OUTCOME

Before we can create a plan for success, we need to consider what success means for ourselves as individuals, and not when comparing ourselves to others' standards. We will explore this concept by revisiting the three challenges from Section 1. Consider the hallmarks of a fulfilling life and possible accommodations as you work through the following exercises.

*Alternatively rather than re-listing the three challenges, you can choose any related situation you'd like to improve upon in the future. For example, let's say in Section 1 you wrote about rejection sensitivity dysphoria surrounding a group project that went wrong. For Section 3 you might choose to focus on an upcoming performance review so you can prepare for this particular experience.*

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**Visualization Tips**

If you have trouble visualizing things or coming up with how things could be made better in your examples, here are some things you can try:

- Consider what the best case and worst case scenarios would look like.
- Search for youtube videos of someone who is talking through a similar situation and offering tips (Example Search: managing overwhelm at the doctor's office)
- Consider how you want to *feel* in that particular situation (empowered, at-peace, confident, etc.). When did you last feel that way? What about that situation contributed to those feelings?

*Exercises begin on the next page.*

## CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #1

(Restate Challenge #1 from Section 1 or provide alternative scenario)

Finish this sentence: In this situation, I would ideally like to feel (ex: empowered, peaceful, in-charge, calm, etc.)

Set a timer for 2 minutes. Think about what this situation would look like practically if you could go back and do it again in a way that feels better. Consider where you are positioned in the space, what you're wearing, the ideas you're communicating, how you're communicating, etc. The more specific you can be, the better. Think of each specific detail you add as an opportunity to influence/change your experience.

## CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #2

(Restate Challenge #2 from Section 1 or provide alternative scenario)

Finish this sentence: In this situation, I would ideally like to feel (ex: empowered, peaceful, in-charge, calm, etc.)

Set a timer for 2 minutes. Think about what this situation would look like practically if you could go back and do it again in a way that feels better. Consider where you are positioned in the space, what you're wearing, the ideas you're communicating, how you're communicating, etc. The more specific you can be, the better. Think of each specific detail you add as an opportunity to influence/change your experience.

## CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #3

(Restate Challenge #3 from Section 1 or provide alternative scenario)

Finish this sentence: In this situation, I would ideally like to feel (ex: empowered, peaceful, in-charge, calm, etc.)

Set a timer for 2 minutes. Think about what this situation would look like practically if you could go back and do it again in a way that feels better. Consider where you are positioned in the space, what you're wearing, the ideas you're communicating, how you're communicating, etc. The more specific you can be, the better. Think of each specific detail you add as an opportunity to influence/change your experience.

Congrats on completing Section 2. You are working hard to create new and life-changing patterns for yourself. Focus on saying "yes" to more things that feel good, and saying "no" to things that don't (whenever possible!).

# SECTION 3: CREATE A PLAN

## ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 HOUR

In this section we will set goals to better manage our challenges. We will do this through the following process:

1. Exploring sensory regulation tools.
2. Setting goals related to our top three challenges.
3. Pairing tools with goals to create a plan for success.

## SECTION 3 STEP 1

# EXPLORING REGULATION TOOLS

Sensory regulation is necessary for autistic individuals because our nervous systems tend to operate on high-alert, taking in more information through our senses than allistic (non-autistic) individuals, which often leads to overwhelm/overstimulation. Learning to regulate sensory overwhelm is a life-changing skill that is more accessible than you may think.

The list of sensory tools below was compiled by many in the autistic community who use these tools to improve their quality of life. Read through the list and consider which tools might be useful to you when facing sensory overwhelm. There is a space at the end to add your own ideas.

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- A long hug
- Acceptance of one's own patterns
- Acupressure mats
- Aromatherapy
- Automating processes (automatic pet feeder, robot vacuum, etc.)
- Avoiding caffeine/alcohol
- Bamboo plates to reduce upsetting noises
- Baths
- Bilateral beats/bilateral music
- Body doubling
- Box breathing
- Buying multiples of clothes you really like
- Chiropractor
- Compression clothing
- Cranial sacral therapy
- Creative expression
- Crying

---

- Dancing
- Drumming
- Earbuds/headphones
- Eating protein
- Egg chairs/swings
- Fidgets
- Fresh air
- Full month wall calendar
- Gardening
- Goblin tools
- Grocery pickup/delivery
- Hiking
- Hot tea
- Hydration
- Ice water on neck/wrists
- Journaling
- Laughing
- Learning about PDA
- Less screen time
- Mantras
- Massage
- Meditation
- Nighttime ceiling projectors with stars/pictures
- Occupational therapy
- Pilates
- Polyvagal theory
- Prayer
- Puzzles
- Remote control/voice controlled lights
- Saying no/boundaries
- Scheduling apps
- Self compassion
- Setting realistic expectations
- Sex
- Singing
- Sitting in front of the fireplace
- Sleep
- Snacks
- Space heater in the bathroom/regulating body temperature



- Spoon theory
- Stimming
- Sunglasses
- Support groups
- Swimming
- Tapping/EFT
- Therapy (DBT/CBT/EMDR)
- Timers
- Trampoline
- Weighted backpack
- Weighted blankets
- Weighted vests/clothing
- White noise/brown noise, etc.
- Writing events on paper calendar
- Yoga



What would you add to the list? Which practices/products improve your quality of life?

## SECTION 3 STEP 2

# SETTING GOALS FOR SUCCESS

For Step 2 we will create specific goals related to our top three challenges (or alternative scenarios).

---

## CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #1

(Restate below)

_____

Define 3 specific goals for the next time you face this challenge/scenario. The more specific you can be, the better.

Example: The next time I face this challenge I will:

1. Communicate my boundaries before I attend the event with my in-laws. “When we visit for Christmas we will be staying in a hotel.”
2. Wear comfortable clothes that allow me to feel more like myself. (My blue sweatpants, NSYNC t-shirt, hair in ponytail and tennis shoes).
3. Bring food that I know I’ll be able to eat. (My favorite protein bar, cheddar popcorn, and string cheese).

1st Goal: _____

_____

2nd Goal: _____

_____

3rd Goal: _____

_____

Setting these goals makes me feel _____

---

## CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #2

(Restate below)

_____

Define 3 specific goals for the next time you face this challenge/scenario. The more specific you can be, the better.

1st Goal: _____

_____

2nd Goal: _____

_____

3rd Goal: _____

_____

Setting these goals makes me feel _____

## CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #3

(Restate below)

_____

Define 3 specific goals for the next time you face this challenge/scenario. The more specific you can be, the better.

1st Goal: _____

_____

2nd Goal: _____

_____

3rd Goal: _____

_____

Setting these goals makes me feel _____

## SECTION 3 STEP 3

# PAIRING TOOLS WITH GOALS

For Step 3 we will choose specific tools to support us with our goals.

Choose up to 5 tools from our list of accommodations and/or list of regulation tools to support you as you work towards the goals you defined on Section 3 Step 2.
(You don't have to know whether they will work or not. Just make your best guess!)

## RE-LIST CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #1

Tools to support me:

# RE-LIST CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #2

Tools to support me:

## RE-LIST CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #3

Tools to support me:

**Congrats on finishing Section 3!**

You are on your way to transforming your life and getting *unstuck*. Section 4 will walk you through how to put your plan into practice. Remember to take time to regulate/stim/relax after completing each section. Be gentle with yourself. This work can bring up a lot of feelings.

# SECTION 4: PRACTICE THE PLAN

## ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE: 30 - 60 MINUTES

You've made it to Section 4. Take a moment to appreciate the work you've done so far. It may sound cheesy, but close your eyes and take three deep breaths. Thank yourself for committing to this practice of getting unstuck. Your life is becoming full of new possibilities, and you are growing into a fuller version of yourself. This is brave and empowering work!

In Section 4 we are putting all our previous work into practice, in real life!

We will do this through the following process:

1. Brainstorming ways to practice.
2. Learning emotional regulation strategies for uncomfortable emotions.
3. Writing out your practice plan.

## SECTION 4 STEP 1

# WAYS TO PRACTICE

Read over the list below for ideas about how to practice the goals you set in Section 3. Add your own ideas to the bottom of the list.

- Visualization
  - Close your eyes and envision what it will look like and feel like to enact your plan. Be as specific as possible. What will you be wearing? Who will be there? What will you say? What resources can you have ready to support you? What will you do afterwards to regulate?
- Journaling
  - Write out what it will be like to enact your plan. Feel free to use the visualization description above as a guide.
- Creating accountability
  - Talk through your plan with a trusted friend, family member, coworker, etc.
  - Ask for feedback/ideas
- Reading/watching videos about others who have been through similar experiences
- Intentionally recreating your chosen challenges/scenarios in real life
- Talking through your plan with a therapist or other mental health professional

What other ways could you potentially practice your plan?

## SECTION 4 STEP 2

# EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Read through the emotional regulation strategies below to help you manage negative emotions that may come up as you carry out your plan.

---

First, it is important to become aware of signs of **emotional dysregulation**. These vary from person to person, but some of the most common signs are:

- Feeling anxious
- Itchy or uncomfortable skin
- Suddenly angry/on edge
- Feeling stuck or frozen
- Unable to make decisions
- Self harm
- Mood swings
- Excessive substance use (caffeine, alcohol, drugs)
- Perfectionistic tendencies escalate
- Impulsivity escalates
- Noise and lights seem more upsetting than usual
- Clothes may feel tight and uncomfortable
- More sensory overwhelm in general
- Excess stimming

What other ways does your body communicate that it is overwhelmed?

_____

_____

_____

---

# MOVING THROUGH DYSREGULATION

As soon as you notice signs of dysregulation:

1. Pause. Breathe. Create space to feel whatever you are feeling as fully as possible. You may wish to relocate to another room/outside.
2. Notice what you feel. How does it show up in your body? Is there tension? Heat? Discomfort? Trembling?
3. Name what you are feeling, using resources from the Emotional Education section to help you with labels if needed.
4. Accept the emotion. One phrase that can be helpful is: “It makes sense I am feeling this way.” Take deep breaths while repeating this phrase. Another one of my favorites is: “In this moment, I am safe.”
5. Practice mindfulness. Stay with your breath and allow the feeling to flow through you. When you are ready, take note of the situation that triggered this response and adjust your environment to feel more at peace.
6. After you have regained a feeling of stability and centeredness, take a moment to think through possible changes you could make to avoid or mitigate this type of dysregulation in the future. (Important to remember: Other people’s feelings are **not** your responsibility).

## SECTION 4 STEP 3

# WRITE OUT YOUR PRACTICE PLAN

You've got all the tools you need and it's time to make the magic happen! Follow the prompts on the following pages to create your plan. Refer back to "Ways to Practice" if you need help. And if you're unsure, just start somewhere. It's ok to choose the option that feels the least intimidating.

---

*The exercise begins on the next page.*

## RE-LIST CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #1:

One possible opportunity for me to practice the goals I set for this challenge would be:

*(Ex: I can practice the goals I created for visiting family during Christmas by communicating a boundary with my mom for my birthday. I will tell her I kindly request no gifts and that we celebrate at a quiet restaurant with immediate family only. I will communicate this the next time I see her at my son's baseball game.)*

I anticipate that practicing this might make me feel:

I can practice managing or regulating those feelings by:

## RE-LIST CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #2:

One possible opportunity for me to practice the goals I set for this challenge would be:

*(Ex: It will be difficult to practice this scenario until it actually happens again, but in the meantime I can talk through my ideas with my therapist and ask for feedback. I can also practice emotional regulation techniques like yoga and journaling when I experience uncomfortabe emotions related to this challenge. I will also use the mantra "I am worthy of living a life that feels good to me" when I need motivation and encouragement.")*

I anticipate that practicing this might make me feel:

I can practice managing or regulating those feelings by:

## RE-LIST CHALLENGE/SCENARIO #3:

One possible opportunity for me to practice the goals I set for this challenge would be:

*(Ex: I can practice the goals I set for this challenge by watching a few youtube videos from other autistic adults who have experienced similar things. I can reach out to the MoTS community on Podia for more feedback and journal about how I want to respond the next time I'm in a similar situation.)*

I anticipate that practicing this might make me feel:

I can practice managing or regulating those feelings by:

# GREAT JOB COMPLETING SECTION 4!

The finish line is right in front of you and the framework is in place for you to **Unstuckify**. Trust the process and see it through to the end. Investing in yourself is the best investment you can make.



# SECTION 5: COLLECT FEEDBACK

## ESTIMATED TIME TO COMPLETE: 30 - 60 MINUTES

Let's take a second to appreciate all that you've learned from the beginning of this experience:

- Strategies for putting words to emotions
- Common autistic challenges
- Hallmarks of a fulfilling life
- Real life autistic accommodations
- Sensory regulation tools
- Emotional regulation strategies

And along the way you've also created personalized goals that will help you UNSTUCKIFY, plus remind you of the POWER you have over the direction of your life.

Section 5 is easy to overlook, but this might be the *most important* section of all. Here's why:

The MOST effective way to create change is to try again and again and again, making small adjustments along the way. Our brains have neuroplasticity, meaning they can adapt and change over time. Information travels along our neural pathways to help us carry out all of life's demands, and grooves are created when the same information is transmitted the same way again and again, much like a path being cleared by footsteps in the woods.

When we begin creating new patterns, it's going to feel awkward. We're choosing a new route in a dark forest and we've never been this way before. But the next time we see the path, it becomes a little more recognizable. Each day we take the path it gets easier and easier until one day we realize we could find it without much effort or thought.

(cont. on next page)

Trust the process. Give it time. And err on the side of grace. To quote Mary Oliver, “Things take the time they take.”

And the good news is, it’s all just information. If you set a goal and start practicing it and it goes horribly wrong, it’s just information. Use it to change course and select a different route next time. Try not to take anything too personally, and take plenty of time to rest and recover when you feel you may have pushed a little too hard.

Section 5 is simple yet transformative.

**After you carry out your practice plan for any of the 3 challenges/scenarios listed, consider these questions and journal your responses**:

- What went well when I tried this plan?
- What did not go well when I tried this plan?
- How did I feel before I tried this plan? After?
- What do I know about myself now that I didn’t know before? (Ex: I know I can stand up for myself when someone says something I don’t agree with. OR I know I can revisit a conversation after it has happened to communicate my ideas after I’ve had time to develop them.)
- If I could try this again, what would I change? What new strategies/tools might I use to help?
- Are there any opportunities I feel more capable of pursuing NOW after having been through this process?
- How can I show myself love and support after trying something new and maybe a bit scary?

And here are some **mantras** you can keep with you as you develop new, healthy life practices:

I can do hard things.

The discomfort will pass.

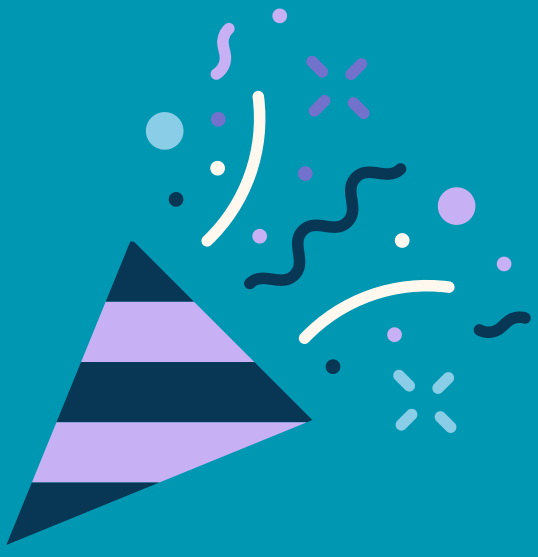
I can always say no.

I am in charge of my life.

I am worthy of living a life that feels good to me.

# YOU DID IT!

# CONGRATS ON UNSTUCKIFYING YOUR LIFE



# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mom on the Spectrum Website

MoTS Community Classes and Events

Mom on the Spectrum YouTube

Meltdown Survival Guide

Ultimate Guide to Understanding Autism

The Big Autistic Resource Guide

How to Unmask: Cultivating Your True Autistic Self






# SUGGESTED READING

The following links are Amazon affiliate links. Taylor Heaton, LLC earns a commission from qualified purchases.

***Who You Were Meant to Be by Dr. Lindsay Gibson***

***Set Boundaries, Find Peace by Nedra Glover Tawwab***

***The Dance of Anger by Harriet Lerner***

***Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents by Dr. Lindsay Gibson***

***Aspergers in Love by Maxine Aston***

***Codependent No More by Melody Beattie***

***The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk***

***The Drama of the Gifted Child by Alice Miller***

***Keep Moving by Maggie Smith***

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