

BURNOUT, INERTIA, MELTDOWN & SHUTDOWN SUMMARY

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What is BIMS?

Burnout, Inertia, Meltdown and Shutdown, which we refer to as "BIMS" are terms grounded in the language of autistic people. The information presented in this handout reflects our best and current understanding of BIMS based on descriptions generated through a collaboration of autistic and non-autistic co-researchers.

Each person's experience of BIMS is unique, and not all experiences or strategies listed here will be relevant or helpful to all people. The autistic youth who helped create these descriptions feel that it is important for adults (parents, teachers, etc.) to listen to their stories and understand how they experience BIMS (Phung et al., 2021). We hope this brief description of BIMS and strategies for managing will help autistic people and the important people in their lives discuss their experiences and make a plan for decreasing and managing BIMS.

Burnout

**BURNOUT IS DESCRIBED AS
FEELING COMPLETELY DRAINED**

(Welch et al., 2021)

It is a loss of energy that can occur when an autistic person pushes themselves beyond their limit; can result from a lot of socializing, school, busy days, or situations that are overwhelming (i.e. loud, bright, confusing).



Meltdown

**MELTDOWNS ARE DESCRIBED AS FEELING
UPSET AND OUT OF CONTROL.**

(Welch et al., 2021)

They can be caused by high social demands, emotions, stressful sensory input (bright lights, unwanted textures, loud noises), or a combination of these. Often people do things during a meltdown that they feel badly about later.



Inertia

**INERTIA IS DESCRIBED AS
FEELING STUCK**

(Welch et al., 2021)

An autistic person may experience feeling unable to move, difficulties planning or initiating the actions they need to do, or feel disconnected from their body and stuck in their mind.



Shutdown

**SHUTDOWNS ARE DESCRIBED AS
BEING EXTREMELY UPSET AND UNABLE
TO REACT TO A SITUATION, WITH SOME
SAYING THEY FEEL "FROZEN".**

(Phung et al., 2021)

Research and autistic co-designers have described shutdown as "a meltdown on the inside" (feeling extremely upset or not in control), but instead of moving around or yelling, they become very still and quiet. Some people cannot move or speak when in shutdown.



STRATEGIES FOR BIMS

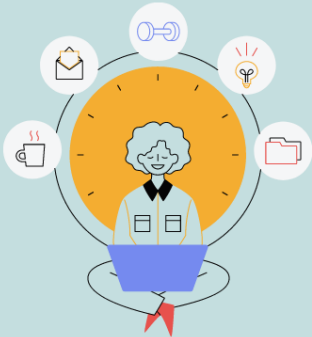
It is most helpful to talk about BIMS openly and supportively and to also plan ahead



Burnout

- Encourage your child to take a break to avoid reaching burnout or to manage their burnout.
- Allowing your child to not be sociable if they don't want to be.
- Encourage your child to ask for and accept help from people they trust. Reassure them that It is OK to receive help when they need it.

Inertia



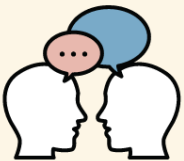
- Have your child talk themselves through what they need to do to start an activity. You can model this by doing it during everyday tasks when your child is around.
- Have a set routine; tell your child in advance if plans have changed.

Meltdown

- To avoid a meltdown, it can be helpful to give a warning (verbal, a calendar reminder, etc.) so that your child knows what to expect, especially when things are changing.
- Encourage your child to walk away to a different safe setting if they need space or alone time away from the stressful situation.



Shutdown



- Have “communication cards” explaining to the others what a shutdown is and how they can help in that moment.
- Encourage your child to tell people ahead of time how they can help and what makes it worse (i.e. things someone can do and say to help, if it is OK to touch them, and let key people know that your child won't be able to answer their questions in the moment).

Phung, J., Penner, M., Pirlot, C., & Welch, C. (2021). What I wish you knew: Insights on burnout, inertia, meltdown, and shutdown from autistic youth. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4981.

Welch, C., Cameron, D., Fitch, M., & Polatajko, H. (2021). Living in autistic bodies: bloggers discuss movement control and arousal regulation. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 43(22), 3159-3167.