



Overcoming Burnout Video Transcript

If you're reading this post, we probably have a lot in common. I might have even felt some of the feelings you are feeling *right now*. When my son, Ben, was five, he was diagnosed with autism. I remember the moment the doctor told us Ben was on the spectrum, because I was absolutely devastated. In fact, after Ben was diagnosed, I went from being a positive, optimistic, social, and pretty happy person, to being a frightened, confused, overwhelmed, lonely, and—to be honest—depressed lady.

There is nothing like having your child receive an autism diagnosis. For me, it was the death of a dream, the ending of a lifetime of imagining what my child would be like, who he would be, and my picture of our family's future together. I grieved my vision of that future, and of that child, for a long time.

I also felt like a failure. A failure as a mother, a failure as a woman, and a failure as a human being. I blamed myself, and came up with countless reasons why it was my fault that Ben had autism. I felt utterly despondent. I needed hope, but at the same time, I was *afraid* to hope, because “everyone said” autism was lifelong and chronic. “They” told me: *Don't get into false hope. Don't set yourself up.*

Well, scoffers beware, because now, eight years after his diagnosis, *Ben no longer meets the criteria for autism*. Not only that, but he is one of the most interactive, self-aware, and “others-aware” 13-year-olds you'll ever meet. He is also a prolific writer, and has written close to 50 children's books. He's currently studying for his *bar mitzvah*, loves his school, loves biographies and history, and recently discovered a love for sewing stuffed animals—much to the delight of the younger children at his school.

In other words, *Ben has recovered from autism*.

Is he free from problems? No way. Ben now faces ADHD, still has significant speech challenges, and is probably less sophisticated on some levels than his peers. But his autistic symptoms have receded enormously.



So what did we do? How did Ben come so far? In my UnlockYourChild programs, I share the nuts and bolts of what I did, how it worked, and how you can implement some of these approaches to help *your child* make progress, and improve the lives and relationships of everyone in your family.

Working with a child with autism is a big job. It took Ben a long time to make the progress he has made. But it's doable. Autism recovery is real. I no longer fear "false hope"—I don't even believe in it. Ben's story is a testament to the power of hope, and this post is about *the first step*.

You may find my first step to autism recovery counterintuitive, or even a little frightening. But it might also come as a relief to you. The first step in autism recovery is, specifically, to learn to care for yourself, as a necessary foundation for helping your child. As I tried to be the parent Ben needed, I realized I had to ask myself: how well was I parenting *myself*? Autism recovery, which is what I want for you, which is what I have in my life, with my son, is a long journey. If you take care of yourself, your child's chances for progress are heightened massively. Conversely, if you drive yourself too hard and burn out, your child will benefit less.

We've all heard the instructions on the airplane: put the oxygen mask on yourself before your child, so that you can take care of your child when they need you. In parenting, the same principle applies. Now, I've done it both ways. In the beginning, I worked obsessively for my son, rarely took time for myself, felt guilty when I did, and ultimately burned out and crashed—and was totally useless to my son when I did. But over time, I learned to take care of myself, I became sharper, more focused, and much more clear. And my impact on my child was bigger.

Taking care of myself does not come naturally to me. It has taken me years to learn to do it, and even today, I can easily drop into guilty feelings when I do things that have nothing to do with taking care of my children. So I have to constantly remind myself that *being good to myself is part of good parenting*, and that *when I am good to myself, my children benefit*.



Three key tools have helped me enormously with this process of investing in myself as I parent my children. All three of these tools (a) are simple, (b) don't cost a lot of money, and (c) require some willingness on my part to let go of old tapes that tell me I'm being selfish. I have to think "self-caring"—which benefits my children—rather than selfish. Each tool has been a game-changer for me.

My Top 3 Picks from my Self-Care Toolbox

1. *Breathing.* These days, everybody talks about breathing, but everybody talks about it because it's really important, and it really works. Two of the best breathing techniques I know are (1) alternate-nostril-breathing, and (2) *ujayi* breath, or the ocean breath. Doing either of these takes you less than five minutes, but using them can literally change how you react to your child. And guess what: breathing is free!
2. *Communication.* I want you to look at whether you are communicating about what's going on inside. So, I'm not talking about that you have to go to therapy, or join a 12 Step Program, or start listening to a guru. I'm just talking about you doing a little inventory about how often am I talking about what's really going on inside of me? And I'm not talking about the times when you and your husband are yelling, or crying and catharsis. Those all happen for me, I'm sure they're happening for you. But I'm talking about really brass tacks, talking about your fears, talking about your hopes, talking about your shattered dreams. Are you talking about them? And if you're not, let's find some ways for you to have a place to bring those things to. Because you need to be able to emotionally get cared for, so you can care for your child.
3. *Fun.* When is the last time you had fun? Real fun? Where you actually forgot about autism for five minutes? When's the last time you did something *for yourself*? It had been months, if not years, for me, when I first started changing my life in order to heal my son. So what I want you to do is another little inventory, about what you really enjoy. What makes you forget about the struggle, the confusion, the overwhelm. For me it's getting my hair blown out, listening to disco, meeting friends for lunch. Stupid little stuff but it makes me happy. Doing graphic design. Eating awesome food with awesome people. I had stopped doing ALL OF THOSE. But then one of my mentors told me that if I wasn't happy, I wasn't going to be



able to help my son. Strong language, but I listened because her son had recovered from severe autism. And she was right: When I was better to myself, I was a better mom. I kind of had to learn to parent myself, in order to parent my child.

If you implement these three tools, I guarantee you: your chances of helping your child will be exponentially higher.

Life is passing, and as parents, we forget to take care of ourselves. But we are actually *supposed* to take care of ourselves, as well as our children. They need us to be nourished, emotionally and spiritually, as well as physically. We are also their role models—let's help them grow up to be self-caring individuals!

Let me be the one to give you permission to take care of yourself.

The more I take care of myself, the more I have to offer my child. The more I give to myself, the more I can help my child. The more I love myself, the more love I can give to my child. Try this stuff. It really works.

I didn't believe my son could recover—then I *watched* him recover. I didn't believe in myself, but as my son grew and changed, *I* grew and changed. I didn't have to be a supermom. I just had to start with baby steps. *You* don't have to be a super-mom, super-dad, or super-grandma or -grandpa. Start where you are, and by investing in yourself, first. Which means taking care of **YOU!**