The Support Shelf

Parent Care Guide

Small, realistic ways to refill your own tank on hard weeks.

SHELF 4 · SUPPORT AT HOME

Made by a Registered Behavior Technician who works with autistic kids and their parents every day.

thesupportshelf.org

How to use this

This is not a self-care list. You have seen those. This is eight pages for the week you are actually in, and most of them are things to write, not things to read.

Nobody in your house gets the version of you that you want to give them when you are running on nothing. That is not a character flaw. It is how people work. The point of this guide is to get you one real break this week, in a way that costs the least and does not require anyone's permission.

Fill in page 2 first. It takes three minutes and it tells you which page to go to next.

START HERE IF

This week is bad and you need to figure out what to let go of	Page 4
You want to know whether this is tired, or something past tired	Page 3
You have twenty minutes and no idea what to do with them	Page 5
You need to ask someone for help and can't find the words	Page 6
You want to know what help actually exists for parents like you	Page 7

> **What this guide will not do.** It will not tell you to find joy in the small moments, take a bubble bath, or remember that you are enough. It will not pretend that twenty minutes fixes a year. It will help you take the twenty minutes anyway.

The week I'm in

Three minutes, honest answers. Nobody reads this but you.

RIGHT NOW, I AM

1	2	3	4	5
Running on fumes. Not sure how I'm still going.	Getting through, barely. Everything is heavy.	Tired, but functioning. The usual.	Okay. Not great, but okay.	Actually fine this week.

Circle one. There is no wrong answer and no prize for a high number.

WHAT DRAINED ME MOST THIS WEEK

Bedtime every night. Two calls with insurance. Nobody asked how I was.

ONE THING THAT WAS FINE, EVEN SMALL

Tuesday morning. She got in the car without a fight and I had coffee in the driveway.

WHAT I NEED MOST RIGHT NOW

- [ ] Sleep
- [ ] Time alone, no one touching me or needing me
- [ ] Someone else to take the kids for a while
- [ ] Someone to talk to who gets it
- [ ] To not be the one who decides everything
- [ ] To cry without having to explain
- [ ] Help with one specific thing: _____
- [ ] I don't know. That is an answer too.

Where to go next. Circled a 1 or 2, or checked more than three boxes: go to page 3, then page 4. Circled a 3: page 4 and page 5. Circled a 4 or 5: page 5, and pick one thing while you have the room to.

Tired, or past tired

Tired gets better with a night of sleep. Past tired doesn't. Parents of autistic kids run past tired for months without noticing, because the demands never pause long enough to check. Check now.

IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS

- [ ] I snap at the people I love most, over small things, and hate it afterward
- [ ] Things I used to enjoy don't feel worth the effort
- [ ] When I finally can sleep, I can't
- [ ] I'm getting sick more, or a small thing won't clear up
- [ ] I feel nothing much at the good moments
- [ ] I dread mornings before I'm fully awake
- [ ] I forget things I'd never have forgotten before
- [ ] I've thought "I can't keep doing this" more than once
- [ ] I've stopped answering friends because explaining is too much
- [ ] I can't remember the last time someone asked how I was and I told the truth

CHECKED	WHAT IT USUALLY MEANS	WHAT TO DO WITH THAT
0 to 2	Tired. The ordinary kind that comes with this.	Page 5. Take one real break this week and protect it.
3 to 5	Past tired. The tank is empty and you are driving on the light.	Page 4 first. Drop something. Then page 6, and ask for one specific thing.
6 or more	This has gone on long enough that it is affecting your health.	Make an appointment with your own doctor this week. Bring this page. Say "I think I'm burned out." That sentence is enough to start.

If you have had thoughts of hurting yourself, or of not wanting to be here, that is not burnout and it is not a sign that you are a bad parent. It is a sign you need a person tonight, not a worksheet. In the US, call or text 988, any hour. More options are at thesupportshelf.org/crisis.

Burnout in parents of autistic children is common enough that there is research on it. It is treated, not endured. Your own doctor is the right place to start, and they will have heard this before.

What I can drop this week

Write down everything on your plate for the next seven days. All of it, including the things you feel guilty about even listing. Then sort.

Has to happen

Someone gets hurt or something breaks if it doesn't.

Thursday therapy

Meds refill

Can wait a week

Nothing bad happens if it's next week instead.

Returning the IEP email

Costume for the party

Someone else can do it

Not as well as you. Still done.

Groceries (pickup)

Saturday bath (partner)

Most parents find the first column is shorter than they expected and the third is longer than they were allowing. "Someone else" includes grocery pickup, paper plates, frozen dinners, the older sibling, and lowering the bar. Dishes in the sink are not a safety issue.

THE ONE THING I'M DROPPING THIS WEEK, SAID PLAINLY

I'm not cooking Wednesday through Friday. Frozen is fine.

Refills that fit a real week

Sorted by how much time they take, because that is the thing you actually don't have. This is not a list to complete. Pick one. Do it once. That counts.

FIVE MINUTES

- [ ] Sit in the car in the driveway before going in. Engine off, no phone.
- [ ] Shower with the door locked, even if someone cries.
- [ ] One song, headphones, eyes closed.
- [ ] Stand outside and look at something far away.
- [ ] Text one person one true sentence about your day.
- [ ] Eat something warm, standing up, without sharing it.

TWENTY MINUTES

- [ ] A walk around the block, alone. No stroller.
- [ ] A nap on the couch while the show is on. The show is the babysitter. It's fine.
- [ ] A meal sitting down, start to finish.
- [ ] Call someone who doesn't need anything from you.
- [ ] The thing you used to do before all of this, in its smallest possible form.

HALF A DAY

- [ ] Someone takes the kids and you go nowhere. Stay home and sleep.
- [ ] A drive with the music up.
- [ ] Church, the gym, a friend's kitchen table. Whichever one used to be yours.
- [ ] An appointment for your own body. Dentist, doctor, haircut. The one you keep moving.

The half-day column needs another adult. If there isn't one, page 6 is how you ask, and page 7 is where respite care comes in. Do not skip the half-day column because it feels impossible. That feeling is the reason it's on the list.

THE ONE I'LL ACTUALLY DO, AND WHEN

Driveway, five minutes, every day after pickup this week.

Ask without a speech

You don't owe anyone an explanation. A specific ask with a day and a time is easier for everyone, including the person you're asking. Fill in the blanks and send it as written.

TO A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER

Can you take _____ on _____ from _____ to _____ ? I'll have everything set up and written down. I need _____ .

Fill the last blank with the real thing: "sleep," "to sit in silence," "a doctor's appointment." People say yes to specifics.

TO A PARTNER OR CO-PARENT

I'm at the end of what I have this week. I need you to own _____ through _____ . I'm not going to check how you do it.

"Own" means they decide and you don't fix it afterward. That last sentence is the hard part. Keep it in.

TO YOUR CHILD'S BCBA OR CLINIC

Things at home are harder than they look in session, especially _____ . Can we spend part of our next meeting on that? And do you know of any parent support or respite resources near us?

Parent training is part of most ABA plans. You are not asking for a favor. You are asking for the part of the plan that is for you.

PEOPLE I COULD ACTUALLY ASK

My sister, Saturday mornings

Dana from the clinic parent group

Where real support exists

Most parents don't know these are available until someone tells them. Use the right column to track what you find, because you will not remember three phone calls from now.

WHO	WHAT THEY CAN DO	WHAT I FOUND
Your child's ABA clinic	Parent training is part of most treatment plans. Ask your BCBA what's in yours. They also usually know the local parent groups and respite options.	
Respite care	A trained person cares for your child for a few hours so you can rest. Often funded through state programs (in Texas, ask about Medicaid waiver programs) or local autism organizations. Waitlists are common, so ask now, not when you're desperate.	
Other parents	Local Autism Society chapters, your clinic's parent group, and the honest online groups for your area. The best ones are where people say the hard parts out loud.	
Your own doctor	Burnout, anxiety, and depression in parents are treated every day. Bring page 3. You do not have to have the words. "I think I'm burned out" is enough.	
Your faith community, if you have one	Meal trains, childcare during services, someone to sit with. Many will help if asked and won't know to offer.	
988	Call or text, any hour, in the US. For the nights that are too much. More at thesupportshelf.org/crisis.	

The Find care page at thesupportshelf.org has more on what exists in Texas and how to reach it. If you find a resource that helped and isn't listed, email kyle@stringhamwebdesign.com so the next parent finds it faster.

What now

Three things this week. Not all of them today.

THIS WEEK

- [ ] Drop the one thing from page 4. Say it out loud to someone in the house.
- [ ] Do the one refill from page 5, once. Then once more.
- [ ] Send one message from page 6, filled in, as written.
- [ ] If page 3 said 6 or more: make the doctor's appointment.

NEXT MONTH

Fill in page 2 again. Compare the number. If it moved up, you know what worked. If it didn't, that is information too: it means the week needs more than you can give it alone, and page 7 is where to go.

NEXT ON THE SHELF

Sibling Support (Support at Home) is for the brother or sister who has been quietly fine for too long: conversation starters and a page they fill in themselves.

Calm-Down Corner Kit (Support at Home) sets up a low-cost calming space your child chooses to go to, with printable breathing and grounding cards that work for parents too.

If either one isn't out yet, the email box on its shelf at thesupportshelf.org/shelf will tell you when it is. One email, then nothing else.

The Support Shelf is made by a Registered Behavior Technician, not a doctor or a therapist. This guide helps you notice and organize. It does not diagnose anything. If something on page 3 worried you, your own doctor is the next step.