

## Questions to Ask Yourself About Shutdowns...

---

1. Do I experience shutdowns?

- Sometimes
- Often
- Never

2. How often do I experience shutdowns?

- Never
- Every day
- Every week
- Every month
- Less than the options above

3. What are things that make me more likely to have shutdowns? (e.g., being around a lot of people, a lot of noise, high-stress situations)

4. In what kind of situations/where do I experience shutdowns? (e.g., family gatherings)

5. When I feel shutdowns coming on, my body feels... (frozen, nauseous, going mute, etc.)

6. When I am experiencing **shutdown**, I think about and feel... (overwhelmed, sad, scared that others are angry with me, etc.)

7. What do my **shutdowns** look like to other people? (e.g., the silent treatment, wandering off, ignoring others)

8. After **shutdowns**, I feel... (e.g., embarrassed, isolated from others, emotionally distressed, angry with myself, scared because I don't know when it will happen again)

## Strategies to Manage Shutdown

---

Here are some strategies for coping with [shutdowns](#) that other autistic adults find helpful:

- **Identify your triggers for shutdowns**
  - *Crowded places, background noises, activities, an unorganized schedule, etc.*
- **Assess your stress levels before they escalate**
  - *Take breaks even if you feel alright and think you can keep going*
- **Ask people you trust to check in with you**
  - *They can ask you, “Can you tolerate [this place] for [this amount of time], or do you need a break?”*
  - *This strategy can help you modulate sensory inputs before shutdowns occur (since shutdowns can happen fast)*
- **Create a plan with strategies for different levels of stress/anxiety you experience**
  - *Level 1: Low level of anxiety*
    - *Recognize the feelings are unpleasant for yourself*
    - *Pay attention to the feeling as it fades or grows*
  - *Level 2: Increased stress or anxiety*
    - *Use strategies to cope*
    - *Continue to monitor you feelings*
    - *Leave the situation if you can*
    - *Call or talk to someone about how you feel*
  - *Level 3: Worst case scenario*
    - *Go to a safe location*
    - *Implement your contingency plan*
  - *Tip: Before leaving a situation, wait 5 more minutes to see if the anxiety fades*
  - *Tip: Be gentle with yourself because it takes time to learn your limits*
  - *Tip: Have strategies prepared for different settings*
    - *At home: nature walks, crafts, comfort food, weighted blanket, books, video games, pre-programmed messages on your devices that say “I’m not talking right now”, etc.*
    - *At school: watch a movie on your laptop, listen to music, designate a quiet place to go, etc.*
    - *At the grocery store or mall: go to the washroom to refocus on your goal, tell yourself you can do it, focus on what you can do next and where you will go after, etc.*
- **Take the time and space you need away from others even before you sense shutdowns coming on**

- **Communicate through text during shutdowns if you can't speak**
- **Communicate by pointing**
- **Ask people you trust to stay close to you and talk to you without expecting a response**
- **Ask people you trust to reassure you that they are not upset with you and it is okay to take a break**
- **Ask people you trust to wait for you to come back to an activity or situation when you are ready**
  - *If others are supportive of you during shutdowns, you might want to open up a discussion with them about what happened, but you shouldn't be forced to*
  - *Others need to give you time, acceptance, space, and support*
- **Try to think of shutdowns as a response to what your mind and body need at the moment**

### **Things to Avoid When It Comes to Shutdown**

---

- Activities that cause sensory overload like playing music too loudly or being forced to go to the movies
- Being around people who wrongly perceive you as unfriendly or rude when you need time in a quiet place during a social situation
- Being pressured to do something you don't want to do
  - E.g., being pressured to speak
- Being around others who ask you repeatedly if you are okay instead of giving you the space you need
- Being around others who have misconceptions about "high-functioning" or "mild autism"
- Being around others who think you owe it to them to explain how you're feeling before you understand it yourself
  - Shutdowns can feel painful, scary and embarrassing, and when others add demands on top of that, it just makes things worse
  - This can lead to feelings of internalized failure and make it even harder to come out of shutdowns

## My Plan to Manage Shutdown

---

Using the strategies above and your own ideas, follow some or all of the prompts below to help you create a personalized plan for dealing with shutdown.

### What I can do before shutdowns happen...

When I sense shutdowns coming on, something I can try is:

This is how I assess how I'm feeling throughout the day:

I experience shutdowns during these kinds of situations:

During each of these situations, something I can try to do to prevent shutdowns is:

Ahead of time, I can tell people around me that during shutdowns: *(circle all that apply to you)*

I want to be alone    **OR**    be with someone  
I want to talk        **OR**    stay silent        **OR**    can't speak

The way I would want to communicate (or not) during shutdowns is:

**What I can do during shutdowns...**

During shutdowns, I can go:

During shutdowns, I can be more kind to myself by telling myself:

**What I can do after shutdowns...**

After shutdowns, something I can do to feel better is:

Something others can do/say to support me is:

## Self-Advocacy Script for Shutdown

---

Below are some prompts to help you create a script for explaining **shutdown** to others. This script can be used to help you advocate for support in managing **shutdown**.

1. Introductory sentence (how you would start this conversation):

2. Description of the problem as you see it (what is going wrong because of **shutdown** and your environment):

3. Description of what **shutdowns** are like for you (e.g., frozen, sad, overwhelmed):

4. Your request - what do you think could change about the environment (physical, sensory, and social), or what could other people say and do that would help?