## Questions to Ask Yourself About Shutdown...

- 1. Do I experience shutdowns?
  - □ Sometimes
  - □ Often
  - □ Never
- 2. How often do I experience shutdowns?
  - □ Never
  - Every day
  - Every week
  - Every month
  - $\hfill\square$  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)



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

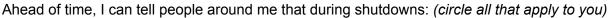


## My Plan to Manage Shutdown

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:



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|--------------------|----|--------------|----|-------------|--|
| I want to be alone | OR | be with some |    |             |  |
| 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 <u>during</u> 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:



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?

