

JOHN PENDAL: Coaching For People Who Feel Like Outsiders

SELF CARE

Before folk realise they are autistic I've noticed they often live in one of two states of being:

- Either they are *fine*, totally *fine*, putting everything into their job or family to make sure no one can complain about anything, unconsciously masking to get by, and not quite sure why everything is such an effort.
- Or they are suffering from burnout, unable to function in the evenings, weekends or on holiday.

They wonder why other people seem to be able to enjoy holidays and do social activities, when they never have any energy for themselves.

Part of my coaching is helping people work out the grey area between those two states. Ways we can live without masking 100% when we are with others, or non-functioning the rest of the time.

During our first few sessions together we might discuss how their energy is spent. Eventually we are going to get around 'self-care', and how to charge yourself up again.

Initially the response is: *"I relax when I'm asleep"* or *"my self-care is going to bed"*. It may seem like a selfish act to look after yourself, but it is a necessity if you want to function seven days a week.

<https://www.johnpendal.com>

johnpendal.coach@gmail.com

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Here are some tips that I've found help me. Sharing in case they help you:

- 1) I used to add self-care to a list of things to do, and then it felt like a chore or obligation and that made me not want to do it. Now I picture self-care as a pyramid I can climb, and it feels more rewarding. If one level doesn't work I know I can climb to the next level and try something else. My bottom rung is going outside for a minute and looking for bees – the top level is being in bed for 15 hours with blackout blinds and earplugs. Part of the game is making new levels as I discover other things that restore my energy.
- 2) I used to wait until I felt like I needed to do some self-care before I did any – but I'd still have days with no energy. Now I schedule it in without relying on feelings. For example, I make sure I go outside for a short break after every client call and I'm less tired at the end of the day.
- 3) Self-care doesn't have to be a set amount of time. I used to think for a walk to do any good it had to take an hour. Now I've realised I can walk to the end of the road and back, and that will help. If I don't have 5 minutes, I can just step outside the front door for 30 seconds for a break. If I don't feel up for a full gym workout I might go for just one exercise. Doing a little still counts.
- 4) Different activities give you a *"fast or slow charge"*, and that's different for every person. One of my clients describes being in their garden as if that's their *"docking station"* where they charge up quickest. For others it might be listening to music or spending time in a sensory swing. There are more ways to charge than just *"being in bed"*.

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5) If you struggle with the idea of self-care because you think you should always be helping other people and not yourself, try thinking of it this way: *you're doing self-care to make yourself sustainable so that you CAN help other people tomorrow.*

I hope that helps. Please let me know if you'd like to talk about this, I'm happy to set up a call.

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