



Toolkit: Self-Care & Mental Health

A practical, supportive guide for parents of autistic children

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1. Introduction

We know how demanding and emotional this journey can be. This guide is here to help you put your oxygen mask on first — because when you're supported, your child thrives too.

This isn't about being perfect. It's about finding small, meaningful ways to care for yourself while navigating the complexity of parenting an autistic child.

You are not alone. Barney's Box is here to walk with you, step by step.



2. Understanding the Need for Self-Care

You matter. But as a parent of an autistic child, your needs often come last.

This section explains why **your wellbeing isn't optional - it's essential**. Research shows that chronic stress and burnout are common among caregivers of autistic children.

However, when parents prioritise small moments of self-kindness, they report:

- Better emotional regulation
- Stronger relationships
- More capacity to support their child

Self-care is not indulgent. It's a quiet act of resilience.

3. Common Mental Health Challenges for Parents

You might be feeling:

- Overwhelmed or constantly “on edge”
- Guilty for taking breaks or having needs
- Lonely or misunderstood by family/friends
- Mentally overloaded, even when you lie down
- Emotionally burnt out

These are not signs of weakness. They are signs of someone doing the emotional work of **holding everything together**.

You deserve support too.

4. Step-by-Step Self-Care Plan

Step 1: Acknowledge your stress without judgement

Step 2: Choose 2–3 micro-actions (5–10 minutes each) that calm or uplift you

Step 3: Schedule them (even loosely) into your week

Step 4: Share this plan with someone supportive

Step 5: Review it weekly with self-compassion. What worked? What didn't?

Examples of micro-actions:

- Drinking a hot cup of tea alone
- 5-minute walk in nature
- Quick breathing exercise
- Journaling
- 10 minutes of music or a podcast

5. Planner

Micro Action	Schedule	Status/Outcome
Example - 10-minute walk in nature	Walk through woodland after school drop-off each morning	Completed this week. Helped me to relax and reset before starting work.



Barney's Tip: Small steps count. Be realistic. One cup of tea in peace is progress.

6. Small Strategies That Work

Remember to be kind to yourself.

- **Morning check-in:** “What do I need today?”
- **Evenings:** Replace guilt with gratitude. “What’s one thing I did well?”
- **Crisis days:** Use the Barney’s Box mantra: *Pause. Breathe. You are doing your best.*
- **Build a Rescue List:** People, music, smells, or places that restore calm
- **Visual self-care board:** Place on the fridge or save to your phone

Every family has tough days. Self-kindness helps you survive them.



7. Tools & Templates

- Weekly Self-Care Planner
- Daily Mood & Energy Tracker
- Quick Calm Checklist

(Available from barneysbox.co.uk/tools)

8. Helpful Links

[Mind UK](#) – Mental health support

[Carers UK](#) – Advice for unpaid carers

[Barney's Box Downloads](#) – Templates, guides, and checklists

Local support groups – Ask your GP, school SENCO, or local council



Barney's Tip: Print and stick planners, checklists and trackers somewhere visible, or use digitally. Choose what feels right.

9. Final Thoughts

There is no “right way” to parent, and no perfect self-care routine.
There is **you**, doing your best, and now - this toolkit, to lean on.

You are enough. And we’re with you, every step of the way.

– **The Barney’s Box Team**

www.barneysbox.co.uk