

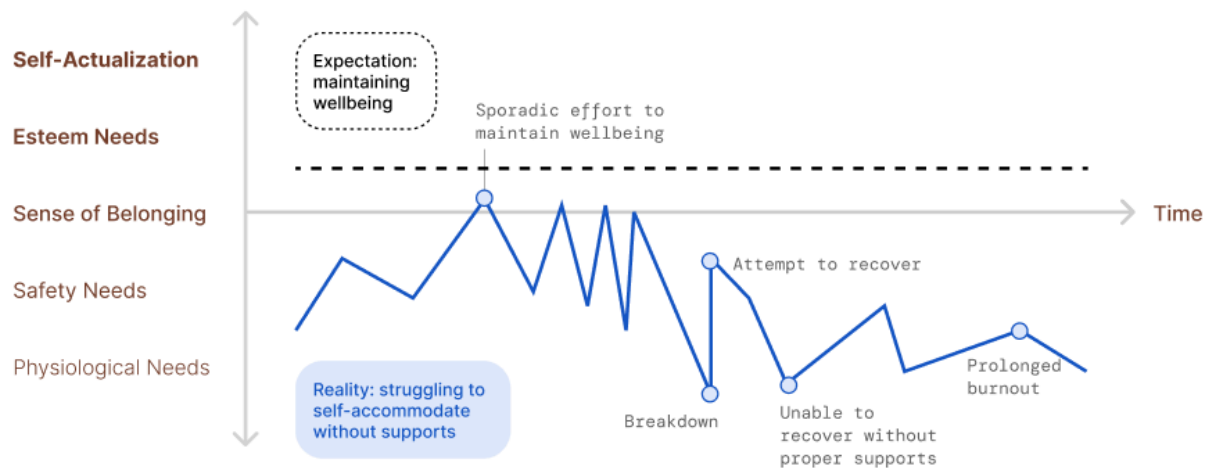
## Our Research Study on How to Make Decisions Easier for Autistic and ADHD Adults

Our team at Independence Through Interdependence Assistive Technologies (ITI) created an app called "Decide" to help autistic and ADHD adults make decisions. We did this because:

- Autistic and ADHD adults often struggle with making decisions
- This struggle can lead to burnout and health problems
- Making too many decisions uses up mental energy
- Simple choices can feel overwhelming when you're tired

**Figure 2** from "AI-Powered Supports for Neurodivergent Minds"

*Illustration of autistic burnout cycle in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs*



When studying autistic burnout, Raymaker and others (2020) found that autistic people often get overwhelmed because what people expect them to do doesn't match what they can actually do. ITI used a common framework, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, to help explain the kind of expectations we thought they were talking about. For example, physiological needs includes things like eating and drinking and sleeping which can be challenging for neurodivergent people. It's hard to even think about feeling well when you can't tell if you're getting dehydrated or get enough sleep reliably

## Our Research

Between August 2023 and January 2025, we collected 1,197 research touchpoints. We took out any data that we weren't sure was accurate for our study and were left with 930 touchpoints. This means we talked to or surveyed hundreds of people to understand the problems and test our solutions. Each data point is a conversation or a survey response or other point where they gave us information. More than 734 of the included data points were with autistic and/or ADHD adults.

## Our Definition of Wellbeing

Wellbeing means feeling good about yourself and your life. For autistic and ADHD adults, wellbeing is when you know what's good for you and others, and **you can actually do those things**. You understand how your actions affect how you feel inside, and you are able to use this knowledge to make better choices. You also understand how what you do affects the people around you and the world, and you are able to make choices based on this understanding. When you have wellbeing, you don't just know what's right for you—you're **able to do it**, too.

## Why Decision-Making Is Hard

The average person makes about 33,000 decisions every day. Autistic and ADHD adults probably make even more than that. This can be extra challenging because:

- Their brains may process information differently
- They may need to think about each option very carefully
- They may not automatically know which choices are most important
- Small decisions (like what to eat) can use up energy needed for bigger decisions

## Our Solution: The "Decide" App

We created an app with two main features:

1. **Random:** Helps you pick from a custom list based on how much energy you have
2. **Guided:** Walks you through thinking about a decision with simple agree/disagree questions. Then, it makes a recommendation and **explains why** what you said makes that option the better choice.

Decide helps people:

- Make decisions faster
- Feel less stressed when choosing
- Consider how choices affect their well-being
- Feel secure they've thought a decision through
- Follow through on decisions

## What People Think About Decide

We asked for feedback from 44 autistic and ADHD adults who tested the app for two weeks:

- 77% said it helped them think about how their actions affect their well-being
- 55% felt calm when using the app
- 77% thought the app's suggestions were good
- 100% found the app at least somewhat useful

## What's Next

We plan to:

- Add voice support to the app
- Add the ability to give additional information that impacts a decision
- Create more tools to help with daily challenges
- Develop ways to help healthcare and social service workers better understand and support autistic and ADHD adults

## Why This Matters

When autistic and ADHD adults have better support for making decisions, they:

- Have more energy for important activities
- Experience less stress and burnout
- Can take better care of their physical and mental health
- Can contribute their unique skills and perspectives to society

We believe people do best when they have the right support to make their own choices.

