

ADHD & LATE DIAGNOSIS *EXECUTIVE FUNCTION TOOLKIT*

*Tools & Strategies to help
manage ADHD Symptoms*

***Evidence-Based
Practical strategies***

***Compassionate
Support***

***Empowering
tools that work***



WHAT IS ADHD?

WHAT IS ADHD?

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that starts in childhood and can continue into adulthood. It affects people differently, but there are three main types: inattentive, hyperactive/impulsive, or a combination of both.

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

- Difficulties staying focused on a task.
- Being forgetful & frequently losing track of time.
- Difficulties with sitting still for longer periods.
- Being inattentive when completing tasks that are “boring”, while hyper-focusing when tasks are “interesting”.
- Difficulties with taking turns in conversations.
- Constantly moving and “on the go”.
- Difficulties with “quiet” tasks. Intensely talkative.

MANAGING ADHD SYMPTOMS

There are a number of ways to help stay on top of ADHD symptoms, including:

- Structured therapy (for example CBT therapy).
- Medication.
- Regular physical activity.
- Creating structured habits for healthy eating, time management and using tools such as reminders, focus plans, breaking up tasks etc.

ADHD LATE DIAGNOSIS

WHAT IS A LATE DIAGNOSIS?

A late ADHD diagnosis refers to individuals who aren't diagnosed until adulthood. While ADHD symptoms must appear before age 12 to meet the official criteria, many people aren't diagnosed in childhood and only seek help as adults. Although it can be confusing and stressful, a late diagnosis can bring relief to many.

REASONS FOR A LATE DIAGNOSIS

There are a number of reasons why an individual would not get diagnosed until adulthood, including:

- Adults may miss ADHD symptoms in children due to lack of knowledge.
- Symptoms vary by environment (e.g., overstimulation).
- ADHD symptoms are often missed in girls.

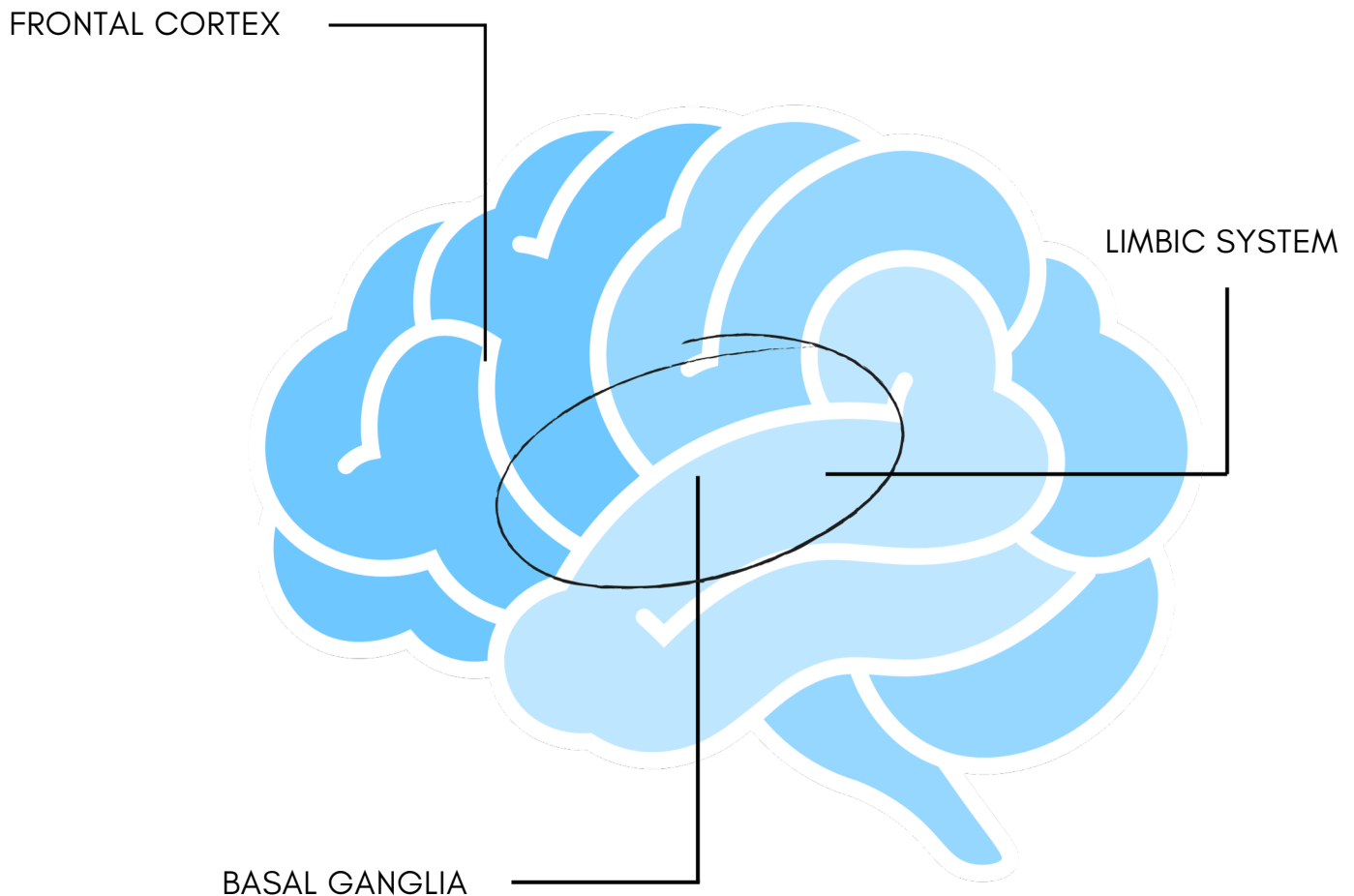
WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT ADHD

If you suspect ADHD, start by consulting your doctor, who can refer you to professionals for assessment and diagnosis. The person who diagnoses ADHD varies by location, but it's usually a psychiatrist or psychologist.



THE ADHD BRAIN

There are a few distinct areas of the brain that are affected in individuals with ADHD. Read on below to learn more about the ADHD brain.



FRONTAL CORTEX: The frontal cortex controls attention, executive function, and organization. In ADHD, its weaker function and structure impact these abilities.

LIMBIC SYSTEM: The limbic system controls emotions, attention, and motivation. Changes in this area due to ADHD may contribute to hyperactivity, inattention, and poor decision-making.

BASAL GANGLIA: The basal ganglia, deep in the brain, controls motor learning and helps regulate emotions, focus, and behavior. This area may be impaired in individuals with ADHD.

NEURODIVERSITY

WHAT IS NEURODIVERSITY?

"Neurodivergent" refers to individuals whose brain functions differ from the typical, affecting their strengths and challenges. These differences may stem from medical disorders, learning disabilities, or other conditions.

THE MOVE FROM DEFICITS TO DIFFERENCE

The neurodiverse movement has gained momentum in recent years, though bias against those with ADHD, autism, Down syndrome, and other diagnoses remains. Historically, the focus has been on their challenges, overlooking their strengths. Viewing neurodiverse individuals as a whole, rather than just their symptoms, is key to recognizing the importance of shifting from seeing "deficits" to "differences."

CONDITIONS UNDER THE NEURODIVERSE UMBRELLA

Neurodiverse individuals may have various medical diagnoses, psychological conditions, and learning disabilities, such as:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Down Syndrome
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyslexia
- Dyspraxia
- Intellectual disabilities
- Sensory processing disorders
- Tourette syndrome
- Williams syndrome

MYTHS ABOUT NEURODIVERSITY

Many myths about neurodiversity are gaining traction. Let's take a moment to debunk some of the most common ones...

"NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS ARE UNINTELLIGENT"

Not at all! Many neurodivergent individuals are highly intelligent and exceptionally gifted.

"NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS CANNOT BE SUCCESSFUL"

Many neurodivergent individuals are highly successful, including Oscar-winning actor Sir Anthony Hopkins, Olympian Simone Biles, and animal scientist Temple Grandin.

"NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS CAN'T HAVE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS"

While some neurodivergent conditions may affect social cues and communication, with the right support, individuals can build and maintain healthy, long-lasting relationships.

"NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS ARE ONLY SUITED TO REPETITIVE JOBS "

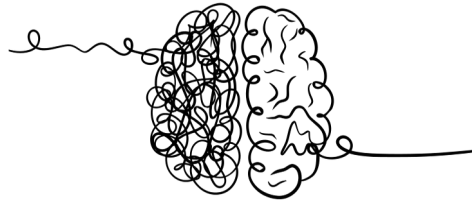
Like anyone else, there's no one-size-fits-all job. Some neurodivergent individuals prefer repetitive tasks, while others thrive in creative, flexible roles.

"NEURODIVERSITY IS A DISORDER"

A common misconception about neurodiversity is that it's a disorder that needs curing. In reality, neurodiversity is a natural variation in the human brain, similar to differences in physical traits or abilities.

HOW DOES THE ADHD BRAIN DIFFER?

ADHD varies between individuals and includes three different presentations. Read on to learn more about the types outlined in the DSM-5.



INATTENTIVE

Often:

- Struggles with attention to details and makes careless mistakes
- May seem to not listen when spoken to
- Has difficulty sustaining attention
- Struggles with task organization

HYPERACTIVE-IMPULSIVE

Often:

- Frequently fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in chair
- Has difficulty sitting still
- Can be extremely restless
- Constantly "on the go"

COMBINED

Often:

Combined ADHD involves a mix of both inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms. While the symptoms don't need to be equally balanced, the individual must meet the criteria for both types of ADHD to be diagnosed with the combined presentation.

THE STRENGTHS OF THE ADHD BRAIN

While ADHD presents challenges, it also brings many strengths. Dr. Edward Hallowell compares the ADHD brain to a powerful Ferrari engine with weak brakes—suggesting that with proper support, these strengths can flourish. Here are a few notable traits of individuals with ADHD:

HYPER-FOCUS

The ability to focus all your energy and attention on work that you enjoy or find interesting.

SOCIAL CONNECTION

The ability to connect with others through warmth and humor.

EMPATHY

The ability to be empathetic and show kindness and generosity towards others.

CREATIVITY

The ability to think outside the box and come up with creative solutions.

WILLINGNESS TO TAKE RISKS

The willingness to step outside your comfort zone and try something new.

PERSISTENCE

The ability to persist towards a goal, no matter the challenges, once you set your mind to it.

PASSION

The ability to be driven and passionate about situations and work you care about.

SPONTANEITY

The ability to be driven by energy and impulses, embracing spontaneity.

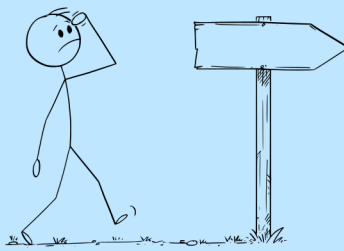
HUMOUR

The ability to be silly, laugh at yourself and situations, and not take life too seriously.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION VS DYSFUNCTION

Executive function and executive dysfunction are closely related but represent opposite ends of a spectrum...

Executive function refers to the ability to plan, organize, manage time, regulate emotions, and complete tasks effectively. It's what allows us to set goals, stay focused, adapt to change, and control impulses.



Executive dysfunction, on the other hand, is when these skills are impaired. It can show up as trouble starting or finishing tasks, forgetting important details, poor time management, emotional outbursts, difficulty shifting between tasks, or feeling mentally disorganized.

IN SUMMARY...

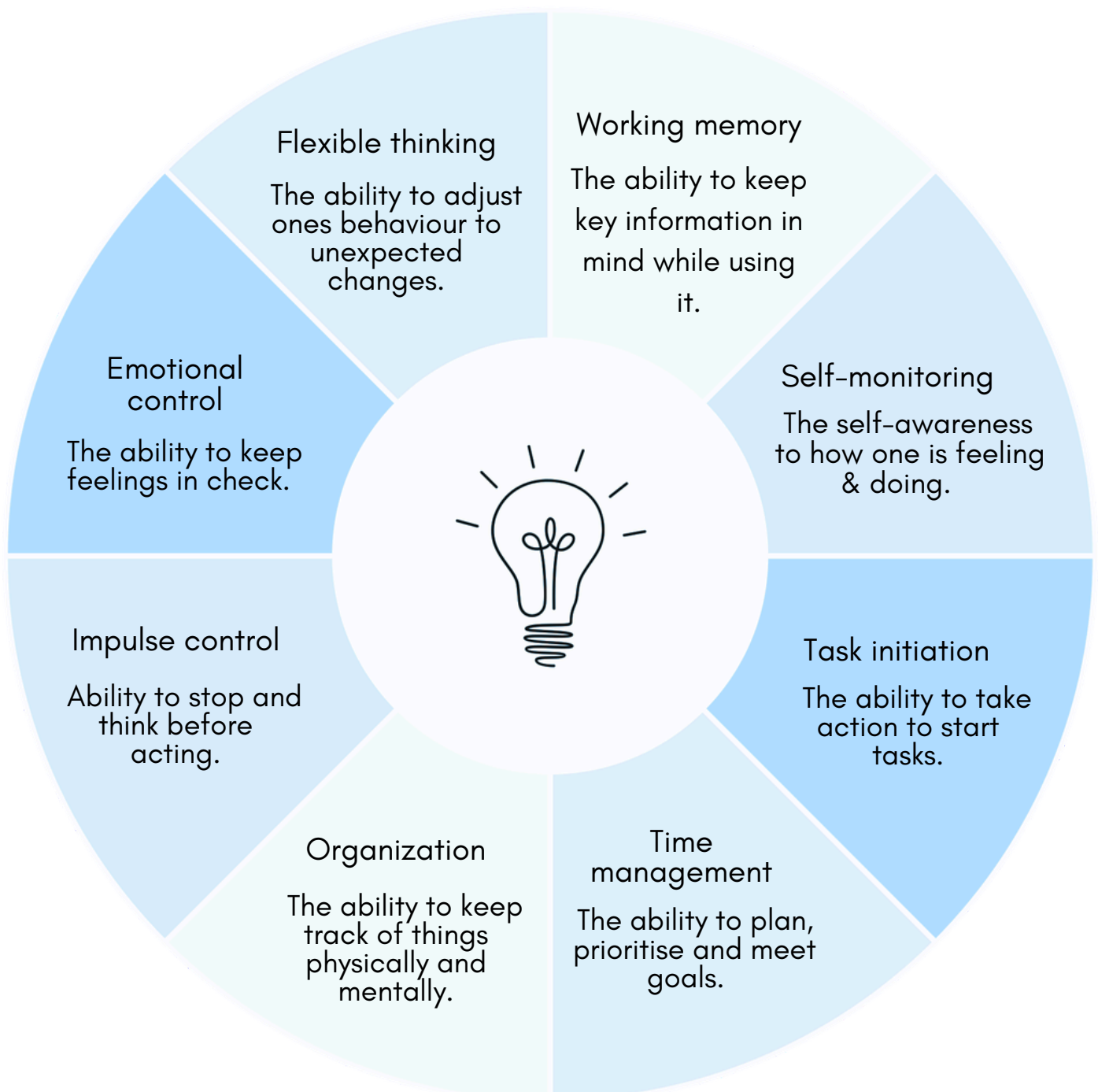
Executive function = the brain's management system working well.

Executive dysfunction = that system struggling to do its job.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION WHEEL

Executive function refers to mental skills that help us plan, meet goals, control impulses, follow multi-step directions, and stay focused.

Struggles with executive function can lead to difficulties with focus, emotional regulation, and impulse control.



TIPS FOR IMPROVING EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

FLEXIBLE THINKING

Boost creativity by imagining alternate endings for movies or books you've already experienced.

WORKING MEMORY

Try different memory techniques like lists, routines, visualization, or making songs and rhymes to recall information effectively.

SELF-MONITORING

In a notebook or journal, write about challenges you face and your thoughts, feelings and beliefs during these moments.

TASK INITIATION

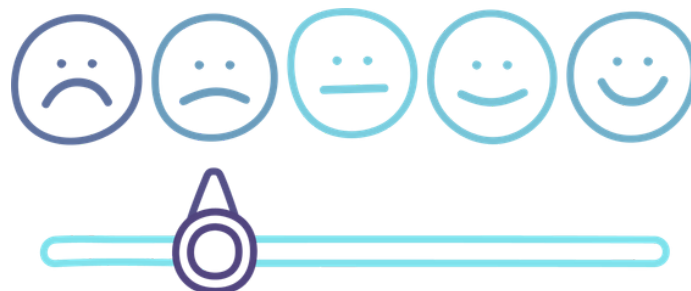
Pick one daily chore and break it into small, manageable steps of 5-10 minutes each. Start with the first step and work through each step, one at a time.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Organize your to-do list into categories: "urgent," "important," and "non-urgent." This helps you prioritize tasks and manage your time more efficiently.

ORGANIZATION

Declutter your home or office to stay organized and reduce overwhelm. Keeping your space tidy makes it easier to find items and feel more at ease.



EXECUTIVE FUNCTION COPING SKILLS

SELF CONTROL

- Pause and take a deep breath before reacting.
- Think "STOP" to interrupt impulsive actions.
- Exercise regularly to improve emotional resilience.
- Recognize your body's early signs of overwhelm.

PLANNING

- Write down tasks that need to be completed
- Add them in to a calendar or schedule
- Prioritize tasks, starting with the most important/urgent Plan ahead for tomorrow

ATTENTION

- Identify and remove distractions from your area
- Take regular breaks that include some type of movement
- Create a focus plan
- Avoid multitasking

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

- Name the feeling or sensation
- Talk about your feelings
- Write or draw your feelings
- Create a calm place
- Use sensory items to help calm down

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT
EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

MANAGING ADHD CHEAT SHEET

CREATE STRUCTURE

A structured routine helps individuals with ADHD manage distractions and focus.

BREAK DOWN GOALS

Break big goals into smaller, manageable steps to stay focused and make tasks feel achievable.

USE REMINDERS

In a distracting world, using lists or phone reminders can help you stay organized and on track.

SET A TIMER

Setting time periods for tasks, like cleaning for 30 minutes, enhances focus and makes goals achievable.

STAY ORGANIZED

Stay organized by creating to-do lists, keeping your space clutter-free with daily tidying, downsizing regularly, and completing small tasks immediately when possible.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Prioritize sleep: Aim for 7-9 hours to maintain focus, energy, and impulse control.
Stay active: Exercise boosts mood, focus, memory, and executive functions.
Eat well: Regular meals, ample protein, and limiting sugar, caffeine, and alcohol support mental and physical health.

SLEEP HYGIENE

Quality sleep supports mental health. Aim for 7-9 hours nightly to prevent anxiety, irritability, and poor focus. Not sleeping well?

Explore simple strategies to enhance rest...

Get regular. Maintain a consistent sleep schedule by going to bed and waking up at the same time daily, including weekends, to improve sleep quality.

Sleep when sleepy. Only try to sleep when you actually feel tired or sleepy, rather than spending too much time awake in the bed.

Get up & try again. If sleep doesn't come within 20 minutes, step away and engage in a calming activity until you feel drowsy, then return to bed to try again.

Use a sleep diary. Keeping a diary around sleep for a few days or a week can help you identify good and bad habits that may help or interrupt sleep.

Bed is for sleeping. Reserve your bed solely for sleep to reinforce its association with rest. Using it for activities like eating, working, or watching TV can disrupt this connection.

Avoid naps. It is best to avoid taking naps during the day, to make sure that you are tired at bedtime and to reinforce a clear routine around sleep.

Sleep rituals. Create a bedtime routine to signal your body it's time to sleep. Options include relaxing stretches, breathing exercises, a warm shower or bath, or a caffeine-free tea ritual.

No clock-watching. Many people who struggle with sleep tend to watch the clock too much. Frequently checking the time during the night can wake you up and reinforces negative thoughts.

A calm space. Ensure your bedroom is quiet, comfortable, and cool. Use enough blankets to stay warm, curtains or an eye mask to block light, and earplugs for outside noise.



SELF-CARE GRID

Like a battery, we experience energy boosts and drains. Reflect daily on activities, people, and places that energized or uplifted you, and those that depleted your energy or affected your self-esteem.

DAY	WHAT DID I DO TODAY THAT MADE ME FEEL ENERGIZED OR INCREASED POSITIVE EMOTIONS?
MON	
TUE	
WED	
THU	
FRI	
SAT	
SUN	

DAY	WHAT DID I DO TODAY THAT DRAINED MY ENERGY OR INCREASED NEGATIVE EMOTIONS?
MON	
TUE	
WED	
THU	
FRI	
SAT	
SUN	

UNDERSTANDING PROCRASTINATION

WHAT IS PROCRASTINATION?

Procrastination is the habit of avoiding tasks or seeking distractions to delay difficult or boring work. While occasional procrastination is normal, for some, it becomes a persistent challenge. In these cases, learning strategies to overcome it is essential.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

Struggling to meet deadlines, getting easily distracted, filling time with minor tasks, and repeatedly delaying important work despite consequences can all be signs of procrastination. This ongoing habit often leads to stress, which may impact sleep and overall well-being.

REASONS FOR PROCRASTINATION

People often fall into the procrastination cycle due to perfectionism, anxiety, ADHD, lack of routine, low self-esteem, or difficulty motivating themselves to complete unpleasant tasks.

THE PROCRASTINATION CYCLE

Procrastination stems from faulty beliefs about our abilities and the discomfort of tasks. When we underestimate ourselves or overestimate the difficulty, we're more likely to delay tasks. Understanding the procrastination cycle helps us break free and shift into action with the right tools.

THE PROCRASTINATION CYCLE



APPROACH THE TASK/GOAL

UNHELPFUL RULES & ASSUMPTIONS ACTIVATED

This can stem from low confidence, fear of failure, uncertainty, or exhaustion, as well as seeking comfort or distraction.

DISCOMFORT DRIVEN

The person feels discomfort about the task or goal, dislikes this feeling, and develops a strong urge to avoid it. To justify the avoidance, they find excuses to procrastinate.

ENGAGES IN PROCRASTINATION ACTIVITIES

CONSEQUENCES OF PROCRASTINATION EXPERIENCED

Consequences can be both positive and negative.

CONTINUE TO PROCRASTINATE NEXT TIME

THE DOING CYCLE



INSTEAD

ADJUST UNHELPFUL RULES & ASSUMPTIONS + TOLERATE DISCOMFORT + DISMISS PROCRASTINATION EXCUSES

APPLY PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO STOP PROCRASTINATING

CONSEQUENCES

The task gets done! A sense of achievement is experienced.

CONTINUE TO DO NEXT TIME, RATHER THAN PROCRASTINATE

OVERCOMING PROCRASTINATION

At the heart of procrastination is a desire to avoid discomfort, whether it's fear, anxiety, boredom, or exhaustion. By learning to sit with discomfort and using strategies to reduce it, we can overcome the urge to procrastinate.

Below are some simple tips to help you get started on overcoming procrastination.

Worst first. Tackle the hardest task first—everything else will feel easier afterward.

Use the momentum. Starting with an enjoyable task can boost positive emotions, helping maintain motivation and momentum for subsequent tasks.

Give me 5 (minutes). Set a 5-minute timer and focus on the task. Short intervals make tasks manageable, and even if you stop, you're 5 minutes closer to done.



PERFECTIONISM VS STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

Perfectionism and striving for excellence may seem similar, but their underlying motivations and effects are quite different, often leading to vastly different outcomes.

PERFECTIONISM

- Spending excessive time on trivial problems.
- Believing that everything has to be perfect all the time.
- Sets impossible standards for success.
- Motivated to action by the fear of failure or criticism from others.
- Experience distress, shame and guilt when not meeting goals.
- Can only see oneself as either perfect or a failure.

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

- Focuses time and effort on the most important problems.
- Has the ability to judge what calls for perfection and what does not.
- Sets standards that are challenging but achievable.
- Motivated by potential success, as well as happiness.
- Feel content and pleased of oneself based on both achievement and effort.
- Has the ability to see self from a balanced perspective.

GOAL BREAKDOWN

Feeling overwhelmed when facing new challenges or big goals is common. To build momentum, motivation, and confidence, break your goals into smaller steps. This helps manage stress and reduces procrastination. For example, if you're looking for a new job, you can break it down into tasks like: researching job options, updating your resume, and submitting applications.

GOAL TASK	TIME REQUIRED	SCHEDULE
Research jobs I may be interested in.	30 minutes	Sunday afternoon
Look through job ads to get an understanding of the job description/ qualifications needed for these jobs.	45 minutes	Monday when I come home from work
Update my resume to include relevant skills, qualities and qualifications.	30 minutes	Wednesday after dinner
Apply for 3 jobs I have found on local job search sites.	1 hour	Saturday morning

GOAL BREAKDOWN

GOAL:

<i>GOAL TASK</i>	<i>TIME REQUIRED</i>	<i>SCHEDULE</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>		
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ABC ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

An ABC analysis is a great first step in understanding your thoughts and learning how to manage your feelings and actions.

Here's an example of an ABC analysis from a thought diary:

A - Situation

This could be an actual event, a situation, a thought, a mental image, or a memory.

E.g. Walking into a party

B - Thoughts/beliefs

1. List the thoughts that connect A to C. Ask yourself: "What was I thinking?" "What was I saying to myself?"

2. Find the most distressing thought and underline it.

*E.g. "What if I say something wrong"
"Everyone will judge me"*

C - Consequences

1. Write down words describing how you feel.

2. Underline the one that is most associated with the activating event.

3. Rate the intensity of those feelings (0 to 100).

*E.g. - Panic (90)
Stressed (60)*

4. Write down any physical sensations you felt or actions you took.

*E.g. - Heart pounding,
lightheaded, dry mouth,
fast breathing
- Stopped for water*

Now it's time to practice! Follow the steps and examples above and think of recent situations that caused you to feel stress, overwhelm, or anxiety.

Take your time to write down the situation, the thoughts or beliefs you had in response, and the feelings and physical sensations that followed.

ABC ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

A - Situation

B - Thoughts/beliefs

C - Consequences

A - Situation

B - Thoughts/beliefs

C - Consequences

ABC ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

A - Situation

B - Thoughts/beliefs

C - Consequences

A - Situation

B - Thoughts/beliefs

C - Consequences

FOCUS PLAN

- 1 **Define the task.** Write down a task that you want to complete. For example 'complete my psychology assignment'.

- 2 **Break the task down in to chunks.** Break the task down into smaller steps to make it feel more manageable. For example, you might write steps like "read the chapter on psychological theories," "create a Word document for the assignment," or "write an introductory paragraph."

TASK STEPS	TIME REQUIRED
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

- 3 **Create a schedule.** Schedule the task(s) for a specific day/time. Also make sure to note down how you will remind yourself of each task (e.g. 'set a reminder on my phone').

SCHEDULE	REMINDERS

FOCUS PLAN

- 4 **Prepare for the task.** Note down how you will prepare for the task ahead of time, and how you will tackle possible distractions.

<p>Eliminate Distractions. List distractions you can eliminate before starting (e.g. put phone on silent).</p>	<p>Plan for Unavoidable Distractions. Create "If, then" plans for likely distractions (e.g. If my mum calls, then will say "Let me call you back in 30 minutes").</p>
<p>Materials and Supplies. List any items you will need to complete the task (e.g. laptop, course book, notebook).</p>	<p>Physical Preparation. List actions you will take to be ready for the task (e.g. set up my workspace, have a snack)</p>

- 5 **Imagine the outcome.** Many people underestimate the positive feelings that come from completing a task. To build motivation and momentum it can be helpful to describe the benefits of completing the task, and how you will feel as a result ahead of time. Have a go at that now below.
-
-

- 6 **Ready to go.** Now that you have done your planning and created your focus plan it is time to get started on your tasks!

PROBLEM SOLVING

WHAT IS PROBLEM SOLVING?

Problem-solving is a daily necessity, from managing schedules to assembling products. When challenges cause stress or anxiety, a clear and structured strategy can make tackling issues more manageable and less overwhelming.



WHAT PROBLEM SOLVING LOOKS LIKE

Problem-solving involves clear steps:

- Define the issue
- Brainstorm solutions
- Assess and discard unfeasible options
- Choose the best solution
- Implement it
- Review the results, and if the solution falls short, revisit your list and try another approach.

REASONS TO PROBLEM SOLVE

Engaging in structured problem-solving offers several benefits: it promotes action-taking over avoidance, sharpens decision-making, fosters patience, boosts confidence, and enhances self-efficacy.

Adopting this approach can significantly improve how you tackle life's challenges.

SOLVE FRAMEWORK

Stress or overwhelm can make it hard to move forward, as even small issues may feel massive with an overactive mind. A clear problem-solving strategy, like the SOLVE model, can help you regain momentum.

S	<u>SPECIFY THE PROBLEM</u> BE SPECIFIC. ASK YOURSELF "WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM FOR ME?"	
O	<u>OPTIONS</u> ADD ANY IDEAS YOU CAN THINK OF. DO NOT EVALUATE AT THIS STEP.	
L	<u>LIST PROS & CONS</u> WHAT ARE THE LIKELY BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES OF EACH OPTION?	
V	<u>VERIFY THE SOLUTION</u> CHOOSE THE BEST SOLUTION AND ACTION YOUR SOLUTION.	
E	<u>EVALUATE</u> WHAT WENT WELL? WHAT DID NOT GO WELL (IF ANYTHING)?	

WORKING BACKWARDS

To solve problems by working backward, start with the end goal and retrace the steps needed to reach it.

Identify what must happen at each stage until you arrive at the starting point. This technique helps clarify the process and plan actionable steps toward achieving your goal.

1

WHAT IS MY IDEAL SOLUTION/GOAL?

2

WHEN DO I NEED TO LEAVE/START WORKING ON THIS?

3

WHAT ITEMS DO I NEED TO GET TO MY GOALS/SOLUTION?

4

WHAT OBSTACLES MIGHT GET IN MY WAY TOWARDS THE GOAL?

5

WHAT ELSE MIGHT I NEED TO PREPARE FOR REACHING MY SOLUTION?

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a powerful tool for sparking creativity and finding solutions. Whether alone or with others, let your thoughts flow freely without self-censorship.

Use writing or drawing to capture ideas and explore possibilities—every idea can lead to an innovative solution. Just let inspiration take the lead!

