

The background is a light cream color with various decorative elements. There are several four-pointed stars in shades of yellow and pink. Large, soft-edged abstract shapes in teal, pink, and yellow are scattered across the page, creating a playful and modern aesthetic.

# Focus Forward

**A Playful & Practical  
ADHD Toolkit for  
Adults**

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## SECTION 1: Welcome to the Toolkit

**“You’re Not Broken. Your Brain Just Has a Different Beat.”**

### **A Note from Sayaka**

Hey you - yes, the one with 47 tabs open (mentally or literally). Welcome! I’m Sayaka Sayeed - a queer, neurodivergent Bangladeshi-Australian counsellor, ADHD advocate and coach, and founder of *Girls That ADHD*. This workbook is for folks like us - ADHD adults navigating a world not built for our brains. This workbook isn’t here to fix you - because you’re not broken. It’s here to help you understand your beautiful, chaotic, uniquely wired brain and give you real-life tools that actually work *for* you, not against you.

I made this toolkit because I know how exhausting it can be to try to fit into systems that don’t work for us. We’re told we’re lazy, disorganised, or too emotional - when in fact, we’re navigating life with a different operating system. This isn’t about fixing yourself. It’s about understanding your brain, learning what works for you, and embracing a life that feels aligned - not forced.

Let’s focus forward - gently, playfully, and in a way that honours who you are.

## **Why This Workbook Exists**

This workbook is your permission slip to do ADHD life differently.

It exists to help you:

- Understand your ADHD without shame
- Discover tools that actually work for your brain, not against it
- Create routines and systems based on energy and interest, not perfection
- Feel seen, supported, and celebrated - just as you are not as who you “should” be

## **My ADHD Story**

I grew up between worlds - culturally, emotionally, and mentally. I was the sensitive, bubbly kid with a loud laugh and a brain full of ideas. But I was also the kid who forgot her social etiquettes, spaced out doodling in class, and felt shame for things I couldn't explain. Fortunately (or unfortunately), I was smart, high achieving and socialised as a girl, so I got by well in school without understanding my brain worked a bit differently and understood that acting out would lead to social isolation and consequences. This quickly led to me becoming the shy, sensitive, and picky kid, who couldn't just smile and get on with it.

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Let's be real, I've always known I was "a lot." Big feelings. Fast brain. Never-ending curiosity. I navigated life in between cultures, expectations, and invisible mental load - while constantly trying to manage the chaos in my head.

As an adult, I masked those traits by overworking, over-caretaking, and trying to be what I thought I should be. In short, I was stuck in a constant cycle of burnout. It wasn't until my own diagnosis at the age of 26 - and counselling client after client with the same struggles - that I realised: we're not broken. We're just wired differently. And that difference? It's not a flaw - it's a feature.

It wasn't until adulthood that I realised my patterns weren't personality flaws - they were ADHD traits. Once I stopped masking, shaming, and over-explaining, I started *understanding*. And that changed everything.

It's now the superpower that allows me to support other ADHDers through therapy, my podcast 'Girls That ADHD,' and the community we've built at Umeed Psychology. Now, I help adults with ADHD - from all walks of life - learn to thrive by working *with* their brains, not against them. My work has helped hundreds of clients (and myself) feel more empowered, regulated, and free. I

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continuously get to help other ADHDers and neurodivergent adults find clarity, compassion, and connection.

My humble hope for this little booklet is to bring all those lessons together - for you. So, you feel less alone, more understood, and better equipped to build a life that works with your beautifully wired brain. Let's GOOOOOO!

### **What Makes This Workbook Different**

- **Neuro-affirming:** No shame, no blame - just understanding
- **Culturally responsive:** Made by someone who gets the whole cultural guilt and generational pressure thing
- **Values-based:** Because your life should reflect what matters most to YOU
- **Playful & calming:** Gentle colours, affirming language, and worksheets that won't make you cry (unless it's a good and well needed cry, because here we welcome and nurture big feelings with gladness)

## SECTION 1: Welcome to the Toolkit

### Who This Workbook is For

This e-book is designed for:

- Adults with ADHD (diagnosed, self-diagnosed, curious or navigating)
- Mental health professionals supporting neurodivergent clients
- People who are tired of trying to fit into systems never designed for their brains

### How to Use This E-Booklet (Without Overwhelm)

We know this workbook is packed with a *lot* of content, strategies, and activities - and if you have ADHD, that can feel both exciting and... totally overwhelming.

So, here's your friendly reminder:

**You don't need to do everything.**

You don't need to read everything in one go.

And you definitely don't need to have it all figured out by next week.

This e-booklet is here to *support you*, not pressure you. It's designed to be a companion - something you can return to again and again as you grow. You can read this in any order. Use what sticks. Toss what doesn't. Scribble in the margins. Make it yours.

## Potential Approaches to Try:

### 1. Read it all once (with no pressure to take action)

Skim through the whole booklet first just to get a feel for what's inside. This helps your brain map out what to expect and relieves the pressure to do everything *right now*.

### 2. Read the sections one by one as is - or start with what resonates

Although the sections in this workbook are organised in a way that flows well (at least for my ADHD brain, and from what I've seen support many clients), ***you absolutely don't have to go in order***. Follow your curiosity, your needs, or your current challenges. Whatever speaks to you is the right place to begin. Maybe that's emotional dysregulation, maybe it's burnout, maybe it's routines. Go where your energy naturally wants to go. Start there. It'll stick in your brain better that way.

### 3. Focus on one activity at a time

Instead of trying to do it all at once (hello overwhelm), pick *just one* strategy or worksheet to experiment with. Give yourself a week or two - or even a whole month - to explore it deeply. Print out the pages if that helps. Jot down what worked, what didn't, and what tweaks made it easier for your brain. Let it be messy, playful, and real. Progress looks different for everyone.

## SECTION 1: Welcome to the Toolkit

### **4. Journal your reflections**

Use the booklet as a jumping-off point. Write down your thoughts, challenges, discoveries, and wins. This can help slow down and process any changes, deepen your self-awareness and track your growth over time. Without tracking progress, you might easily lose motivation to keep trying.

### **5. Take breaks - this isn't a race**

Some sections of this workbook might bring up big feelings - especially if you've spent years masking, struggling, or feeling misunderstood. Be gentle with yourself. Take breaks. Let the insights land at your own pace. If something doesn't fully click yet, that's okay. Sometimes your brain just needs time, space, or the right conditions to process it.

There is no timeline for learning how to work with your brain. I'm a therapist with ADHD who works with other ADHDers every day - and *I'm still learning new things about it and about myself all the time*. Growth with ADHD isn't linear, and it's not about fixing yourself. It's about building a better relationship with your brain, one step at a time.

### **6. Work through it with a coach, therapist, or buddy**

You don't have to go through this alone. Processing your thoughts, patterns, and ADHD experiences with someone else - whether

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that's a professional or a trusted friend - can make a huge difference. It can help you feel supported, regulated, and motivated.

Some of the exercises might stir up emotions, bring insight into old patterns, or highlight habits that are hard to shift on your own. That's where community comes in. Whether it's through coaching, therapy, or even an ADHD buddy system, having someone to reflect with can offer accountability, validation, and fresh perspectives.

**Everyone needs support - including you. Especially you.**

**⚠ Remember: This is NOT a Replacement for Therapy**

This e-booklet is an educational resource - not therapy. It's here to help you understand your ADHD brain, not diagnose or treat anything. If you find parts of this bring up intense emotions, please consider reaching out to a counsellor, ADHD coach, or mental health professional for support.

**Now that we've set the stage, let's light it up!**

**All set?**

**Deep breath.**

**Alright - ADHD cape on. Let's dive in and make this workbook yours!**

## **SECTION 2: Understanding Your ADHD Brain, Traits & Language**

### **What is ADHD (really)?**

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder – wow, what a dreadful title) is not a lack of attention. It’s a difference in how we regulate attention, emotion, and motivation. ADHD affects executive function, impulse control, memory, emotional regulation, and the nervous system. It’s developmental and lifelong - not a personality flaw or lack of willpower.

### **The 3 Types of ADHD**

ADHD isn’t one-size-fits-all. It shows up in different ways for different people - and that’s why there are three official types. They’re based on the main traits someone experiences most strongly: inattention, hyperactivity/impulsivity, or combined.

#### **1. Primarily Inattentive Type**

This is sometimes what people used to call “ADD” (which is no longer a separate diagnosis).

##### **Key traits:**

- Easily distracted or “zoned out”

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- Struggles to stay organised or remember details
- Trouble following through on tasks
- Often labeled as “daydreamy” or “lazy” (which they’re not)
- May appear quiet, passive, or like they’re “not trying”

### **Real-life example:**

You sit down to do one task but end up scrolling for hours or starting five other things. You forget appointments, lose your keys, or completely blank on what you just read.

## **2. Primarily Hyperactive-Impulsive Type**

This type is more outwardly visible - often recognised earlier, especially in kids.

### **Key traits:**

- Restlessness (internal & external), fidgeting, tapping, bouncing
- Interrupts or talks a lot without realising
- Acts without thinking (impulsive decisions or blurting things out)
- Struggles to sit still or wait their turn
- Feels like they’re constantly “on the go”

## SECTION 2: Understanding Your ADHD Brain

### **Real-life example:**

You speak before thinking, find yourself pacing during phone calls, or jump from idea to idea without finishing anything. You might get told you're "too much" or "too loud."

### **3. Combined Type**

This is the most common type and includes *both* inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms.

#### **Key traits:**

- Easily distracted *and* restless
- Trouble focusing *and* sitting still
- May feel mentally and physically overwhelmed
- Gets bored easily, struggles with routines, emotional regulation issues
- High highs and low lows when it comes to energy and focus

### **Real-life example:**

You forget to do basic tasks *and* interrupt conversations. You start projects with enthusiasm but burn out quickly. You feel like your brain is racing even when your body's exhausted.

 **Important to Know:**

1. ADHD can look *very different* in adults than in kids - and in women, girls, and gender-diverse folks, it's often underdiagnosed because it doesn't always come with visible hyperactivity. Hyperactivity can be in the form of thought spirals and an overactive mind.
2. These types can shift over time. You might've been more hyperactive as a kid and lean more inattentive as an adult.
3. No type is "more real" or "more difficult" - they're all valid experiences of how a brain processes the world differently.

**Common ADHD Traits in Adults**

- Trouble starting or finishing tasks
- Forgetfulness and time blindness
- Emotional overwhelm and rejection sensitivity
- Hyperfocus and motivation challenges
- Sensory overload
- Sleep difficulties

## SECTION 2: Understanding Your ADHD Brain

### Reflection Activity: What ADHD Traits Affect You Most?

- I get overwhelmed starting tasks even when I want to do them.
- I hyperfocus and lose track of time.
- I forget things unless they're in front of me.
- I overthink or spiral from small triggers.
- I struggle with routines.
- I feel guilt or shame about things neurotypicals seem to handle easily.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

💬 **Therapist Reminder:** You may not experience every ADHD trait with the same intensity every day - and that's completely normal. ADHD isn't one fixed experience; it's a spectrum that shifts with your environment, stress levels, sleep, hormones, and more.

Every ADHD brain is unique. No matter your type, ADHD is *not* a flaw - it's a different way of experiencing time, energy, emotion, and focus. Learning how *your* ADHD shows up is the first step to working *with* your brain, not against it.

## **A Note on the Power of Language**

Before we go any further into the e-book, I wanted to acknowledge that the words we use to describe ourselves shape how we see ourselves. And for people with ADHD, language can often feel heavy, clinical, or shaming.

We hear words like 'disorder,' 'deficit,' 'impairment' - and over time, we internalise them. We start to believe that we are the problem, that we are broken or flawed.

## SECTION 2: Understanding Your ADHD Brain

But what if we changed the way we spoke about ADHD? What if we started seeing traits instead of symptoms, differences instead of deficits?

Psychiatrist Dr. Edward Hallowell introduced the term VAST: Variable Attention Stimulus Trait. This reframes ADHD not as a disorder, but as a different way of responding to the world - full of intensity, creativity, and sensitivity. It's not perfect, but it reminds us that we're more than a diagnosis.

### **Why the Language Matters**

- Calling it a 'trait' instead of a 'symptom' reminds you that it's part of who you are - not all of who you are or a disease.
- Saying 'I have ADHD' is different from 'I am ADHD' - the first creates space between you and the condition.
- Using terms like 'interest-based nervous system' or 'executive functioning difference' opens up curiosity, not shame.

## Language That Lifts (instead of limits)


Instead of this:


- “I’m so disorganised.”
- “I’m lazy and scattered.”
- “I’m too sensitive.”
- “I always mess things up.”

Try this:

- “I have a nonlinear brain that needs visual cues.”
- “I need more structure to get started, and that’s okay.”
- “I feel things deeply - and that’s a strength too.”
- “My brain works differently, and I’m learning what supports me.”

## Mini Journal Reflections

 *What are some words you’ve used to describe yourself that felt heavy or harsh?*

 *Can you rewrite them using affirming, curious language?*

*Example: Change ‘I always procrastinate’ to ‘I struggle with starting tasks when they feel too big or boring - maybe I need to break it down differently.’*

## SECTION 2: Understanding Your ADHD Brain

### **Therapist Reminder:**

You are not a problem to be solved.

You are a person learning to live in alignment with your beautifully wired brain.

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For the sake of this workbook, I'll continue using the words "ADHD" and "traits" as those are what feels affirming for me and where I'm currently at with my identity journey. I encourage you to practice using words that feel right and authentic to you as you continue reading on.

Yes, words have power but also...remember that you're the ones who put meaning into them. The "D" in ADHD can equally mean "disorder" or something completely unrelated, like "dinosaurs". I'm hoping that joke landed...and if it didn't well...that's okay, I'll still live and enjoy living in my own ADHD bubble where that was considered funny.

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools (Now with Extra Sass & Client Wins)

### 1. Attention Regulation

Your brain isn't short on attention - it's just giving it out like Oprah at a giveaway. 'You get attention! And you get attention!'... just not to the thing you were supposed to do. Not a lack of attention - a difficulty directing it.

#### Common Signs

- Zoning out mid-conversation and realising you've planned an entire holiday in your head.
- Opening 5 tabs, 2 snacks, and 3 side quests before responding to an email.
- Reading a whole paragraph and retaining approximately... none of it.

#### Try This

- Use a visual timer. Time is real when you can see it melting away.
- Keep a distraction journal. Because some thoughts need to park themselves somewhere **other** than your forehead.

### SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

- “Now, Next, Later” cards and break tasks into manageable steps by showing what you're doing now, what's next, and what comes later. It's especially helpful for ADHD brains that get overwhelmed by too many steps at once - think of it as a to-do list with a calming storyline.
- Play lo-fi beats and pretend you're studying for a 90s rom-com montage.

🌟 **Client Win:** *“Using lo-fi music and visual timers finally helped me write my thesis - and I actually enjoyed it.”*

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### Worksheet: My Focus Boosters

Write down 3 things that help you focus and 3 that hurt your focus.

#### Three things that help me focus:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### Three things that hurt my focus:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### How can I change my environment to increase access to focus and create barriers to the things that hurt my focus?

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

### 2. Executive Dysfunction

This is your brain's 'management team' - planning, starting, organising, finishing. It gets glitchy with ADHD. It's not procrastination. It's your brain doing the equivalent of buffering... indefinitely.

#### Common Signs

- You know what to do. You even **want** to do it. But starting? Feels like lifting a truck.
- Thinking about the task instead of doing it - for hours.
- Doing literally everything **except** the thing. Yes, even deep cleaning the toaster.

#### Try This

- Break it down. Smaller. No - smaller. 'Open laptop' counts as a step. Let the dopamine you get from ticking achievable tasks off build trust in yourself and propel you to keep going.
- Do a verbal countdown into a small movement: 5-4-3-2-1-blastoff-jump before you begin.
- Create a silly launch ritual - light a candle, wear a wizard hat. Whatever works.

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- Write a 'Done List' because yes, brushing your teeth **is** a win.

🌟 **Client Win:** *"Once I broke 'send that email' into 4 tiny steps, I finally got out of inbox purgatory."*

SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

**Worksheet: Practice The Tiny Task Breakdown**

<p><i>Example Task: Laundry</i> <i>Step 1: Gather clothes</i> <i>Step 2: Put clothes in machine</i> <i>Step 3: Dry clothes</i> <i>Step 4: Fold laundry</i> <i>Step 5: Put clothes away</i></p>	<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____</p>
<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____</p>	<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____</p>
<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____</p>	<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____</p>
<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____</p>	<p>Task: _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____</p>

### 3. Emotional Regulation

You don't feel things - you FEEL things. You're the Beyoncé of emotions. Feelings often hit fast and big. ADHD brains feel deeply - and often get stuck in spirals.

#### Common Signs

- One rude email = spiraling into 'I'm a failure' real quick.
- Overreacting then replaying the scene in your head like it's a Netflix drama.
- Shutdown mode activated after one small inconvenience (see: unexpected phone call).
- Feeling rushed and overwhelmed and like you are always running out of time.

#### Try This

- Box breathing: in-2-3-4, hold-2-3-4, out-2-3-4... survive.
- Create an Emotional First Aid Kit - fuzzy socks, meme folder, 90s power ballads.
- Name it to tame it. Saying 'I'm overwhelmed' out loud is weirdly powerful.
- Move your body: shake it out like a wet dog. Seriously. It works. In psychological and biological terms, we call this

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

“upregulation”. Honestly, Google it, it really changed the game for me.

- Externalise the emotion so you create some distance from it so that it doesn't identify you or overly cloud your judgements and actions. For example, saying "Anxiety is showing up today and making me doubt myself," instead of "I'm just an anxious person." This helps create space to respond with curiosity and compassion, rather than judgment or overwhelm.

☀️ **Client Win:** *"I used to spiral after small feedback. Now I pause, name the emotion, and use my fuzzy socks of power."*

### 4. Time Blindness & Motivation

There are two times: Now, and Not Now. Everything in between? Pure fiction. ADHD brains live in 'Now' and 'Not Now.' This means we often underestimate how long things will take or struggle to start until the deadline panic hits. We're not lazy - we just have a different relationship with time and motivation, which is interest-based, not importance-based.

#### Common Signs

- Underestimating or overestimating how long something will take by approximately 800%.

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- Starting a 2-minute task 12 hours before the deadline. Or starting a 12-hour task 2 minutes before the deadline.  
Classic.
- Feeling physically allergic to ‘boring’ tasks unless there's a fire under your ass.

### Try This

- Time block and Timebox it like it's a calendar rave.  
Flexible time blocking and time boxing involve setting aside chunks of time for tasks, but with wiggle room (time to procrastinate and transition between tasks) built in - so you're not punished for being human or having an ADHD brain that runs on vibes, not exact minutes. Instead of rigid schedules, you group similar tasks into time “blocks” (like admin, creative, rest) and use “boxes” to contain them, helping you stay focused without feeling trapped in a productivity prison. Set a start **and** end alarm.
- Use silly timers (chicken sound? Duck quack? The more chaotic the better).
- Create a Dopamine Menu so you can reward yourself without needing to buy a boat. A dopamine menu is a personalised list of activities that boost your mood and motivation, organised into categories that suit your

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

energy, time and vibes like low/medium/high effort, indoor vs outdoor, or free vs paid dopamine boosters. For example, under “Low-Effort + Free + Indoors” you might list “listen to a favourite song,” while “High-Effort + Paid + Outdoors” could include “dance class or hiking trip.”

- Try body-doubling. Someone watching you work = magic ADHD productivity spell.
- Creating accountability and deadlines that actually work for you might mean swapping guilt for creativity - like inviting friends over so you're forced to clean before they arrive (hello, socially-induced motivation!). It's all about turning “ugh, I should” into “oh no, they're coming,” because nothing lights a fire under an ADHD brain like mildly embarrassing external pressure.

☀️ **Client Win:** *“Putting timers in different voices made me laugh and move. I even started on time - once!”*

### 5. Impulsivity & Dopamine Seeking

If you've ever made a questionable purchase at 1am or texted your ex just to 'check in'... hi, welcome. Your dopamine-seeking missile system is online.

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### Common Signs

- You open your phone to check the weather and somehow order a mushroom-shaped lamp instead.
- Saying things mid-convo before your brain signs off on it.
- Impulse shopping, doom scrolling, or eating 6 biscuits while deciding what to eat.

### Try This

- Create a Dopamine Menu: Low, Medium, High effort options or break them down by other meaningful categories for when you're bored out of your skull. Actually write it down and stick it somewhere visible - because ADHD brains have the memory of a goldfish in a hurricane and will absolutely forget it exists 10 minutes later.
- Delay reactions: Give yourself a 10-minute pause before texting, spending, or rage-emailing.
- Put your credit card in a jar of rice. Or the freezer. Whatever works. Or setting aside a monthly budget for your dopamine purchases can help keep them controlled and reduce the guilt and shame you may feel from overspending.

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

- Name your impulse brain: 'Chaotic Brenda does not get to make decisions after 10pm.'

☀️ **Client Win:** *"My 'Dopamine Menu' stopped me from rage-buying activewear I don't need. I went for a walk instead!"*

### 6. Memory & Working Memory

Working memory = the brain's sticky note. ADHD version? The sticky falls off, gets eaten by a cat, or spontaneously combusts.

#### Common Signs

- Walking into a room and instantly forgetting why you're there.
- Reading something, forgetting it immediately, rereading, rinse, repeat.
- Needing to ask the same question 3 times and still forgetting the answer.

#### Try This

- Narrate yourself like a cooking show: 'Now I'm putting the keys on the bench.'
- Sticky notes. On mirrors. On your forehead. Wherever works.

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- Voice memos to Future You: Bonus if you do a British accent.
- Keep a 'Where Did I Put It' log. Harold the water bottle is MIA again.
- If it's not on your calendar, it isn't happening.

☀️ **Client Win:** *"Talking to myself like I'm narrating a cooking show sounds weird - but I've stopped losing my keys!"*

### 7. Restlessness & Movement

ADHD bodies are allergic to stillness. Even when you're exhausted, the fidget fairy is dancing on your spine.

#### Common Signs

- Leg bouncing that could power a small town.
- Pacing while on the phone. Or in deep existential thought.
- Trouble sleeping because your brain decided it's memory lane o'clock.

#### Try This

- Schedule movement breaks - toe taps, pacing, drop and give 10 pushups, spontaneous interpretive dance.

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

- Use fidget tools, stress balls, or just a pen cap you'll definitely chew on.
- Alternate postures: Sit, stand, floor nest, Gremlin squat.
- Build a 'Movement Altar' - a box of silly ways to get the jitters out.

☀️ **Client Win:** *"I added 2-minute movement breaks to my workday. Now I don't feel like crawling out of my skin by 3pm."*

### 8. Sensory Sensitivities

Your nervous system's motto: 'Too much, too bright, too loud, too scratchy, make it STOP.'

#### Common Signs

- Wanting to scream when fluorescent lights (we call them "big lights") buzz or someone chews loudly.
- Being absolutely done after 20 minutes in a crowded room.
- Wearing the same soft jumper 9 days in a row because it's the only thing that doesn't feel like punishment.

#### Try This

- Noise-cancelling headphones: AKA your sensory shield.

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- Build a sensory-safe zone: Blankets, fairy lights, calming scents, permission to hide.
- Wear comfy clothes like your life depends on it. (It might.)
- Create a sensory rating scale - because some days you're a 2, some days you're a 10 with sirens.

☀️ **Client Win:** *"Noise-cancelling headphones changed my life. I can actually focus in cafes now - and no murderous rage!"*

### **Beyond the Stereotypes**

ADHD isn't just about being hyper or distracted. It can show up as being forgetful, emotionally reactive, daydreamy, sensitive to noise or light, or chronically overwhelmed. It can be internal and quiet - especially in adults and people socialised as women. Many of us were missed in childhood and only understood our brains later in life, often after burnout, failed coping strategies, or a major life event.

### **Self-Reflection Prompt/Your Permission to Vent:**

*What made school, work, or relationships hard for you - that didn't seem to affect others as much?*

## SECTION 3: Core ADHD Challenges & Tools

### 🗨️ Final Thoughts: Go Gently with Yourself

If you're feeling overwhelmed right now, that's completely valid. There's a lot packed into this section - and no, you don't need to manage every ADHD trait every day. Start with a few tools that sound doable and see how they fit into your life. Think of this as a series of science experiments or like making a new friend or like a murder mystery party - with your brain. You're learning how it works, how it reacts, what makes it tick, and what makes it tantrum.

You're not trying to force yourself into productivity or punish yourself into change. That's a fast track to resentment - and nobody wants to be ghosted by their own brain. This is about partnership. About working **with** your ADHD brain, not against it. And here's the kicker: what works now might not work in six months. That's okay! Again, you're not broken. You're just wired for novelty and adaptability. This whole toolkit is about leaning into that, not fighting it. So go slow, get curious, and adjust often. You're doing a great job and I'm proud of you for even wanting to try.

## **SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation, Burnout & Your Nervous System**

### **Why We're Focusing on Emotional Dysregulation**

Let's get real: **emotional dysregulation is one of the most overlooked - but most life-shaping - parts of living with ADHD.** It's not just about "big feelings" or mood swings - it's the root behind so many daily struggles: the rushing, the spirals, the meltdowns, the overreactions, the freeze moments, the shame hangovers. And yet... most ADHD resources barely talk about it. Not here!

We're giving emotional regulation the attention it *deserves* because when you work on this piece, everything else gets a little more manageable. Regulating your emotions helps you...

- Handle transitions without spiraling
- Pause before snapping or shutting down
- Come back to tasks more easily
- Create space between a trigger and your reaction
- Feel safer and more connected in your body (which helps with focus, planning, memory, and motivation too!)

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

ADHD isn't just a "focus disorder" - it's a **nervous system regulation difference**. And emotional dysregulation is a core part of that. The more you learn to work *with* your nervous system, the easier it becomes to manage everything else.

So, in this section, we're not skipping it. We're diving in - with compassion, tools, and a reminder that you're not too sensitive or too much. You're just a human with a beautifully complex brain and a lit up nervous system that deserves support.

### **What Emotional Dysregulation \*Feels\* Like**

Imagine your brain is being chased by a bear - except there's no bear, just your overflowing inbox or that one text you forgot to reply to. Emotional dysregulation means your nervous system gets stuck in survival mode over things that feel 'small' to others but are **everything** to you.

Examples:

- You're five minutes late and feel like you've ruined your entire week.
- Someone gives you feedback and you spiral into shame for hours.
- A simple decision feels so overwhelming you shut down for the rest of the day.

## **Your Nervous System: Fight, Flight, Freeze (and Feeling Like Burnt Toast)**

Your nervous system is like a smoke alarm. Sometimes it's doing its job - alerting you to real danger. But sometimes, especially with ADHD, it's screaming over *burnt toast*. ADHD brains tend to get stuck in either overdrive (fight/flight) or complete shutdown (freeze/fawn).

This is not because we're dramatic or unmotivated, but is often because we've spent *years* masking, overcompensating, and pushing ourselves to meet expectations that weren't built for our neurotype. We've rarely been given the chance to fully rest, feel safe, or just *be ourselves* - and our nervous system knows it. Our nervous system starts to see everyday stressors - like a messy inbox, missed call, or unstructured time - as *threats*.

## **Polyvagal Theory — ADHD Edition**

Let's start with a helpful lens: **Polyvagal Theory**. It's a powerful way to understand how your body responds to the world around you. Your nervous system shifts between different states constantly - it's *not weakness*, it's just your body doing its primary job and protecting you.

The star of the show is your **vagus nerve** - a communication superhighway between your brain, heart, lungs, and gut. It helps

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

decide whether you're safe, or whether it's time to run, freeze, or fight.

Polyvagal Theory explains that we have three core nervous system states - like settings on a dial:

### ● **Safe & Social (Regulated)**

This is your *window of tolerance* - your grounded, calm, connected state. You feel like yourself and can handle things without shutting down or spiraling.

#### **What this might feel like:**

- Rest without guilt
- Able to connect with others and feeling like yourself while doing it
- Not spiraling over small things
- Present and focused
- You can start (and even finish!) tasks without panic (YES - THIS IS POSSIBLE!)

The goal is to spend most of your time in your 'window of tolerance' - the zone where you can think clearly, feel your feelings without overwhelm, and take action without spiraling.

### 🔥 Fight/Flight (Overstimulated)

When the vagus nerve senses threat, it kicks you into survival mode. Your body prepares to either *fight the danger* or *run from it*. You feel unsafe or overstimulated, so your body gears up to *do something fast*. This is where panic, frustration, or constant rushing live. ADHDers often live here without realising it - racing thoughts, panic planning, or emotionally reacting faster than we want to.

#### **What this might feel like:**

- Snappy, restless, agitated, or anxious
- Speed-running your to-do list but finishing nothing
- Hyper-focusing on stress but can't make decisions
- Feeling like you're always running out of time
- Distracted and unable to focus

### 🧊 Freeze (Understimulated/Shut Down)

If the threat feels too overwhelming to fight or flee, your nervous system hits the emergency brakes: freeze. You shut down emotionally, mentally, or physically. This isn't laziness - it's your body saying, *"It's not safe to try."* You go still, quiet, or numb - not by choice, but because your body is trying to keep you safe.

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

### What this might feel like:

- Not being able to move or start anything
- Everything feels too much - even replying to one message
- Doom scrolling but nothing's sinking in
- Feeling numb, disconnected, or out of it
- Avoidant or paralyzed by tasks
- Stuck in place with no motivation
- Like you're watching life from the outside

### Retraining Your Nervous System — Slowly, Gently, Consistently

One of the most important (and overlooked) parts of managing ADHD is **retraining your nervous system to stop seeing everything as a threat**. That buzzing text notification? Not an emergency. That pile of laundry? Not a crisis. But to a nervous system that's been stuck in survival mode for years - it *feels* like one.

Just like going back to the gym after a long break, you're not going to "lift heavy" on day one. But the more consistently you practice nervous system regulation - especially after small stressors - the more resilient you become. And yes, I know this sounds like a lot

## Focus Forward: ADHD Toolkit

of intentional and persistent effort, but as someone who has made it to the other side of this effort, I promise you it is absolutely worth it!

This is how you grow your **window of tolerance**. The more you pause, breathe, regulate, and reset *throughout your day*, the more safety signals your brain receives. Over time, that nervous system muscle strengthens - and tasks like doing the laundry or opening an email *won't feel like the world is ending* anymore.

### So... How Do We Get Back to Regulated?






The goal isn't to avoid stress forever (you actually do need some stress as motivation to get things done). It's to *notice* when you've shifted out of your window of tolerance and find gentle ways to bring yourself back.

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation






**Here's how you can start:**

### **Regulate Your Nervous System**

**If you're in fight/flight (overstimulated):**

-  Deep belly breaths (in through your nose, out through your mouth twice as long. Feel your belly moving.)
-  Splash cold water on your face or hold an ice pack
-  Try progressive muscle relaxation or stretch it out
-  Play calming sounds or brown noise
-  Write it out fast - brain dump the chaos

**If you're in freeze (understimulated):**

-  Do one small action (e.g., stand up, brush teeth, move your mug)
-  Watch something gentle but stimulating (lava lamp app, pet videos)
-  Say out loud: "I'm stuck, but I'm safe."
-  Walk around your room or step outside for 1 minute
-  Add a sensory input - light a candle, chew gum, or sip a cold drink

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💬 **Therapist reminder:** You are not “too sensitive” or “too reactive.” You’re a human with a tired nervous system trying to protect you the only way it knows how. Every time you choose regulation over reactivity - even just once a day - you’re building a brain and body that feels safer, calmer, and more able to handle life. That’s not weakness. That’s healing. 💖

### **Why Track Your Regulation?**

Tracking how regulated you feel daily helps you prevent burnout **before** it takes over. The goal isn’t to avoid stress forever or stay regulated all the time (you’re human, not a robot). It’s to *notice* when you’ve shifted out of your window of tolerance and find gentle ways to bring yourself back. Think of it like checking your fuel tank - don’t wait until you’re empty.

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

### **Activity: Window of Tolerance/Regulation Check-In**

Note down what each zone feels like **for you** (*i.e., what behaviours, habits, thoughts, emotions, body sensations do you experience at each zone*) using the examples provided earlier as a starting point, and what helps you return to a regulated state.

<b>Safe &amp; Social (Regulated)</b>	
Signs:	What keeps me here:
<b>Fight/Flight (Overstimulated)</b>	
Signs:	What relaxes me:
<b>Freeze (Understimulated/Shut Down)</b>	
Signs:	What stimulates me:

 **Activity: Your Burnout Scale (0%–100%)**

**A tool to check in with your body *before* it hits burnout.**

Burnout doesn't always hit all at once. It builds gradually - one missed meal, one skipped rest break, one internalised stressor at a time. The ADHD brain often misses early warning signs until it's too late, because we've trained ourselves to push through, keep going, and *over-function*.

This tool helps you map what your energy, emotions, behaviours, and coping look like at different stress levels - from fully rested to complete shutdown - so you can spot the signs *early* and make supportive adjustments.

Use this as a **regular reflection check-in** (weekly or even daily). Try to take action before you hit 50% - that's the sweet spot where regulation tools are still easier to access. The further up the scale you go, the harder it becomes to "bounce back" - so early care = long-term sustainability.

If you've been running above 50% for most of your life (I see you), be gentle with yourself. Instead of trying to jump from Level 100 to 0 in a week, aim to gradually shift down - from Level 100 to 75 over a month or two, for example. This process takes time. Honour your pace, offer yourself grace, and remember: awareness is the first step.

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

Here's an example.

### **Level 0 - 25% = Rested + Regulated**

- **Energy:** Energised, steady
- **Behaviours:** Flowing through tasks, flexible
- **Emotions:** Calm, clear, optimistic
- **Coping/Regulation Strategies to Maintain or Reduce Stress Level:** Full toolbox is available! Try workouts, creative projects, deep planning

### **Level 25% - 50% = Slightly Off**

- **Energy:** A little tired, mildly distracted
- **Behaviours:** Procrastinating small things, forgetting appointments
- **Emotions:** Irritated, scattered, impatient
- **Coping/Regulation Strategies to Maintain or Reduce Stress Level:** Try light movement, a walk, dopamine snack, short body scan

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### Level 50% - 75% = Dysregulated

- **Energy:** Low motivation, fatigue kicking in
- **Behaviours:** Snappy, zoning out, skipping meals, trouble focusing
- **Emotions:** Frustrated, guilty, overwhelmed
- **Coping/Regulation Strategies to Maintain or Reduce Stress Level:** Keep it simple: brain dump, change environment, Pomodoro with breaks

### Level 75% - 100% = Strained/Survival Mode

- **Energy:** Mentally exhausted, overcommitted
- **Behaviours:** Avoiding tasks, overbooking, masking in social settings
- **Emotions:** Anxious, stuck, disconnected
- **Coping/Regulation Strategies to Maintain or Reduce Stress Level:** Gentle tools: ice pack, music, soothing sensory input, 5-min tidy-up

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

### Level 100% = Burnout/Shut Down

- **Energy:** No energy, frozen or numb
- **Behaviours:** Total avoidance, emotional outbursts, shutdown or illness (YES, if you don't pay attention to your burnout, your body will find a way to be heard!)
- **Emotions:** Shame, resentment, hopelessness
- **Coping/Regulation Strategies to Maintain or Reduce Stress Level:** Use minimum effort strategies: dim lighting, weighted blanket, hydration, validating self-talk

Now try filling in your **own Burnout Scale** with personalised examples. You can even colour-code it and keep it somewhere visible as a visual check-in tool throughout your week.

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**Your Burnout/Dysregulation Scale (0%–100%)**

Level	Energy & Body	Behaviours	Emotions	Regulation/Coping

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

### 🧠 Why Matching Your Regulation to Your Capacity Matters

Not all coping strategies are created equal - and your brain can't reach for a 20-minute meditation or gym session when you're at 75% or 100%. That's okay. In fact, **that's expected**.

This is why it's so important to:

- Choose **low-effort, nervous-system-friendly regulation tools** when you're in the burnout zone
- Save **higher-energy strategies** (like cleaning, exercise, or deep journaling) for when you're below 50%
- Accept that your capacity will fluctuate - and **that's not a failure**, it's being *human*

💡 Being consistent with small regulation habits while you're at 25–50% makes it **easier to stay out of the 100% zone**. You're not "failing" when you need rest - you're succeeding at listening to your body. *Think of this as rebuilding trust with your nervous system.* Every time you respond to overwhelm with care instead of punishment, you're telling your body: *"I'm listening. You're safe. I've got you."*

## Focus Forward: ADHD Toolkit

### ***And a quick reminder...***

With ADHD, even the best tools can *stop working* over time. That's not a flaw - it's just how your brain craves novelty. You might love a certain playlist, grounding exercise, or visual timer for weeks... and then suddenly, it doesn't hit the same.

That doesn't mean you're doing it wrong - it just means it's time to refresh your toolkit. Stay curious. Try new things. Swap out strategies every so often. You're not being inconsistent - you're being adaptive. ✨

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

### **Ground Your Coping Strategies in These 5 Areas:**

Use the tools you've seen in earlier sections, explore others or ground your coping activities across these key areas, based on your needs and where you sit on your burnout scale:

#### **1. Name it & reframe it with compassion**

- *"This isn't laziness. This is freeze mode."*

- *"I'm not behind - I'm at capacity."*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### **2. Move your body (gently or energetically)**

- *Stretch, walk, shake, bounce - movement signals safety to the nervous system.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Ground your senses**

- *Cold water, deep breaths, soothing textures, familiar scents - use your five senses to return to the present.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Check your needs**

- *Ask: "Am I hungry? Tired? Overstimulated? Lonely?"  
Often the answer is simpler than it feels.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Connect with someone or something safe**

- *Text or talk to a friend, watch a comfort show, send a meme - connection helps shift you back into regulation.*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 4: Emotional Dysregulation

💬 **Therapist Reminder:** Update your burnout scale and regulation plan often - it's not meant to be static. It's a living, breathing reflection of *you* - and you're allowed to evolve. This stuff is serious. Chronic stress isn't just about being 'a little tired.' It can impact your immune system, relationships, and joy. You deserve to feel safe in your body. This section is your permission slip to take your wellbeing seriously 💖

## **SECTION 5: Building a Life that Works for Your Brain**

Welcome to the part where we stop forcing ourselves into morning routines stolen from billionaires with personal chefs and emotional support yachts. This section is all about building a life that actually works for your ADHD brain - not your neurotypical cousin's colour-coded calendar.


### **Your ADHD Values Map**


Before we get into routines and energy tracking, let's talk about why this section matters so much. Living with ADHD isn't just about surviving the day - it's about building a lifestyle that helps you feel like **you** in the long run. This means eventually aligning your daily energy with your long-term values. Because if we're always chasing goals that were handed to us by neurotypical society or undiagnosed parents, we're going to end up burnt out, disconnected, and wondering why we still feel 'off' even when we're doing everything 'right.'

## SECTION 5: Building a Life for Your Brain

While the tools in the last section help you respond to ADHD traits in the moment, this part of the workbook is about zooming out. What are you spending your energy on? Who or what are you building a life for? This section helps you anchor your days in what matters most **to you** - and when you do that, emotional regulation gets easier, burnout happens less, motivation starts feeling less like a rare magical unicorn and one day, you start enjoying life again rather than dreading it. And yes, I speak from both personal and client experiences.

ADHD brains aren't motivated by obligation - we're driven by **interest, purpose, and meaning**. Use this space to reflect on what truly matters to you.

 **Remember:** *Aligning your life with your values makes boring things slightly less boring.*



 **Reflection Activity: Your ADHD Values Map**

List 5 values that guide your decisions (*e.g. creativity, freedom, connection, learning, rest, family, relationships, health, spirituality, personal growth, career, activism*)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Write down why each one matters to you (*it's important to pinpoint the why because ADHD brains are driven by interest, purpose, and meaning. The WHY also provides more flexibility in how certain values can be practiced in your life. Goals can change as life unfolds, if the underlying value that drives them has meaning for YOU.*)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## SECTION 5: Building a Life for Your Brain

What routines or habits could help honour those values daily or weekly?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Build a Routine by Energy — Not Shame**

We're throwing out the idea of 'productive days' and swapping it for 'aligned energy days.' Because some days you're a squirrel on espresso, and others you're a plant in a thunderstorm.

Remember that having the expectation to be consistent and show up with the same level of energy and concentration every day is a neurotypical myth. It's okay to give 80% one day and 20% the rest of the week rather than upholding the expectation to give 100% every day and being stuck in a shame spiral and burnout cycle instead when you can't do it. Progress is progress. Aim for small progress over perfection on the really hard days (also, in general). Have trust in your skills and your ADHD ability to hyperfocus to create output that will balance out in the end. Succeeding isn't about who is the most talented, smartest, or fastest. Success comes from finding a pace and systems that helps YOU stay sustainably persistent enough to eventually find it. Think long-game, not short-term gains.

**Fun Fact:** Research suggests that the average person is estimated to be productive for around 3 hours in an 8-hour workday. While some studies indicate this could be closer to 2 hours and 53 minutes, others suggest it might be up to 4 hours. Regardless, it's generally accepted that the average worker

## SECTION 5: Building a Life for Your Brain

isn't productive for the entire duration of their workday. And these stats aren't even about people who have ADHD. I hope this gives you permission to be kinder to yourself regarding your expectations on productivity and consistency.

### **Create 3 flexible routines based on energy levels:**

#### **Low Energy Days (bare minimum)**

- Wake up → drink water → body scan → one gentle task

#### **Medium Energy Days**

- Wake up → breakfast → 2-3 key tasks → walk → wind down

#### **High Energy Days**

- Wake up → ride the dopamine wave → batch tasks → celebrate wins

### **Why Routines Matter for ADHD Brains**

For ADHDers, unstructured time can quickly lead to task paralysis or decision fatigue. Without clear routines or at least an idea of one, you might spend your mornings spinning in circles, unsure of what to do first - or end your day overstimulated, restless, or forgetting basic needs.

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Routines create predictability, which reduces the mental load of decision-making. They help your nervous system feel safer and more regulated - because your brain isn't constantly in "what now?" mode.

**Morning routines anchor your day**, easing the transition from sleep to action.

**Night routines support winding down** and create signals that it's time to rest.

These don't have to be rigid. Think of them as rhythms that protect your energy and reduce overwhelm - so you can start and end each day with more calm, clarity, and intention.

### **Morning & Night Routine Templates**

☀️ Morning Menu (choose 3–5 per day):

- Movement (stretch, walk, wiggle dance)
- Nutrition (actual breakfast counts, meal prep the night before or have a list of easy/no-cook meals ready to use)
- Focus ritual (lo-fi beats, Pomodoro, to-do list)
- Dopamine treats (sunshine, song, cat video, voice memo)

## SECTION 5: Building a Life for Your Brain

### 🌙 Night Menu (choose 3–5 per night):

- Screen wind-down (yes, even TikTok needs a nap)
- Reduce external stimuli to signal rest for your body (mood lighting, comfy clothes)
- Soothing activity (read, draw, journal, pace dramatically, skincare, hot shower)
- Plan tomorrow or brain dump your worries (but gently)
- Self-compassion check-in

### 📅 Create Your Weekly Rhythm Maps/Routines

- Draw (or print) a weekly grid.
- Divide your days into energy blocks: Morning / Afternoon / Evening.
- Fill it out like a game: What habits or tasks suit each block on low vs high energy days?
- After tracking your weeks over a month, can you identify any weekly patterns i.e., you have high energy on Mondays and low energy on Thursdays? If so, group high energy tasks and routines on Monday and low energy tasks and routines on Thursdays.

 **Your Weekly Rhythm Maps**  
**High Energy Routines & Habits**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

**Tip:** Leave buffer zones i.e., time to procrastinate, rest/regulate or transition between tasks. You're human, not a Google Calendar event. Include shorter buffer zones for high energy days.

## SECTION 5: Building a Life for Your Brain

### Medium Energy Routines & Habits

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

**Tip:** Leave buffer zones i.e., time to procrastinate, rest/regulate or transition between tasks. You're human, not a Google Calendar event.

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### Low Energy Routines & Habits

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

**Tip:** Leave buffer zones i.e., time to procrastinate, rest/regulate or transition between tasks. You're human, not a Google Calendar event. Include longer buffer zones for low energy days.

## SECTION 5: Building a Life for Your Brain

### **Reflection: What Matters Most?**

When your week goes well, what's usually happening?

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What feels nourishing, joyful, or grounded?

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Use your answers to build your week around what makes life feel like **yours**. Go back to your weekly rhythm maps and figure out how, when and where you can incorporate these activities throughout your days and week. Feeling regulated is a **NEED** to stay away from chronic stress and burnout and thrive with ADHD. It is **NOT** a luxury.

### **Therapist Reminder:**

You don't have to 'get it right' - you're building something flexible. Treat this like dance practice, not a test. If it doesn't work, we adjust and find something that does. Your brain isn't the problem - your system just needs to match your rhythm.

## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

Let's talk about goals. Not the rigid, hustle-culture kind (now, I don't believe in cancel culture, but I think we should definitely cancel "podcast bros" who reword and repeat what they learn from reading *Atomic Habits* by James Clear). The kind that feels doable, flexible, and actually exciting for your ADHD brain. This section will guide you through setting goals that feel aligned with your values and how you function best, using visuals, dopamine boosts, and gentle accountability systems that support **you**.

### Aligning Goals with Your Values (Without the Overwhelm)

When you have ADHD, traditional goal-setting can feel rigid, overwhelming, or like it's built for someone else's brain (because, honestly - it usually is). That's why this **Visual Goal Planner** is designed to help you build goals around your *values* - not just tasks or outcomes - so that what you're working towards actually *matters* to you and feels good in your body.

But here's the catch: **don't treat this like a strict to-do list**. This isn't about perfection or ticking boxes - this is about learning how to work *with* your brain, not against it. Think of it like a science experiment: you're trying things out, gathering data, and adjusting as you go. Maybe three goals in a week IS too much. Maybe one is

## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

just right. The goal isn't to be consistent every single day - it's to be **consistent enough** over time, in a way that feels *sustainable*, *meaningful*, and *compassionate*.

And while we're redefining things - let's also rethink what *progress*, *productivity*, and *consistency* look like. For neurotypical folks, it might be "doing three tasks at the same time every morning." For ADHDers, it could be:

- "I felt more regulated today."
- "I came back to the task quicker than I usually do."
- "I didn't spiral after a bad start - I pivoted and tried again."



## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

**Middle: 3-Month Focus:** What 2–3 key areas or projects do you want to prioritise over the next 90 days?

**Priorities based on yearly goals for the next 3 months:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Month 1	Month 2	Month 3
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
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<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

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**Base: 1-Week Plan:** What tiny, low-pressure steps can you take this week to move in that direction?

Monday	Thursday
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Tuesday	Friday
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Wednesday	Saturday/Sunday
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

**Side Notes - Daily Wins:** Write down 1–2 things you did today (even if it’s just “I rested when I needed to”). Progress counts in *every* form. *Tracking progress is **ESSENTIAL** for motivating ADHD brains.* Without an actual visual tracker, your short-term memory **will** forget you’ve done things for yourself and you will constantly feel like you are not doing enough or moving fast enough. Change happens by taking small steps over a long period of time.

Monday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tuesday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Wednesday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Thursday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Friday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Saturday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Sunday: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Habit Stacking & Dopamine Boosting Rewards

**Habit stacking** is a simple strategy that helps ADHD brains build new routines without relying on motivation (because let's be real -motivation is flaky). It works by *anchoring a new habit to something you already do automatically*. Think of it like hitching a new habit to a train that's already running on schedule.

Why it works for ADHD-ers: Your brain loves *structure with flexibility* and *shortcuts with meaning*. Habit stacking gives your brain a reliable cue to trigger the new habit, reducing the mental load of remembering and the resistance of starting.

### Examples:

- 🪄 After I brush my teeth, I take my meds.
- ☕ After I make coffee, I check my calendar.
- 🎧 After I finish a task, I play my favourite song as a mini celebration.

ADHD brains also thrive with **reward systems** - they help keep you engaged, boost dopamine, and make progress feel fun instead of like a chore. Try these ideas or create your own:

- Give yourself a sticker each time you complete a task (yes, adults can love stickers too).

## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

- Use 'dopamine snacks': like stretching, a fun song, or guilt-free scrolling - as rewards after focused work.
- Create a token jar: one bead or token per completed task → trade it in for a self-care treat at the end of the week (e.g., fancy snack, long bath, guilt-free rest).
- Sensory treats: weighted blanket, favourite tea, playlist, bath, 5 minutes in the sun, sticker
- Social rewards: share wins with friends, co-working
- Gamified apps: Finch, Flora, Tiimo can turn progress into points
- Adding to a progress/wins list, ticking off your To-Do List

### **Work:Rest Ratio Tracker – Finding Your Focus Flow**

ADHD brains often swing between two extremes: *hyperfocus until burnout* or *struggling to start at all*. Finding the right balance between work and rest helps you stay productive *without* frying your nervous system.

A helpful way to start is by testing out different **work:rest ratios**:

🕒 Try **25 minutes of focus + 5 minutes of rest** (aka the Pomodoro Technique).

🕒 Or go for **45:15** or **60:30** if you're deep into a task and don't want to break your flow.

The key? **Track how your energy feels after each round.** Use a colour-coded system, emojis, or a simple app to log how focused, tired, or regulated you feel after each session. Then iterate - treat it like a personal science experiment. You're not trying to "get it right," you're just learning what works for *your* brain.

💡 **Remember:** the goal isn't to force perfect productivity - it's to find a rhythm that feels *sustainable* and *kind*.

## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

### **Accountability Checklist – Keep Goals Moving Without Burnout**

Staying on track with goals - especially long-term ones - can be tricky with ADHD. That's where *accountability systems* come in: not to shame you into doing more, but to gently guide you back to your values and what actually works for your brain.

Here are some ways to keep yourself accountable *with compassion and flexibility*:

#### **Daily & Weekly Supports**

☑ **Body Double / Buddy System** - Work alongside a friend, co-worker, or online pal (even silently!) to stay on task.

☑ **Shared To-Do Lists** - Use tools like Google Keep or Notion to keep goals visible and collaborative.

☑ **End-of-Day Review** - Ask yourself:

- “What did I do today?”
- “What worked? What didn't?”
- “What can I try differently tomorrow?”

Do this with *curiosity*, not shame - it's all data!

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☑ **Weekly Check-In** – Chat with a friend, therapist, coach, or ADHD support group about your progress and roadblocks. Even 10 minutes can help refocus your energy.

### **Monthly, Quarterly & Yearly Reviews**

☑ **Monthly Reflection** – What’s one win from this month (no matter how small)? What felt aligned with your values?

☑ **Quarterly Checkpoint** – Revisit your 3-month goals: Are they still relevant and realistic based on your capacity? What needs adjusting? What patterns have emerged?

☑ **Yearly Vision Check-In** – Reflect on your 1-year vision: What did you learn? What shifted? What are you proud of? And what do you want to carry forward?

💡 **Tip:** Set reminders in your calendar for these reviews or make it a ritual - light a candle, grab your dopamine snack, and make it something you look forward to.

💎 **Remember:** accountability isn’t about perfection - it’s about staying connected to yourself and your “why,” one compassionate check-in at a time.

## SECTION 6: Setting ADHD-Friendly Goals

### **Creative Vision Board (Cut + Paste Style)**

This one's for your *dreamy, intuitive, visual* ADHD brain - the part of you that feels what matters before you can explain why. Get your hands on some paper or open an empty Word/Canva document to create a vision board that represents where you're headed - not just what you want to *do*, but how you want to *feel*. Think colours, textures, moods, words, quotes, doodles, or magazine cutouts. Don't worry about making it look perfect - make it look like *you*.

### **Things to add to your vision board:**

- 🌈 What lights you up?
- 💡 What kind of life are you imagining?
- ✍️ What vibes do you want to carry into the next chapter?

Stick your vision board somewhere you'll actually *see it* - on your wall, fridge, desk, or even the back of your bathroom door. If you choose to do a digital vision board, put it up as your desktop background. Let it be a visual nudge, a gentle motivator, and an inspired reminder that your journey doesn't have to be linear - it just has to feel *authentic*.

- 🌟 Make it beautiful, messy, bold, quiet - whatever feels most *you*.

🗨️ **Therapist Reminder:**

Progress doesn't have to be perfect - it just has to feel *good enough* to keep going. You're not falling behind if you need to change direction, scale back, or take a break. Goals aren't linear, and success doesn't look the same every day. Expecting it to be is just unfair to yourself and is an unrealistic expectation for your ADHD brain.

You're building a life that works *with* your brain - not chasing gold stars in hustle culture.

On lower-energy days, remember to check your **Dopamine Menu (Section 3)** and choose tasks and rewards that meet you where you are.

You can also use your **Energy-Based Task Planner (Section 4)** to work with your natural rhythms.

Gentle progress is still progress. Be kind to yourself - you're doing beautifully. 💖

## SECTION 7: The Shame Spiral & Inner Critic Work

Welcome to the emotional heart of this workbook - the part where we stop pretending we're just disorganised and start calling out the shame monster for what it is: a lie that says your worth is measured by how 'productive' or 'consistent' you are.

If you've ever called yourself lazy, flaky, or not enough - this section is for you. ADHD brains are particularly prone to internalising shame because our world isn't designed with us in mind. What looks like a 'simple task' to someone else might feel like climbing Everest to us. So, we end up blaming ourselves. Let's stop that cycle. Let's get curious about it instead.

### **What is Shame + Why ADHD Brains Feel It More**

So many of my ADHD clients tell me they feel *guilty* for not doing enough, not living up to their potential, or not being as productive as they "should" be. But when we unpack it, it's often not guilt they're feeling - it's shame dressed up in a guilt costume.

### **Here's the difference:**

Guilt is about something you did and says "*I did something wrong. I forgot to reply to that email.*" Shame is about who you *are* and

## Focus Forward: ADHD Toolkit

says *“There’s something wrong with me. I’m so disorganized, I’ll never get it right.”*

Guilt is about behaviour and can actually help us reflect or grow. Guilt can be uncomfortable but useful – it motivates change. Shame, on the other hand, attacks your identity and chips away at your self-worth - it tells you that you’re lazy, bad, broken, or not good enough.

It’s so important to differentiate the two, because how you respond emotionally - and what kind of support or self-talk you need - depends on which one you’re feeling. Guilt might call for a small repair or a new plan. Shame calls for compassion, unlearning internalised expectations, and reminding yourself: *you are not a problem to be fixed -you’re a person learning to work with your brain, not against it.*

ADHDers are especially prone to shame because we’ve spent so much of our lives being told - directly or indirectly - that the way we think, feel, and function is *wrong*. We’ve had to work in systems that weren’t built for our brains, measured by standards that don’t take our needs or strengths into account. Over time, those messages seep in and become stories we tell ourselves: “I’m lazy,” “I should be better by now,” “What’s wrong with me?”

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

This is called **internalised ableism** - when we unconsciously absorb society's negative beliefs about neurodivergence and start turning those judgments inward. It often shows up as harsh self-talk, perfectionism, people-pleasing, masking, or burning ourselves out trying to keep up with expectations that were never designed with us in mind.

And here's the most important part: **it's not your fault**. You didn't choose to internalise these messages - you were simply trying to survive in a world that didn't give you the tools or accommodations you needed.

To begin unlearning internalised ableism:

- Start noticing when your inner critic uses words like “should,” “lazy,” “too much” or “not enough.”
- Practice externalising those thoughts (e.g., “That’s not *me* talking - that’s internalised ableism again”).
- Reframe your traits as *differences*, not defects.
- Build self-compassion by surrounding yourself with ADHD-affirming communities, content, and professionals who understand your experience.

Your brain isn't broken. It's just been misunderstood. And it deserves care, not criticism.

## Unmasking Shame and Negative Self-Talk

### Activity: Visualise & Rewrite Your Inner Critic

Ever get hit with a thought like “*I’m a mess*” or “*I’ll never get it together*”? That’s where **externalisation** comes in - a narrative therapy tool that helps you separate *yourself* from your inner critic. Because guess what? **You are not your thoughts.**

- What does your inner critic look/sound like? Draw or describe them below. Shame thrives in being kept a secret. Exposing them out in the open, takes away its power.
- Name them. Make them silly if you want - shame hates humour.
- What do they usually say to you?
- Have an honest conversation with them. Tell them what you find helpful vs not helpful. What would you like them to say to you instead?
- What do they **really** need (e.g. safety, reassurance, boundaries)?
- How can you give them what they need?

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

### Example:

#### 👉 Step 1: Identify the thought.

"I'm a mess."

#### 👉 Step 2: Give it a character name and personality.

Mine's called **Judgey Jeff**. He wears a too-tight suit, carries a clipboard, and acts like he's the unpaid manager of my life. He shows up every time I forget something or fall behind, always ready to throw in a snarky comment.

#### 👉 Step 3: Get curious.


What does Judgey Jeff *sound* like? What does he *want*? What is he *afraid of*?

Maybe he sounds like that one disapproving teacher. Maybe he wants you to "get it together" so you don't feel embarrassed. Maybe he's afraid people won't love you unless you're perfect.

#### 👉 Step 4: Talk back or reassure.

"Thanks, Jeff. I get that you're trying to protect me in your own weird way... but I've got this now."

Externalising your thoughts gives you space to respond with understanding and compassion instead of criticism - and reminds you that *your inner voice doesn't always get the final say*. YOU do.



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**Activity: Visualise & Rewrite Your Inner Critic**

*Use this space to draw out and visualise your inner critic*

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

What do they usually say to you

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Why do they think the way they talk to you is helpful? Where did they learn this from? Has it worked before?

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What do they **really** need (e.g. safety, reassurance, boundaries)?

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How can you give them what they need? E.g., actions, changes in self-talk, self-trust etc.

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What can they say that would be more helpful to you (sometimes your inner critic doesn't genuinely know that there are better or kinder ways to be helpful and get their point across to you)

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## **Exercise: Replacing All-or-Nothing Thinking with Balanced Thoughts**



ADHDers often fall into all-or-nothing or extreme thinking as a kind of mental safety mechanism - it helps create a sense of control in a world that often feels chaotic or overwhelming. When the ADHD brain struggles with planning, uncertainty, or emotional regulation, thinking in black-and-white terms (“If I can’t do it perfectly, I won’t do it at all” or “I’m either productive or a total failure”) can feel oddly comforting.

It simplifies complexity, reduces decision fatigue, and offers temporary relief from the anxiety of grey areas - but over time, it can fuel burnout, shame, and cycles of avoidance.

Recognising this pattern is the first step in gently challenging it with more balanced, compassionate thoughts.

**Example Thought:** “If I don’t do it perfectly, I’ve failed.”

- **Evidence for:** I didn’t complete all my tasks.
- **Evidence against:** I completed the most important ones, and I’m learning to pace myself.
- **Balanced Thought:** “Progress matters more than perfection. And I am progressing.”



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### **Worksheet: Rethinking Shame & Rewriting Your Internal Script**

Now, real talk - it might feel *weird* or even exhausting to start doing this. That's totally normal. If your brain is used to thinking in extremes, especially when shame gets loud, practicing this kind of gentle, curious self-talk might feel unnatural at first. But think of it like learning any new skill - you're not "bad" at it, you're just *new* at it. The more you practice, the more your brain will begin to offer more balanced, compassionate thoughts on its own. It takes intention, repetition, and a lot of patience - but it's so worth it.

Here's a simple worksheet to help you start rethinking shame and rewriting your internal script:

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**Activity: Rethinking Shame & Rewriting Your Internal Script**

*Fill this out and be prepared for the next time your inner critic pops up.*

*The goal isn't to silence it completely - it's to teach it a new script.*

<b>Thought/Critic Voice</b>	<b>Evidence For</b>	<b>Evidence Against</b>	<b>Balanced Reframe</b>
<i>"I'm useless and always falling behind."</i>	<i>I've missed some deadlines.</i>	<i>I've also been managing other things well.</i>	<i>"My brain works differently. I still get things done, just at my own pace. I'm doing my best with what I have."</i>

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

### Self-Compassion Affirmations & Scripts

If you're finding it hard to come up with kinder thoughts - especially when you're deep in shame or overwhelm - that's okay. Try using (or tweaking) one of these self-compassionate scripts until it starts to feel more natural. Feel free to underline/highlight the ones that resonate:

- "I'm allowed to rest without earning it."
- "My worth isn't based on output."
- "This feeling will pass, and I'll still be me - whole, worthy, human."
- "I'm not lazy - I'm navigating a brain that wasn't built for this system."
- "Even if I'm struggling, I still deserve kindness."
- "I wouldn't say this to a friend - so why say it to myself?"
- "I'm doing the best I can, and that's enough right now."
- "Being imperfect doesn't make me a failure - it makes me human."
- "My brain is different, not broken."
- "I'm allowed to need help and still be whole."
- "I'm learning to work **with** my brain, not against it."

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You don't have to believe the words fully yet. Just start saying them or put them up somewhere highly visible e.g., your bathroom mirror, your computer screen. With time and repetition, they begin to soften the edges of your inner critic - and plant the seeds for a more compassionate inner voice.

### **Finding & Owning Your ADHD Strengths**

One of the most powerful ways to rewrite shame is to reconnect with your strengths. ADHDers often have strengths that don't fit traditional productivity models - but that doesn't mean they're not powerful. Here's how to start uncovering yours:

**Ask people who love you or who you trust:** "What do you think are my best qualities or strengths?" This might feel awkward, but the right people will be more than happy to sing your praises! And if nobody can help, this is your sign to venture out and find better friends and people in your life. You 100% deserve it.

**Try an Ikigai exercise:** This is a reflective tool that helps you uncover your unique strengths and sense of purpose by exploring the sweet spot where four areas overlap: what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for (or valued for). A quick google search should help you find a tutorial on how to complete one. But, to try it,

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

draw four overlapping circles and label each one with those categories (*what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid or valued for*). Start jotting down words, skills, passions, or roles that come to mind in each section - for example, maybe you love writing, you're good at empathising, the world needs more mental health support, and you're valued for your honesty. Where these circles meet is your Ikigai - the intersection of joy, talent, meaning, and contribution. For ADHDers especially, this can be a grounding way to recognise how your unique brain can align with fulfilling work and life, even if the path looks different from the norm.

### **Reflect on moments you felt most proud, present, or alive:**

- What traits and skills were you using?
- What were you like before the world told you to “be more normal”? Think back to what you enjoyed in your childhood or teenage years.
- When do you feel most like yourself?
- What parts of your personality feel energising rather than exhausting?
- What do people often come to you for help with?

### Common ADHD Traits That Can Be Strengths

When you live with ADHD, it's easy to get caught up in what's *hard* - the forgetfulness, the overwhelm, the executive dysfunction. And because some of your natural abilities come so effortlessly, you might not even recognise them as strengths.

Many ADHDers are so used to masking, self-criticism, or hearing only what they're "not good at" that they overlook what makes their brain *brilliant*. But your traits aren't just quirks or challenges - they can also be superpowers in the right context. Here are some common ADHD traits that, when embraced and supported, can become powerful strengths:

#### Hyperfocus:

- When something sparks your interest, your focus can be intense and laser-sharp.
- This can lead to deep knowledge, flow states, or creating something truly incredible.
- **Use it for:** creative projects, deep research, learning a new skill.

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### **Big-picture thinking:**

- You often see connections others miss, thinking outside the box and questioning the norm.
- You might have ideas that disrupt, reframe, or innovate existing systems.
- **Use it for:** strategy, vision-setting, designing inclusive or creative solutions.

### **Creative problem-solving:**

- You tend to approach problems in non-linear, unconventional ways - and that's a gift!
- ADHD brains are great at coming up with multiple solutions quickly.
- **Use it for:** brainstorming, design, pivoting when stuck.

### **Empathy and emotional sensitivity:**

- You feel things deeply and often pick up on unspoken emotions in others.
- You're likely to show up for others with compassion, humour, and emotional insight.
- **Use it for:** people-centered jobs (this is why I love being a therapist!), caregiving, peer support, writing, art, or advocacy.

**Spontaneity:**

- You're open to change, often bringing energy, humour, and adventure to a group.
- You're more willing to take chances and explore new things.
- **Use it for:** travel, live performance, creative workshops, intuitive decision-making.

**High energy (in bursts!):**

- You can accomplish a huge amount in a short period of time when motivation hits.
- This makes you great in crisis, on deadlines, or when inspiration flows.
- **Use it for:** event management, content creation, short sprints of productivity.

**Pattern recognition:**

- You might notice trends, inconsistencies, or connections before anyone else does.
- This helps in spotting problems early or generating new ideas that feel "ahead of their time."
- **Use it for:** data analysis, coaching, intuitive business strategy.

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

### **Risk-taking and curiosity:**

- ADHDers tend to try new things without overthinking, which can lead to big leaps.
- You're likely to experiment and iterate faster than others.
- **Use it for:** entrepreneurship, creative exploration, activism.

### **Sense of humour & storytelling:**

- Many ADHDers use humour and storytelling to make sense of their world.
- You might be the person who brings lightness, play, and relatability into heavy spaces.
- **Use it for:** writing, podcasting, teaching, client work.

### **Resilience:**

- Living in a world not built for your brain means you've likely developed deep resilience, resourcefulness, and self-awareness.
- **Use it for:** mentoring, advocacy, guiding others who feel different or left behind.

### **Create Systems That Centre Your Strengths**

Knowing your strengths is the first step. The next is designing systems that *actually* help you *use* those strengths - not just admire them. These systems should support you to shine, feel energised, and reduce the constant friction that comes from trying to operate in neurotypical ways. Don't force yourself into productivity styles that exhaust you.

Here are some playful but practical ways to build strength-based systems:

- **Work in sprints, not marathons:** Your brain thrives on bursts of energy, not long hauls. Tackle tasks in short, focused sessions (10-30 minutes), then take a brain break! The Pomodoro technique, playlist timers, or using your “interest juice” wisely can help.
- **Set timers, not pressure:** A gentle countdown clock can create urgency *without* the stress of perfectionism or unrealistic expectations. Use visual timers, apps with dopamine rewards, or even your favourite lo-fi playlist to keep time.

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

- **Co-work with a body double or friend for accountability:** Just having someone around (even virtually on mute!) makes it easier to start, stay on track, and feel less alone. Try apps like Focusmate or just text a friend: “Wanna body double for 30 mins?”
- **Use visual, colourful, playful systems:** Your brain loves novelty! Think sticky notes, colour-coded whiteboards, rainbow Google calendars, or themed to-do lists or bingo cards. Play with tools until they feel fun enough to *want* to use. If it’s engaging, you’re more likely to actually use it.
- **Delegate the boring, challenging and executive-function-draining tasks wherever possible:** ADHD brains burn more fuel doing certain things. If it drains you - cleaning, admin, logistics - ask for help from your community or outsource it. If you don’t have the finances to pay for help right now, have a look and see if you can accommodate for help in your budget going forwards or make it a goal for the near future. The investment is totally worth it!

### **Quick Self-Reflection: System Check**

- What systems make things *easier* for me right now?
- What systems have I outgrown or feel too rigid?
- What's something *fun* I could try next week that supports one of my strengths?

You don't need to overhaul your life. You just need a few good structures that *stick* - because they're designed for *you*.

### **Client Story: From 'Lazy' to Leader**

One of my clients was convinced he was 'lazy' because he couldn't stay on top of life admin. Once we explored the executive functioning challenges underneath and he learned to work with his brain, he not only built systems that worked - he also started a neurodivergent collective. It wasn't about trying harder or being mean to himself; it was about trying differently.

## SECTION 7: Shame Spirals & Inner Critic Work

### 💬 **A note on the Ikigai:**

It is important to acknowledge that the version of the Ikigai stated in this chapter is a more Westernised adaptation of the original Japanese concept. In its true cultural context, Ikigai isn't just about finding your ideal career or purpose - it's about the small, everyday things that bring meaning to life. It could be the warmth of the morning sun, the smell of your favourite meal, or a quiet moment with someone you love (kind of sounds like a dopamine menu!). While we use to reflect on meaningful work, relationships, hobbies, I invite you to also consider the simple, gentle things that give your life richness, ease, and joy. That, too, is Ikigai.

### 💬 **Therapist Reminder:**

You don't have to be productive the "normal" way. You're allowed to be creative, strategic, playful, and unconventional. You're not broken. You're navigating a world that wasn't built for your brain, and you're doing it with courage. The shame spiral doesn't get to drive anymore. You do - and you've got tools, humour, and community riding shotgun. So why not design your life around what *actually works* for you instead? 💖


## SECTION 8: Your ADHD Toolkit


Welcome to your ADHD survival kit - but make it sensory-friendly, app-supported, and deeply affirming. This section includes tools you can turn to on tough days (or even average ones). Think of it as your go-to box of support for regulating, regrouping, and restarting.

### ADHD-Friendly Apps


Sometimes, the right tool can make all the difference - especially when it's designed with neurodivergent brains in mind. These apps are not just functional, they're fun, visual, and dopamine-friendly to help you stay on track without the overwhelm.


Here are some favourites to try:


 **Tiimo** – A visual daily planner that's actually *cute*. Fully customisable with icons, colours, and timers to help you see your day at a glance. Like a gentle schedule you'll actually want to look at.


 **Goblin Tools** – Your little AI assistant that breaks tasks down into bite-sized steps, checks tone for emails, and even helps plan meals. Perfect for when executive dysfunction strikes.

## SECTION 8: Your ADHD Toolkit

 **Brain Toss** – Got a thought you *can't* forget but no time to write it down? Quickly record a voice note or snap a pic and send it straight to your inbox. Brain dump = sorted.

 **Finch** – A virtual self-care pet that celebrates your small wins. Set goals, journal, reflect - and get rewarded with hugs from your adorable bird buddy.

 **Flora** – A gamified focus timer where staying off your phone helps grow a tree. Great for Pomodoro-style sprints with a cute nature twist.

 Try them out, keep what works, and remember - tech is just a tool. You're the real magic behind the progress.

### **Sensory Toolkit Suggestions**

ADHD isn't just about focus - it's also deeply tied to how your nervous system responds to the world around you. When you're overstimulated, under-stimulated, anxious, or stuck in a freeze mode, having a **sensory toolkit** can help bring you back to centre.

This is your invitation to create a *sensory box, basket, or corner* - a go-to spot filled with tools that soothe or energise you, depending on what your body needs. You can use it during moments of overwhelm, transitions between tasks, or whenever you feel dysregulated.

## Focus Forward: ADHD Toolkit

Here are some ideas organised by sense - mix and match to create your personalised calm kit:

### **Touch**

- Weighted lap pad or blanket
- Fidget ring, cube, or textured keychain
- Soft fabric, velvet swatch, or plush toy
- Stress ball, kinetic sand, or therapy putty

### **Smell**

- Essential oils (lavender = calming, peppermint = energising)
- Scented putty or lotion
- Herbal tea bags (yep, even just sniffing them counts!)

### **Sound**

- Noise-cancelling headphones
- Calming rain sounds, white noise, or nature ambience
- Playlist of your comfort songs or nostalgic music


## SECTION 8: Your ADHD Toolkit


### Sight

- Soft lighting or a warm lamp
- Visual timers (like sand timers or time cubes)
- Lava lamp, slow animations, or soothing screensavers
- Inspiring affirmations or calming visuals

### Taste


- Chewing gum or mints
- Herbal tea
- Small grounding snacks (e.g., crunchy crackers, dark chocolate, dried fruit)


 **Bonus Tip:** Keep it somewhere easy to reach and label it something fun like “Calm Kit,” “Brain Break Box,” or “Sensory Reset Corner.” The goal isn’t perfection - it’s regulation. Listen to your body and give it what it needs.


 **ADHD First Aid Kit – For When Everything Feels Too Much**


Some days, it's not about productivity - it's about *survival with softness*. When your brain is overwhelmed, overstimulated, or just *done*, reach for your **ADHD First Aid Kit**: a short list of grounding, regulating actions to help you reset gently.

Some days, your only job is to *pause* and tend to your nervous system. This kit isn't about pushing through - it's about softening the edges when life feels too loud. Try one or two of these - no pressure to fix everything, just enough to help you feel a little more *you* again:


 **Ice pack on your neck or hands:** A quick sensory reset to calm the nervous system and bring you back into your body.


 **Put on music** that matches or shifts your mood: scream it out or sway it out. It could be a sad girl ballad or a dance-it-out anthem.


 **5-minute tidy-up:** Clear just one surface (desk, floor, bed) to reduce visual clutter. A little order can create a lot of relief.


 **Brain dump everything** swirling in your head: Get your thoughts out with no filter or structure. Just get it out.


## SECTION 8: Your ADHD Toolkit


 **Sit or lie down somewhere cosy** for 10 minutes: blanket, zero expectations, no stimulation. Let yourself just *be*. I call this “lizard time”.


 **Drink a glass of water** slowly: bonus points if it's cold or in your favourite cup.

 **Try a body scan:** Check in with each part of your body, even just for 1–2 minutes.


 **Use a comfort item:** Hug a pillow, plush toy, or something soft that feels safe.

 **Repeat a grounding phrase:** Try “I am safe,” “This feeling will pass,” or “I can start again.”

 **Cuddle a pet** or look at animal videos: yes, it counts as nervous system care.

 **Step outside** for even 30 seconds: fresh air and daylight can shift your state fast.

 **Wrap up in a warm blanket** or hoodie: physical warmth = emotional regulation.

 **Turn on airplane mode:** Give your brain a break from notifications and demands.

 **Doodle, scribble, or colour:** No expectations, just movement and colour.

**Remember:** You don't have to feel "better" instantly. These are small acts of care to help you *pause, breathe*, and reconnect - one gentle moment at a time. You are not lazy or broken - you're overloaded. This is your *reset button*, not a productivity hack. Come back to yourself first. Everything else can wait. ❤️

### **Weekly Check-In Journal Page – Reflect, Reset, Realign**

Your week doesn't have to be "productive" to be worth reflecting on. In fact, some of the most powerful growth comes from *pausing* to notice what's working - and what's quietly wearing you down. This check-in isn't about judgment or fixing - it's about *getting curious* and creating a life that supports your real needs.

Set aside a few minutes at the end of your week (or whenever your week *feels* like it ends) to journal your reflections. No need for full sentences - dot points, scribbles, or voice notes are totally valid.

## SECTION 8: Your ADHD Toolkit

Each week, gently ask yourself:

- **What gave me energy?** (e.g., social time, creative work, alone time, moving my body)
- **What drained me?** (e.g., long meetings, cluttered spaces, skipping meals)
- **What helped me regulate?** (e.g., music, stretching, sensory tools, breathwork)
- **What felt good or worth celebrating?** (Even small wins like “I rested without guilt” count!)
- **What small change might help next week feel easier?** (Think: flexible, doable, not drastic.)

**Remember:** This isn't about being “better.” It's about being *aware* - so you can start making your life more ADHD-friendly, one small adjustment at a time. You're allowed to repeat the same answers each week. Patterns are powerful. And so are you.

## 'Things That Helped Me' – Your Personal ADHD

### Experiment Log

ADHD isn't one-size-fits-all - and neither are the strategies that support it. What works *brilliantly* for you one week might completely flop the next - and that's *not* a flaw or failure. It's just your brain being its beautifully dynamic self.

That's why this section is your personal lab and ongoing experiment - a space to track the strategies, tools, routines, habits, supports or rituals that have *actually* helped you feel more grounded, motivated, or in flow. List the things that boosted your focus, regulated your nervous system, sparked joy, or just made life feel a little easier.





Some things might come from this very booklet. Others might come from conversations with fellow ADHD-ers, friends, therapists, TikTok rabbit holes, Google deep-dives, or moments of accidental genius. However, you find them - **log them here.**

When something works, write it down. Also jot down what *didn't* work (no shame - just data!) so you can start noticing patterns and adjust accordingly.





## SECTION 8: Your ADHD Toolkit

And when something stops working? Don't panic or punish yourself. ADHD brains need *novelty*, flexibility, and rotation - it's part of the deal. You're a beautifully complex, ever-evolving human with ever-evolving needs. That doesn't make you inconsistent or unreliable - it makes you *adaptive*.

### Categorise your tools for clarity:

-  **Emotional Regulation** (e.g., 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, weighted blanket, naming emotions aloud)
-  **Motivation Boosters** (e.g., body doubling, countdown timers, music rituals, mini rewards)
-  **Focus Hacks** (e.g., Pomodoro method, noise-cancelling headphones, visual timers, habit stacking)
-  **Rest & Recovery** (e.g., movement breaks, naps, creative rest, no-guilt downtime)

Use this section to reflect on, journal and track:

-  What helped?
-  What surprised you?
-  What patterns are showing up?
-  What needs rotating or reworking?

💬 **Therapist Reminder:**

You are your greatest ongoing experiment and investment. Be curious. Be flexible. Be kind. Keep taking notes. You're not here to be perfect - you're here to build a life that works *with* your brain and you're doing better than you think!

You don't have to earn support. It's okay to build systems around your needs instead of pretending they don't exist. Use your toolkit with pride - it's a sign of self-awareness, not weakness 💖

## SECTION 9: What Next?

If you've made it here - wow! Just pause and appreciate yourself. You've read, reflected, scribbled, circled, highlighted, and maybe cried a little. This workbook wasn't just about managing ADHD. It was about reconnecting with your power, your preferences, your story. And now? You don't have to do it alone.

### 🌟 Join Our Community & Movement: Girls That ADHD

Girls That ADHD is more than a podcast - it's a movement. A space for late-diagnosed adults navigating ADHD, shame, identity, and joy. We talk real talk. No fixing, just understanding. Come hang out with us:

### 🎧 Girls That ADHD Podcast

You can find us on the following podcast platforms:


- [Spotify](#)
- [Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Castbox](#)
- [iHeartRadio](#)
- [Pocket Casts](#)

📷 Instagram: [@girlsthatadhd](#)


## Focus Forward: ADHD Toolkit

### **Free ADHD Webinars & Tools**


 Sign Up to [Our Newsletter](#) for monthly ADHD tools and updates on our upcoming workshops, webinars e-learnings and merchandise


 Website: [www.girlsthatadhd.com/](http://www.girlsthatadhd.com/)


### **Ready for More Support?**


 [Book a counselling or ADHD coaching session with Sayaka at Umeed Psychology](#)

### **Say Hello or Reach Out**

 Sayaka Sayeed – Senior Counsellor & Sydney Hub Lead at Umeed Psychology & Founder of Girls That ADHD

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## SECTION 9: What Next

🗨 **Final Therapist Reminder:** You don't need to do it all. You just need to start where you are. Keep this workbook close. Use it when you're spiraling, stuck, or even soaring. Also, share it if you think it can genuinely help someone out! Let it remind you: your brain isn't broken - it's just built differently. And different can be beautiful 💖

### About Sayaka:



Sayaka Sayeed (she/they) is a queer, neurodivergent Bangladeshi-Australian counsellor, neurodivergent coach and founder of *Girls That ADHD*, a podcast and platform supporting adults with ADHD to understand their brains and build lives that work *with* their neurodivergence - not against it. Sayaka is also the Senior Counsellor and Sydney Hub Lead of Umeed Psychology, a community-rooted social enterprise that provides culturally responsive, neuro-affirming care and community events for diverse clients.

## Focus Forward: ADHD Toolkit

Her therapeutic work spans across individual, couples, and group therapy, and she brings an intersectional, trauma-informed lens to everything she does. Sayaka's approach is deeply shaped by her own lived experience navigating mental health, identity, and intergenerational expectations.

With lived experience of navigating life between cultures, big feelings, and a fast-moving brain, Sayaka now helps others do the same - with more self-understanding and less shame. Through therapy, community events, activism work and her podcast, she's passionate about decolonising mental health and creating spaces where people feel seen, supported, and never "too much." For Sayaka, healing isn't just individual - it's deeply collective.

She believes healing isn't a solo journey - it's deeply collective. It's something we do in community, in conversation, and in connection with others.