

YOUR RESET POWER · ADHD

# Late Diagnosed ADHD

*A practical guide to what happens next and  
what nobody tells you.*

• • •

Jeanette

*Creator of the RESET Method*

© Jeanette. All rights reserved.

This guide is provided for educational and informational  
purposes and is not intended to replace professional medical  
or psychological advice.

Part of the RESET Method series.

## Let's be honest about what this is

When people talk about ADHD they talk about distraction. Forgetting things, losing focus, being late, not finishing what you started. They talk about it like a quirky inconvenience.

They don't talk about being too loud, too excitable, too intense, every single day, for decades, and genuinely not knowing why. They don't talk about dancing in the middle of a supermarket aisle because your body has energy in it you cannot keep contained, while people look at you like you're embarrassing yourself. They don't talk about people asking, not joking, if you're on drugs, because you're talking too fast, too wired, too much, while at the same time you can barely concentrate on the simplest task in front of you.

They don't talk about what it costs to hold a mask that heavy for that long. The exhaustion. The friendships that quietly ended. The years you spent concluding you were just difficult, that something about you was fundamentally wrong.

***This is not a wobble. Not a personality quirk. It's a brain that runs on a completely different system, in a world that never explained that to you, plus the exhaustion of trying to live like everyone else anyway.***

If you have late-diagnosed ADHD, none of this will be new. What might be new is having a name for it: an explanation that isn't "you need to

try harder" or "why can't you just be normal." Because you've heard all of that. You've tried. It hasn't worked. And there's a reason for that, and it isn't that you're broken.

#### IN MY OWN WORDS

I'm an accountant. There were days reconciling accounts felt like reading a language I'd never learned, even though I knew the numbers cold. My brain simply refused to cooperate.

Then it would flip. Hyperfocus. I'd work through the night into the next day without noticing time pass, forget to eat, forget the world existed. The work from those stretches was often brilliant. Sharp, precise, the kind that got me praised for intelligence and dedication.

Nobody saw the chaos underneath it. I spent years asking myself the same question: why can I do this sometimes, and not all the time?

## What the relief actually is

I'd spent most of my life feeling completely misunderstood. Then someone said three words.

***"It's ADHD."***

My entire life clicked into place in that sentence. Every contradiction. Every burst of brilliance followed by total shutdown. Every time someone called me lazy when I knew, somewhere, that wasn't true.

I went down the rabbit hole after that. Videos, books, other people's stories. Every description landed: *that's me*. But when you've spent your life masking, even recognition comes tangled with doubt. Am I seeing this because it's real, or bending myself to fit an explanation I want to be true?

I pursued a formal diagnosis. Paid privately, eight hundred pounds, a real amount of money for something that still carried uncertainty. But I needed to know.

When it came back confirmed, it felt like validation. Huge relief. For the first time there was a reason why life had always been harder than it looked for everyone else.

What I didn't expect was what came right behind it.

# Why your brain goes there

Most people are taught attention works like a switch. Decide to focus, and the brain cooperates.

An ADHD brain doesn't run on a switch. It runs on a spotlight.

Something interesting locks the spotlight in with real intensity. Hours disappear, you forget to eat, that's hyperfocus. Something dull doesn't hold it, no matter how hard you want it to, no matter how many times you tell yourself the task matters. You can want to focus. You can know it's important. The brain still won't engage.

For years that inconsistency reads as laziness, because you've seen exactly what you're capable of during the good stretches. But the actual driver is dopamine, the chemical behind motivation and reward. Stimulating, urgent, emotionally engaging, novel: dopamine rises, focus gets easy. Dull, repetitive, overwhelming: dopamine drops, and the brain simply will not engage.

***That's not evidence you lacked effort. That's evidence your brain did exactly what it was wired to do.***

Understanding this rewrites a lot of your own history: the nights absorbed in a project, the sudden bursts of productivity, the days when even simple tasks felt strangely impossible. Extremely common in ADHD. Not a character flaw. A wiring difference.

## The years nobody saw

Masking doesn't start with a decision. It starts the moment you notice that how you naturally move through the world makes other people uncomfortable, and often nobody says it out loud. You just see it. A look. A pause. A flicker in someone's face. You learn to read disapproval before anyone says a word.

I'm a small, generally non-threatening woman, which means people say things to me they'd never say to someone else. Even children have told me they thought I was strange. I move differently. Walking down the street, my body moves, I wiggle, I almost dance without thinking about it. Someone once told me they'd seen me earlier that day and described it as "rather jiggly," "dancey." Not meant cruelly. I saw the disapproval on their face as they said it anyway.

That's the moment you start adjusting. Not all at once. Slowly. You sit still when your whole body wants to move. You stop talking so much. You hold your leg down when it jiggles. You learn, through hundreds of small reactions from other people, that something about you needs controlling.

- You calculate the exact moment it's acceptable to speak, then miss the window and lose the thought
- You rehearse sentences before you say them, and by the time you do, the conversation's moved on

- You monitor your own reactions through an entire conversation instead of actually being in it
- You notice you've missed half of what someone said because so much energy went into managing yourself

It becomes exhausting in a way that's invisible from the outside, because from the outside it just looks like you're a bit quiet today.

## What it feels like from the inside

There's a version of your inner voice most people have: the quiet commentary that helps you think things through. This is not that voice.

This one criticises. If you grew up hearing certain things enough times, *why can't you be more like your sister, what is wrong with you, just sit still, behave*, those words don't disappear when the moment passes. They settle. Eventually they live inside your head, running on their own.

I thought that voice was normal. I thought everyone ran several commentaries at once: one analysing what just happened, one predicting what's about to go wrong, one replaying earlier conversations for mistakes. It was genuinely shocking to learn a lot of people just don't have that. Or theirs is kinder.

***The voice gets there first. It criticises you before anyone else can, in a strange way, trying to protect you. But the cost of that protection is heavy.***

### IN MY OWN WORDS

For years I believed that voice was telling the truth. That it was accurately describing who I really was. It took a long time to see it differently.

It wasn't my personality. It was an echo, built from years of people trying to correct behaviour they didn't understand at the time. It still shows up. It's had plenty of practice. But once you can name it, you stop mistaking it for fact.

## When funny becomes a problem

ADHD personalities tend to be intense, all or nothing. Comfortable, you bring a lot into a room, and at first people enjoy it. Fun. Lively. Interesting. There's a fine line between entertaining and too much, and most of us don't feel it until we've already crossed it.

For a long time, a drink can seem like the fix. Confidence, less self-monitoring, the energy in your body suddenly feels acceptable because everyone else is loosening up too. Until it happens again, too loud, too much, and you wake up with a stomach full of shame, replaying the night, trying to work out exactly where it went wrong. So you adjust. Go out less. Monitor harder. Promise yourself one drink next time.

The same pattern shows up in friendships. Finding someone you feel safe with can feel enormous. You open up fast, share deeply, and to you that's real connection. Most people build trust more slowly, and when they see that openness early, some pull back. Not because you did anything wrong. You feel the shift immediately, and you retreat. Over time you learn to keep parts of yourself hidden, and end up craving deep connection while having very few friendships that feel genuinely safe.

***Nobody sat us down as kids and said: this is something you'll need tools for one day. It was funny, or forgivable, or "she's got spirit," right up***

*until it wasn't, and nobody explained what  
changed or why.*

## The damage it does

When your emotions run strong and your reactions come quickly, things can happen before you fully understand how they got there.

- Relationships that ended not because they were wrong, but because a reaction in one moment decided they were, before you could stop it
- Jobs left before the exhaustion of masking made staying impossible
- Friendships that quietly created distance, not from one explosion, but from people never knowing which version of you they'd get
- A running mental tally of evidence that you're too much, that you ruin things, that people are better off keeping some distance

### **IN MY OWN WORDS**

I've thrown grenades into relationships without meaning to. Reacted too fast, spoken too bluntly, gone quiet when I felt misunderstood, and alienated people along the way without understanding why, for a long time.

So I reached the obvious conclusion: that I was just difficult. That something about me was fundamentally wrong.

Part of this is Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria: an intense, almost instant emotional reaction to perceived criticism or rejection, even when the

trigger is small. A flat email reply. A slightly off tone. Your nervous system reads it as a threat before the rational part of your brain has caught up, and reacts accordingly.

It doesn't mean you're too sensitive. It means a nervous system that's been misunderstood for years learned to react fast to protect itself.

## The grief that follows

Nobody warns you that diagnosis brings grief. You expect relief. You don't expect to spend the following months replaying decades through a completely new lens.

School. Relationships that went wrong. Jobs that felt harder than they should have. Every time you were criticised, corrected, misunderstood. Every system people insisted you follow that never worked for you, and how hard you tried anyway.

- Why didn't anyone notice?
- Why was I always the one who had to change?
- Why didn't anyone actually see me?

These aren't bitter questions. They're the shock of understanding how long you lived without the right explanation for your own mind. The grief isn't really about the past. It's about the years you spent believing the wrong story about yourself: *you're lazy, you're careless, you're too emotional, just try harder.*

***Relief answers the question why. Grief reminds you how long you lived without that answer.***

## What you can do

You don't need to rebuild your whole life this week. Understanding comes first. Change comes after, not instead of it.

The most useful shift is small: swap "what is wrong with me" for "how does my brain actually work." That single question changes what you're able to do next.

### **SOMETHING TO TRY**

#### The energy audit

For a week, don't try to fix anything. Just notice. When is your mind sharpest? What kind of work drains you fast, and what energises you? What environments settle your attention? Quiet, or noise and movement? Write it down as you go. This is better data on how your brain runs than any generic routine you've tried to force onto yourself.

### **SOMETHING TO TRY**

#### Shrink the start

When a task feels too big to begin, the size of the task usually isn't the real problem. The size of the first step is. Don't aim to finish the project. Open the document. Write one sentence. Sort one small pile. Momentum tends to follow movement, not the other way round.

### SOMETHING TO TRY

#### The pause before the story

When rejection sensitivity spikes, your brain writes a story fast: they're upset, they're disappointed, they're judging me. Before you believe it, build in a pause. A few breaths. Ask what else the situation could mean. RSD defaults to the worst interpretation first; questioning it, every time, softens the impact.

Treat all of it like an experiment, not a test. A test has a right answer and constant pressure to get it. An experiment just asks "what happens if I try this," keep what works, drop what doesn't. Drop the judgment, and you start actually finding out what helps.

## For the people who love them

This chapter is written for the people around someone with late-diagnosed ADHD: partners, family, friends, colleagues. If they've shared this with you, it's because they're trying. Please read it.

You've probably been on the receiving end of things that didn't make sense from where you were standing. A reaction that seemed to come from nowhere. A sudden need to leave the room, or the conversation, or the plan you'd made together. Someone who seems fully present one week and completely unreachable the next, for no reason you were given.

You may have wondered whether they actually care. Whether the distance means something about how they feel about you. Whether you're somehow making things harder just by being the person who's there.

Here is what I want you to understand.

The masking, the intensity, the sudden withdrawal, the overreaction to something small, none of it is about not caring. It's the visible edge of someone who has spent years, sometimes decades, managing a brain that runs on a different system, almost entirely without tools, while being told the whole time that not managing it perfectly was a character flaw. They are not doing this lightly. They are exhausted by

it. And they are far more critical of themselves about every single instance of it than you will ever be, even on your worst day with them.

***Nobody is harder on them than they already are. What looks from the outside like someone who's checked out is almost always someone who cares so much it's exhausting them.***

### ***When they go quiet***

Sometimes the withdrawal isn't rejection. It's regulation. Masking all day, every day, costs real energy, and when that runs out there often isn't much left over for conversation. Going quiet is frequently the nervous system doing the only thing it has left, not a message about you. Don't chase it in the moment. Let the quiet happen, and check in once it's passed.

### ***When the reaction feels too big***

If Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria is in the mix, something that felt small to you, a joke, a delayed reply, a tone of voice, can land as a genuine threat to them. You won't win by explaining that they're overreacting; in the moment, they can't access that logic any more than you could talk yourself out of flinching from a loud noise. Give it space. The size of the reaction will make far more sense once you understand what it's actually connected to, usually not the thing that just happened, but years of things that happened before you were there.

## ***When they try to explain, or repair***

Repair from someone who's spent a lifetime being told they're too much often arrives late and imperfectly, because the shame makes it hard to get there sooner. That doesn't make it any less real. If they're trying, showing up with an explanation, an apology, a guide like this one, let that count for what it is: someone doing the hard, exposing work of saying *this is what's actually happening in me, and I don't want to keep losing people to something I'm working this hard to understand.*

You don't have to get this perfect either. You just have to know that the person in front of you is not choosing to make your life difficult. They are working with a brain that was never explained to them properly, in a world that mostly just told them to try harder, and they are still here, still trying, still choosing you enough to hand you this page.

## You were never too much

You've probably spent years building a case for why you're fundamentally too much and not enough at the same time, in a way that makes you hard to be around.

That case isn't the truth. It's what happens when a brain that works differently spends decades trying to survive in a world that expected it to behave like everyone else's, without the right explanation, without the right support, without anyone ever sitting you down and naming what was actually happening.

It wasn't wrong. It was unexplained. There's a difference, and understanding it, properly, not just intellectually, is where things actually start to shift.

You were never too much. You were a person with a brain that works differently, trying to survive in a world that hadn't yet learned how to

see you clearly. Now you're starting to see yourself. That's where it actually begins.

## YOUR RESET POWER

***You are not the only one figuring this out. There are more of us than you think, quietly learning how to live in a world that never explained us to ourselves.***

### KEEP GOING

If this guide made things click even a little, there's more where it came from: practical tools, the free trackers, and a space built for people whose brains work exactly like yours. Join the RESET newsletter to stay close to what comes next.

Jeanette

*Creator of the RESET Method*