

YOUR RESET POWER · FREE GUIDE

RESET

When Sadness Hits

A grounded guide to the sadness that arrives for no reason,
even in the middle of something good.

Why this exists

I built RESET because I spent years not understanding my own head.

This one's about the sadness that turns up uninvited. Sometimes there's no trigger you can point to at all. Sometimes there is one, and it's not what you'd expect. You get the good news, the job, the moment you'd have said you wanted more than anything, and somewhere underneath it, or right behind it, something drops anyway.

Most of what's written about sadness assumes there's a reason and you just haven't found it yet. This guide doesn't assume that. Sometimes the reason is buried somewhere and worth finding, eventually. Sometimes there isn't one you'll ever land on, and hunting for it just burns the hours you needed for getting through the day.

If you've ever smiled through something, thanked someone, held a completely normal conversation, and been somewhere else entirely underneath it, and nobody around you had any idea, this is for you. Not the version of sadness people can see. The kind you carry while looking fine.

I'm not going to tell you to think positive. I'm not going to tell you it's just hormones, or that you should be grateful, or that a gratitude journal will sort it. I'm going to tell you what's actually happening in your body when this hits, why it hits people with ADHD and trauma histories, and exactly what to do with the next hour, because the next hour is usually all you can actually hold.

Read it in order, or skip to Chapter 6 for what to do when it's happening to you right now.

Jeanette, Your RESET Power

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What's actually happening

This isn't random, even when it feels completely unprovoked. Something in you is processing a backlog, even if your mind can't see what's in it yet.

You might recognise this as:

- A heaviness with no clear cause
- A mood that dropped suddenly, sometimes for no reason you can name
- A drop that arrived right after something good: the phone call, the yes, the milestone
- Feeling flat or overwhelmed after holding it together all day
- Questioning yourself: what's wrong with me that I can't just be okay?
- Smiling through it, thanking people, holding the conversation, while something underneath is already going black
- Nobody around you clocking it at all, because you're good at this, and being good at hiding it is exactly why nobody thinks to check

That last one is worth sitting with. A lot of what's in this guide isn't visible from the outside. You can be mid-conversation, mid-celebration, mid-completely-normal-Tuesday, and be somewhere else entirely underneath it, and still say "I'm fine" and have it sound true. That's not you being fake. That's the same system you'll read about in the next chapter, doing what it's always done: keeping the outside steady while the inside does something else completely.

None of this means you're ungrateful, dramatic, or secretly self-sabotaging. It means something that's been holding a lot, for a long time, just hit its limit, and sadness was what came out the other side, whether or not anyone else ever saw it happen.

QUICK VERSION

This isn't random, and it isn't a character flaw. Most of it is invisible from the outside. You can look completely fine and be somewhere else entirely underneath. It's what happens when a system that's been holding a lot finally hits its limit.

Why this hits ADHD and trauma brains

An ADHD brain doesn't file emotion the way a neurotypical brain does. Regulation isn't missing. It's delayed and disproportionate. A small trigger can produce a response completely out of scale with what caused it. So can a big one, in either direction.

Trauma adds a second layer. Trauma responses run on old wiring, not present-day logic. Your body doesn't file things by date. If safety, rest, or being truly seen was ever unreliable before, your system can still treat a good moment now with suspicion, bracing for the drop instead of trusting the high.

There's a third thread that doesn't get talked about enough: masking. If you've spent years managing how you come across (softening reactions, rehearsing responses, holding yourself together in front of people) that effort has to be paid for eventually. The crash after a big emotional event isn't always about the event itself. Sometimes it's the bill coming due for the performance that got you there.

These three don't operate separately. A milestone can be joyful, overwhelming, and the exact moment years of held-together effort finally has permission to stop, all at once. No wonder it doesn't come out as simple happiness.

Overwhelm, not weakness

None of this is a character flaw. It's a known feature of how ADHD brains regulate emotion, a known trauma response, and a known cost of long-term masking. You're not doing this on purpose, and you're not the only one it happens to.

QUICK VERSION

ADHD brains regulate emotion in a delayed, disproportionate way. Trauma brains brace against good moments. Masking has a cost that gets paid later. Any one of these can crash a moment that should feel good. Together, it's no surprise when it does.

The science bit

Short chapter. Sourced, so you can check it, not because I need you to take my word for it.

ADHD and emotion. Emotional dysregulation is now widely recognised as a central part of adult ADHD, not a side effect of it. A 2020 review of the research found that around seven in ten adults with ADHD report emotional dysregulation or big mood swings. European ADHD experts have described it as one of the core features of adult ADHD. Some of this traces to Russell Barkley's model of ADHD, which frames the underlying issue as a difficulty with inhibition: the same mechanism that makes it hard to stop an impulsive action also makes it hard to stop an emotion running at full intensity once it's started.

Trauma and good news. Many trauma survivors describe finding it hard to feel the excitement they "should" feel around good news: a promotion, an engagement, a birth. A brain that learned good things don't last can dampen or delay the response to protect you. That's not drama. That's a system doing the job it learned to do, in a moment it's misjudging as unsafe.

Masking. A 2026 study from Simon Fraser University in Canada surveyed 202 adults with ADHD and found that more than nine in ten hide, suppress or compensate for their ADHD traits to get through social situations, work and relationships. The same people reported a real cost: exhaustion, anxiety, low mood, and feeling disconnected from themselves. Research on masking in autism has found similar patterns for years. Holding a performance together isn't free, even when nobody around you can see the bill.

None of this is a diagnosis, and it's not medical advice. But it's real, documented, and worth knowing, so the next time it happens you can recognise it as a mechanism instead of a mystery.

QUICK VERSION

Around 70% of adults with ADHD report emotional dysregulation. Trauma survivors often struggle to feel excitement around good news, for protective reasons. Over 90% of ADHD adults in a 2026 study said they mask their traits, at a real cost that often surfaces later. All three are documented, not character flaws.

Sources

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Myths, and why people dismiss this

You've probably heard some of this already, maybe from other people, maybe from yourself.

"You've got everything to be happy about, so what's wrong with you?"

Nothing's wrong with you. Sadness that shows up in a good moment isn't a judgement on the moment. It's a system reacting to intensity and effort, not to the content of what happened.

"This is just ingratitude."

Gratitude and this kind of sadness aren't opposites, and they're not in competition. You can want the thing, mean it completely, and still get flattened by your own system minutes later. Both are true at once.

"You seemed absolutely fine. You were smiling."

You may have been managing how you looked, not how you felt. That gap is often exactly where this kind of sadness lives.

"Just take the medication and get on with it."

Medication helps a lot of people, and if it's offered to you, that's worth taking seriously with your GP. But being handed a prescription doesn't automatically explain what's happening or make the confusion go away. You're allowed to want to understand the mechanism as well as manage the symptom.

"You're overreacting to nothing."

It isn't nothing. It's a real, physical response, even when there's no visible cause. Chapter 3 has the research if you want to point someone to it.

QUICK VERSION

Not ingratitude, not performance, not overreaction to nothing. A documented response: real even when it arrives in the middle of something good, and even when nobody watching could tell.

Body regulation: where to start

When this hits, focus on stabilising, not solving. You can't think your way out of a physical response. You have to settle the body first, and the thinking tends to come back on its own once it does.

Feet flat on the floor

This interrupts the spiral by giving your attention somewhere physical and boring to land. Notice the actual pressure of your feet against the ground, the temperature, the texture, whatever's actually there. It works because it's specific and present, and a spiral can't hold your attention and a specific physical sensation at the same time.

Hold something cold

A sharp temperature change pulls attention out of the emotional loop and back into the body, fast. A cold glass, a tap running over your wrists, anything close at hand. You're not trying to distract yourself from the feeling. You're giving your body a competing signal strong enough to register over it.

Wrap in a blanket

Weight and warmth signal safety to a system that's currently convinced there isn't any. This isn't hiding from the feeling. It's a legitimate way of telling your body the room you're in is not a threat, even though something inside you clearly feels like one.

Slow, gentle breathing

Not a specific count, not a technique to get perfect. Just slower and gentler than the breathing you're doing right now. Rushed, ragged breath keeps signalling danger even after the danger's passed. Slowing it down is one of the few calming signals you can send on command.

Say less than you think you need to

If you're with someone, you don't owe them the full explanation while it's happening. "I need a minute" is a complete sentence. Explaining takes energy you don't have to spare mid-wave, and it can wait until you're steadier.

QUICK VERSION

Body first, thinking second. Feet on the floor, something cold, a blanket, slower breathing, and permission to say less than feels polite. None of it needs to be done perfectly.

How to actually ride it out

A simple sequence for when it's happening right now. Not later, not once you've analysed it.

- 1. Name it.** Out loud if you can. "This is one of those drops." Not "I'm broken," not "what's wrong with me," just naming it as a known thing that happens, not a verdict on you.
- 2. Lower the bar for today.** Whatever the plan was, it can shrink. Getting through counts as success.
- 3. Do one small, safe action.** Make the tea. Get the light on. Nothing bigger is needed right now.
- 4. Leave the "why" for later.** This isn't the moment to work out where it came from. That question can wait until you're steadier. Chasing it now usually feeds the drop rather than closing it.

Then check in

After a while, notice what's changed, if anything. Sometimes it eases. Sometimes it just moves into something else: flatness instead of sadness, tiredness instead of both. That's normal. Keep doing the small, safe things either way.

QUICK VERSION

Name it. Lower the bar. Do one small safe thing. Leave the why for later. Check in when you're steadier, not immediately.

This is what it actually looked like for me

I was twenty-five, in my flat, a proper pokey little thing, barely room to turn around in the kitchen, when he proposed.

For about five minutes I was deliriously happy. The kind of happy where you can't quite locate your own hands.

Then it was just black. Not sad exactly. Black is closer to it. It came in on top of the happiness so fast there wasn't a gap between the two, like the same five minutes had two different endings stacked on top of each other.

Some of what I felt in that black, I think now, was relief with nowhere to go: the idea that someone had actually chosen me, all the way, the way you hope someone will. But I was masking hard at the time, harder than I understood in the moment. So underneath the relief was a much quieter, worse thought I didn't have words for yet: he'd said yes to the version of me I'd let him see. Not all of it. I don't think I could have told you that clearly at twenty-five. I just felt it, as black, in my own kitchen, five minutes after the happiest thing that had ever happened to me.

I was told I was suffering with depression. I was offered medication. I remember not being able to make that fit. How could this be depression, when the trigger was the best news I'd had in years? I know medication is genuinely the right call for a lot of people, and if it's you, that's not a smaller or lesser path than working it out the way I did. For me, in that moment, nobody explained the mechanism. I just got the label and the prescription, and neither one matched what was actually happening in that flat.

So mostly, I pushed forward. That was hard, in a very specific way: smiling my way through congratulations while something in me was still sitting in that black patch from five minutes after he asked. I didn't have language yet for any of it. That a system can crash from intensity itself, good or bad. And that when you've spent years managing how you come across, the moment someone finally accepts you can be the exact moment the whole performance has permission to stop holding, and it stops all at once, not gently.

I'm not writing this to tell you it resolved neatly. It didn't, and not quickly. What actually shifted things, eventually, was understanding that the black wasn't a verdict on him, or the flat, or whether I wanted to marry him. It was what happens when too much lands at once (joy, relief, exposure, years of held-together effort) faster than anything can process it.

That's the whole reason this guide exists. Not to fix the wave. To help you recognise it for what it is while it's happening, so you're not fighting the confusion on top of the sadness itself.

This is one version of it: mine. Yours might not involve a proposal, or a pokey kitchen, or anyone at all. It doesn't need to look like this story to be the same thing. If any part of it landed, that's enough.

I got through that stretch without it tipping any further than it did. Not everyone's does, and that's not a failure on your part if yours has. The next chapter is for that: for when this needs more than a guide.

When this isn't enough

This guide helps with a lot. It doesn't replace proper treatment, and it isn't meant to.

Talk to a GP or a therapist if any of this has been going on for more than a couple of weeks, whatever else you're also trying:

- A low mood that isn't easing at all, even briefly, no matter what you try
- Numbness spreading into everything, not tied to one thing anymore
- Using alcohol, food, or anything else to get through the day, and it's increasing
- Thoughts that life would be easier if you weren't around, or not caring what happens

In England you can refer yourself to NHS Talking Therapies without seeing a GP first. Search "NHS Talking Therapies". In Scotland, search "NHS Scotland psychological therapies".

If you need someone right now

UK: Samaritans, free, any time: **116 123**. Breathing Space (Scotland), evenings and weekends: **0800 83 85 87**.

US: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, call or text **988**.

Elsewhere: findahelpline.com lists free crisis lines by country.

If you're in immediate danger, call 999 (UK) or 911 (US).

This guide is a tool. If you need proper support, use it alongside that support, not instead of it.

A simple daily check-in

Not a tracker. A quick, honest check with yourself. Use it on the days it's needed. That's the whole point of it existing.

- ☐ What's actually going on right now? Name it properly, not vaguely.
- ☐ Where in my body am I feeling it?
- ☐ Did I eat something, get light, do one predictable thing today?
- ☐ Did anything shift, even slightly?
- ☐ What's still there that I might need to come back to later?

If you want to see your pattern over weeks rather than days, the free **ADHD Moment Tracker** on my website lets you log a drop in under a minute and watch the pattern build. No sign-up: yourresetpower.com/adhd-moment-tracker

The toolkit: ready-made scripts

Something to say to yourself for specific flavours of this. Use the words as they are, or change them to fit what's actually happening. The full sequence is always Chapter 6: name it, lower the bar, one small action, leave the why for later.

The good news crash

Name it: "Something good just happened and I'm sinking instead of celebrating. That's a system reacting to the size of the moment, not a verdict on the news."

Small action: Tell one safe person how you're actually feeling, not just the good news. Do one thing from Chapter 5 before deciding anything else about the day.

The being-seen crash

Name it: "Someone got close to the real me and now I'm crashing. That doesn't mean the closeness was wrong. It means it cost something I hadn't accounted for."

Small action: You don't have to explain this to the person who got close. A blanket, or something cold, and a few minutes before you decide what, if anything, to say.

No-reason heaviness

Name it: "This is here and I don't need a reason for it to be real."

Small action: Lower today's plan to the smallest version of itself. Eat something small. Get near a window.

The slow fade

Name it: "This has been building for days, not just today. I'm not overreacting to right now. I'm reacting to the whole week."

Small action: Pick one predictable action (tea, shower, a short walk) and do only that one.

Self-doubt spiral

Name it: "I'm questioning myself because I feel wrong for feeling wrong. That question can wait. It's not urgent right now."

Small action: Feet flat on the floor. Slower breath. Nothing needs deciding today.

Do one round properly. Check in. If it's still there, that's normal. Do another, adjusting the words to whatever's shifted.

This is a wave

You are not broken. You don't need to solve everything today.

Pick one page. Use it properly, once, before deciding whether it helped.

You don't need a reason for the sadness to be real, and you don't need to have earned the right to feel bad on a good day.

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The RESET Room £5 a month

A weekly check-in with me by text or voice note, and I reply personally. New guides and tools as I write them. Cancel any time.

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The Direct Line £10, one-off

A personal plan in your first week, then message me on WhatsApp. I reply myself, not a team or a bot.

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