

The Short Version Focus with ADHD

100 Practical Ideas for ADHD Brains, Two Pages Each

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How to use this book

Do not read it. Use it.

This is a hundred subjects, two pages each. The left page is the gist: five or six bullets on what the idea is, what the research found, and the mistake most people make with it, with the book or study it comes from in one line at the foot. The right page is what to do: two or three exercises, one of them five minutes or less and doable today, one that runs over a week, each with a box to tick and a line for the date. At the foot of the right page, a short example of the first exercise filled in, so you can see what yours might look like. The examples are made up. The people in them are not real, the numbers are not results, and yours will differ.

There is no order. Each subject stands alone, and where another subject helps, its number is in brackets. Open the book where it hurts: the map on the next page turns a problem into a page number. The sections run from the inside out, from how this brain works to the people you live with, but nobody is checking.

One subject at a time. Pick one, build it this week, write the date and its number on the inside cover (or in a note on your phone titled with this book's name, if you are reading it there), and only then pick the next. Ten subjects at once is how the drawer of abandoned planners was filled. The log on the inside cover is the record of what you built.

When a rule does not fit, change the rule, not yourself. Every tool in here is a bet, and some will not take for you. A tool that fails is a reason to try a smaller version, a different one, or someone's help, never a verdict. Where the book sounds certain, read it as "this is what I would try first."

The book says what it leaves out: ADHD in children, parenting with ADHD, couples beyond two pages of logistics, addiction, the conditions that often travel with ADHD, and anything a clinician should be handling, including which treatment, if any, is right for you. Not because they do not matter. Because a page cannot hold them. If what you are carrying is heavier than a page can hold, if you have not slept properly in weeks, cannot function, or have thoughts of harming yourself, this book is not the tool. Talk to a doctor, or call a crisis line in your country. The pages will still be here afterwards.

Start here

Find the line that sounds like you. Go to the first number. The other two are where to go next.

If this is you	Start with	Then
I can't start anything, even things I want to do	22	21, 24
I start everything and finish nothing	56	49, 57
Hours disappear and I can't say where	38	7, 31
I'm late to everything	36	35, 40
I lose everything: keys, phone, papers	17	18, 11
I forget what I was asked within the hour	11	3, 13
I can't stay on the task once I've started	42	41, 48
I only work at the last minute	51	39, 5
Every system I build dies in a month	15	20, 14
I snap at people and regret it within the hour	62	61, 69
A neutral text and I'm sure they hate me	63	65, 70
I can't fall asleep and can't get up	71	72, 40
I forget to eat and then I'm furious	77	61, 55
Money disappears in fees and impulse buys	86	87, 88
My work is a trail of lost actions	82	85, 84
My partner has become my alarm clock	92	91, 19
I haven't messaged my friends in months	94	95, 79
The flat is a disaster and it feels like proof	96	17, 18
I'm hard on myself about all of it	10	70, 9
I've read the books and nothing changed	1	2, 100
I want to know whether this is ADHD at all	the next page	98

If none of these is you: subject 2, the six executive functions in one page. Score them, and the lowest score is your section.

7 Hyperfocus is real, and it is not a superpower

You cannot concentrate for five minutes, except when you cannot stop for five hours.

- Hyperfocus is intense, prolonged absorption in one activity, with reduced awareness of time, surroundings and your own needs: hunger, thirst, the bathroom, the pick-up. In a survey of adults, the more ADHD symptoms a person reported, the more often they reported hyperfocus, in study, hobbies and screen time.
- It is not the opposite of ADHD. It is the same mechanism seen from the other side: attention steered by interest and immediate reward rather than by intention. When something pays now, the brain locks on and the usual exits (boredom, time, discomfort) stop working.
- Which is why it is not a superpower. It lands on what is rewarding, not on what matters. The five hours go into the game, the forum thread or the garage, not the report, unless the report has been engineered to pay (subject 50).
- It has costs: missed meals, missed people, a crash afterwards, and the lie it tells you, that you could do this for the report if you only wanted to.
- Two skills, two pages. Getting out: subject 38, the exit timer. Aiming it: subject 50, the conditions that let it land on something you chose.
- The common mistake: counting on hyperfocus to save a deadline. It arrives on its own schedule. A timer set in advance is the most reliable exit you have, and a plan the most reliable entry.

Go deeper: Hupfeld, Abagis & Shah, "Living 'in the zone': hyperfocus in adult ADHD", *ADHD Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders* (2019); Ashinoff & Abu-Akil, "Hyperfocus: the forgotten frontier of attention", *Psychological Research* (2021).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: list the last five.** The last five times you lost hours without noticing. For each: the activity, and what it had going for it. Immediate feedback? Something new? No natural stopping point? A score, a count, a thread? Underline what repeats. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week: a timer in another room.** Before any session on a known hyperfocus activity, set a timer and put it somewhere you have to stand up to reach. When it rings, stand up. Whether you go back is a separate decision, made standing. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week, once: aim it at something useful.** Take one task you want done. Give it what the five had: a clear finish line, a visible count that rises, no open tabs, a challenge slightly above your level. Note here whether it took, and for how long. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Five: the game (3 hours), a spreadsheet formula (2), a forum thread (2), reorganising the garage (4), the side project (5). What repeats: immediate feedback, no natural end. Timer tonight: the kitchen timer, 45 minutes, on the hall table.

17 Out of sight is out of mind

You bought it twice because you forgot you owned it.

- The popular name for this is "object permanence issues", and the phrase captures the feeling well. The process it describes is a different one: object permanence is what infants develop in their first year, and you have it; you know the thing exists. What fails is working memory (subject 3): what you cannot see does not get retrieved at the moment you need it.
- So visibility is the storage principle. Open shelves over closed cupboards. Clear bins over opaque ones. Labels on everything that has a lid. The thing you need next, placed where you will trip over it.
- One-step storage. If putting something away takes more than one motion (open, lift, move, close), it will stay out. Hooks instead of hangers; bins without lids; one layer deep. Pinsky's test is whether a tired person at 11pm would do it.
- A home for everything, and the home is where the thing is used, not where it ought to go. Scissors in the kitchen drawer you open, not the craft cupboard you do not.
- The cost of invisible things is the ADHD tax (subject 86): duplicates bought, documents lost, late fees on bills that went into a drawer.
- The common mistake: tidying into drawers. A clear surface with everything hidden looks organised and is a trap. The aim is visible order, not invisible stuff.

Go deeper: Pinsky, *Organizing Solutions for People with ADHD* (2012); Alderson et al., "ADHD and working memory in adults", *Neuropsychology* (2013).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes on paper, then 10 to place them.** The five things you lose most. Next to each, a visible home at the point of use, and whether it needs a label. Then, the next time you have ten minutes today, all five go to their homes, labels on the ones with lids. *Done on* _____

- ☐ **Today, 10 minutes: open one cupboard.** Choose the cupboard whose contents you keep re-buying. Take the door off, or take the bin out and leave it on the shelf, or move the contents to an open shelf. One cupboard; the rest can wait. *Done on* _____

- ☐ **This week, 7 evenings: two minutes of homes.** At the launch-pad alarm (subject 18), walk the five things to their homes. Tally the evenings you did it. The homes only work if the things are in them. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Five: keys, charger, glasses, the car papers, the school forms. Homes: hook by the door; charger taped to the desk edge; glasses on a tray by the bed; car papers in a clear sleeve in the glovebox; forms in a clear tray on the fridge door.

22 Name the next physical action

"Do taxes" has been on the list for six weeks.

- A project is not an action. "Do taxes" is a project; "find the login for the tax site" is an action. An ADHD brain stalls at vagueness because a vague item has to be planned at the moment of starting, and planning is one of the weak functions (subject 2). The item sits there because touching it means thinking.
- The test, from David Allen: the next action is the next visible, physical thing a person could watch you do. If you cannot picture yourself doing it, it is not an action yet.
- The research behind it is the if-then plan: deciding in advance when, where and what ("if it is 9am and I am at the desk, then I open the folder") raised goal attainment with a medium-to-large effect across 94 tests, in general populations. The plan does the deciding so the moment does not have to.
- The next action is small enough to start in two minutes. The second action is not on the list; it appears when the first is done.
- The daily card (subject 13) holds three actions, never three projects. A card with "taxes" on it is a card that will be ignored.
- The common mistake: making the next action the big one. "Write the report" is still a project. "Open the file and type the title" is the action.

Go deeper: David Allen, *Getting Things Done* (revised edition, 2015); Gollwitzer & Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (2006).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: translate the five oldest.** Take the five items that have sat longest on your list. Rewrite each as a physical next action that passes the test. Anything that cannot be rewritten is a project: give it a next action and move the project name off the list. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **Today, 2 minutes: one if-then.** Pick one of the five and write it as a plan: "If it is _____ and I am at _____, then I _____." Put the time and place in the calendar with an alarm (subject 19). *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week, at the review: count the projects.** At Sunday's review (subject 14), give every list item a next action. Count how many were projects wearing task clothes. That number is how long your list has been lying to you. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Oldest five: "do taxes" to "find the login in the password manager"; "fix the bike" to "photograph the broken part"; "call the bank" to "write the question on a card"; "sort the photos" to "open the June folder"; "start the course" to "bookmark lesson 1". If-then: 9:00, at the desk, the login.

36 Why you are late, and the fix

You left on time. You were still late.

- Lateness happens at departure, not at arrival, and three things go wrong before the door. The "leave at" time is worked out from the arrival time with no travel buffer. The getting-ready time is never counted: shoes, coat, keys, the thing you forgot. And "one more thing" before leaving, which is hyperfocus (subject 7) wearing a coat.
- Work the times backwards. Arrive at 10:00. Travel, 25 minutes, so leave at 9:25 with a ten-minute buffer. Getting out of the door, 10, so start getting ready at 9:15. The alarm is set for 9:15, labelled with those words (subject 19), not for 10:00, when it is already over.
- Time the getting-ready sequence once, with the timer. It is longer than you think, by about the ratio in subject 33.
- The launch pad (subject 18) removes the search and the night-before set-up (27) removes the decisions, which is most of the ten minutes.
- "One more thing" gets a rule: nothing new starts in the fifteen minutes before "start getting ready". Nothing opened, nothing checked, nothing tidied.
- The common mistake: an alarm for the time you are meant to be there. That alarm tells you that you are late. It is a notification, not a plan.

Go deeper: Ptacek et al. (2019); Barkley, *Taking Charge of Adult ADHD* (2021).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: four times for tomorrow.** Tomorrow's first appointment. Write: arrive at; leave at (travel plus buffer); start getting ready (leave minus the ready time); nothing new after (start getting ready minus fifteen). Set two labelled alarms: "start getting ready" and "leave now". *Done on* _____
- ☐ **Today, 15 minutes: time the sequence.** Next time you leave the house, start the timer at "start getting ready" and stop it at the door. Write the number. Use it from now on. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week: log arrivals.** For every appointment, the arrival time next to the planned one, on this page. Count the on-time ones. Note what caused each late one: travel, ready time, or one more thing. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Tomorrow: dentist, 10:00. Travel 25, buffer 10, out of the door 10. Leave at 9:25; start getting ready 9:15; nothing new after 9:00. Alarms set. Getting ready, timed: fourteen minutes, not five. On time this week: six of seven. The late one: one more email.

44 Noise that helps

You concentrate better in a café than in a silent room.

- This runs against the standard advice, and part of the ADHD evidence runs with you. In the original experiments, white noise played during a memory task improved performance in children with ADHD and did not help the children without. A 2024 meta-analysis found a small benefit of white or pink noise for children and young adults with ADHD or attention problems. The theory is that an under-aroused attention system needs a floor of stimulation to work, and the noise provides it.
- The evidence is for white and pink noise, in young samples, and the effect is small; brown noise and café recordings are untested extensions of the same idea. So white or pink noise first, and the others as your own experiment. Through headphones, the same track every time, and not music with words: a song is a second task and a playlist is a decision every four minutes (subject 26).
- Moderate volume. The aim is a constant floor that masks the variable sounds, not a wall.
- The same track, every block, becomes a cue (subject 26): the brain learns that this sound means work, and the ritual starts the session for you.
- The common mistake: judging it on one try. Alternate days with and without for a week and compare the ratings. The result is a clue about you, not a proof; if it does nothing, drop it, and if it helps, keep it.

Go deeper: Söderlund, Sikström & Smart, "Listen to the noise: noise is beneficial for cognitive performance in ADHD", *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2007); Nigg, Bruton, Kozlowski, Johnstone & Karalunas, "Do white noise or pink noise help with task performance in youth with ADHD or with elevated attention problems?", *JAACAP* (2024).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: pick one track.** An hour of white or pink noise, saved offline so starting it needs no browsing. Headphones on the desk. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **Today, one block: rate it.** Run one block with the track on. At the end, rate your focus 1 to 5 on this page. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week: alternate and compare.** With the track on Monday, Wednesday, Friday; without on Tuesday and Thursday. Rate every block. Sunday: average the two columns. A difference is a clue, not a proof; keep the track if the clue is in its favour. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Track: pink noise, one hour, saved offline. Headphones on the desk. First block with: focus 4. Alternating days: with 4, 4, 3; without 2, 3. Kept. The café recording, tried the week after, was worse: too much happening in it.

56 Finish the last 10%

You have twelve projects at ninety percent.

- The pattern has a mechanism. The interesting part is done, so the novelty is spent (subject 15). What remains is the boring part (49). And the end is in sight, so the urgency is gone too: "it's basically done" is the brain filing the project under not-now (32) from the other side.
- "Done" has to be defined before starting, in writing (subject 28): sent, published, installed, paid, on the shelf. "Finished" is not a definition. Ninety percent happens because nobody wrote the finish line.
- The closing sprint gets the fuel. The minimum version is a block (subject 37) with a body double (25). If that fails, add the rest one at a time: a reward collected after (52), a race against the clock (53), a person expecting it by Friday (39). The last ten percent is the hardest ten, so it gets what it needs, and no more than it needs.
- One at a time. List the twelve; choose one; close it this week; the other eleven wait. Closing one is also evidence, against the record (subject 10), that you finish things.
- Some will never close. A project that will never be finished is an open loop (subject 11). Decide at the review (14), write "abandoned" and the date, and take it off the list. Killing a project is a kind of finishing.
- The common mistake: starting something new to escape the end of this one. The new thing is novelty (subject 5). It will be at ninety percent as soon as the novelty is spent.

Go deeper: Tuckman, *More Attention, Less Deficit* (2009); Hallowell & Ratey, *ADHD 2.0* (2021).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 10 minutes: the ninety-percent list.** Every project that is nearly done. Next to each, the exact finish line in three words. Circle one. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: book the closing sprint.** A block this week, with a double booked. That is the minimum. Add a reward or a message to someone who will ask only if the first sprint does not close it. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week: close one, kill one.** Run the sprint. Write "done" and the date next to the circled one. Pick one that will never close, write "abandoned", and remove it. *Done on*

What it looks like. At ninety percent: the website (contact page), the bookshelf (back panel), the course (two lessons), the tax file (one receipt), the photo book (the order). Circled: the tax file. Closing sprint Thursday 14:00 with Léa, flat white after, accountant told "Friday". Killed: the photo book.

64 Overwhelm: one thing

Everything is urgent, so you are doing nothing.

- Overwhelm is the ADHD freeze. Too many inputs, no filter, the working memory full (subject 3), and the function that would sort the list offline. Standing in the middle of the kitchen is the brain's answer to a list it cannot hold.
- The fix is mechanical, and the CBT programmes teach it as the first organising skill. Write everything down, every single thing (subject 11). Pick one, not the best one, one. Do it. Cross it off. Pick the next. The list absorbs the panic because it holds what the head cannot.
- Pick the one by a dumb rule: the one someone is waiting for; or the shortest; or the first on the page. Choosing well is the capacity that is gone, so do not ask it to choose.
- The five-minute contract (subject 24) starts the one. The race (53) keeps it moving. Saying it out loud (30), "one thing: the invoice", closes the other eighteen.
- Two crossed off and the panic is usually gone; the list is still long, but it is now a list rather than a wall.
- The common mistake: trying to plan the whole list while overwhelmed. Planning is the function that is offline. Do first; plan on Sunday (subject 14).

Go deeper: Safren et al., *Mastering Your Adult ADHD* (2017), the organising module; Mary Solanto, *Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Adult ADHD* (2011).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: the overwhelm card.** Five lines: 1. Write everything. 2. Pick one by the dumb rule. 3. Five minutes. 4. Cross off. 5. Next. It lives with the reset card (subject 20). *Done on* _____
- ☐ **Today, or the next time it hits: run the card.** Note the number of items the list had and the number crossed off before the panic went. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week: tally events and runs.** Each overwhelm, one mark; each time the card was run, a second mark. The gap between the two columns is next week's work. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Card written. Tuesday 11:00, overwhelm: a list of nineteen items in four minutes. Dumb rule: the shortest. "Reply to the garage": two minutes. Then the invoice, then the form. Three crossed off by 11:40; the panic gone after the second. Events this week: two; card run: two.

72 Revenge bedtime procrastination

Midnight is the only hour that is yours, so you refuse to give it up.

- Bedtime procrastination is going to bed later than you intended with nothing stopping you: no shift, no baby, no reason. The research that named it found it was a self-regulation failure, the same failure as every other kind of putting off, and that it predicted not getting enough sleep. Self-regulation is the ADHD deficit, so this is the ADHD version of a late night: not insomnia, which is wanting to sleep and not managing, but choosing not to go.
- The "revenge" is the lived part. A day with no unstructured time leaves the night as the only time that feels like yours, and giving it up feels like giving up the whole day.
- Two fixes, and they go together. Move the pleasure earlier: thirty protected minutes of your own thing before nine, in the calendar, so the night does not have to carry it. And set an alarm for "start getting ready", not for bedtime. A bedtime is an arrival time, and you are late to arrival times (subject 36).
- The getting-ready sequence is a transition (subject 26), so it gets a ritual, and the phone goes to its room (42) at the alarm.
- Exit timer (subject 38) on whatever swallows the evening.
- The common mistake: a bedtime. Set the departure, not the arrival.

Go deeper: Kroese, De Ridder, Evers & Adriaanse, "Bedtime procrastination: introducing a new area of procrastination", *Frontiers in Psychology* (2014).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: thirty minutes of yours, before nine.** In tonight's calendar. The game, the book, the hobby, with an exit timer. The point is that the day contains it. *Done on* _____

- ☐ **Today, 2 minutes: the departure alarm.** "Start getting ready", set at the time you want to be in bed minus thirty. At the alarm, the phone goes to its room and the sequence starts: teeth, launch pad (subject 18), book. *Done on* _____

- ☐ **This week, 7 nights: tally and log.** Did the sequence start at the alarm? What time were you in bed? Two columns on this page. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Own thing: 20:15 to 20:45, the game, exit timer on. Alarm: 22:30 "start getting ready", phone to the kitchen. Sequence: teeth, launch pad, book. Started at the alarm: five of seven. In bed: 23:00, 23:05, 23:40 (Thursday), 23:00, 22:55, 23:30, 23:00.

86 The ADHD tax

Late fees, lost chargers, the subscription you forgot, the thing you bought twice.

- The ADHD tax is what the condition charges in money: late fees, fines, replaced items, subscriptions nobody uses, impulse buys, expired vouchers, refunds never claimed. In population data, adults with ADHD show markedly more financial distress, more missed payments and worse credit; in the laboratory, they make poorer financial decisions and discount the future more steeply.
- The mechanisms are all in this book. Working memory (subject 3) loses the bill. Time blindness (4) misses the date. Discounting (5) buys the thing. Out of sight (17) loses the charger.
- So the fix is not budgeting discipline, which is willpower, which this brain has none to spare. It is visibility and automation: the bills that can be funded on autopay and dated reminders for the rest (subject 87), a waiting rule for purchases (88), one number you look at weekly (89), and a sweep every quarter (90).
- Count the tax once. A year's statements: fees, fines, replacements, unused subscriptions, duplicates. The total is the motivation for the next four pages, and it is usually larger than the cost of fixing it.
- The small expensive objects get a home (subject 17) and a spare: a second charger that lives in the bag.
- The common mistake: shame. The tax is a mechanism and the fix is a system. Count it, build the system, stop counting.

Go deeper: Beauchaine, Ben-David & Bos, "ADHD, financial distress, and suicide in adulthood: a population study", *Science Advances* (2020); Bangma et al., "Financial decision-making in adults with ADHD", *Neuropsychology* (2019).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 15 minutes: the audit.** Twelve months of statements, with a body double if it helps (subject 25). List every fee, fine, replacement, unused subscription and duplicate. Total it. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **Today, 2 minutes: the number on the wall.** Next to the deadline sheet (subject 31), for one month. Not as punishment; as the price of the next four pages. *Done on* _____
- ☐ **This week: start subject 87.** Tonight if you can. The audit is finished when the first bill goes on autopay. *Done on* _____

What it looks like. Audit: late fees 85; two parking fines 70; three chargers and a pair of headphones 140; two subscriptions unused for a year 180; a jacket bought twice 90; a refund never claimed 60. Total: 625. On the wall. Next: subject 87, tonight.

96 Good-enough housekeeping

The flat is a disaster, and it feels like proof of what kind of person you are.

- Care tasks are morally neutral. A dirty kitchen is a kitchen; it is not a verdict. The ADHD home fails for the mechanisms in this book: the start (subject 21), the last ten percent (56), out of sight (17), the evening collapse (66). None of them is about character.
- The standard is functional, not clean. Can you cook, sleep, find things, keep the place safe and clean enough to be healthy, and have someone over without panic? That is the bar, and it is the only bar.
- Closing duties: ten minutes each night after the desk shutdown (subject 40), with their own timer; they are the household's shutdown, separate from the desk's. Dishes into the machine. Surfaces cleared into the trays. Launch pad loaded (18). When the timer rings, stop, whatever is left.
- Doom piles get a box with today's date on it. The box is sorted in its own ten-minute slot after the Sunday review (subject 14), one box at a time, and nothing leaves the house unlooked at: a doom pile can hold a passport, a bill, keys or the one photograph. The box is the capture point for objects, and the date is there to shame the box, not you.
- One-step storage (subject 17) for everything that comes out daily. The rest can live in boxes; that is what boxes are for.
- The common mistake: the weekend blitz. It is a project (subject 56), it is at ninety percent by Sunday night, and the flat is worse by Thursday. Ten minutes nightly is the system.

Go deeper: KC Davis, *How to Keep House While Drowning* (2022); Pinsky, *Organizing Solutions for People with ADHD* (2012).

DO THIS

- ☐ **Today, 10 minutes: closing duties, timer on.** The four steps on a card by the sink. Run them now, timer set, stop when it rings. Done on _____
- ☐ **Today, 5 minutes: box the piles.** Every doom pile into a box with today's date. Do not sort. Put the boxes where they are not in the eyeline (subject 46). Done on _____
- ☐ **This week: nightly, and one box.** Closing duties every night at the anchor; tally. At the review, sort one box, twenty minutes, looking at every item before it goes, and bin what you do not keep. Done on _____

What it looks like. Card by the sink: 1. Dishes in. 2. Surfaces to trays. 3. Launch pad. 4. Timer rings, stop. Tonight: nine minutes. Boxes: three, dated 13 October (the hall chair, the desk corner, the bedroom floor). Closing duties this week: six of seven. Sunday: the hall-chair box sorted, twenty minutes, two things kept.