

Thriving with Adult ADHD: Skills to Strengthen Executive Functioning

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- ADHD presents itself uniquely to each individual.
- ADHD impacts cognitive skills in five core areas of executive functioning:
 - Attention and Focus
 - Organizing and Planning
 - Mental Flexibility
 - Emotion Regulation
 - Impulse Control
- Attention and memory are inextricably linked.
- When a memory is created, it follows a path that starts with attention or awareness, at which point the information enters into the working memory, then the short-term memory, and then, finally, the long-term memory for extended storage (p. 16).
- Working memory is about remembering what you are doing in the moment and retaining all the information you need to execute the task at hand (p. 117).
- The most common sign of being too stressed is forgetfulness. Stress causes the release of hormones that have a direct negative impact on our ability to make and retrieve memories. The two most consistent ways to improve mental functioning and, therefore, memory are to sleep and to exercise.
- Working memory improvement:
 - 30 minutes of daily exercise
 - Target sleep and wake times
 - Label or name a current task before doing something else
 - Positive self-talk (p. 19)
- Create a narrative about the activity you are going to do that includes a beginning, middle, and end (p. 20).
- Memory is improved: Rehearse; Mnemonics; Mind-set. (p. 25)
- Using instructions: Write, Repeat, Recap, Give context and meaning (p. 29).
- People with ADHD don't really have a deficient in attention; in a way, they have too much attention. The struggle lies in their ability to regulate where their attention is focused and for how long. They feel either totally scattered or locked in deep focus on a single task. The deep hyperfocus is not very predictable and is not always directed at the right task. Most adults with ADHD don't experience hyperactivity (p. 32).
- The problems people encounter are often centered around initiating and sustaining focus over the long haul to see their ideas manifest (p. 32).
- Chunk time; take breaks [at 90 minutes] (p. 38).
- Procrastination is typically an act of avoidance. What are you truly avoiding? (p. 50)
- Prioritizing based on urgency can be a challenge with those with ADHD because there is often the sense that everything is an emergency. It becomes a default state, even when there isn't an emergency (p. 53).

- Decide which tasks are most urgent before you find yourself in a crisis. If you end up with two equally urgent tasks, do your least favorite one first (p. 53).
- Three categories to create priorities: Must do; Should do; Would be nice to do (p. 54).
- Before saying “yes,” consider PET: Pause, Evaluate, Trust (p. 59).
- The cannibal task: one that gradually eats up big chunks of your time – time that really belongs to other tasks. This most often happens with tasks that don’t have clear parameters. More time does not equal better work (p. 60).
- If it’s not written down, it doesn’t exist. Lists act as a safety net (p. 61).
- To create flexible problem-solving, embrace absurdity before making decisions (p. 72).
- The ADHD mind often tends to land on the most emotionally charged idea (p. 74).
- When you find yourself automatically defending your belief, action, or comment, use it as a cue to pause and ask questions about the other person’s perspective (p. 77).
- We can’t change anything in life without awareness (p. 79).
- There is one thorn in the side of everyone with ADHD: changing gears. Most adults with ADHD feel they are either completely stuck in one gear or all the way on the other end of the spectrum, slipping from one gear to the next with almost no control (p. 83).
- Use the power of attentional shift to create positive change (p. 86).
- Emotional regulation is identifying the feelings you are experiencing and making a conscious effort to control the intensity of those feelings (p. 91).
- Emotions don’t live in the same part of the brain as your ability to control them. Think about emotions as the gas pedal in a race car that is located in the middle of your brain. The middle of your brain (limbic system) is not where ADHD symptoms live. ADHD is predominately caused by deficits in the front of the brain (prefrontal cortex), where your core functions live. The brakes for this emotional race car are part of your core functions. So, when you step on the gas and rev up the engine of intense emotions, you may find that the brake pedal isn’t strong enough to slow the emotional race car (p. 92).
- In order to control these emotions, you need to be able to name them as they are happening (p. 93).
- One of the most common negative emotions for everyone with ADHD is shame (p. 94).
- One of the most common positive emotions for people with ADHD is excitement (p. 95).
- There is an emotional roller coaster ride associated with ADHD (p. 95).
- Dealing with emotions: Sit and experience the emotion, rather than try to make them go away or become upset that you are experiencing them (p. 97).
- Use “I feel” and no “I am” phrases. Feelings happen to you; they are not you (p. 97).
- Traits of emotional resilience:
 - Able to hear criticism without self-defeat or emotional wild fire.
 - Use support of others to gain strength.
 - Have optimistic view of outcomes while remaining realistic.
 - Face challenges and fears.
 - Take care of physical well-being.
 - Remain flexible and open to perspectives and ideas.
 - Listen to criticism as information for growth.

- Persistent with endeavors when faced with challenges and setbacks.
- Empathetic to others and their viewpoints.
- Accept that change is part of life, so they adapt, rather than fight all changes.
- Pause and are thoughtful rather than constantly impulsive (p. 102).
- Learning not to do something is generally harder than learning to do something. A big reason for this is that when we display a particular behavior or learn a new skill, there's some sort of reward at the end. But when we don't do something, there is often no reward (p. 116).
- In order to control behaviors, you must quickly pause; assess possible outcomes, consequences, and rewards; and then act accordingly (p. 117).
- Pause > Breathe > Think > Act (p. 121).
- Reactive Process: stimulus > action > outcome
- Responsive Process: stimulus > pause > breath > evaluation > action > outcome
- Diffusion is a way to decrease the intensity of thoughts and behaviors by separating your thoughts from behaviors. Aware is the key to all change. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (p. 122).
- Remember to zoom out. STOP: Stop, Think, Observe, Plan (p. 123).
- The ability to delay gratification is deeply rooted in core mental skills. You must manage emotions, accurately recall memories, keep impulsivity in check, plan ahead, and remain mentally flexible in order to choose to receive a reward later (p. 126).
- The rush of dopamine, the neurochemical that allows us to feel reward, is released a short time before the reward is actually achieved. This is why the last 5 to 10 percent of a project's completion is the hardest – because the reward has already happened inside your brain (p. 127).