

NeSS have developed a set of support resources for people with ADHD. These fall into the following categories:

- [Links to other resources and services \(signposting\)](#)
- [Information about symptoms and advice or strategies](#)
- [Handouts](#)
- [Worksheets and activities](#)

## Signposting

### General ADHD Resources

1. We have developed a booklet called 'Making Sense: A Guide to Living with Adult ADHD' which is available on our Trust website: [www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/adult-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder](http://www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/adult-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder) (a paper copy is available on request through our Service)
2. We have also developed a short film on living with ADHD available via YouTube: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHwi1mjVwcs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHwi1mjVwcs) (a DVD copy is available on request through our Service)
3. The ADHD Foundation website also has useful resources: [www.adhdfoundation.org.uk](http://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk)
4. Further information is also available on the AADD-UK website: [www.aadduk.org](http://www.aadduk.org)
5. ADDISS also offers information and support: [www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk)
6. Our Trust offers a 6-week course for adults with ADHD through Nottingham Recovery College called 'Living Well with ADHD'. Contact the College directly for information: [www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/nottingham-recovery-college](http://www.nottinghamshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/nottingham-recovery-college).  
Telephone: [0115 9560827](tel:01159560827) or [07769243329](tel:07769243329).  
Email: [nottingham.recovery.college@nottshc.nhs.uk](mailto:nottingham.recovery.college@nottshc.nhs.uk)
7. There is a local Adult ADHD Facebook group: search [Nottingham Adult ADHD Support Group](#) ([www.facebook.com/groups/585995824915983/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/585995824915983/))
8. The Nottingham Adult ADHD Support Group also meet on a monthly basis (for adults with ADHD, their parents and partners). [Contact them through the Facebook page](#)

### Relationships

9. How ADHD can impact on relationships: [www.adhdmarriage.com](http://www.adhdmarriage.com)

### Strategies

10. Practical strategies to manage executive issues: [Brain Hacks: Life-changing strategies to improve executive functioning](#), by Lara Honos-Webb

### Related issues

11. Many adults with ADHD find learning and practising mindfulness helpful. One useful resource is The Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD by Lidia Zylowska: [www.lidiazylowska.com/about/mindfulness-for-adhd](http://www.lidiazylowska.com/about/mindfulness-for-adhd)
12. Sleep is often a difficulty for adults with ADHD and I would recommend [Why we Sleep: the new science of sleep and dreams](#), by Matthew Walker, which is available as paperback or audiobook
13. Many adults with ADHD also experience significant stress and anxiety and may find it useful to consider ACT approaches (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) and I would particularly recommend [The Illustrated Happiness Trap: how to stop struggling and start living](#), by Russ Harris, which is in a very accessible animated format

### YouTube/blogs

14. Rene Brooks blog: 'black girl, lost keys': [www.blackgirllostkeys.com](http://www.blackgirllostkeys.com)
15. ADHD alien – comics about the daily struggle with ADHD: [www.adhd-alien.com](http://www.adhd-alien.com)
16. Jessica McCabe: [www.HowToADHD.com](http://www.HowToADHD.com) website and YouTube channel.
  - The book 'Brain Hacks' by Lara Honos-Webb discusses many strategies for managing executive functioning difficulties.
  - Many adults with ADHD find learning and practising mindfulness helpful. One useful resource is The Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD by Lidia Zylowska: [www.lidiazylowska.com/about/mindfulness-for-adhd](http://www.lidiazylowska.com/about/mindfulness-for-adhd)

### Students

Please speak to student support services at your university for advice on supports they can offer.

## Information, Advice and Strategies

# What is ADHD?

### **ADHD is a neurodevelopmental condition.**

- This means that symptoms are there when you're growing up.
- Symptoms can look different and change as you get older.
- ADHD can affect people in different ways.
- There are 3 types of ADHD you can be diagnosed with.
- A person with ADHD has always had ADHD.

### **Each person with ADHD has differences with:**

- Their attention span (including memory).
- Their need for movement.
- Their ability to organise or plan.
- Their ability to regulate their impulses.
- How they experience emotions.
- How their senses feel.

### **ADHD is natural:**

- ADHD affects 5% of children and 3% of adults (1.5 million people) in the UK, making it the most common neurodevelopmental condition in the country.
- There are probably more that don't have a diagnosis.

### **The 3 types of ADHD diagnosis are:**

- Predominantly Inattentive – mostly issues with attention and memory.
- Predominantly Hyperactive – mostly issues with hyperactivity and impulsivity.
- Combined type – features of inattention and hyperactivity.
- Note: A person may get diagnosed with one of the 'predominant' types and still have features of the other present. They will just not have enough of these symptoms to reach a combined diagnosis.

### **Other names for ADHD:**

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).
- Hyperkinetic Disorders.
- Attention Deficit.

### **Is ADHD a disability?**

- ADHD is a developmental disability that affects different people in different ways (and to different extents).
- Not all people with ADHD consider it a disability. Instead, they see it as a difference.

## Characteristics of ADHD

### Symptoms of Inattention

- Often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Often has difficulty sustaining attention on tasks
- Often doesn't seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Often does not follow through on instructions; fails to finish tasks
- Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities -phones, diaries, letters, bags, keys
- Easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- Often forgetful in daily activities

### Symptoms of Hyperactivity

- Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
  - Excessive fidgeting may include picking their fingers, shaking their knees, tapping their hands or feet, and changing position
- Often leaves seat in situations in which remaining seated is expected
  - Difficulty remaining seated during mealtimes, lectures, during conversations
  - Often runs about or climbs excessively in situations it is inappropriate
  - Adults may be excessively restless. May manifest as a strong internal feeling of restlessness
- Often has difficulty engaging in leisure activities quietly
- Often "on the go" or acts as if "driven by a motor"
- Often talks excessively

### Symptoms of Impulsivity

- Blurts out answers before questions have been completed
  - Tendency to say what comes to mind without considering timing or social appropriateness
- Difficulty waiting turn
  - Adults find it difficult to wait for others to finish tasks at their own pace; may feel irritated waiting in line at a supermarket or cash point machine
- Interrupts or intrudes on others
  - This is most often experienced by adults as social ineptness e.g. an inability to watch others struggle with a task without jumping in to do it themselves

### Diagnostic Criteria

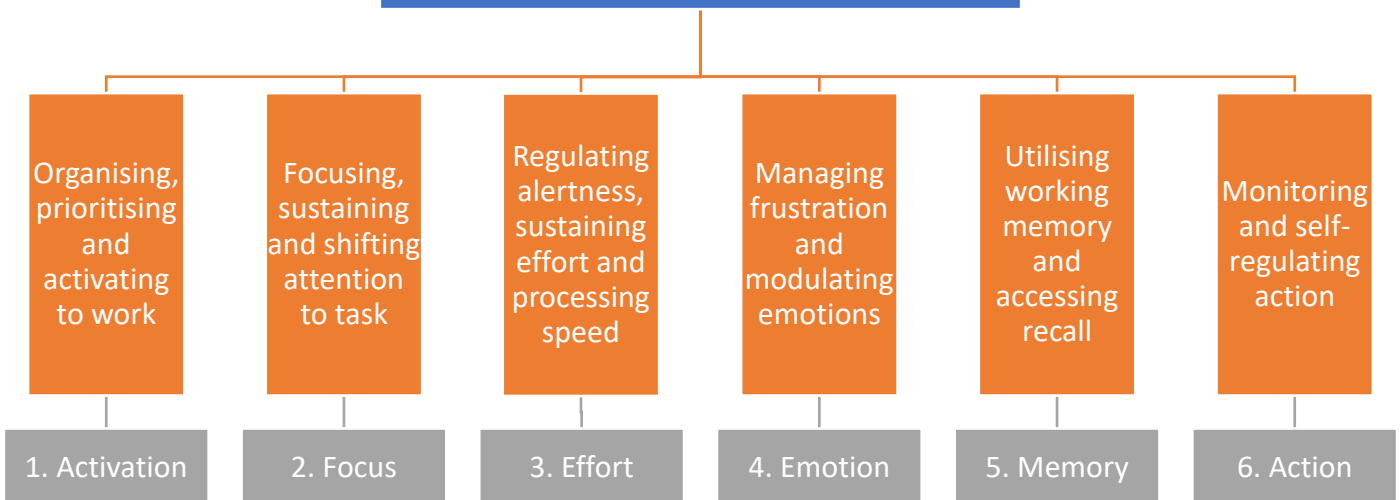
- As **a child**, to get a diagnosis of ADHD, you must experience at least **6 of these symptoms** in either category
- As **an adult**, to get a diagnosis of ADHD, you must experience at least **5 of these symptoms** in either category
- In either case, these symptoms must be accompanied by **impairment**. This can mean difficulties at work, school, college, university, social life, mental health and/or romantic life.
- These symptoms must be present in **at least 2 contexts** (e.g. work and social life)

## Characteristics of ADHD Continued

### Executive Dysfunction

- Executive functioning is an umbrella term for a group of skills
- These skills are often used together in a variety of combinations
- Executive functioning difficulties can present as a number of inattentive and/or hyperactive/impulsive symptoms
- Executive functioning difficulties are often found in people with neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and Autism. When people struggle with these, it's called **Executive Dysfunction**.

### Executive Functioning



### Executive Functioning Skills Explained

1. **Activation:** Organising yourself and finding the motivation to start tasks
2. **Focus:** Staying on task and dealing with minor distractions before returning to a task
3. **Effort:** Maintaining the same level of effort throughout the task (e.g. not having bursts of productivity)
4. **Emotion:** Responding appropriately to emotional circumstances (including calming down)
5. **Memory:** Using your short-term and long-term memory
6. **Action:** Behaving appropriately (e.g. thinking carefully before acting)

## **Sensory Processing**

### **What does this mean?**

What we see, hear, touch, taste, smell and how we move, helps us to understand what is happening, both in our environment and inside of our body. The senses give our brain information about the physical conditions of the body and environment so that we can use it to function and interact with objects and others appropriately. The senses help alert us to potential dangers. They impact our feelings and behaviours and help us to relax, concentrate, learn, move safely and plan our actions.

The senses work together (integrate) to detect, convert, organise and send sensory information to the brain via the brainstem. When this happens well, the brain forms perceptions, behaviours and learning. How easily we perform tasks and respond to situations depends on how efficiently our central nervous system processes the information.

### **How does it affect people?**

Sensory processing differences can be relatively minor, others can impact behaviour, social life and performing everyday tasks. Differences are common in people with autism or ADHD and can result in challenges (such as coping in busy environments), benefits (such as better focus and strong interests leading to unique skills) and pleasure (such as greater enjoyment from music, lights, rides). The brain is adaptable, and change is usually possible if needed, with the right sensory input and practice.

**Sensory self-regulation:** the (usually unconscious) ability to achieve, sustain and change alertness by filtering unnecessary sensory information and letting in enough for a coordinated, proportionate response to a situation or activity. If this process is not organised, there may be difficulties managing emotions and functioning, as self-regulation is the basis for all goals.

**Sensory over-sensitivity:** a person may experience more of a sensation than most people, which can feel very intense or uncomfortable, and therefore respond differently, like covering ears to noise. Being over-sensitive can lead to physical pain, such as when lightly touched. Over-sensitivity can lead to difficulties managing emotions due to sensory overload, feeling overwhelmed, anxious and difficulty thinking rationally. Protective responses of fight (anger, irritability, attack), flight (avoidance, fear, withdrawal), freeze (not moving or responding) to real or perceived dangers may occur, others may not notice the triggers.

**Sensory under-sensitivity:** a person may experience much less of a sensation than most people and may seek out more input to 'top up' the nervous

system and experience it to a recognisable and useful level. A person may appear that they cannot get enough of the sensation, such as enjoying loud music, strong flavours, fast rides, or they may not respond at all, like not noticing a smell or sound that others can, or not being able to feel their own body.


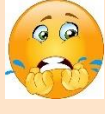



There are naturally times when people get too much or too little sensory input. Stressful situations can make a person more or less aware of a sensation. Sleep, hunger and level of interest in a task can also have an impact on alertness. A person can be over- and under-sensitive within different senses, or they can be just right, depending on the state of their nervous system and the situation they are in.

**Sensory discrimination:** the brain's ability to process and interpret the details and differences between sensory information received through the senses.

**Praxis:** the brain's ability to identify, sequence, plan and execute new or novel and coordinated motor movements which impacts on performing everyday motor tasks and activities.

### **Sensory ladder**

This tool shows the states of the nervous system. It can be used to check in with how you are feeling, which helps you become more in-tune with your feelings. Practicing regularly will help you respond to what your body needs. It can help you understand how your senses impact mood and behaviour. Learning strategies to change alertness levels on this continuum can help understanding of what to do to feel calm and alert, and to change unwanted behaviours.

	<b>Shutdown-</b> overwhelmed, avoidant, withdrawn, may be unable to speak	
	<b>Over-alert-</b> anxious, angry, upset, irritable, hyper, distracted, joyful, fight/flight. Extreme effort needed.	
	<b>Just right</b> – calm, alert, attentive, focused, ready to learn/engage/remember, rational, can control impulses & make good decisions	
	<b>Under-alert</b> – bored, sleepy, underwhelmed, low motivation, low mood	
	<b>Tired, resting, asleep</b>	



**Other factors:** Behaviours are not always due to sensory needs. Consider whether there are physical, nutritional, biomedical (unwell, allergies, sleep difficulty), emotional, stress factors or whether the activity is the wrong level of challenge for suitable functioning.

### **What strategies might be helpful?**

Sensory strategies set up the nervous system for success and support self-regulation. They are unique for each person – what may be calming to one person may be alerting to another person. 'Bottom-up' sensory strategies are more immediately useful to a person than 'top-down' verbal instruction/self-talk as they arrive at the brainstem first before verbal guidance, which must travel further through the brain.

Speak to your occupational therapist who will help you with understanding your sensory needs, how they impact your alertness and strategies that may help.

### **Guide for preparing sensory strategies.**

Consider what you already choose to engage in to alert or relax yourself, whether going on a walk, stroking a pet, music, massage, or spicy food and write them down. Notice how they make you feel, which sensations are comforting to your nervous system, and which are alerting. Write a visual plan / routine to schedule in sensory activities throughout the day as needed to help raise or lower alertness – small adjustments and predictability can make a big difference to helping you feel safe, manage your emotions, get organised and feel motivated.

Speak to an occupational therapist who can help you understand how you increase or decrease your alertness and what feels comforting or energising to your nervous system, to work out strategies to manage your alertness levels. There are no right or wrong strategies if they are safe and they help – every person is different in what they need to keep them feeling their best. Try out new strategies a few times to decide whether they are helpful. Having open conversations about your sensory needs can help everyone understand what is important so that adjustments can be made.

**Resting and taking breaks** is important for recovery from overstimulation. It helps to lower the blood pressure and improves the immune system, health and wellbeing. A good sleep schedule is important – the brain responds well to familiar cues around bedtime (see info sheet on sleep).

**Mindfulness techniques – Paying attention to the senses**, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgementally. This can be combined into usual activities, like eating, showering, stretches, nature walks, by focusing on 5



things you can see, feel, hear, smell, and taste. This improves self-awareness and reduces anxiety. **Focused breathing**, regularly taking in and focusing on slow, deep breaths, makes calming hormones release which relaxes the body, reducing anxiety. Examples at <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/breathing-exercises-for-stress/> Practice regularly, start with 5 minutes per day.

Examples of things to do to manage sensory difficulties.		
Sensory system	Typically alerting input	Typically calming input
<b>Mouth</b>	<p>Cold drinks – water, smoothie, hydration for focus &amp; wellbeing</p> <p>Crunchy/chewy snacks engaging the senses: carrot, apple, breadsticks, popcorn, liquorice, jerky, raisins, granola, pretzels, nuts.</p> <p>Spicy food, pickles, ice lollies, carbonated water</p>	<p>Suck water or favourite drink through spouted bottle / straw activating jaw nerve and mouth muscles.</p> <p>Chew gum or adult chew tools.</p> <p>Warm drink</p> <p>Slow deep breaths while you work</p>
<b>Move</b> <b>Deep pressure</b>	<p>Weight bearing activity (heavy work), resistance activities (stretching) and movement breaks that encourage muscles and joints to stretch and tense by pushing, pulling, carrying, moving heavy objects, and adding weight and resistance increases proprioception. This is the most effective way to be grounded, organised, alert and calm or 'just right', whether over- or under-alert in any of the senses.</p> <p>Leisure or power walks, running, jump rope, chair pull-ups &amp; push-ups, marching, wall pushes, steps, stretches, dance, housework, gardening, cycling, swimming, exercise console games, vibration cushions, chin up door bar, steady swinging, ball games, jumping, rocking, go for a ride in a car – soothing movement, balance board, gentle spinning, exercise ball, trampette, wobble cushion for postural feedback. Slow continuous movement is calming - incorporate slowly if sensitive to movement. Fast and erratic movement is alerting.</p>	
<b>Touch</b>	<p>Alerting or fidget items like tangles, poppers or squeezey or stretchy items in sensory bag or pocket</p> <p>Light touch / tickling is usually alerting.</p> <p>Cooler showers, using scrubs</p> <p>Crowded places</p> <p>Water over hands</p> <p>Gentle breeze</p> <p>Walking barefoot on grass or sand</p> <p>Spiky foot rollers</p>	<p>Comfort items like fabrics, BluTac, squeeze ball, keys, coins in sensory bag or pocket. These help to focus the mind and feel in control of environment.</p> <p>Weight of backpack, weighted cushion, or lap pad (2kg) or blanket-deep pressure</p> <p>Hugs, massage or squeezing to arms, hands, feet, squeeze hands together in prayer position and push palms together or clasp hands, place on head and push down for 5 seconds.</p>

	<p>Touching different textures can reduce sensitivity for some. Sitting / laying on the floor</p>	<p>Firm, slow, continuous touch Stroke a pet or soft toy. Tight Lycra clothing, bigger sizes, seamless clothes Warm baths, using creams, tangle teaser brush, electric or finger toothbrushes, foam-free or tasteless toothpaste. Soft blanket, tight sheets, cushions Cooking, baking- stirring, kneading dough. Comfortable chair</p>
<p><b>Look</b></p>	<p>Bright lighting, light up items, neon signs, daylight, sunrise, mirrors. Art/craft activity – doodle, collage, colouring, painting, crochet, puzzles, wordsearches Reminders and visual supports – post-its, phone alerts, to-do lists to help remember to do sensory strategies regularly</p>	<p>Low lighting, lamp or fairy lights, light projector, coloured bulbs, lava lamp, blackout curtains/blinds, sunglasses, cap Look away from digital screens, turn down screen brightness. Look at a distant view to relax eyes or at something pleasant: a living plant, flowers, through a window, artwork, photos, clouds, night sky, sunset. Watch fish tank or fireplace (on TV if none) Nature walks, time spent in green space, particularly walking in bright daylight in mornings supports regular body clock and sleep. Consider colour preferences, reduce clutter, space dividers.</p>
<p><b>Listen</b></p>	<p>Create own alerting playlist. Play through loudspeaker or headphones but not so loud that it may risk damaging ear drum. Singing/humming along Use a person's name to get their attention first. Sudden sounds Loud voices</p>	<p>Create own soft, calming music playlist. Play through noise-cancelling earphones or quietly through headphones. Calming and steady music can support deep breathing/relaxation. Podcasts can help focus. Earplugs, noise cancelling earphones or tighter fitting hat to dampen sound. White or pink noise or other sound generating apps through earphones. Movement and fidget breaks</p>

		Calming sounds of nature – ocean, rain, leaves crunching, birds Go to designated quiet space. Shut doors, windows. Sit near exit. Covering ears, soothing music, quiet soft sounds are generally calming.
<b>Smell</b>	Citrus smells like orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit Peppermint Jasmine Fresh air breaks.  Please check for contraindications of any essential oils used.	Favourite essential oil/perfume/product added to cuff/wrist or bag for discreet calming e.g., lavender, rose, vanilla, chamomile. Diffusers, scented candles Fresh-air breaks. Unscented products

## Executive Function

### What does this mean?

Executive function is a set of mental skills. The ability to use these skills underpins many daily tasks such as using your short-term memory, self-control, planning and flexible thinking. This is something that people develop as they get older and have more experience of using these skills. People with Autism and ADHD often have difficulties with executive function skills.

People sometimes understand executive function skills in 3 main parts: working memory, cognitive flexibility, and self-control.

Your working memory is your short-term memory. When it is being used, you are able to hold information in your mind for a small amount of time and use it in some way. For example, if someone on the phone tells you a code to a door and you enter it.

Cognitive flexibility is about flexible thinking. When it is being used, you are able to think about something in more than one way. For example, being able to see both sides of an argument or approaching a problem in multiple different ways.

Self-control is about resistance and patience. When it is being used, you are able to ignore distractions and resist temptations. For example, being able to wait for your turn to speak or not buying everything that you want and/or like.

### How does it affect people?

People who lack executive functioning skills can find it very difficult to do tasks that others may find easy. For example, they may struggle to follow instructions (a working memory skill) or organise their day (a cognitive flexibility skill). A lack of executive function skills can also make it difficult to manage your emotions and to exercise self-control. These skills are often required and expected in modern workplaces as well as in education. This can make it hard for people with these difficulties to access work and education.

## **What strategies might be helpful?**

There are lots of ways to improve executive functioning skills and not all of them are effective for everyone. It's important to research and find what is useful to you. Even people without neurodevelopmental conditions like Autism and ADHD can improve their skills.

### Working Memory

- Using hand-written notes on a visible calendar or electronic reminders. It can be helpful for your memory to physically write things out and making checking a calendar a part of your daily routine. Similarly, electronic reminders using a smart phone or smart speaker can alert you of things that need to happen at specific intervals.
- Establishing a routine as far as possible. Repeating tasks in the same way for a long time can help people to anticipate and remember what happens next.

### Cognitive Flexibility

- Practice seeing things from other points of view. For example, you could watch a film and then try to explain the perspectives of 3 different characters and what they might think or feel at particular moments.
- Ask for help. If you're not sure how to prioritise, or what someone else might be thinking, you can always ask questions. If you have someone you trust or someone you admire, you could reach out and ask if they have any tips for you.

### Self-control

- Take your time. Try to give yourself the space to think before you act on something. For example, when you pick up something that you want in a shop, whilst you're doing the rest of your shopping you can try to think about whether it's something you *really* want.
- Get to know your emotions. Take some time to learn about what your emotions are and what might make you feel that way. Learn about the functions of emotions and how they may impact on our behaviour. Once you have a better understanding of your own emotions, you can understand what things might lead you to become upset and prevent it from happening.

## **Executive functioning skills and communication**

Executive functioning can affect our communication. When considering this, we can divide these skills into three broad categories: planning, working memory and self-control.

- **Planning**

Planning doesn't just mean making plans for your day but also affects your ability to think of solutions to situations in real time. It also allows you to manage the time you are speaking and self-monitor your communication.

Difficulty in planning may leave you struggling to get a word in during a fast-paced conversation, giving too much or too little information, struggling to stay on topic, or clamming up and not being able to say anything. Self-monitoring means that you know how long you have been speaking for, how much of the information you want to give has been given and what is left to say. It also allows you to know what you are communicating non-verbally through your facial expressions and body language. Sometimes, when you are over-stimulated or anxious, self-monitoring can become challenging; you may struggle to monitor your communication or you may become overly aware of yourself and your communication, creating an information feedback loop and overloading your working memory.

- **Working memory**

Working memory allows you to hold information in your mind for a small amount of time and use it to keep track of what you are doing and complete tasks. An example of this could be remembering a phone number while you get a pen and paper to write it down. Your working memory allows you to remember what was last said in a conversation and hold the information, and your response, in mind until it is your turn to speak. It also allows you to hold all the information you were planning to give, and the plan of how to order it, in your head as you speak. Sometimes you might have an idea of what you are trying to say to someone, and the right words planned for explaining it, but in the process of beginning your explanation the words have gone and you're left grappling around for the vocabulary. In a group conversation your working memory is keeping track of who said what and what the replies were.

Working memory is used to hold important pieces of information, such as when and where someone wants you to meet them. If that gets lost in the conversation before you have chance to make a note of it, you might walk away from a conversation without realising you have missed information.

- **Self-control**

This includes the ability to inhibit (stop) your actions, initiate (start) actions or tasks, control your emotional responses, and maintain (keep) your attention. Difficulties with inhibition may mean you interrupt people, say too much, speak too quickly, give too much detail or over-share. Difficulties initiating may leave you struggling to speak. If you struggle to control your emotions, then emotive topics may cause you to become confrontational or unresponsive. If you have difficulty maintaining your attention you are likely to zone out during conversations or continue an alternate conversation in your

head while another person is speaking. You may find yourself thinking about listening and becoming overly observant of your own non-verbal communication instead of listening to the words being spoken to you.

### So what is there to do?

There are things you can try to help communication feel easier.

People don't all have the same difficulties and different solutions will work for different people, so it's important to see what works best for you.

Let's break this down into specific hurdles and potential solutions.

#### **1) Talking Too Much**

This can affect us some of the time, or all of the time. Knowing how long to speak for or how much information is needed can be really tricky, especially if you are feeling anxious or you are really passionate about what you are saying. You might be really conscious of this even when it's happening, or you might not notice until after or maybe not at all. People might tell you that you talk too much, or they might just choose not to talk to you.

There are, of course, times when it's appropriate or necessary, to be talking a lot, but often we don't have to share every thought that crosses our minds.

#### **Solutions:**

- Tell yourself to take breaks when speaking to give others time to speak.
- This will look different depending on the situation. If you are in a casual conversation with friends or acquaintances, this might be after just a sentence or two. If you are delivering training to some colleagues this may be after 5 or even 10 minutes.
- Try asking more questions.
- When you ask a question, allow time for the other person reply, this will give them a chance to share anything they have been waiting to say.
- Be honest and open with people you feel comfortable to about your tendency to go off topic and let them know how to get you back on track. This could be a key phrase for them to say, such as "you were saying..." or simply getting your attention and giving you a meaningful look. Whatever would work for you both.

#### **2) Oversharing or speaking and regretting it later**

Sometimes we start by telling a simple story about something we are going through or something that happened and before we know it we have told the other person our entire life story including all the ups and downs, our heartbreaks and traumas and what we named our first pet. By the time we

are finished the other person doesn't know why we were telling them and, to be honest, neither do we.

**Solutions:**

- Consider the relationship you have with the other person and the type of conversation you are in, is it polite chit-chat or a deep-and-meaningful? If it's a deep conversation they will be interested in your deepest thoughts and musings but if not, maybe save them for a different conversation.
- Once you've made your first point, take a breath to consider what is relevant. If you hear yourself starting down a track that is going to take even more explanation, consider if it is necessary. If it is, try to consider how to sum it up in a sentence or two then get back to your main point.

**3) Feeling Like You Can't Speak Up**

As well as having times when we can't stop the words tumbling out of our mouths, there can also be times when we want to speak up but can't figure out how. This can happen when our emotions are running high, and we have too many strong feelings on a subject to be able to plan where to start. This might happen in a romantic relationship when there is an argument, for example.

**Solutions:**

- Explain that you need time to yourself. This could be shown with words, written down, a pre-agreed signal (e.g. a hand gesture) or with your behaviour (such as just walking away).
- Take some time to consider your own viewpoint. Write this down, draw it, create a spider diagram, whatever works for you. You could use this to help you when you have the conversation or you could give this to your partner directly.

**4) Going off topic**

Our interest in novel stimuli is great in many ways; so many great things have been discovered by people who got distracted from what they were meant to be doing. But our conversation partners might get a little frustrated by our constant tangents and new topics. When we are trying to discuss our child's behaviour at school with their teacher and find ourselves instead telling them about unrelated family gatherings, or how we have been thinking of buying them a new scooter but can't decide on which one, we should probably rein it in a little.



### **Solutions:**

- Be aware of your tendency to do this and be honest with the people you are speaking to. Ask them “am I still on topic?” if you are unsure where you started.
- Where possible, and when the conversation is important, try to have conversations in quiet places that are free of distractions.
- If you have noticed a fun thing, like a person with a nice outfit or a cute squirrel, enjoy that thing for yourself but only point it out to the other person if you really think they would be interested or would need to know (like if said cute squirrel were about to jump on their head).
- If the new topic is actually something that you need to address and you need to do it now, before you forget it, let your conversation partner know that you’re changing the topic by saying something like “hold that thought” before making your point and coming back to the original topic. This way, if you have then forgotten what you were originally discussing, you can ask them to remind you where you were.

## **5) Finding the Right Words**

Everybody sometimes has difficulty remembering the word that they were going to say, it’s often called “that tip of the tongue feeling” because your tongue is ready to help you form the word but your brain isn’t ready to tell you what the word is. People with executive functioning difficulties may have the issue more than others. It can affect any word, even words you use daily and can cause an anxiety feedback loop where your anxiety about the difficulty finding the word then makes it even harder to remember. This is why it affects us more in stressful situations, such as meetings or interviews.

### **Solutions:**

- If you can’t think of the exact word that you want, try describing it instead. This can often help the word come to you.
- If there is a really important term/word that you need to remember, and you have the time, try prompting your phonemic (speech sound) level of language processing, by going through the alphabet in your head until the right letter triggers the memory of the word.
- If you can, come back to the subject later. This could be later in the conversation or later in the day. If you get a chance to stop actively looking for the word it is likely your brain will continue the search, subconsciously, and once it is ready it will come to you as if from nowhere.

## **6) Interrupting**

It can be hard to find a natural way into a conversation and when you feel you have something important to add, interrupting can sometimes be necessary. It can become a problem though if you are always interrupting, without letting others finish what they were trying to say, or if you interrupt in a way that comes across as rude. If you struggle with your working memory, you may be more likely to interrupt because you are afraid of forgetting something important you want to say. Self-control also matters here because you need to inhibit your desire to speak until the time is right.

### **Solutions:**

- If you are sure that the interruption is required, try starting it with “if I could just interrupt for a second...”
- If you know you should wait until they have finished their point and you need to hold on to your point, try repeating a key part of it in your head while you wait.
- If you are aware that you interrupt too often, give yourself a target such as, in this 1 hour meeting I will interrupt no more than 3 times.
- If you realise after you have interrupted inappropriately, be open about it and apologise. Allow the person you interrupted to go back to what they were saying.

## **7) Zoning Out**

It can be hard to keep your focus on what someone is saying. If you have had your imagination triggered by something they have said and then they have moved on to something else, you might even be carrying on a completely different conversation in your head of things you would like to say on that particular topic. Others can get very frustrated by this and mistake you for being rude, or they might ask you something which you can't answer.

### **Solutions:**

- If you are speaking with someone who knows you well, try to be honest with them when you have stopped listening. They may get frustrated by this but if they really want you to know what they are saying they should appreciate being told when they need to give the information again.
- Remind people that your difficulty maintaining your attention is not a reflection on them, or how much you value them and what they are saying.
- In formal settings, such as in work meetings, try keeping short notes to keep yourself engaged.

## **8) Speaking too fast**

You might not notice that you are speaking too fast and only find out later when someone else comments on it. This could come from your excitement and interest in the topic and lack of inhibition slowing you down or it may come from a place of anxiety due to worrying that you will forget what you are saying before you have finished saying it. People can struggle to keep up if you talk very fast and may miss some of what you have said.

### **Solutions:**

- For familiar conversation partners, ask them to let you know when you are speaking too fast before it becomes frustrating for them. It's better to be interrupted politely than by someone who is upset.
- For new friends or people, you have just met, (particularly in situations it is likely to happen, for example in a job interview) let them know that you do this and ask them to stop you if you are going too fast.
- If you are going to an important meeting, write what you need to say in advance to reduce your anxiety around forgetting.

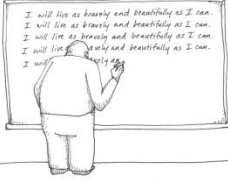

Handouts:


## Ways to maximise your attention

### External Strategies

These are external changes you can make to your surroundings:

- Listen to music or white noises to block out other noises
- Wear earplugs to dampen other noise
- Switch your phone to silent, and put it out of view, only checking for messages when convenient
- although it can be awkward, if needed, tell other people around you to be quieter
- Go to a quieter room if you can
- Minimize visual distractions - work in a de-cluttered space - move pictures and other visual distractions away from where you are working
- Make sure you are not facing the window when you are trying to work or concentrate, face into the room, or a wall
- Use bright colours/pens to draw attention to the task you are doing, e.g. post-it notes, highlighters
- Make a cue card for yourself such as “Focus on what you are doing!” and put it on your computer screen, or write on your hand

<p>Repetition and Rehearsal</p> 	<p>The more you repeat or rehearse a strategy/ new habit, the more likely it is to go from being a task you have to work hard to remember, to something you just do automatically (like putting clothes on before you go outside!)</p>
<p>Make a picture</p> 	<p>If you struggle to hold verbal information, pairing it with a visual image can help you to remember it (as it uses two different types of memory). It can be a related image, or something entirely random!</p>
<p>Mnemonics</p>	<p>A mnemonic is a tool to help remember facts or a large amount of information. It can be a song, rhyme, acronym, or a phrase to help remember a list of facts in a certain order. For example, use RICE when you have a sprain (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation).</p>

<p>Problem solve it!</p>  A black silhouette of a person standing on a cluster of colorful puzzle pieces (green, blue, purple, orange). The person has their hand to their head in a thinking pose.	<p>If you have lost something, systematically mentally retrace your steps. Ask yourself 'when did I last have my keys?' or 'where did I first go when I came into the house?'</p>
<p>Try to keep calm!</p>	<p>Feeling emotional and stressed can impact on both attention and memory. Trying to keep calm, have a break if you are getting stressed, and make a plan for action can help to manage this.</p>

## Handout: Put a stop to impulse shopping

When you have ADHD it can be hard to resist impulsive spending. Even just walking down the street, shops can lure you in with special offers or you can see things you want or think you need. Online emails and websites will also try and sell you things you don't need.

These strategies can help to manage shopping differently:

- Shop with cash only - leave your bank cards at home
- Have only one bank card to keep track of
- When you go shopping, take a list of what you need and stick to it
- Keep a running total whilst shopping (you can use the calculator on your mobile phone)
- Stay away from places where you know you're likely to spend too much money
- Get advice from a friend or family member about whether you should buy something
- Leave the shop and see if you still think you need the item when you return
- Throw away catalogues that come in the post as soon as they arrive so they are not a temptation
- Delete 'junk' emails trying to sell you products you don't need

Worksheets and Activities

## **How ADHD Presents in Me**

### **Symptoms of inattention**

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## How ADHD Presents in Me

### Symptoms of hyperactivity and/or impulsivity

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## How ADHD Presents in Me

### Other symptoms (e.g. executive functioning)

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## Things I Do To Help Myself

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## Things people can do to help

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## Unhelpful Things

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