

ADHD & Executive Function Support

A Strategy Guide for Clarity, Compassion & Structured Support

Executive function refers to the set of mental skills that help us plan, **organise**, start tasks, stay focused, manage time, regulate emotions and remember information.

For people with ADHD, these skills develop differently because the ADHD brain processes motivation, attention and working memory in unique ways. **This isn't a matter of effort or discipline — it's a neurological difference.** Understanding how executive function works allows us to support children, young people and adults with clarity, compassion and strategies that genuinely help.

THE PILLARS OF EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Planning

Organisation

Task
Initiation

Focus

Time Mgmt

Emotion
Reg.

Memory

WHAT EXECUTIVE FUNCTION DIFFICULTIES LOOK LIKE

Executive function challenges can show up in many ways. These challenges are neurological, not **behavioural** — they reflect how the ADHD brain manages information, motivation and cognitive load.

- **Task Paralysis:** Struggling to start tasks, even when wanting to, especially when multi-step activities feel too big or unclear.
- **Time Blindness:** Losing track of time, or underestimating how long things will take.
- **Working Memory Gaps:** Forgetting instructions shortly after hearing them.
- **Transitions & Layouts:** Experiencing difficulty **organising** materials, planning ahead or switching between tasks.

TARGETED STRATEGIES & SUPPORTS



Supporting Children with ADHD



Supporting Adults with ADHD

Children thrive when the environment provides structure, clarity and predictable routines.

- **Bite-sized steps:** Breaking tasks into small, manageable steps reduces overwhelm and helps them get started.
- **Visual supports:** Visual supports such as picture schedules, **colour-coded** subjects, step-by-step charts and timers reduce working-memory demands and make expectations clearer.
- **Clear instructions:** Giving one instruction at a time, modelling tasks and checking understanding helps children stay on track.
- **Movement as a tool:** Movement should be used as a tool, not a reward — fidget tools, stretch breaks and movement jobs help regulate attention.
- **Process praise:** Celebrating effort, not neatness or speed, builds confidence and motivation.

Adults often mask difficulties, making external structure critical to replace internal pressure.

- **External structure:** Planners, alarms, reminders, calendar blocks and visual to-do lists help reduce daily cognitive load.
- **Actionable tasks:** Breaking tasks into "minimum viable steps" reduces paralysis and makes tasks feel achievable.
- **Body-doubling:** Working alongside someone else in person or online is one of the most effective strategies for improving focus.
- **Time awareness:** Tools that support time awareness, such as visual timers or time-tracking apps, help with time blindness.
- **Minimising fatigue:** Reducing decision fatigue through routines, meal plans and simplified choices can significantly improve daily functioning. Creating calm, **organised** environments and using noise-reduction tools also support emotional regulation and focus.

★ Why Executive Function Support Matters

Supporting executive function helps ADHD learners feel capable, **organised** and understood. It reduces overwhelm, improves emotional regulation and builds independence. When we adapt the environment — rather than expecting the individual to “push through” — we create spaces where ADHD brains can thrive academically, socially and professionally. Executive function support is not about fixing ADHD; it is about recognising how the ADHD brain works and providing the tools, structure and compassion that allow people to succeed on their own terms.