FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ADHD



Switched On

Your guide to ADHD: how your brain works, what helps, and owning it on your terms.

focus · time · feelings · school · your strengths

ANDREW RYDER

Belongs to _____

Start here

You've been diagnosed with ADHD. However you feel about that, it's valid. This guide is yours to read in any order, scribble on and come back to.

A diagnosis is...

An explanation for things you might have noticed for years

A key to support at school, college and work

A way to understand yourself better, and be kinder to yourself

A diagnosis isn't...

A limit on what you can do or become

Your fault, or anyone else's

Everything about you. You are a whole person, not a checklist.

How do you feel about it right now? Circle any.

relieved | "this explains a lot" | validated | annoyed it took so long | confused | worried what people will think | curious | nothing much yet

Skip around. No order needed.

Write on it. It's yours.

Share only the pages you choose.

Questions I still have

Bring these to your next appointment, or ask someone you trust.

What ADHD actually is

ADHD is a difference in how your brain regulates attention, energy, impulses and emotions. It's not a lack of attention. It's attention that's hard to steer.

Attention
Locks on to what grabs it. Drifts from what doesn't.

Energy
A restless body, a racing mind, or both.

Impulses
Act or speak first, think second.

Emotions
Feelings arrive fast, big and loud.

Three ways it can show up

Mainly inattentive
Drifting, daydreaming, losing things, busy mind

Mainly hyperactive and impulsive
Restless, on the go, quick to act

Combined
A mix of both, which is the most common

Your report may say which fits you. It can shift as you get older.

Facts worth knowing

Around 1 in 20 young people has ADHD.

It isn't caused by parenting, sugar or screens.

ADHD and autism often go together. Some people say AuDHD.

It's one of the most strongly inherited conditions there is.

It often continues into adulthood, but tends to look different.

It's easily missed if you're quiet, dreamy or good at hiding it.

Things that make more sense now I know

Your ADHD, your identity

ADHD is part of how you're wired. How you talk about it, and how much it's part of who you are, is your call.

Ways people say it. All valid.

"I have ADHD" "I'm ADHD" "I'm an ADHDer" "I'm neurodivergent" "AuDHD" "I don't really label it"

Neurodiversity, in one breath

All brains are different, and that's natural, like biodiversity. A lot of what feels hard comes from the mismatch between your brain and a world built for a different kind of brain. That's not a you problem.

What people say	What's actually true
"Everyone's a bit ADHD."	Everyone gets distracted. ADHD is when it's constant, lifelong and gets in the way.
"It's just an excuse."	It's an explanation. Explanations help you find what actually works.
"You're just lazy."	ADHD affects starting, not caring. Lots of ADHDers work twice as hard to keep up.
"Only boys have it."	People of every gender have ADHD. It's often missed in girls because it can look quieter.
"You'll grow out of it."	Many adults still have ADHD. What grows is your toolkit and your self-understanding.

How I want to talk about my ADHD

Focus runs on interest

Psychiatrist Dr William Dodson describes ADHD as an "interest-based nervous system". Your brain switches on for certain things, not just because something matters or someone said so.

What flicks the switch

Interest
A topic, game or skill you're into

Novelty
Something new or different

Challenge
A puzzle, goal or competition

Urgency
A deadline breathing down your neck

Passion
Something that really matters to you

Hyperfocus: the upside

Deep, intense focus for hours. Huge creativity and output when you're locked in.

The catch

Losing track of time, forgetting to eat, struggling to stop. Set an alarm before you dive in.

Hacks for the boring stuff

Borrow urgency. Race a timer. "How much can I do in 15 minutes?"

Body double. Work alongside someone, in person or on a video call.

Make it new. Change where you work, or use colours and different pens.

Add a challenge. Beat your record, or turn it into a quiz.

Stack it. Pair simple tasks with music or a podcast.

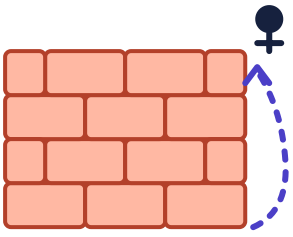
Move. Stand, pace while you revise, or fidget with your hands.

Things that switch me on

My best boring-task hack

Getting started

Your brain's "admin team", called executive function, handles planning, starting, organising and remembering. With ADHD it's often short-staffed, so starting can feel impossible, even for things you want to do.



The Wall of Awful

ADHD coach Brendan Mahan describes how every past struggle, telling-off or failure with a task adds a brick to a wall. The bigger the wall, the harder it is to start. You don't always have to climb it. You can find a way round.

Ways round the wall

Shrink the first step. Not "write the essay". Just "open the document".

Name the feeling. "I'm avoiding this because I'm worried it'll be rubbish."

Start anywhere. The middle, the easy bit, the fun bit. Starting is starting.

Five-minute deal. Agree to do five minutes. You're allowed to stop after.

Give your admin team some backup

One inbox for your brain. Notes app or notebook. Write it down the second you think of it.

A launch pad. Keys, bag, charger and travel card live in one spot by the door.

Checklists. For mornings, PE days, packing. Your brain doesn't have to hold it.

Done beats perfect. A finished okay thing beats a perfect thing you never start.

One thing I've been avoiding:

The tiniest first step is:

Time: now, and not now

Lots of ADHDers live with "time blindness". "Not now" feels miles away, until suddenly it's now. Running late or last-minute is not a character flaw.



Make time something you can see

Visual timers. A clock face or timer you can watch shrinking beats numbers on a screen.

Label your alarms. "Leave NOW for the bus" works better than a random beep.

Plan backwards. Start from when you need to arrive and work back.

Add a buffer. ADHD brains tend to underestimate. Add extra time to every guess.

Mini-deadlines. Split big deadlines into small ones in your calendar.

Switch warnings. Alarms at 10 and 5 minutes before you need to stop.

Time detective

Guess how long it takes, then time it

Task	My guess	Actual
Getting ready in the morning		
Getting to school or college		

Big feelings and rejection

ADHD affects how your brain manages emotions too. Feelings can go from 0 to 100 fast and take longer to settle. That's not being dramatic. It's wiring.

When rejection hits harder

Many ADHDers feel criticism, rejection or the idea of letting someone down extremely intensely. Some people call this rejection sensitive dysphoria, or RSD. It isn't a formal diagnosis, but lots of people find the name helps. It can look like:

- replaying a comment for days
- people-pleasing
- not trying in case you fail
- sudden anger or tears
- reading a "k." text as a disaster

When a feeling hits

1

Notice

Where is it in your body? Hot face, tight chest?

2

Name it

"I'm embarrassed." Naming it helps tame it.

3

Pause

Step away. Cold water. A long, slow breath out.

4

Check the story

Is there another explanation? Would a friend see it differently?

My reset menu. Circle what works.

- music, loud
- walk or run
- shower
- talk it out
- write it down
- sport or gym
- time with a pet
- a game, with a timer
- sleep on it

My early warning signs

What actually helps me

Impulses, risk and the buzz

ADHD brains often chase stimulation and act fast. That can make you brave, spontaneous and great in a crisis. It can also mean choices you wish you'd thought about for two more seconds.

The upside

Spontaneous, brave, quick-thinking, up for anything, makes creative leaps other people miss.

Watch out for

Blurting, interrupting, impulse buys, risky dares, saying yes to everything at once.

The two-second pause

Buy time: "Let me think about it and get back to you."

24-hour rule: for buying stuff, including in-game purchases.

Park it: write the thought down instead of saying it right now.

Future check: "Will this still seem like a good idea tomorrow?"

Your brain online

Endless feeds are built on constant novelty, which hooks ADHD brains hard. You're not weak. The app is doing its job. Try app timers, fewer notifications, and charging your phone outside your room.

Staying safe, your way

ADHD can mean more risk around alcohol, vaping, drugs, roads and money. Not a lecture, just information, so your choices are made with your eyes open.

Decide your limits before you go out, not in the moment.

Have a mate you check in with and look out for.

On ADHD medication? Ask your prescriber how alcohol or other substances could affect it.

My pause phrase or plan

Energy, rest and sleep

ADHD energy can swing between full throttle and totally flat. And lots of ADHDers find their brain gets busiest right when it's time to switch off.

Restless is a need

Your body might need more movement than a school day gives you. Sport, walking, stretching, a fidget or standing to work all count.

Watch for burnout

Pushing hard to keep up for too long can leave you exhausted, foggy and flat, even about things you love. That's a sign to rest, lower the pressure and tell someone.



Why sleep can be harder

Racing thoughts, a body clock that runs late, and night-time hyperfocus on a game or video. Tired-but-wired is really common with ADHD.

What helps

Steady wake-up time, even at weekends (ish).

A wind-down routine for the last 30 to 60 minutes.

Phone out of reach, or at least dimmed and on silent.

Brain dump every thought onto paper before bed.

Background sound, like an audiobook or rain sounds.

Daylight and movement earlier in the day.

If sleep has been a real struggle for weeks, tell your GP or ADHD team. There is help, and sleep affects everything else.

My wind-down routine

School, college and exams

You have a right to support that fits how you learn. It doesn't need to wait until things go wrong. Tick what would help you.

- [ ] A movement or time-out pass
- [ ] Instructions and homework written down
- [ ] Regular check-ins with a key adult
- [ ] Notes or slides shared in advance
- [ ] A quiet space to work or reset
- [ ] A seat away from distractions
- [ ] Big deadlines split into smaller ones
- [ ] Being allowed a fidget in lessons
- [ ] Help getting started on tasks
- [ ] Being corrected privately, not in front of the class

Exams: access arrangements

For GCSEs, A levels and many other qualifications, your school or college can apply for arrangements based on your needs. Talk to your SENCo early, because they need time to gather evidence.

supervised rest breaks · a separate room · extra time · a word processor · a prompter

Revision that works with your brain

Sprints. 20 to 25 minutes on, a proper break, repeat.

Make it active. Flashcards, mind maps, teach it to someone.

Move. Walk while you test yourself out loud.

Gamify past papers. Time yourself and try to beat your score.

One thing I'm going to ask for, and who I'll ask

Friends and relationships

ADHDers are often the fun, loyal, up-for-anything friend. Some ADHD traits can trip friendships up too. Knowing which is which helps.

What you bring. Circle yours.

loyal · funny · spontaneous · honest · creative · protective · great in a crisis · full of ideas

What can happen	What helps
Forgetting to reply	Tell close friends it's not personal. A quick emoji keeps the thread alive.
Interrupting or talking a lot	Notice it, own it, hand it back: "Sorry, go on."
Forgetting plans or birthdays	Calendar reminders a few days before, not on the day.
All-in friendships	Intense is lovely. Keep a few people close, not just one.
Small things stinging	Check the story before you react (page 8).

You deserve people who get you

In friendships, relationships and online, you deserve people who like you as you are. If someone mocks your ADHD, uses it against you or pressures you, that's on them. Talk to someone you trust.

The people who get me

Masking, self-esteem and mental health

Lots of ADHDers spend years compensating: over-preparing, people-pleasing and hiding what's hard. It can work for a while, but it's exhausting.

Signs you might be masking

- staying up late to catch up
- laughing it off when you're struggling
- perfectionism
- wiped out after school
- "I'm fine" on repeat
- copying how others act

That voice in your head

Before diagnosis, lots of young people hear "try harder", "pay attention" and "you're so disorganised" thousands of times. That can leave a harsh inner critic. Try this:

Notice it. "That's the critic talking."

Friend test. Would you say this to a mate?

Collect evidence of things you've done well.

Looking after your mental health

Anxiety and low mood are more common with ADHD, often because of the pressure of living in a world not built for your brain. If you've felt low, anxious or not yourself for more than a couple of weeks, tell someone. Your GP or ADHD team can help.

If you're thinking about hurting yourself or ending your life, please reach out now. **Childline** 0800 1111 (free). **Text SHOUT** to 85258. **PAPYRUS HOPELINE247** 0300 102 2470 or text 88247. **Samaritans** 116 123. In an emergency, call **999**.

My evidence bank

Things I've done, handled or got through that I'm proud of

Medication: the facts, your choice

Some young people with ADHD take medication and some don't. Both are OK. If it's offered, you decide with your family and your specialist, and your views really count.

What it can do

For many people it turns the volume down on distraction and restlessness, so it's easier to start, focus and pause before acting.

What it can't do

Change who you are, or fix everything. Pills don't teach skills, so the tools in this guide still matter.

Two main types

Stimulants

For example methylphenidate or lisdexamfetamine. Work within hours and wear off the same day.

Non-stimulants

For example atomoxetine or guanfacine. Build up gradually over a few weeks.

Finding the right one and the right dose can take a few tries. That's normal.

Questions worth asking

- How will I know if it's working?
- What side effects should I look out for, like appetite, sleep or mood?
- What check-ups will I have?
- What happens if I want to stop or change?
- How does it mix with caffeine, alcohol or other drugs?
- Can I take breaks, like in the holidays?

⚠ **Stay safe.** Stimulant ADHD medicines are controlled drugs. Never share or sell them, even to friends. It's illegal and can be dangerous. Don't stop or change your dose without talking to your prescriber.

My questions for my prescriber

Telling people (or not)

Your diagnosis is your information. Who you tell, when and how is up to you.

Who	Why you might	Worth thinking about
Close friends	They'll get why you forget to reply or zone out	Pick people you trust to keep it private
School or college	Adjustments, exam arrangements, fewer misunderstandings	You can ask for it to stay with key staff
Coaches and clubs	Instructions that work for you, less frustration	A short version is usually enough
Online	Finding your people and ADHD community	Posts can stick around for a long time

Ways you could say it

Short: "I've got ADHD. If I zone out or forget something, it's not that I don't care."

For a teacher: "I have ADHD. It really helps me when _____. Can we try that?"

Your version: "_____"

If someone says "everyone's a bit ADHD"

You don't owe anyone an education. You can explain, send them a link, or just leave it. Their take says more about what they know than about you.

People I might tell, and when

Looking ahead

ADHD comes with you into college, work and independence. So do your strengths. A little planning now makes the next steps smoother.

Moving to adult services

Children's ADHD services usually end around 18. Ask your team early about moving to adult services, so support and any prescription carry on without a gap.

College and university

Tell student support about your ADHD. In England you may be able to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance for things like mentoring or study software.

Work

In Great Britain, ADHD can count as a disability under the Equality Act 2010, so employers must make reasonable adjustments. Access to Work can fund support, though there can be waits.

Learning to drive

You must tell the DVLA if your ADHD, or a change in it, could make you an unsafe driver. See gov.uk/adhd-and-driving, and ask your prescriber about medication and driving.

Finding your fit

Lots of ADHDers do well where there's variety, pace, hands-on work, people or creativity. But any path is open to you. The question isn't "can I do this with ADHD?" It's "what will help me do it my way?"

Skills to build now. Tick when you're on it.

- [ ] Booking my own appointments
- [ ] Using a calendar and reminders
- [ ] Managing money and a budget
- [ ] Ordering my own prescription
- [ ] Explaining what helps me
- [ ] Cooking a few go-to meals

Things I'm excited about for my future

My one-page profile

Share it with teachers, tutors, coaches or a new job.
Update it whenever you like.

Name

Year, course or role

I prefer to be called

Best way to reach me

What I'm good at

What I'm into

What I find hard

What helps me focus

How you can tell I'm struggling

What helps when I am

Please do

Please don't

Help and resources

You don't have to figure everything out alone.

If you need to talk now

Childline
0800 1111
Free, for under 19s. Online chat at childline.org.uk

Shout
Text SHOUT to 85258
Free, 24/7 text support

PAPYRUS HOPELINE247
0300 102 2470
Or text 88247. For under 35s with thoughts of suicide

Samaritans
116 123
Free, any time, about anything

In an emergency call 999 or go to A&E. For urgent mental health help, call **NHS 111** and choose the mental health option.

Learn more about ADHD

ADHD UK	Information and community for people with ADHD	adhduk.co.uk
ADHD Foundation	Neurodiversity charity with resources for young people	adhdfoundation.org.uk
YoungMinds	Mental health advice written for young people	youngminds.org.uk
NHS	Medical information about ADHD and treatment	nhs.uk (search ADHD)

Your assessment team

Questions about your report or what happens next? Ask your clinician.

The service that assessed you is there to help.

Details checked October 2026. Services can change, so check websites for the latest information.

Switched on, your way

Some things to hold on to. Tear this page out, stick it on your wall, or screenshot it.

My brain isn't broken. It's wired differently.

ADHD explains things. It doesn't define me.

Needing support is not failing.

Finding it hard doesn't mean I'm not trying.

My energy, ideas and curiosity are strengths.

Write your own

Supporting your teenager

This guide is written for your young person, in their voice, so let them lead on what they share. The aim now shifts from managing ADHD for them to helping them manage it themselves.

Approaches that tend to help

Coach, don't direct. Ask what would help, offer options, let them try, then reflect together.

Pick your battles. Prioritise safety, health and relationships over tidiness.

Watch the emotional load. Look out for rejection sensitivity, masking and burnout.

Externalise, don't nag. Shared calendars and visual reminders carry the load instead of you.

Protect self-esteem. Specific praise, private corrections, and repair after conflict.

Talk about risk calmly. Open, two-way conversations work better than lectures.

School and exams

Share the report with the SENCo and agree a plan. Ask about exam access arrangements well ahead of GCSEs or college exams, as evidence takes time.

Moving to adult services

Children's services usually end around 18. Raise it with your team by about 16 so care and prescriptions continue.

Medication

A shared decision with your teen and their specialist. Keep stimulant medicines secure and attend monitoring reviews.

Looking after you

ADHD often runs in families, so you may recognise some of it in yourself. Support for you is support for them.

Support for parents and carers

Contact	Advice for families, including education and benefits	0808 808 3555
ADHD UK	Information and resources	adhduk.co.uk
IPSEA	Free legal advice on SEND (England)	ipsea.org.uk
Local SENDIASS	Free, impartial SEND advice	Your council's Local Offer
Assessment team	Questions about the report and next steps	Details in your report

If you're worried about your young person's safety, speak to your GP, call NHS 111 and choose the mental health option, or in an emergency call 999.