

ADHD AND MOTIVATION: THE PINCH MODEL



A self-help guide



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About

Struggling in environments that don't fit neurodivergent nervous systems can lead to cycles of burnout, frustration, and shame. For us ADHDers, the challenge is usually not in performing tasks — it's getting motivated. Once we're in the zone, our brains excel at creativity, problem-solving, and focus. The challenge is sparking that engagement — and that's where the interest-based nervous system comes in. Let's explore how it works!

This workbook was designed by two neurodivergent therapists. We hope you find it helpful. Please note this booklet is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice.

This workbook covers the PINCH model and provides techniques to prevent over and under stimulation. Although this book has been written with ADHD in mind, it may be helpful if you experience similar challenges.

Motivation Differences

As ADHDers, when motivated, we can tap into incredible energy, hyperfocus, and creativity. But the problem is usually getting motivated. Struggling to engage can cause us to face challenges in many areas of our life:



Work and Education



Relationships

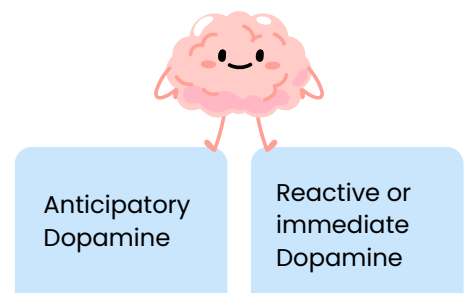


Looking after ourselves

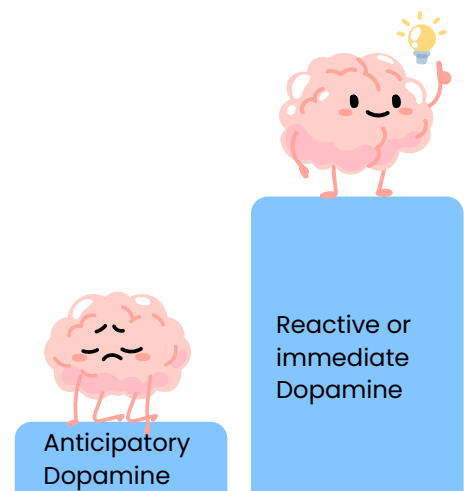
Differences in ADHD

You may have heard of **dopamine**, the feel-good chemical important for motivation. ADHD brains can struggle to release dopamine - as well as other neurotransmitters and hormones like norepinephrine and serotonin.

In the case of dopamine, our ADHD brains struggle to receive this hormone in anticipation of completing tasks. This is why we are drawn to more immediate dopamine from impulsive spending, substances, and instant gratification.



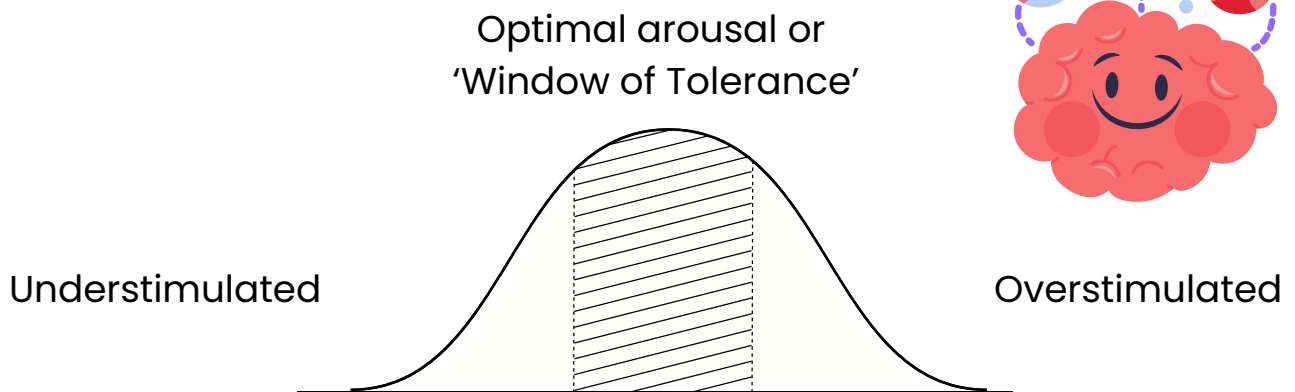
Neurotypical Brain



ADHD Brain

Stimulation Levels

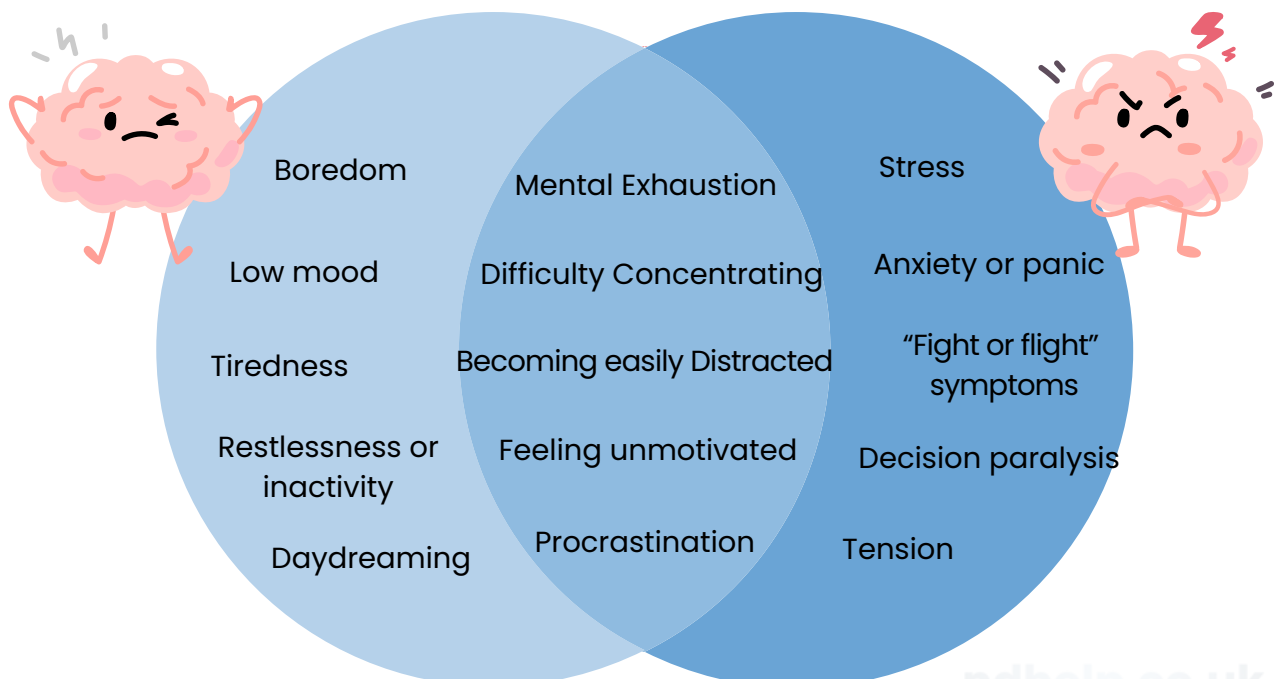
When engaged in a task, research shows there is a level of **'optimal arousal'** - a state of concentration where tasks are engaging enough to keep our focus but not overwhelming.



Why this matters: Studies show it is harder for individuals with ADHD to achieve an optimal state of arousal without external stimulation such as novelty or time pressure, due to differences in their nervous system. This need for stimulation often drives us to seek out environments or activities that raise our arousal to a level that supports better focus.

(This workbook focuses on making tasks more engaging but our Managing Sensory Needs workbook covers more ways to manage under- and overstimulation.)

ADHD can cause **understimulation** and **overstimulation**:



Where to Start

Well done on taking the first steps to reclaiming your motivation. A helpful question at this point may be: *in what areas of my life, right now, am I struggling to motivate myself?*

Reflection: Are there any tasks or activities (at home, work, or my relationships) that I am struggling to complete?



Reflection: How do I feel trying to complete these activities or tasks?

Reflection: Why is this important to me? (What are the values underlying this activity or task?)

If answering this question seems difficult or overwhelming currently, we recommend the 'Getting Started: Core Values' workbook.

Setting a Goal

When setting goals, we should make them SMART: specific, meaningful, achievable, reviewed and time-bounded.

Specific: Be as specific as possible. Ask myself 'what is the smallest step I could take right now towards my goal?'

Meaningful: Goals should be guided by core values. Why is this important to me? Who do I want to be?

Achievable: Consider Capability, Opportunity and Motivation. Is this goal realistic right now?

Reviewed: How will I know when I've made progress towards my goal?

Time-bound: Set a timeframe. When will I complete this by?

My Goals

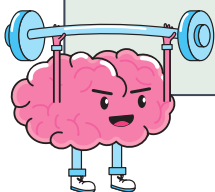
Use this sheet to fill in your SMART goals. If you get stuck, it may be helpful to ask yourself: 'what is the smallest step I can take?' Whatever you can manage right now is okay.

Immediate: over the
next 24 hours?

Short-term: over the
next few days to a
week?

Medium-term: the
next few weeks to
months?

Long-term: the next
few months to a year?



Working with my Nervous System

OK, the science-y stuff. This page covers the **PINCH** model for why motivation is different for those of us with ADHD.

Many neurotypical people are motivated by **importance** — they can push through tasks because of importance or future rewards. For us ADHDers, our motivation works differently. We tend to be driven by an **interest-based** nervous system prioritising passion, wonder and play. If something isn't engaging, it can feel almost impossible to start — even if we know it matters.

Importance-based systems are everywhere from schools to workplaces. These different motivators help explain why individuals with ADHD can struggle with conventional work and educational structures typically designed around an importance-based model.

ADHD

Interest-based

- **P**assion
- **I**nterest
- **N**ovelty
- **C**hallenge
- **H**urry



Neurotypical

Importance-based

- Importance
- Consequences
- Rewards
- Importance to others

Tip: Reclaiming Our Motivation

After struggling to meet neurotypical expectations, we may have come to internalise our struggles as **core beliefs**, for example, that 'I am lazy' or 'I am unmotivated.' It's important to recognise our difficulties do not come from procrastination or a 'lack' of motivation, but a misalignment of neurotypical systems and our nervous systems. This gives hope that we can start reclaiming motivation. How exactly? By working with our interest-based nervous systems.

PINCH: Passion

What gets you out of bed in the morning? Passion in the PINCH model is about capturing your attention by drawing on what is intrinsically meaningful to you.



Reflect: What am I passionate about?

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a dashed border, intended for reflection on passions.

Incorporating this into tasks:

- **Connect to your values.** Why does it matter to you? Why are you doing it in the first place? What does it help you achieve?
- **Add your own personal flair.** Find an outlet for your creativity, focus on learning new things, or ask yourself 'What can I bring to this task?'



Reflect: How could I add passion to my task?

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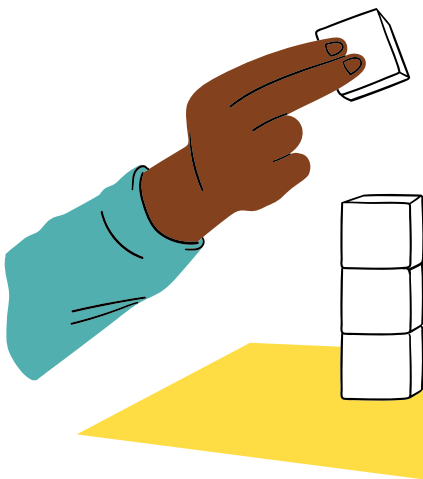
Tip: Take breaks!

ADHD means we can have a tendency to move between different passions. This can be a fantastic thing as we can build up skills in a lot of different areas but it is important we remember to take breaks to recharge, especially after hyperfocusing.

PINCH: Interest

Adding interest in PINCH is about connecting the task to your current interests – whatever you are drawn to right now – even if it is not directly related. Interest is usually situational, but can also be created intentionally.

Reflect: What are my current interests?



Incorporating interest into tasks:

- **'Gamify' tasks.** Set yourself missions, time limits, and rewards. If work feels like a chore, set a timer and try to beat the clock!
- **Introduce a special interest:** Listening to your favourite music can provide dopamine to clean or tidy your house.
- **Role-play.** Use creativity to make routine activities feel more engaging. Be an expert consultant, a detective, or a scientist at work!

Reflect: How could I add interest to my task?



Tip: Use Your Imagination

As children, playing and using our imagination was encouraged. Often as adults we can forget we still have this ability!

PINCH: Novelty

Novelty in PINCH is all about changing up your approach to a task, either mentally or physically, depending on the situation.

Novelty could mean physically changing your environment:

- Rearranging your desk regularly
- Having a 'rotation' of decor at home or using new equipment
- Working from a library, coffee shop, or a different room



Novelty could mean mentally changing focus:

- Working on a different task
- Taking regular breaks
- Working on a different part of a task

Or it could mean trying a new approach:

- Travelling a different way to work
- Handwriting notes
- Different time slots



Reflect: How could I add novelty to my task?

Tip: Time Blindness

Sometimes, those of us with ADHD experience something called **time blindness** – a different experience of time. This can make it harder for us to keep track of how much time is passing. Using alarms and external reminders can help with our awareness of time.



Check in

Well done for getting this far into the workbook. We hope you are finding it helpful so far.



Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have covered so far, and how it connects to what you want to work towards.

Write a reminder of your goal here and why it is important to you:

How much progress have you made towards your goal from 0-10 (or how motivated are you to start)?

Remember: Goals should guide and support you, not feel like a burden. You are allowed to move at your own pace.

PINCH: Challenge or Cooperation

Adding challenge and cooperation to a task can require a little imagination, but is one of the most useful strategies in the PINCH model.



Cooperation:

- **Body double.** Work in the company of a friend or peer – either remotely or in person
- **Teamwork.** Work together with someone on the task if possible

Challenge:

- **Compete with others.** Compete with a friend in a 'race' or game
- **Challenge yourself.** Try to beat your own personal score or complete a task with extra rules

Reflect: How could I add challenge and cooperation to my task?



Tip: Body Doubling

Body doubling is a good way to boost motivation and accountability. It means working alongside someone – either in person or remotely – even if you're doing different tasks. Just having company can make it easier to stay on track.

PINCH: Hurry (urgency)

Time pressure can create motivation (and stress!) Adding urgency to tasks does not mean relying on last minute deadlines but setting time limits to build momentum when completing tasks.

Time Pressure:

- **Set your own deadlines.** Be realistic and make them achievable.
- **Reward yourself.** Write down a deadline and a reward for completing your task on time.
- **Urgency is not importance.** Prioritizing our values helps to prevent the vicious cycle of only completing urgent tasks.



Time Management:

- **Visual Reminders.** Use visual 'alarms' like hourglasses, or aids like sticky notes and task boards
- **Time Blocking.** Break tasks into smaller parts and set deadlines for each part

Reflect: How could I add hurry to my task?

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Tip: Constantly putting out fires?

ADHDers often thrive under pressure or tight deadlines, but the downside is that it can feel like we're always scrambling to put out fires instead of getting things done consistently. For more resources on the difference between urgency and importance, see our 'Managing Attention' workbook.



Recap

What we have learned so far...



Differences in motivation are explained by how ADHD brains process neurotransmitters **and hormones like dopamine...**

...We can start to reclaim our motivation by understanding and working with our **interest-based** nervous systems

....The **PINCH model** is one way we can start to increase our motivation.

Struggling with motivation? Add:

Passion
Interest
Novelty
Challenge
Hurry

Setting goals? Make them:

Specific
Meaningful
Achievable
Reviewable
Time-bound

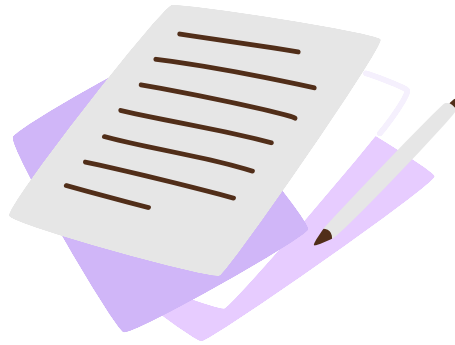
Tip: Keep a motivation diary



Keep a record on your phone or in a journal of times when you feel focused and motivated, including the situation and what you were doing at the time. Over time, patterns will emerge, helping you pinpoint your motivators. For example, you could learn that competition and 'gamifying' tasks excites you, while novelty helps less. Once you recognise what helps, you can incorporate more of it into your daily habits.

Reflection

Well done for completing this workbook. Use this page as a summary of what you have learned from this workbook and how you can apply this to your life.



What information was most interesting?

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What strategies have I found most helpful?

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How much progress have I made towards my goal from 0-10 (if I haven't started, what barriers are getting in the way?)

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