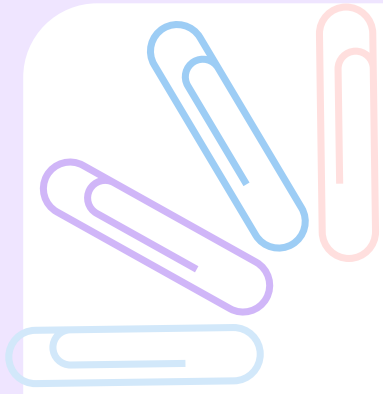


ADHD AND MOTIVATION



A self-help guide



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About

For us neurodivergent individuals 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 deep 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. It also provides techniques to prevent over and under stimulation. Although this book has been written with ADHD in mind, it may also be helpful if you have any related 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

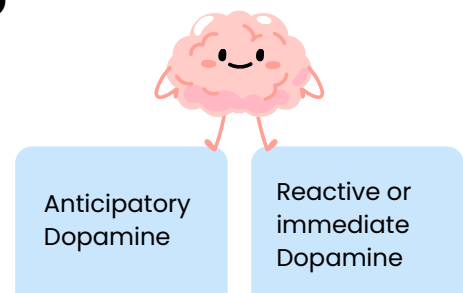


Looking after ourselves

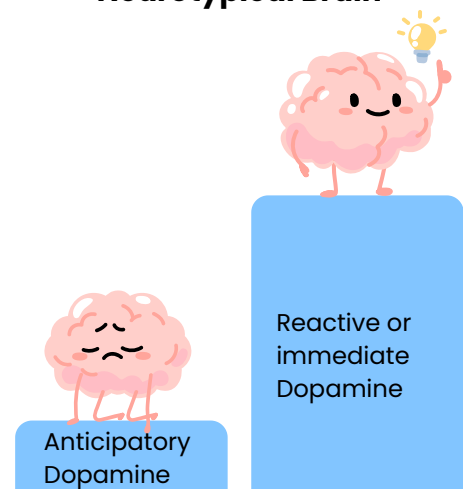
Dopamine differences in ADHD

You may have heard of **dopamine**, a feel-good chemical that keeps us motivated. In ADHDers, dopamine release is reduced which is why we can feel like we're constantly chasing a goal that moves just out of reach!

This is why our ADHD brains struggle to receive dopamine in anticipation of completing tasks and can be drawn to 'quick' dopamine hits: e.g. impulsive spending, substances, and instant gratification.



Neurotypical Brain



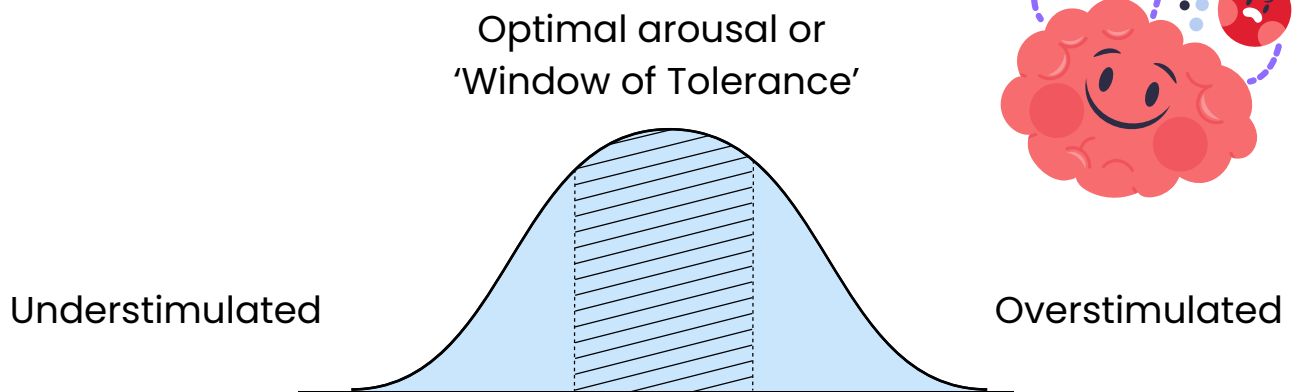
ADHD Brain

Tip: Self Talk

After struggling to meet societal expectations, we may have come to internalise our struggles as **core beliefs**, for example, that "I am lazy" or "I am unmotivated." But 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.

Stimulation Levels

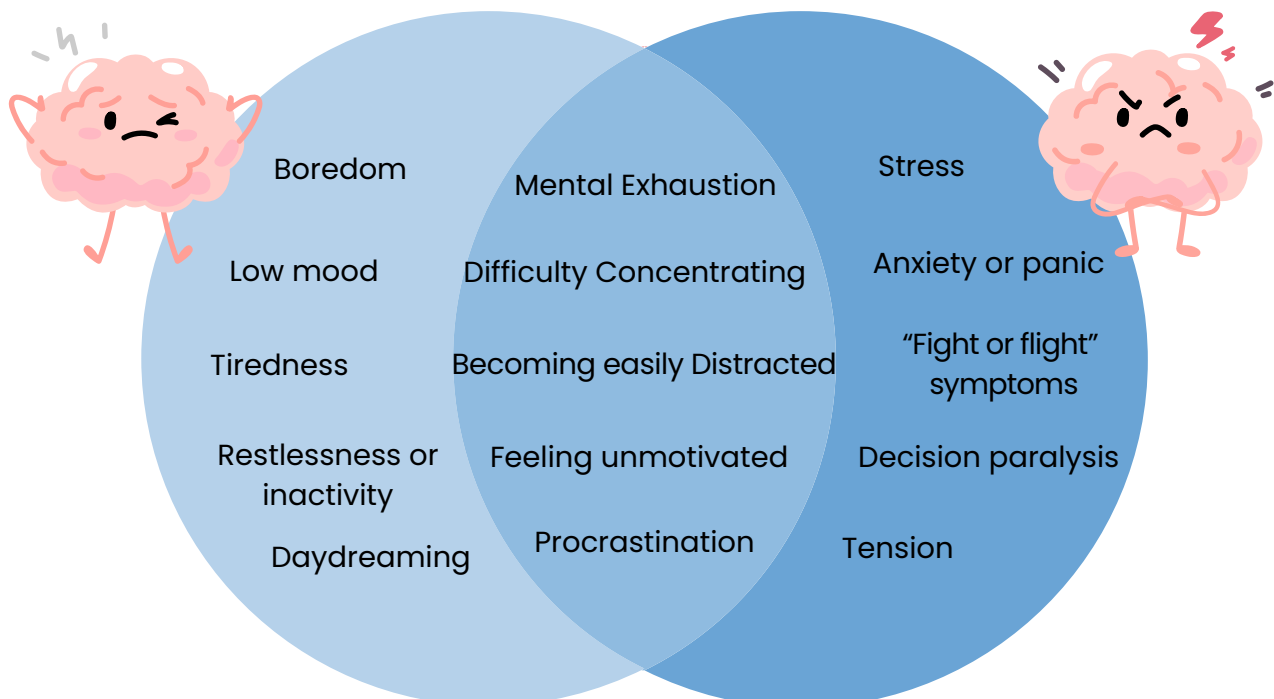
When engaged in a task, there is a level of '**optimal arousal**' – a state of concentration where tasks are engaging enough to keep our focus but not overwhelming.



Why this matters: Studies show it is harder for individuals with ADHD to achieve an optimal state of arousal without additional 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

Before exploring our interest-based nervous system, it can help to set a specific goal for focus and direction. A helpful question to do this may be: **in what areas of my life, right now, am I struggling to motivate myself?**

If answering this question seems difficult or overwhelming, we recommend completing the “Getting Started: Core Values” workbook.

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



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



Reflection: What would completing this task enable me to do? Why is it meaningful to my life?



Setting a Goal

Setting goals helps us to stay motivated in replacing unhelpful behaviours with behaviours more in line with our values.

Specific: Be as specific as possible. What is the smallest step I could take right now?

Meaningful: Align the goal with my core values. What values are underlying my goal?

Achievable: Consider Capability, Opportunity and Motivation. Ask myself, 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 Goal

Setting goals helps us to stay motivated in replacing unhelpful behaviours with behaviours more in line with our values.

Specific:

Meaningful:

Achievable:

Reviewed:

Time-bound:

Working with my Nervous System

Many neurotypical people are motivated by importance — they can push through tasks because of importance or future rewards. For us ADHDers, if something isn't engaging, it can feel almost impossible to start — even if we know it matters. The PINCH model has been suggested to help us understand how we differ.

ADHD Interest-based

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



Neurotypical Importance-based

- Importance
- Consequences
- Rewards
- Importance to others

For many of us with ADHD, our motivation works differently. We're often driven by an **interest-based** nervous system prioritising passion, wonder and play. These motivators explain why individuals with ADHD may struggle with conventional work and educational structures typically designed around an importance-based model.

Reflect: Think about activities you find motivating. Do you feel motivated because they are interesting to you or important? What about activities you struggle to find motivation for?

Tip: Reclaiming your Motivation



Importance-based systems are everywhere from schools to workplaces. Struggling in environments that don't fit neurodivergent nervous systems can lead to cycles of burnout, frustration, and shame. But there's hope. We can start to reclaim your motivation by understanding and 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?

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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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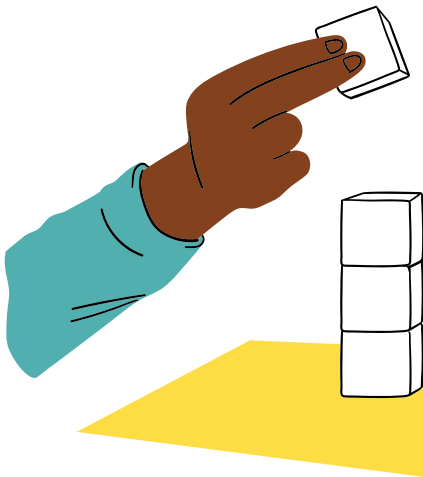
Tip: Take breaks!

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 and 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.



Adding 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

Adding 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

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.

Adding 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.
- **Take on responsibility.** Involving someone else in the task adds an extra level of accountability



Adding Urgency

- **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 urgency 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 **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:

Specific
Meaningful
Achievable
Reviewable
Time bound

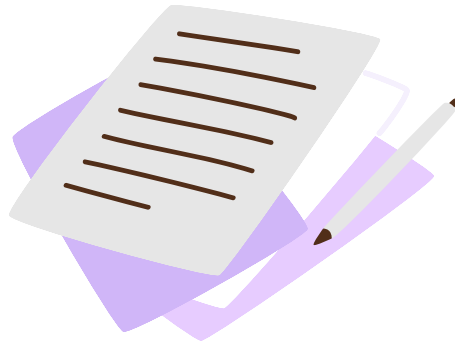
Tip: Keep a motivation diary



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 have you learned or found most interesting?

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What strategies have you found most helpful?

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How much progress have you made towards your goal from 0-10 (if struggling, can you break it down further into steps?)

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Remember: your needs are, and always have been, valid.