11 ADHD Coping Mechanisms

Treatment and Living Techniques That Work with ADHD Brains

From the ADHD Experts at ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD
Most people don’t understand how an ADHD brain is wired. Well-meaning parents, teachers, and spouses suggest organization or concentration techniques that work for them and then they’re surprised (even angry) when we don’t see the same results. They might admonish us or insist we re-try, suggesting our lack of success is tied to some fundamental flaw and implying, “You’re lazy!” or “You didn’t really try.” In reality, though, we’re setting ourselves up for failure because neurotypical techniques just don’t work for ADHD brains.

So what strategies do work? ADHD-specific treatments aren’t inaccessible or particularly hard to follow. It’s much harder, in fact, to unlearn habits that have been built up over a lifetime. However, once you commit to giving up the old neurotypical techniques that never worked, you can start a treatment plan that’s tailored to you. Here’s how:

1. Find Your Cheerleader
The key to being successful and happy is having a cheerleader who unshakably believes that you are good, intelligent, and loving. The most successful adults with ADHD were loved, supported, and valued as kids by a parent, teacher, brother, or even a sports coach. A cheerleader’s chief job is to distinguish between the child’s worth and his achievements.

“My ADHD made me different from other people. Once I recognized that, the self-imposed pressure and stress lifted. I could handle almost anything.”
—Jennifer Koretsky, an adult with ADHD
2. Know Thy ADHD
ADHD therapy should start with understanding — and realistically evaluating what is possible for a person to achieve, and what is not. Parents should not hold kids with ADHD accountable for things they can’t accomplish right now (though they may be possible later). Accountability and responsibility are good things, but only if they lead to success. Every family member must be part of the treatment team — knowing all about ADHD and how to contribute to the solution.

3. Level the Playing Field
The right ADHD medication at the right dosage can take a patient’s attention span, impulsivity control, and motor movements to higher levels. If you’ve tried ADHD counseling or coaching without ADHD medication and didn’t get the outcome you expected, try it again with medication. Most people with ADHD who take medication feel as if they are competing on a level playing field, often for the first time in their lives.

4. Get Things Done with ACT
Meeting a deadline or doing something your boss thinks is important isn’t enough motivation for people with ADHD. ACT — Acceptance and Commitment Therapy — helps focus and motivate a person with ADHD when rewards don’t. With ACT, patients reflect on what matters most to them — family, setting a record or gaining fame, faith in God — to motivate them by asking the question, “Am I doing something that matters to me?”

5. Document Your Successes
Once you are on the right medication at the right dosage, carry a pen and small pad with you and make an inventory of solutions that work for you. Think about those times when you’re in the “zone,” when you’re engaged, productive, and energized. When did it happen? What took you out of the zone and what got you back in it? After a month, you’ll have 20 or so techniques that you know will work for you when you procrastinate.

6. Spark Interest When You Need It Most
To access their full abilities, people with ADHD have to create interest where none exists naturally. Example: A medical student with ADHD was flunking gross anatomy. His ADHD coach had him imagine he was the ER doctor treating President Kennedy — the student’s idol and his inspiration for going to med school — after he was shot. He had to know anatomy to save Kennedy’s life. With this imagined urgency, the student mastered anatomy and graduated second in his class.
7. Change the Format
A person with ADHD may find it hard to demonstrate what he knows. So he needs to look for novel ways to showcase his talent. Example: A young man with ADHD struggled with writing assignments in English class. He was bored by the books he was assigned to read. He talked with his teacher and, instead of writing book reports, he persuaded the teacher to let him write parodies of the books. He zipped through assignments and received the top prize in English.

8. Grab the Reins at School
Adults and kids with ADHD want someone else to make things interesting, but we’re best off doing it ourselves. Example: If you have five English courses to choose from, find out which instructor is bright and engaging. Sit in on classes and ask students for their opinions. Take the course that engages you the most. If you’re a parent, make sure that your child gets in the course by writing an accommodation into his IEP that allows him to register ahead of his classmates.

9. Create Competition to Avoid Boredom
People with ADHD are able to master new jobs and activities quickly, only to lose interest in the blink of an eye. Challenge and competitiveness can help. Trying to beat a personal best, or imagining the task as a video game with more difficult ascending levels, holds the interest of many people with ADHD.

10. Find a Nudge to Stay On Task
Body-doubling is a technique used by tutors, but it can also help people with ADHD at work. Example: An attorney with ADHD was tired of always meeting deadlines at the 11th hour. He cleared his desk of distractions and asked his assistant to bring him one case at a time. They discussed what he needed to do and she checked up on him. At a set time, she took away the original file and ushered him into the next task.

11. Stack the Deck in Your Favor
ADHD treatment is likely to fail unless a trusted significant other gets involved — and stays involved. For at least the first year, the motivation for treatment and the ability to see the benefits will reside primarily in someone other than the patient.

“Those who have a hard time getting motivated, organized, or sorting out their career might find coaching extremely helpful and even vital. Other people put into place the supports that enable them to succeed without the need of a coach.” —Sandy Newmark, M.D.
ADHD 101
A complete overview of ADHD, outlining every step from diagnosis to treatment — all the way to living successfully with attention deficit.

From the moment you suspect ADHD in yourself or your child, you have hundreds of questions. Which doctors can evaluate symptoms? What medication side effects should you be prepared for? Can diet help? This comprehensive eBook has over 100 pages of expert advice, personal stories, and more to help you become an ADHD expert.

>> Learn more about this special report: http://additu.de/adhd-101

Mindfulness & Other Natural Treatments
The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises – including some designed especially for kids – as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn more about this special report: http://additu.de/mindfulness

ADHD Medication & Treatment
The latest information on managing medication, starting behavior therapy, evaluating alternative treatments, and more.

You’re relieved to know, finally, that your child’s symptoms have a name. Or that your inability to focus or pay attention in school as a child – or at work as an adult – is due to attention deficit disorder. But now you have questions. This eBook will explain the myriad of treatment options.

>> Learn more about this special report: http://additu.de/treatment

FREE ADDitude Downloadable Booklets

Is It Adult ADHD?
Habitually disorganized? Always running late? It could be ADHD.

A Daily Routine That Works for Adults with ADHD
Build a system that keeps your day humming along.

Self-Test for Women: Do I Have ADHD??
ADHD looks different across genders. Find out if you (or your daughter) are showing signs.

14 Ways to Help Your Child Make Friends
Build your child’s social skills with these easy-to-use tips.

Who Can Treat ADHD?

Smart Comebacks
Witty responses to ADHD doubters.

It’s Not ADHD
Doctors are sometimes too quick to diagnose ADHD. Read up on common misdiagnoses.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at: http://additu.de/freedownloads
FREE ADHD Webinar Replays from ADDitude:

Mastering ADHD Medications
>> [http://additu.de/22](http://additu.de/22)
Dr. William Dodson, a board-certified adult psychiatrist who specializes in treating ADHD, discusses the many medication options for ADHD and how each one works. Learn about choosing a medication, minimizing side effects, and finding the right dosage for yourself or your child.

Neurofeedback and Cognitive Training for ADHD Kids
>> [http://additu.de/neuro](http://additu.de/neuro)
Is brain training – including neurofeedback and cognitive training (CT) – really all it’s cracked up to be? Is it safe for kids? Is it worth the money? Naomi Steiner, M.D., shares the research behind some computer-based alternative therapies so you can make an informed decision before treating your child.

Exposing ADHD Myths: Science’s New Understanding of the Disorder
>> [http://additu.de/understanding](http://additu.de/understanding)
Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D., offers the latest research to refute common myths about attention deficit disorder, including “ADHD isn’t real,” “bad parenting causes ADHD,” and “most kids outgrow ADHD.”

7 Fixes for Self-Defeating ADHD Behaviors
>> [http://additu.de/brown](http://additu.de/brown)
Are the bad habits setting you up for failure? Find out what behaviors to watch for, and seven simple changes that can help you reach your full potential and put you on the path to success. Entrepreneur and ADHD coach Alan Brown teaches “fix-it” strategies that he used to cope with his own ADHD.

We’re Engaged! Turn Your Boredom Into Action
>> [http://additu.de/boredom](http://additu.de/boredom)
ADHD brains are forever seeking physical or mental stimulation. When you’re bored, it can literally sap your motivation to continue. Learn how to avoid the pitfalls of boredom, boost your executive functions, and keep your mind focused and productive with this expert webinar from Jeff Cooper!