If you have ADHD you may have problems with inhibiting your ideas and impulses, and/or problems with waiting, delaying gratification. Both can lead to impulsivity – you say the first thing that comes into your head or act without thinking about the consequences.

Although this can make you more creative, interesting and entrepreneurial, it can also lead to problems. It can mean that you do not consider all the possibilities.

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Is impulsivity a problem for you?

Where there is a problem, the first step is noticing what you do. If you can’t think of anything, get someone to point your impulsive behaviours out to you, to help you identify your specific problem(s).

“‘I buy too many clothes and CDs when I don’t have the money.’

“I speak without thinking and say the wrong thing.”

Working on the problem

We know that people with ADHD do better if they have a longer time to think and can stop themselves for long enough.

Stop and think strategy

STOP! Say this to yourself. If necessary, remove yourself from the situation.

THINK – Use self-talk: “Stay calm, think before you act”, “Let’s get this right”.

Write down your main points before you speak.

QUESTION YOURSELF – “Do I really need it?”, “How will I feel if I say that?”

PROBLEM SOLVING – Brainstorm alternative solutions.

IMAGINE CONSEQUENCES

SELECT THE BEST OPTION

ACT – Act out the best plan.

REFLECT – Did this work out better? Congratulate yourself on choosing more wisely, or consider what you could do better.
**Make an impulsivity card**

Choose a situation in which you are often impulsive, and make a plan. Put it in your phone or write it out on a small card you can carry around in your pocket.

*Spell out the situation*

*Plan self-talk*

*Choose double check questions and reminders:*

- What am I about to do?
- What will happen if I do?
- How will the other people feel?
- How long have I wanted this?
- How much money have I got?
- Could it be dangerous?
- What could be the long-term consequences?

*What will you do instead?*

- Go to a coffee shop to think about what you can afford before returning to the shop.
- Leave the situation altogether.
- Distract yourself – to give yourself time or to stop yourself. For example get out your phone rather than say something.

*Other ideas*

- Avoid trigger situations wherever possible.
- Talk yourself through the situation.
- Picture yourself doing it differently before you go into the situation.

*Afterwards*

Reward yourself – for being less impulsive – with a mental pat on the back, or tell a friend or family member what you achieved.
Anger and ADHD mood swings

Why are adults with ADHD more likely to have problems with anger?

Because of frustration – Frustration is one of the most common emotions in ADHD, as many things which seem easy to others may take more effort for you. When you are feeling this way, frustration can easily turn into anger at the smallest provocation.

Because of stress – Life with unmanaged ADHD is stressful: you lost your phone again, and now your boss is complaining about the deadline you missed. Feeling overwhelmed, one more thing can tip you over the edge.

Because of mood swings – People with ADHD can be moody; you may feel irritable then happy then sad all before breakfast. Your partner may not have meant anything by a comment, but you were already feeling grumpy.

Because of impulsivity – Since you don’t have as much neurological ability to control your emotions and reactions, if you feel angry it may come straight out in the moment and everyone knows about it.

Feeling angry and even losing your temper does not make you a terrible person, although it can make you feel embarrassed and ashamed. Don’t dwell on these feelings, but accept that it is normal to feel anger. In fact, sometimes it can be a helpful spur to action. You do need to do something about anger if it is becoming a problem in your relationships with others or getting you into trouble.

Of course, not everyone with ADHD gets angry; some people have problems with knowing when they are annoyed, or expressing themselves when they are angry. If this is you, you may need to learn to be more assertive. Others may alternate between showing their anger and bottling it up.

Example

What I do: I spend too much money on clothes, especially bags, which I do not always wear or need.

General plan: I will not go into, or look in, clothes shops unless I need something new and/or have money to spend.

Self-talk: “Don’t get over-excited.” “Remember, I have lots of nice clothes already.”

Reminders/question: Do I need this? Do I already have something like this? What would it go with? Can I afford it? What will happen if I spend this amount of money?

What should I do differently? Go to a café and think about which items I should buy (if any) and how much it comes to. Stay there at least 15 minutes before going back to the shop or going home.

If I succeed in doing this: I can feel really pleased with myself. I can remind myself how much money I saved, and tell my partner what I achieved. If I do go back to buy an item, I can be sure that I really wanted it and made a much more sensible decision.
Understanding anger

**What helps?**

- **Relaxation exercises**
  - Balanced life style
  - Noticing first signs
  - Understanding your core beliefs and what triggers you

- **Noticing thoughts**
  - Replacing ‘hot’ thoughts with ‘cool’ ones: “He is just a kid, he wasn’t thinking about what he said/did.”

- **Self-talk**
  - Calm down
  - Relaxation
  - Leaving the situation

**Anger prevention**

Try to keep your background level of stress down. If you are already tense and irritable when you walk into a difficult situation, you are more likely to take things badly and lose your temper. Learn to relax, putting relaxation techniques into play before difficult situations.

Exercise also helps to reduce background tensions. Try to make it part of your daily routine. Yoga and Martial arts are an especially good exercise as they can also help you to learn to control and channel your emotions.
Think with a cool head

Anger is always triggered by a thought that is your interpretation of a situation. Angry ‘hot’ thoughts are usually based on:

- A perception that you have been harmed in some way or your rules have been broken
- The idea that the person did this on purpose
- The assumption that the person was wrong or stupid to do this and could have acted differently

For example, another driver nearly pulls out in front of you. You feel frightened, thinking: “He could have killed me!” You think that the driver is “an idiot” who does not care.

How to cope with feelings of anger

Everyone makes mistakes, even you, and most people, in most situations, are trying the best they can. Think of the last time someone got angry with you and why you acted as you did. Looking back, you might do something different. At the time, you did what you felt was reasonable or that you had to do in the circumstances. Most of our angry thoughts are extreme and therefore can be distorted. We catastrophise, blame or label someone as a result of one action of theirs, even though we may not know them at all.

Try to replace the “hot” thoughts with more reasonable “cool” or coping thoughts:

- “That was scary – he can’t have seen me.”
- “Her opinion is not important, I don’t have to get upset.”
- Actively think of a phrase or image that helps you to see things more wisely and more compassionately. You can choose how you are going to react.

Practice being assertive

Getting angry is one way of expressing your feelings. There are better ways to communicate your feelings, such as learning how to be assertive:

- “I feel uncomfortable when you interrupt what I’m saying, please could you try not to?”
- “We seem to disagree on this – how can we get around this problem?”

Leave the situation

You can always just walk away. You can come back when you are calmer to talk about the issue and find a way to resolve things. In ADHD, anger often goes away quickly, so find somewhere to go and then use your calming techniques. Walking away can be inflammatory to the other person.
who feels you are not listening, so tell them that you are going away to calm down and will come back when you can talk properly to them.

**After the episode, reflect**

What was the anger about? It is often not about what just happened, but about things that have happened in the past, or that your negative core beliefs have been triggered by the situation. If you feel insecure about yourself, anything that you perceive as being disrespectful will upset you much more than it would a more confident person.

Remember that whenever a difference of opinion becomes a contest over who is right, everyone in the relationship loses, and the connection between you and the other person is weakened. Everyone has a right to express their views. Try to keep in mind that it’s okay if they are not the same as yours.

Also reflect on how you handled the situation this time. If you did well, congratulate yourself on remaining calmer. If not, think about what you would prefer to do in a similar situation in the future. It can help to talk this through with a friend or mental health professional.

**Mood swings**

A known symptom of ADHD is emotional lability or mood swings, although this does not appear in the official list of symptoms. People with ADHD have trouble regulating their feelings, and they may even wonder whether they have a bipolar disorder. ADHD mood swings are rapid, occurring several times a day, and may be very disruptive, making you feel out of control, as you may act emotionally, saying and doing the wrong things.
Do you experience a lot of mood swings?

The same emotional lability can be part of a resilience you may also show. You may find it hard to stay low for long, your thoughts and feelings move on, and you bounce back, don’t dwell on things, and give things another go.

**What helps with mood swings?**

- Recognise and accept that this is part of ADHD for you.
- Be kind to yourself. Breathe and tell yourself that although it feels bad right now, there is no disaster and you can cope.
- Make a record of how your moods go, and ask your friends and family to help you notice them.
- Work out what the triggers might be. It could be that something happens that sets off a thought or activates a difficult core belief.
- Alternatively, the trigger might be a blood sugar level spike – cut out sweet snacks and drinks if so – or it might be related to poor sleep.
- Use the strategies you are learning for depression and anxiety: self-talk, thought challenging, exercise, creative hobbies or mindfulness.
- Ask your doctor if a different medication or a different dose could help. For some people, ADHD medication can stabilise mood.