Organisation

Modern life is complicated; we receive more messages and information every day than any other previous generation and have more belongings and choices. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, especially if you have ADHD, and you may have had many experiences of difficulty or failure in this area of your life. You may criticise yourself or have been criticised by others: “I’m so chaotic”, “Other people don’t get themselves into debt.”

So, accept that you have ADHD. Get treatment. Make realistic plans to improve things.

Do your best, and forgive yourself when you mess up.

Organisation . . .

. . . is about taking control of your life.

- Imagine prioritising so that you can achieve things.
- Imagine having less clutter and feeling more mentally free.
- Imagine feeling less overwhelmed and chaotic.
- Imagine being on time and not broke!

Life can be made simpler

Organisational challenges for someone with ADHD

- You don’t think to plan, or if you do, it’s hard to follow through.
- You get distracted, or you get drawn into hyper-focusing on a different/less important thing.
- You find it hard to finish things and miss deadlines.
- You get enthusiastic about so many things – and have lots of different things to juggle.
- Or you are easily bored by the routine maintenance tasks of life, so you don’t tidy your house or desk, or get around to paying bills.
• You are busy, flitting from task to task, but not necessarily productive.
• You have poor perception of time and are often late.

What are your top tips for organising your life?

Tips for being organised when you have ADHD
• Keep it simple.
• Work with your ADHD, not against it.
• Break things down into small steps.
• Get support and help. Hire a cleaner or accountant, for example, or delegate to other family members.
• Remember that out of sight is often out of mind. Put things where you can see them, or else have visual reminders.
• Catch the mood and do it then. Make it fun: do chores to music, or colour-code systems.
• Keep it loose. Don’t try to be a perfectionist.
• You only have to be organised enough to achieve what you want/need to achieve.
• Get into good habits — make them automatic.
• Keeping it going is often the hardest part. Reward yourself regularly as you work through a task. Use novelty or assistance, or whatever works for you.

My better organisation plan

Instructions
You probably feel that you know how you should organise yourself, but you just cannot see it through. See the plans that you are going to make here as a starting point to have another go at doing things in a different way.

Choose just one or two things in your life that you would like to organise better (e.g. Be on time for work or have clean clothes for the family to wear). Write this down on the sheet ‘My Better Organisation Plan’.

What is your motivation — how would this make you feel? (e.g. I would gain respect at work).
Do not read through all of the following sections, but only those relevant to important areas of your life, either to do with organisation, timekeeping or money. Think through what strategies you might apply in your situation, and write it out on the sheet given with the following headings:

- My main difficulties are: (no more than two)
- My plans to work on this involve:
- Things I need to get (if any):
- My top strategies:
- People who can help me:
- Rewards and plans to keep it up:

### Organising your home/food/paperwork/clothes

If you have ADHD, you almost certainly have clutter!

#### Plan a de-clutter

- Recruit your partner/mother/friend to support you.
- Break it down by room or type of thing (work papers, home papers, clothes, tools).
- Start with whatever is most urgent/important, or with the area that bothers you the most.
- Do it in short bursts with regular breaks.
- Do anything you can think of to make it more fun: set a time limit, have music on, go for a drink with your friend as a reward.

*Encourage yourself! Even completing one small part of a room is a success!*

#### Paperwork

- Have some sort of filing system; any sort of system is better than nothing.
- Use brightly coloured stationary, and put important things where you can see them.
- Sort things into piles: urgent things that need attending to (red file); less urgent but important things (green file); things to be filed; things to be thrown away.
• Get someone to help you set up a filing system and have a regular filing time or get another member of the family to do it.

• Afterwards, make sure you open all your post and put it in the right file, leaving the red, urgent file out where you can see it.

Ask someone to encourage you to keep on top of your organising efforts and to help you when necessary.

De-cluttering other possessions

• Have three piles: keep, give away, throw away.

• For each item, set a buzzer to go off after 2 minutes, after which you have to decide which pile it goes in.

• Your de-clutter partner can take things out to the dustbin before you change your mind.

• Decide where to store the ‘keep’ pile and put those items away.

• Take ‘before and after’ photos and enjoy how good it looks, how much space you have now.

Have a clean and tidy zone in the house so you always have somewhere you can invite people into without feeling embarrassed. Also assign places that can be untidy, messy zones.

Cleaning

• Perhaps choose one day of the week to clean.

• Take one room at a time and set a time limit to clean each one.

• Meanwhile, set laundry off in the washing machine.

• Listen to music, or do it with your partner.

Food

• Simplify! Simplify! Healthy, everyday meals do not need to be complicated (or even cooked).

• Try to do one big shop per week (maybe online).

• Have two basic weekly sets of menus (which work for the whole family) which rotate, so you need only two basic shopping lists.

Clothes/laundry

• Put clothes that are the wrong size/season in a separate place/container.

• Zone your clothes into work clothes/casual clothes, winter clothes/summer clothes, or other categories.
• Stick to a few colours that work together or have a ‘uniform’ that you wear much of the time.
• Get socks all in the same colour, or a different colour for each member of the family.
• Before going clothes shopping, decide what you need to get and stick to it.
• Buy easy-care clothes that can be tumble dried and don’t need ironing.
• Have a divided wash basket for darks/lights/delicates to help on wash day.
• Perhaps have a set day for laundry. Sort the clothes and do the ironing to music.

Have the right things with you when you leave the house

• Have a place/basket near the door where you keep your handbag, phone, keys, etc.
• Put it somewhere you will see it.
• Always put these things back in this place/basket when you come in again.
• When you plan for the next day, put anything you need in that place.

Organising a family

Having to organise other people as well as yourself can be a nightmare for someone with ADHD.

If you have a neuro-typical partner, negotiate what you can cope with and what they need to do.

Some families have a master-plan board, a calendar or whiteboard in the kitchen where the whole week is written out, and each person’s activities are written down, perhaps with the menu plan.

Add a paper pad to write shopping lists, or notes to each other.

Have storage in the hall where each person has a place for their coat, school or work bag, homework, things to remember.

Write out lists for each child as to what they do for their morning routine, so they can get on with it without you. Treats and praise are then given for successful completion.

As soon as children are able, have them make up their own packed lunches. Remember: if you already have a system that works for you, then stick to it!
If you have ADHD, you are likely to have a *poor sense of time*. Time moves too slowly when you are bored and too quickly otherwise.

People with ADHD are also *poor at planning* – some do not plan ahead at all. Do you make plans? Are they just in your head? You may plan but then struggle to follow through.

**What works for you in organising your time?**

**What you can do**

You will need tools to help you plan: a diary, a phone, or a wall chart; and reminders of what you mean to do: alarms on the phone, or sticky notes. Set alarms so that you have plenty of warning to get ready.

Set time aside at the beginning of the week and then at the start of each day to make a plan. Make it specific, write it down, and keep looking at it.

**Set goals** – Review them regularly. What do I want to achieve this week? Break it down into small sub goals, made up of specific and realistic tasks you can achieve.

**List** all the tasks you need to do this week/day, to achieve what you need to for your goals.
Prioritise activities – Rate the tasks for the week or day for importance: 0 to 4 from ‘not at all’ to ‘essential,’ or colour code priorities with red for urgent. Put the tasks in order.

Estimate how long tasks will take – People with ADHD often have a distorted perception of time; it can pass very quickly (unless you are bored), and you often underestimate how long things take. You could try timing how long things actually do take you, or just be aware of this and allow extra time.

Put the plan in the diary/planner – Bearing in mind all of the above, write your plans into your diary, to pin yourself down to when you will do tasks and for how long. Some things obviously cannot be pinned down in this way, so allow “contingency time,” putting a deadline several days earlier in your diary than it actually is, for example. For things that do not get finished, make sure that completing them gets added to the next list.

Now check – is it realistic?
If not, drop something, or move it to another day.

Remember to include breaks and rewards – These are essential and should be frequent to prevent boredom! Plan breaks for just before you tend to lose concentration, and then have a small reward like a walk or a coffee. Bigger rewards are also important for when you complete a longer set of tasks. If the plan feels boring and unspontaneous, schedule in exciting activities, too.

Look back over your plan later – Really notice and take pleasure in what you managed to achieve before starting the next one. You can get things done, and perhaps do, more often than you realise.

Being on time

Plan ahead – What time do you need to leave? Allow for traffic and hold-ups. What time should you start getting ready? Time yourself to find out how long things actually take you, and/or allow an extra 15 to 30 minutes to over-compensate. Set an alarm for 10 minutes before you need to leave and another for when you should be leaving. You must leave when the alarm goes off.

Overcompensation – is good! Allow more time than you think, and if you get to things early, have something to do (e.g. a book, your phone, knitting) to cope with the frustration of waiting.
Procrastination

Everyone procrastinates at times due to assuming you have to be in the mood, fear of failure, perfectionism or else lack of commitment – it seems boring.

Also when the stress of having to do it finally kicks in, the adrenaline acts as a stimulant and you can concentrate better. You may have become used to this and rely on stress to get things done.

Do you often waste time?

- Set yourself time limits for watching TV and using social media.
- Try checking your emails or social media just twice a day.
- Use the ‘Only Handle It Once’ strategy for paperwork/letters.
- Don’t frit from task to task. Save the more interesting task for later as a reward after completing the current one. If distracted by a new thought, write it down and look at it afterwards.

A five-step plan

1. Be positive. Talk yourself up: “I can do this!” Aim to do a good-enough job rather than a perfect job.
2. Think about how you will feel when it is done versus thinking about the problems you will have if you procrastinate.
3. Make it easier. Break the big task into smaller tasks.
4. Make a plan. Put the first task in the diary, and assign the times you will put aside to work on it. Set deadlines for each task, as the pressure may help you.
5. Reward yourself for starting and for each stage of a task you get done. Take breaks at regular intervals. As you start to achieve more, notice and enjoy it.

An alternative approach

Just do it! Your expectations are worse than reality. Like getting into a swimming pool, it’s best to jump in!

The ten-second rule – Tell yourself you must start the task in the next 10 seconds. Starting a task is often the most difficult part.
**The ten-minute rule** – Set yourself the goal of working for 10 minutes on a job – just sitting at the computer with the file open, for example. After 10 minutes you are allowed to do something else if you want to, but more often than not, you will have overcome your initial feelings and find yourself able to continue working.

**Managing your money**

Research shows that adults with ADHD often make impulse purchases, forget to pay bills and are less likely to save money. It is important to acknowledge your attitudes and behaviour around money. Long-term, unhelpful attitudes can store up huge problems in life and in relationships. Money matters are emotive and reported to be one of the biggest sources of disputes amongst couples.

**Be aware**

**. . . of your impulsivity**

Aim to train yourself to leave the shop, asking yourself “Do I really need this?” Go back only if the answer is ‘yes’. It can also be helpful to have a long-term goal for your money, perhaps a holiday, or even a house. Think about this when you are spending, perhaps have a picture on your phone to remind you, or a reminder note wrapped around your credit card.

**. . . of procrastinating**

If you put off paying bills, even though you know they must be paid, then try to use some of the tips from the procrastinating section.

**. . . of your forgetfulness**

If you often forget to pay bills, there are a variety of ways you can remind yourself: phone reminders, sticky notes, putting the bills in the red ‘important’ folder. Set up *direct debits* so that you don’t need to remember.

All the main banks also have *banking apps*, which can be downloaded onto most smartphones. With these apps you can pay bills when they first come in, or pay as soon as you remember. Search on Google Play or the App store or look on your bank’s website for more information about how to use these.

**Take advice if you need it** – If you are struggling with money, perhaps go to the Citizens Advice Bureau.
Initially you could let your partner or a parent help you manage your money if they are trustworthy and better at it. This could be a starting point from which you learn to take responsibility back for managing your own money. Ask the person to help you to learn how.

**Budget!** Make a monthly budget which details all your expenses. This should include one-twelfth of your annual expenses (car insurance, car tax, etc.). Check how much you actually spend, rather than guessing. Your budget should always be less than what you earn – keep it to hand so you can refer to it easily.

**Live on what you earn** – Only budget (and use!) what you earn. Don’t spend more than you earn on credit cards, and don’t take out loans. Be realistic.

**Savings** – Set aside money by setting up a standing order on your bank account. The money you plan to save will come out as soon as you are paid, and before you spend it.

**Know how much money you have in your account** – Many banks have smartphone apps and also have free text services, which let you know when you are reaching £0. Many credit cards will notify you at certain balance levels.

There are lots of resources to help you budget. One example is www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk, a government service that helps you to see what you are spending.

Also, www.adviceguide.org.uk has a similar service provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau. Many banks, now have budgeting tools.

**How to curb impulsive spending**

- Operate on a cash-only basis, and don’t carry a credit or debit card with you if possible.
- Don’t go shopping unless you need something.
- Be aware of triggers for gambling habits and try to avoid these. Seek help if this is a serious problem for you.
- Avoid payday loans at all costs as they have incredibly high interest rates and charges.

**Notice and feel proud of any progress you make!**