

ADHD IN THE WORKPLACE

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ADHD WORKS!

ADHD is a disorder that impacts not only individuals but also their environment. There are no outward signs indicating that people with ADHD sometimes struggle with time management and organization. That's exactly why it's so important to equip them with the right tools and receive support to help them cope with these challenges. Employers and colleagues, for their part, may have difficulty understanding how ADHD affects someone in the workplace.

If you employ, supervise, or work alongside an individual with ADHD, this brochure will provide you with reliable information about ADHD as well as practical advice you may find useful in the workplace. As you read, keep in mind that much of this information may actually benefit your entire team and improve morale.

If you have ADHD, this brochure is also intended to help you understand the barriers and other factors that may affect your role in a professional environment. You'll find ways to maximize your abilities, thereby helping balance out your weaknesses. You'll also learn how your boss and colleagues can better support you. Use this brochure to discover helpful tools and strategies.



SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

When it comes to how you feel from day to day, your energy level makes all the difference. To do your job and get through the day, tending to your health and your body's basic needs is important. While it's easy to let these things slide, making your health a priority is up to you.



BASIC NEEDS

- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Rest/Breaks
- A healthy diet

THINGS THAT POSITIVELY IMPACT ENERGY LEVELS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU HAVE ADHD

- The feeling of having things under control
- Flexibility/Short breaks
- Relaxation exercises and being in the present
- Encouragement, praise, and feedback

YOUR ATTITUDE TO YOUR JOB IS IMPORTANT

Your own needs

Whether you have ADHD or not, being aware of your own needs is important. Understanding what works best for you helps you learn to recognize your strengths and weaknesses. That, in turn, makes it easier for you to cultivate a work environment in which the characteristics of ADHD can best be harnessed.

Experiment

Seek out information, guidance, and advice from experts, colleagues, and family and experiment to see what suits you. Keep using the tools and strategies that work for you and forget about the ones that don't.

Don't take things too personally

As a result of impulsivity, people with ADHD tend to read too much into words and situations and may even fly off the handle at times. Don't take negative comments or situations too personally. Learn from them and keep going. Don't give up.

Admit your mistakes

A big part of the learning process is learning to admit your mistakes. You're probably all too familiar with the feeling of messing up even the simplest tasks, but everyone makes mistakes, especially on their first try. Use the opportunity to take a step back and learn from your mistakes. The important thing is to get right back up and keep going. That's the effective way to grow in your job and work your way up.

GET ORGANIZED

Clear framework

Ask for a job description. A clear job description helps you visualize your role in the workplace and understand your responsibilities. Once some time has passed, do not hesitate to request for the description to be reviewed; over time, as you accumulate knowledge and experience, both you and your job will evolve.

Write down instructions

It's a good idea to make a visual list of tasks for which you are responsible, for instance on sticky notes or on the computer. For each task, note when you need to start and when it must be completed.

Energy crashes

When is your energy at its highest and lowest during the day? Organize your work around the ebb and flow of your energy level. At the same time, think about what might be causing your energy to fluctuate and whether you can make any changes that might help.

Break up complex projects into smaller tasks and make a schedule

When you have complex projects, it's best to break them up into smaller tasks. This will make all your work easier and keep challenging projects from feeling insurmountable. Give yourself deadlines.

Make daily and weekly schedules for long projects

Starting with the due date and working backwards to the beginning of the project, calculate the time needed for each step. The project must be organized in such a way that you can stick to the time frame. Give yourself enough time to allow for unforeseen problems that might come up along the way.

Break your workday into shorter intervals

If you have trouble focusing for long periods of time, break your workday into shorter intervals. For instance, this could mean 10 minutes of focused work followed by a 3-minute break or 20 minutes of work followed by a 5-minute break. You need to figure out what works best for you. Set reminders on your computer or phone to let you know when each interval begins and ends.

Monitor your progress

Take stock of your progress regularly. Are you completing tasks within the set time frames, or do you need to allot yourself more time? Is there anything you can change to make your work easier?

Do you work well under pressure?

It's well known that people with ADHD tend to put things off until the last minute and then either complete them in record time or miss the deadline entirely. If that describes you, use it to your advantage by moving up the deadline; in other words, give yourself a deadline before the real due date so you feel the pressure earlier. You won't master this overnight, but before you know it, it'll practically become second nature.

PRIORITIZING

ABC list

Every day, create a new to-do list, putting each task in one of three categories based on importance. A stands for the most important tasks, B for lower-priority tasks, and C for tasks that can wait longer.

Limit your project load

To make it easier to stay focused, decide which three projects are the most important. Be realistic and, if necessary, get help limiting the number of projects assigned to you at once. If worse comes to worst, you can always request that projects be listed in order of due date before they come to you so you can focus on one thing at a time.

Take longer breaks

Sometimes you reach a point in the day when you need a longer break. Go ahead and take a break, but don't forget to set a reminder so you know when it's time to get back to work.

Reward yourself

Individuals with ADHD need to have their accomplishments acknowledged regularly. You can reward yourself for completing a task by playing a round of solitaire on the computer, playing a quick game on your phone, or whatever else appeals to you. Also, remember to praise yourself when something goes well.

MOTIVATION

Easiest tasks first

Start with the easiest tasks on your to-do list. Once you're in work mode, it'll be easier to tackle more difficult projects.

Don't think, just do

Don't overthink things. Even the simplest tasks can seem overwhelming if you don't get started right away.

Feeling stuck?

Everyone gets stuck on a task at some point. Rather than spending energy trying to get yourself going, sometimes it's better to focus on something else for a while and return to the challenging task later. If nothing works, you can always ask a colleague or supervisor for help.



DIGITAL RESOURCES

Information and solutions

Setting up a folder in the cloud to store important information is often a good idea. There are several services you can use for this, such as Evernote, iCloud, Dropbox, OneNote, and Google Drive. The goal is to increase efficiency and make sure you don't waste time searching for information by collecting it all in one place.

THINGS YOU CAN STORE IN THE CLOUD

- To-do lists
- Completed projects
- Work procedures
- Important information – PDFs, texts, photos, etc.
- Lists of ideas
- Meeting reports
- Goals and plans

The tech solutions that smartphones offer can prove invaluable for people with ADHD. Take advantage of the technological possibilities and make time to learn how to use apps that suit you. Don't hesitate to ask for help if you're struggling with them. Smartphones and cloud-based solutions are important tools for lightening your workload and reducing stress.

YOU CAN USE A SMARTPHONE TO

- Create visual reminders, e.g., regarding schedules/deadlines
- Maintain a simple calendar
- Store everything in one central place
- Take and store photos
- Write and store to-do lists
- Record, store, and send voice messages
- Set reminders (timer, clock, etc.)
- Access your email
- Access work documents

ATTENTION AND FOCUS ON THE JOB

Increased brain function

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter needed to facilitate the transmission of signals between nerve endings. The main symptoms of ADHD are a result of certain areas of the prefrontal cortex ineffectively utilizing dopamine. One way to increase activity in those regions is to increase dopamine production.

Any type of physical activity increases dopamine production.

Walking

Walk to work, get off the bus one stop early, or park your car further from the building and take the stairs. Any of these options gives you the chance to move a bit before starting work.

Moving

When you take breaks at work, get moving. Walk around, stretch, or walk up and down the stairs. Just standing up now and then and sitting right back down again can be helpful.

Meetings

Try to hold standing meetings. This works well for most people and can spark more ideas and boost creativity.

Stand up

Ideally, use an adjustable desk you can move up and down. Switch between sitting and standing at your desk. Find different positions and change often.

Helpful tools

Use tactile tools or other things that help ease your restlessness, such as stress balls, fidget spinners, fidget tangles, or chewing gum.

LIMIT STIMULI

One thing at a time

Focus on one task at a time. Even though your subconscious can process other things behind the scenes, your brain cannot focus on two tasks at once, let alone more.

Maintain a calm environment

Choose a work setup that keeps distractions to a minimum. Limit stimuli by setting up a partition or finding another way to create your own space. Cover the window on the door with yellow sticky notes or sheets of paper. Reduce visual distractions on your desk. Turn off automatic notifications on your phone and computer. Just remember to allow any reminders that you've set to help manage your work hours.

Block out noise

Use headphones or whatever else helps you block out external stimuli. You can listen to music or something else that works for you or use noise-cancelling headphones that reduce background noise without playing anything.

Go offline

If you don't need the internet for the task you're working on, go offline.

Silent mode

Set your phone to silent when you need to concentrate. Make sure your colleagues know you don't want to be disturbed. You may even want to put your phone in flight mode or turn it off completely for a while.

Email

There is no need to answer every email as soon as you receive it. Set aside a certain time to answer emails or reply to messages. You'll get more done that way. Adjust the settings in your email account so that emails you know can wait are directed into certain folders, then set aside time to go through them.

Write it down

Use a notebook, your phone, or your computer to record all your ideas, thoughts, and questions before you forget them.

Reduce stress

If you're stressed or upset, take a break. Find things that help you relax.

Calm your mind

Practice cultivating a sense of inner calm, for instance by using techniques drawn from mindfulness or cognitive behavioural therapy. These exercises often seem difficult at first, but before you know it, you'll be using them without giving it a second thought.

Next task

If you're having trouble completing a task on your list, turn your attention to another one. More often than not, you'll be able to complete the first task quickly and confidently when you go back to it.



SELF-CONTROL AND IMPULSIVITY

Interpersonal interactions

All interpersonal communication is governed by an unwritten set of rules that dictate what sort of behaviour is considered normal and what is not. Individuals with ADHD tend to exhibit stronger emotional responses, and in contrast to many people, this is equally true with positive and negative emotions. As a result, when a person with ADHD has an unusually strong reaction to something and/or displays over-the-top behaviour, those who are unfamiliar with ADHD may struggle to understand.

Keeping your emotions under control is integral to building good interpersonal relations in the workplace. Talking openly and explaining to your colleagues why you react differently than most people is key, and addressing negative feelings sooner rather than later can help prevent conflict. Remind yourself regularly that comments and critiques do not have to come from a bad place.

Impulsivity

Practice not automatically accepting every task that is assigned to you. Consider whether you have time for the task and be careful not to take on more than you can handle.

Conversations

Write down things you want to talk about at meetings. That way, you'll be less likely to forget important points. Instead of interrupting other people (which you probably have a tendency to do), save your questions and be patient; the answers may very well come up in the conversation.



HYPERACTIVITY

Stay focused

Use a fidget spinner, stress ball, or other tool to help you stay focused in meetings and during conversations. A mobile phone can also come in handy; just remember that the phone should be a helpful tool, not a distraction. If possible, avoid tasks that require 100% attention.

Take preventative measures

Be on the lookout for things like low blood sugar and stressful situations. Limit your interactions with people who try your patience and drain your energy. Make sure you always have some sort of snack on hand in case you get hungry and take care to get enough sleep. Get help if necessary.

Determine your triggers

Take note of when and where you lose control or feel your emotions getting the better of you. Do you notice a pattern? What do these episodes have in common? Knowing your triggers can help you avoid situations where you might struggle to keep your emotions under control.

OTHER THINGS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Identify your strengths

Don't despair. Find ways to further develop your strengths and mitigate your weaknesses. Don't waste energy on things that haven't worked out well. Keep trying.

Re-evaluate regularly

Reflect on how you're doing at work and consider new strategies.

Use your own methods

Try out different methods to see what work best for you. Think about what you can do to make difficult things more manageable.

Poke fun at your mistakes

Making mistakes and having a hard day now and then are just part of being human; it happens to everyone at some point. Being able to laugh at your own imperfections helps create a warmer environment in the workplace in which everyone is free to be themselves. Individuals with ADHD have a lot to contribute here and can simultaneously play a part in cultivating a more open and diverse work environment.

USEFUL INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS, SUPERVISORS, AND COLLEAGUES

Supervisors and colleagues play an important role!

Do you supervise or work alongside someone with ADHD or do you simply want to expand your understanding of people with different needs? This brochure can help you understand and identify practical ways for your employees to use their talents most effectively.

Strength or weakness?

People with ADHD are often creative, original, and detail-oriented, have specialized knowledge, and can focus on tasks very intently (hyperfocus). Given the opportunity, many achieve great success. Unfortunately, many people often have limited patience for individuals whose needs differ from those of the average employee. As a result, employers may miss out on a wealth of talents and abilities.

Who's responsible?

Many individuals with ADHD are very aware of their own strengths and weaknesses. However, they cannot be held solely responsible when things go awry; the responsibility rests just as much on the employer and immediate supervisor. Clear communication is an important part of the job. While this is true with all employees, it is particularly important when it comes to people with ADHD or other disorders.

Simply by virtue of being individuals, each person is unique. What one person finds difficult may be a piece of cake for the next. Instead of basing your judgment of the person on their diagnosis, get to know their individual needs. Make it a habit to talk to your employees regularly and ask how they're doing and whether anything can be improved.

Be proactive!

If you think an employee needs support, the first step might be to consider the work environment.

- Ask yourself, is there a clear job description?
- Explain what you expect from the employee
- Explain work processes and project content
- Consider what works for the individual
- Invite the individual to ask questions and suggest alternative work processes



7 THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Explain and show the employee how the company operates. Go over work processes, responsibilities, and tasks. It's a good idea to thoroughly review the job description.

Prioritizing

At the beginning, it's best to help with organizing and prioritizing tasks. Look at how the workday and work week are organized. Revisit the topic in the future and listen to the person's ideas.

Goals and deadlines

Establish clear goals and deadlines. Offer your assistance in breaking down projects into smaller tasks.

Follow-up

Hold regular meetings to find out how projects are coming along. Check to see if the employee needs help with organizing and prioritizing. Remember that meetings do not have to be long and formal or involve a bunch of people. Sometimes, a one-on-one chat over a cup of coffee is just as effective.

Training and reminders

Individuals with ADHD may struggle to recognize boundaries. Remind them if they begin to veer outside the scope of their job.

Constructive feedback

Tell the employee when things are going well. Encouragement and constructive feedback matter.

Mistakes

People with ADHD are generally well aware of their own mistakes, so repeatedly drawing attention to their errors can just make things worse.

Making adjustments

No two people are the same. By adapting the job to suit the employee, you can maximize each person's contribution to the whole. Consider things like workload, workplace culture, work hours, and access to helpful resources.



A COMMON STRUGGLE FOR PEOPLE WITH ADHD

Poor time management

One common manifestation of ADHD is poor time management skills; that is, ignoring or being unable to manage the “internal clock” that gives us a sense of how time is passing. Getting frustrated, nagging, and telling someone to “just buckle down” won’t do much good here; more often than not, people with ADHD are fully aware of the problem, they just aren’t always in control.

It's important to understand that poor time management can have a long-term impact on a person's job. If someone has difficulty organizing their time, planning ahead, meeting deadlines, or completing tasks, supervisors and colleagues can provide great support. Solution-focused conversations usually deliver the best results.

TOOLS THAT HELP WITH TIME MANAGEMENT

- Timer
- Clocks
- Written reminders
- Digital reminders (on phone or computer)
- Apps that remind you how much time is passing

Help with organization

For many people with ADHD, this is one of the most important things. The disorder may make it hard for someone to create a realistic schedule and follow it. As a result, it's important to help them get organized and to follow up as well as to discuss the consequences of poor time management.

Work environment

Go through the workspace. Check to see whether tools like clocks, digital messaging, photos, or checklists might be of use and are available. These can benefit all employees.

ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS FROM PEOPLE WITH ADHD

The following tips were suggested by individuals with ADHD

- Post a sign or photo with the employee's name by their office door
- Provide access to tools that help people see the big picture and keep track of projects and deadlines, e.g., timesheets, to-do lists, whiteboards, charts, or task lists
- Help with organization and check on progress
- Assist with prioritizing tasks
- Provide meeting minutes and summaries of conferences
- Give clear oral and written instructions
- Provide earplugs or headphones to block out noise
- Remove bright lights and flickering bulbs
- Provide a calm space with limited stimuli where people can go to decompress

The goal of this brochure is to help the reader understand that individuals with ADHD are, in fact, likely to enrich the workplace. While they do face certain challenges, given the proper support and resources, they can go far. Focusing on solutions rather than problems is more productive and creates a better work environment for everyone.

ADHD does not have to be a problem in the workplace. The keys to successfully addressing the challenges of ADHD are careful work processes and good solutions, which more often than not benefit all employees.



DID YOU KNOW

- that people with ADHD can make great contributions in the workplace?
- that people with ADHD are imaginative and creative?
- that your attitude toward someone with ADHD matters?
- that it is important for people with ADHD to receive the right support?



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