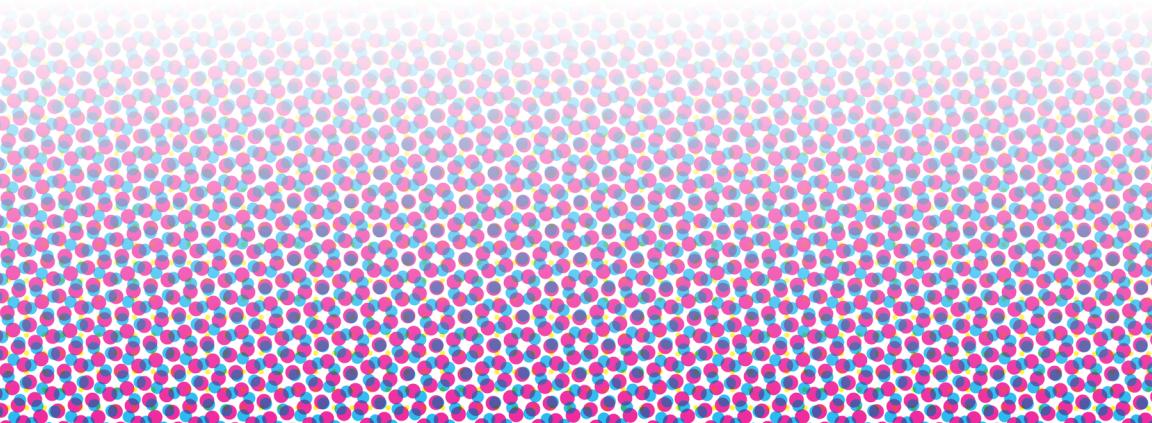


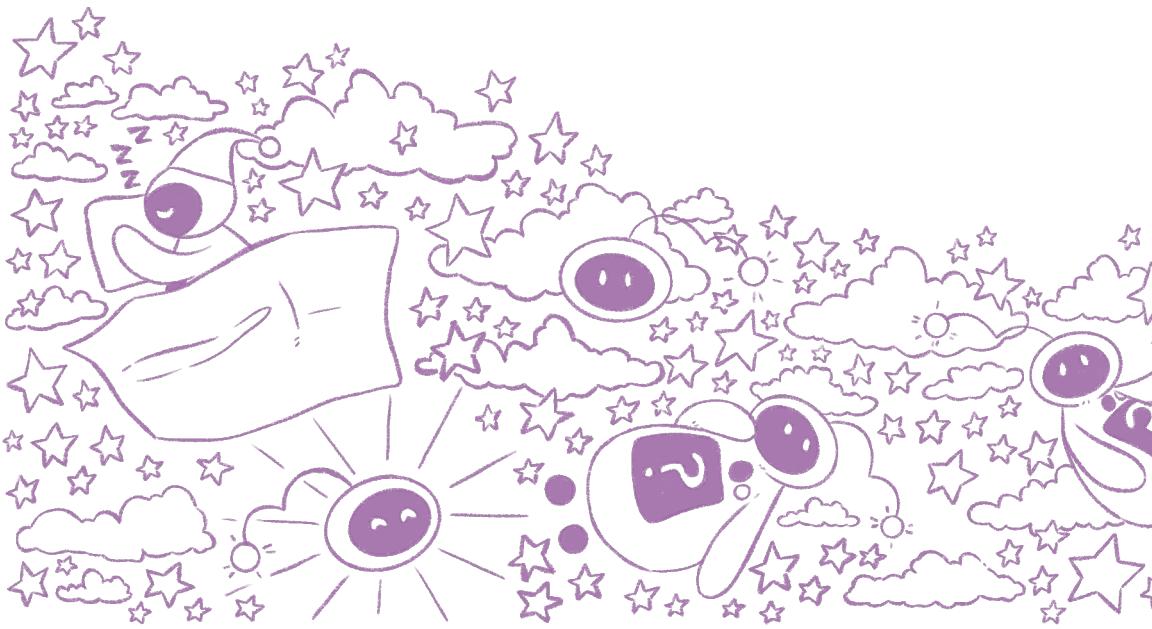
FINDING ORDER
THROUGH

DISORDER

MANAGING ADULT ADHD

BY PARKER PENAFIEL (ADHDER AND
GRAPHIC DESIGNER, NOT DOCTOR)





DISCLAIMER:

While a lot of research and personal experience went into the creation of this book, I am in no way a medical or psychiatric professional.



CONTENTS

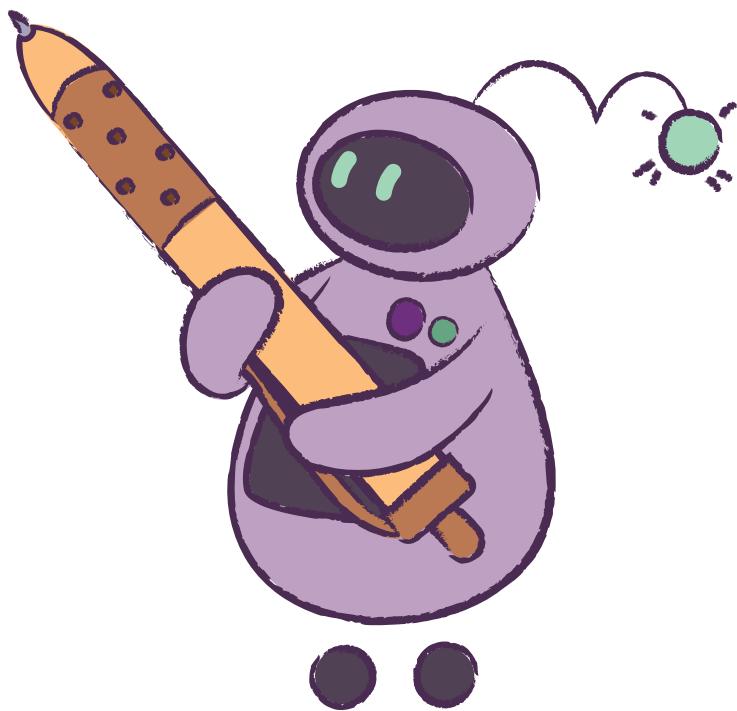
INTRODUCTION.....	1
MOTIVATE.....	7
KEEPING A PLANNER	9
KEEPING YOUR SPACE TIDY.....	13
REGULATE	17
MANAGING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS	19
DEALING WITH RSD.....	23
ACCOMMODATE	27
PLANNING FOR YOUR ENERGY	29
HOW TO DEAL WITH OVERSTIMULATION	33
WORKS CITED	37

INTRODUCTION

This book is first and foremost a tool. I'm not a doctor, but I've spent a long time living with ADHD and managing things in my own scatterbrained way; so I know how we can be made to feel ashamed for our symptoms, even when the person they hurt most is ourselves. If you do nothing but skim this intro, please take away the fact that your ADHD is not your fault, and will only be easier to manage if you let go of the shame around it, and work to understand it rather than hide it.

Neurotypical advice for ADHD problems often doesn't work, not because it's wrong or bad, but because it doesn't get at the actual problem. The problem with your dishes never getting done isn't that you aren't doing the dishes, but all of the invisible obstacles between you and doing those dishes. Within this book, drawing from personal experiences and research, is an examination of those invisible obstacles, where they come from, how to avoid them, and how to deal with them if avoidance isn't an option.

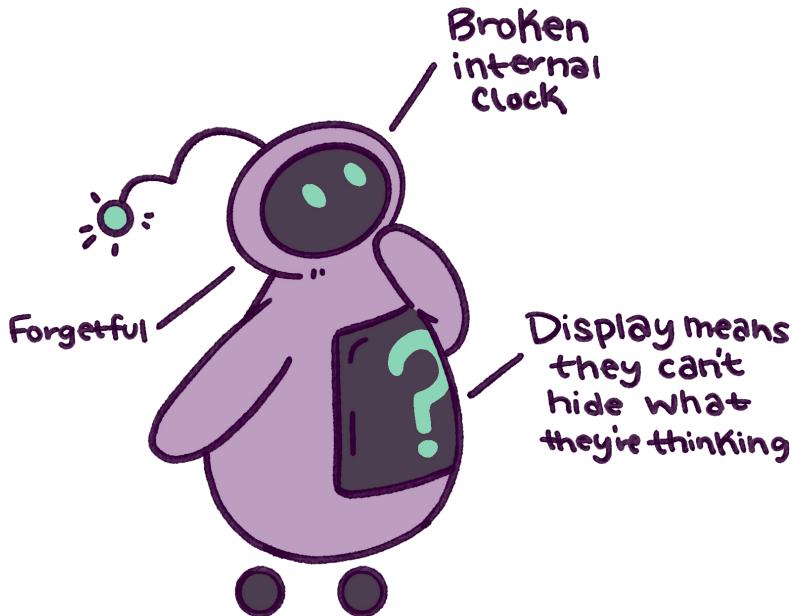
This is Glitch



A robot and fellow ADHDer*

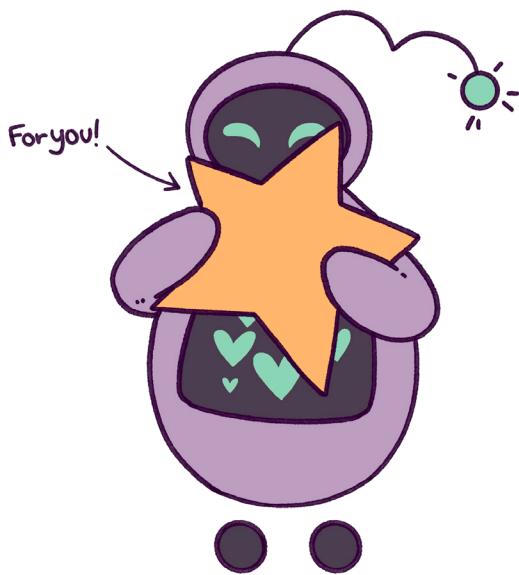
*Person with ADHD

Well, we can't really diagnose a robot (or anyone really as laypeople), but Glitch has as many symptoms as you or I.

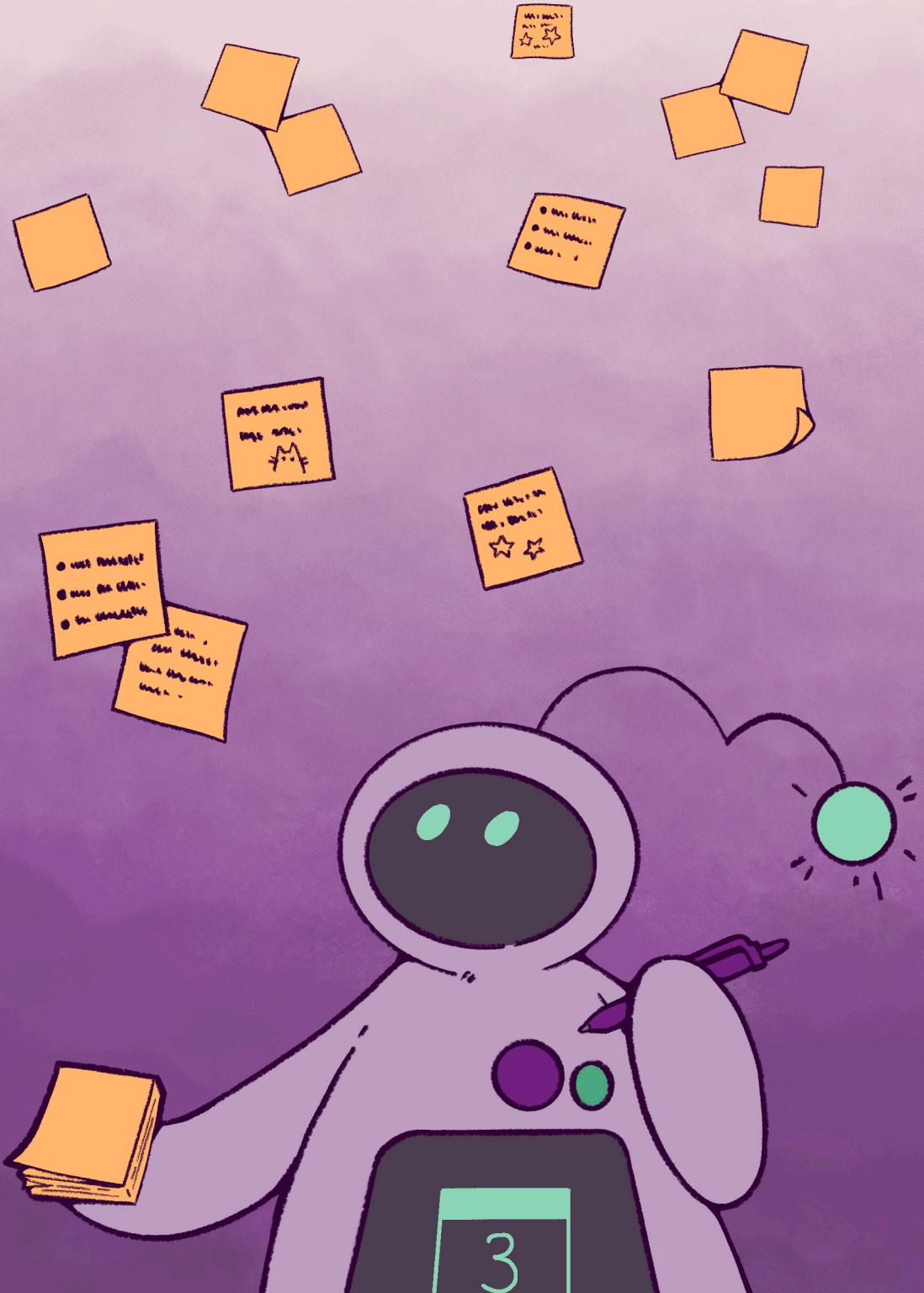


They've had to figure out ways to navigate their "glitches" over the years.

They're happy to share a few tips,

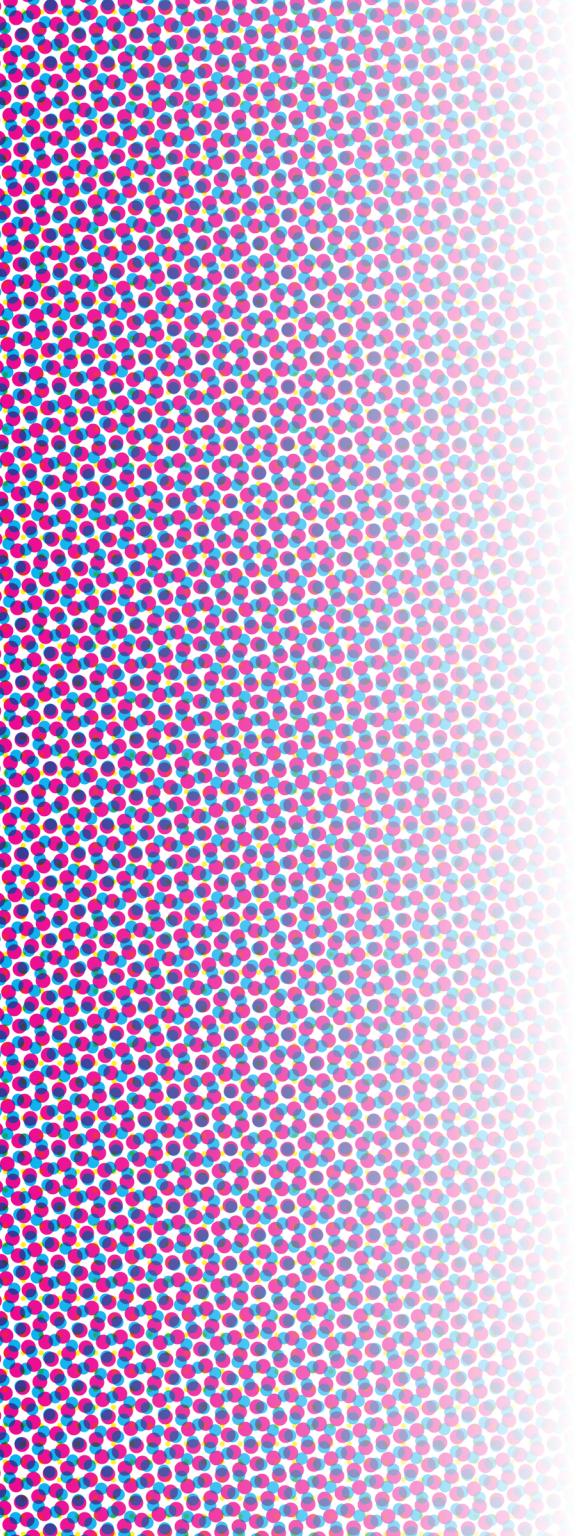


especially if it can help a new friend.



MOTIVATE YOURSELF

This chapter focuses on task initiation, motivation, and maintaining sustained effort throughout a long-term project or goal.



KEEPING A PLANNER

While I can't say for certain, I'd be willing to bet that "have you tried keeping a planner?" is one of the most common and most infuriating pieces of advice ADHDers get. You may as well ask Sisyphus if he tried pushing the boulder to the top of the hill so it didn't roll down. Most of us have tried keeping a planner, and it didn't work for most of us. Grudgingly I'll admit the advice has a bit of merit, but not on its own.

ADHDers struggle with working memory, or short term memory, or the ability to remember something that happened not very long ago. Working memory is helpful because the memories are essentially still on the surface so they're easy to remember without having to do much to trigger the memory, while often long term memories require more prompting. This is why ADHDers struggle taking verbal instructions, lose things often, and much more. Combine this forgetfulness with trouble accurately interpreting time and it's easy to see why deadlines are so often forgotten.

However, planners only work if you check them regularly. Forming habits with ADHD can be remarkably difficult because of executive dysfunction (a category of symptoms that cover regulation, inhibition, and motivation, including the inability to initiate a task despite a desire to do so), poor short term memory,

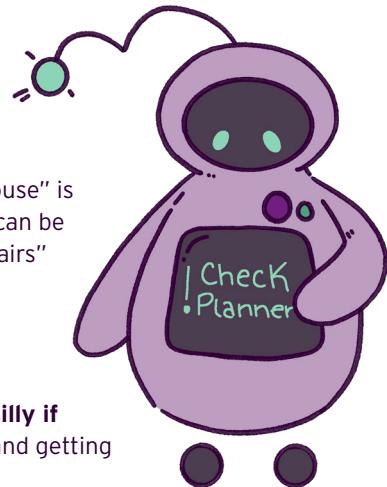
*Keeping a habit
can be really
difficult with
ADHD, but when
used effectively, a
planner can act as
a supplementary
short term memory.*

ADHD brains take in a lot of information and can be easily overwhelmed, so keep systems simple and break tasks into smaller steps when you can.

and struggling with motivation. ADHD brains are desperate for rewards and bad at investing in the long term.

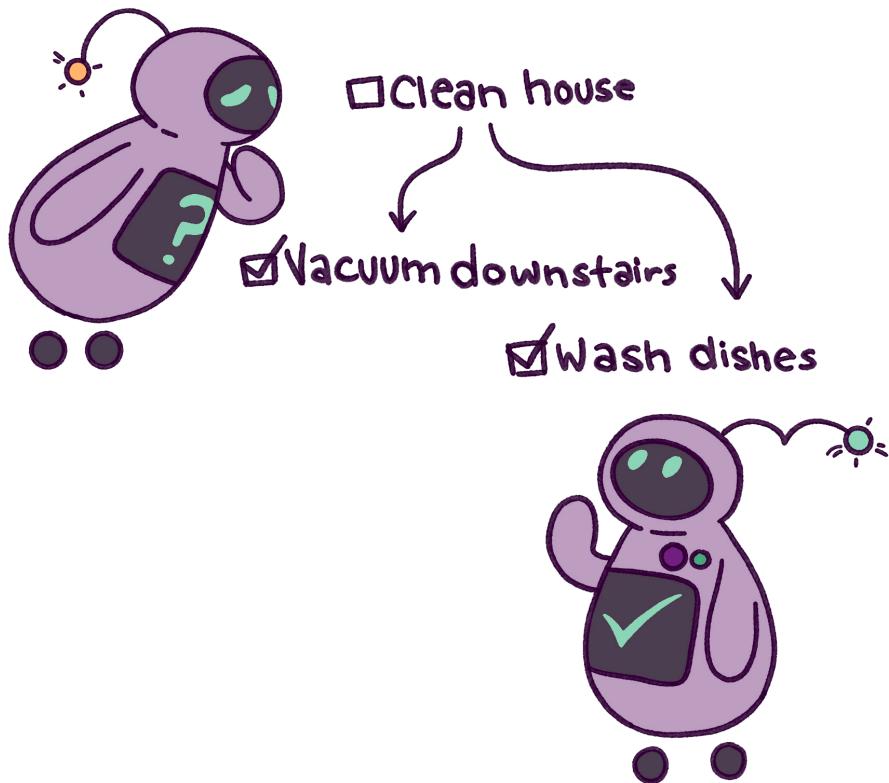
Here are a few things that can help you start using and hopefully keep using a planner:

- ★ **If a pre-planned agenda hasn't worked, try a bullet journal,** skipping days or months won't leave blank pages so shame is less likely to be a barrier.
- ★ **Keep your planner open and in a place that you're likely to be in the morning,** or even on top of something you need to use daily.
- ★ **Keep your system simple** enough that you can use it even on days you're struggling with motivation. A cool and complex system will only work when you have the energy to use it
- ★ **Set your morning alarm with a reminder to check your planner,** your phone has a better memory than you do.
- ★ **Break down tasks,** "Clean house" is vague, not very actionable, and can be overwhelming, "Vacuum downstairs" and "Wash dishes" have a more clear start and end and seem more actionable.
- ★ **Put down tasks that seem silly if it might help,** it's your planner and getting



to cross off small tasks like showering, making a phone call, or taking your medication can make the planner feel more rewarding.

★ **Vary small things like layout, highlight colors, draw on some pages**, ADHD brains love novelty and keeping things feeling new will be more exciting.



KEEPING YOUR SPACE TIDY

Keeping your “spaces” clean and organized as an ADHDer can be challenging. These “spaces” change as we get older ranging from your desk to your locker to your home, but the difficulty with organization often remains as we get older. It can seem daunting, and often the advice that neurotypicals (people without a neurological condition like ADHD, Autism, and many others) feels lacking, because it doesn’t address the core problem. ADHD disorganization, like most other outward symptoms, is due to

WE CAN'T JUST DECIDE TO "CLEAN AS WE GO" OR "NEVER SET ANYTHING ON THE FLOOR", WE NEED ADVICE FOR THE ADVICE.

struggling with executive functioning. We can't just decide to “clean as we go” or “never set anything on the floor”, we need advice for the advice. **So, how do you prevent the mess in the first place?** There are a few things:

- ★ **Identify what is causing the most mess.** There's likely an issue with the way you store this category of items.

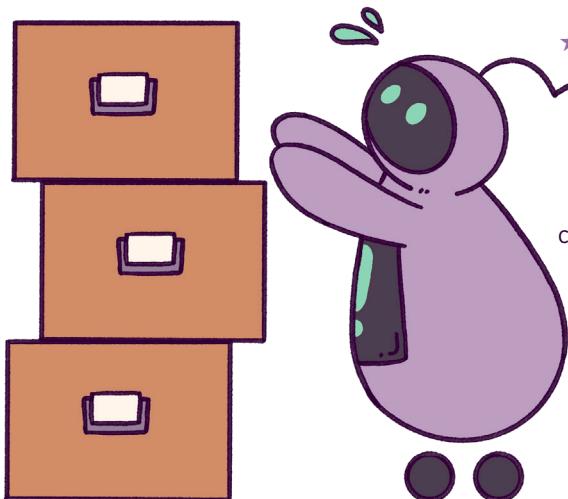
When you're struggling with something there's always a reason, if you can find it, you can usually fix it.

★ **Make it easy to put things away.** Storage in hard to reach places is much less likely to be used. Save it for things you don't use often.

★ **Figure out what things you use daily** or even multiple times daily and keep them visible and easy to reach. Something you use often is something that needs to be put away often, so make it easier to do.

★ **Have places for items in "in-between" states** (ex. Not dirty but not freshly clean clothes, projects that aren't finished but need to be put away). Let's be honest, if you don't know where something goes are you more likely to shove it somewhere or to find it a place?

★ **Listen to your brain by examining your behavior.** Cleaning is likely something that doesn't come naturally, so make it as easy on yourself as possible. But these tips won't mean your spaces are spotless so you need some tricks to do that extra bit of cleaning.



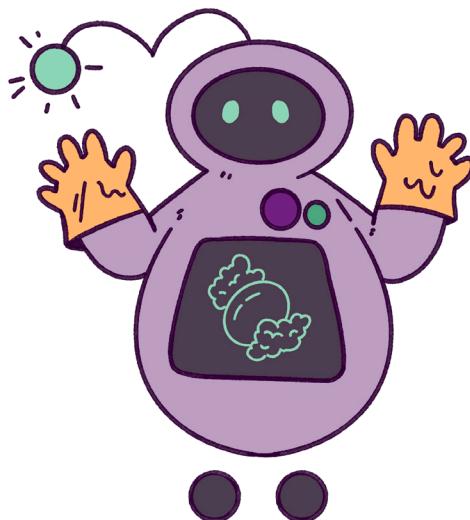
★ **Use body doubling** (having another person in the room or otherwise with you in order to make something more doable) to stay motivated. You can invite a friend over or even just call someone (calling is especially good if you don't feel comfortable bringing someone into a messy space).

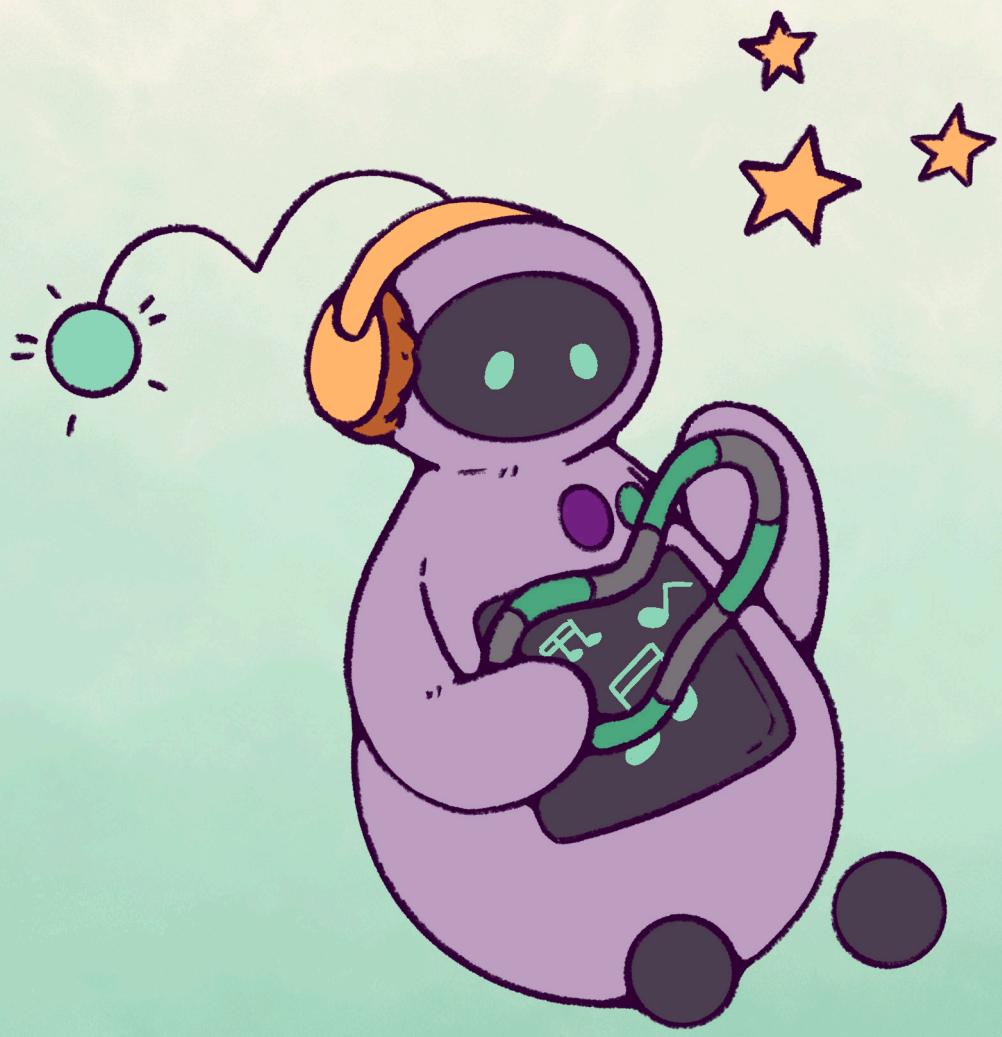
★ **Utilize sensory accommodations** like noise canceling headphones for vacuuming, gloves for dish washing, or unscented detergent for laundry.

★ **Don't go into cleaning with a broad goal of cleaning the house**, apartment, or even a room. This is overwhelming and more importantly, too vague. Approach a single space and break cleaning it into similar tasks.

★ **Remove everything from a space to wipe it down, mop, or sanitize, and then think about the objects you've removed.**

Throw away garbage and then return objects that belong in that space before sorting out everything else and putting them back. Moving them can recontextualize things from “the mess I don’t know how to tackle” to identifiable objects with uses and places they belong.

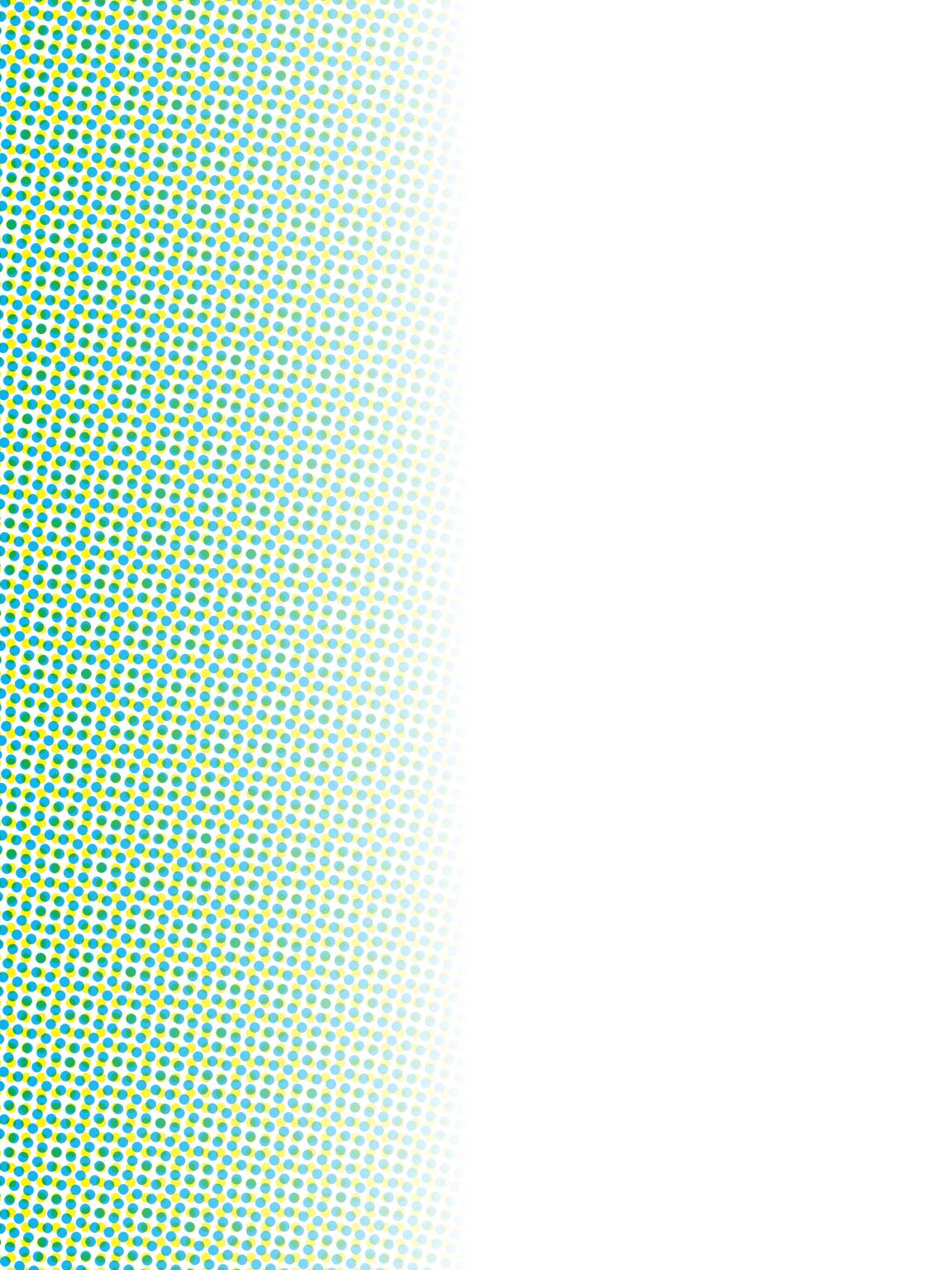




REGULATE

YOUR SENSES

This chapter focuses on managing strong emotions and navigating relationships with ADHD.

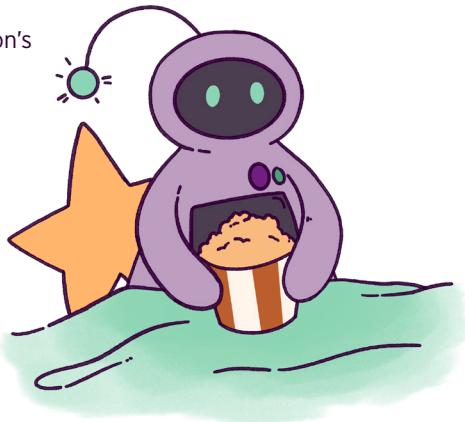


MANAGING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

ADHD is a multifaceted disorder with affects far beyond attention, and can greatly affect a person's mood or mental state. Experiencing depressive lows with ADHD is not uncommon, even without a diagnosis of depression.

With less activity in the frontal lobe, ADHDers experience issues with emotional regulation, or the ability to internally manage emotions

WITH LESS ACTIVITY IN THE
FRONTAL LOBE, ADHDERS
EXPERIENCE ISSUES WITH
EMOTIONAL REGULATION.



and have appropriately intense emotional reactions. So small disappointments, failures, or bumps in the road, can add up quickly and make someone with ADHD spiral. Combining this with poor emotional permanence, or the ability to recall any emotional state outside of the one you are previously experiencing, it can feel as if everything is bad and you have always felt bad.

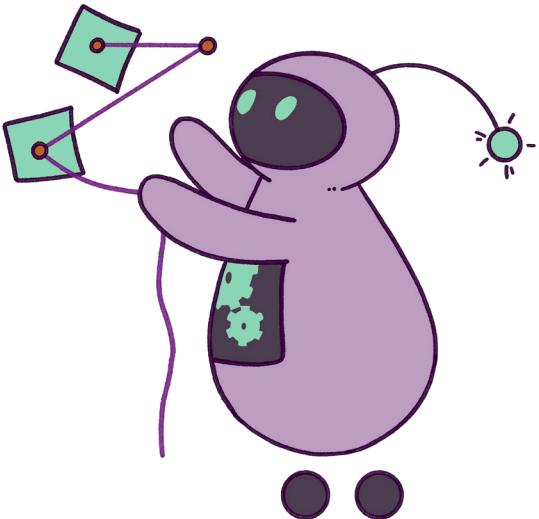
There are a few ways to manage this, keeping the causes in mind, but **it's always best to decide on a plan before you're spiraling.**

★ **Use distractibility to your advantage and force yourself to change subjects** by walking away from the source of your despair (or relocate for a new environment if it's internal), and watch a video, a show, read, or do something else that requires your attention. Mindless activities will give you room to continue ruminating and worsening your spiral. You want to create distance between yourself and the event. You can come back to it later when you're thinking less emotionally.

★ **Keep a journal** of your accomplishments, favorite things about yourself, fun facts, or any other positive thing in your life. It can be difficult to remember the things that make you happy when you're spiraling.

★ **Make an action plan** if it's a solvable problem, and write it down. Even if it's not necessary, and you later find you overreacted, or you can't do much other than research possible actions, writing down a plan will help you feel as if you've resolved it, look at the problem logically, and make you feel less helpless. Try to move on after making your action plan.





*Calming down
should be your first
priority, any actions
can come after you
have a more clear
head. Acting while
spiraling can lead to
impulsive decisions
and overcorrection.*

DEALING WITH RSD

RSD stands for Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria and can be a symptom of ADHD. ADHDers can struggle with emotional regulation, and feel both positive and negative emotions more intensely; on top of this, ADHDers receive an estimated 20,000 more negative comments than their peers by the age of 12, according to Dr. William W. Dodson. Because of poor impulse control and self regulation, kids with ADHD can be rude, harsh, can seem weird to their peers, and bad or lazy to adults in their life. Consistently being

ADHDERS RECEIVE AN ESTIMATED 20,000 MORE NEGATIVE COMMENTS THAN THEIR PEERS BY THE AGE OF 12

treated poorly and listening to negative comments about things you cannot control can be traumatic, especially for a child. When you're expecting rejection and mistreatment, perceived slights can reopen wounds inadvertently, and this "overreaction" to perceived rejection is RSD.

There are two main aspects of RSD that have to be dealt with, first calming your reaction of panic or depression, and then learning to recognize when you are experiencing RSD.

Anecdotally, people with ADHD likely have better than average pattern recognition, which can be a positive and a negative, as we may be more likely to notice similarities between mundane situations and previous instances of rejection.

To calm down you can try a few things (more listed in *Managing Negative Emotions* on page 19):

- ★ **Try grounding yourself**, remembering where you are and that you are safe.
- ★ **Find a way to distract yourself**. Don't do something mindless like coloring or a walk as this will still give you room to ruminate and spiral. Make sure to occupy your mind.
- ★ **Practice positive self-talk**, you might not believe it at first, but reminding yourself of your positive qualities and giving yourself grace helps in the long term.

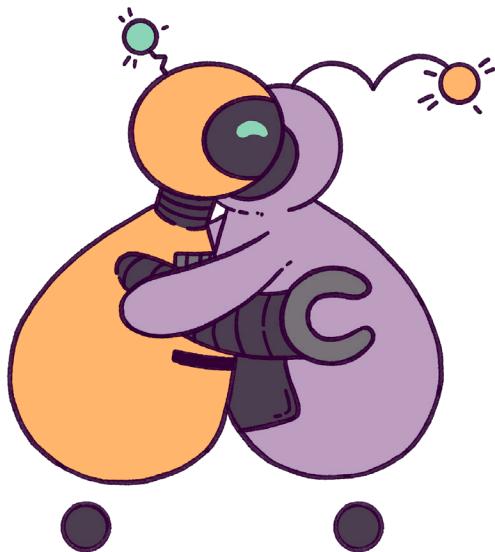
Once you're calm, these are a few ways to recognize RSD in the future:

- ★ **Try not to immediately react to the trigger**, reacting strongly can escalate the situation.
- ★ **Think of a few ways the trigger could be interpreted**. Remember that sometimes you also word things poorly, forget things, accidentally cut someone off, and other similar things.
- ★ **Calmly ask what the other person meant by what they said** in neutral phrasing like, "what do

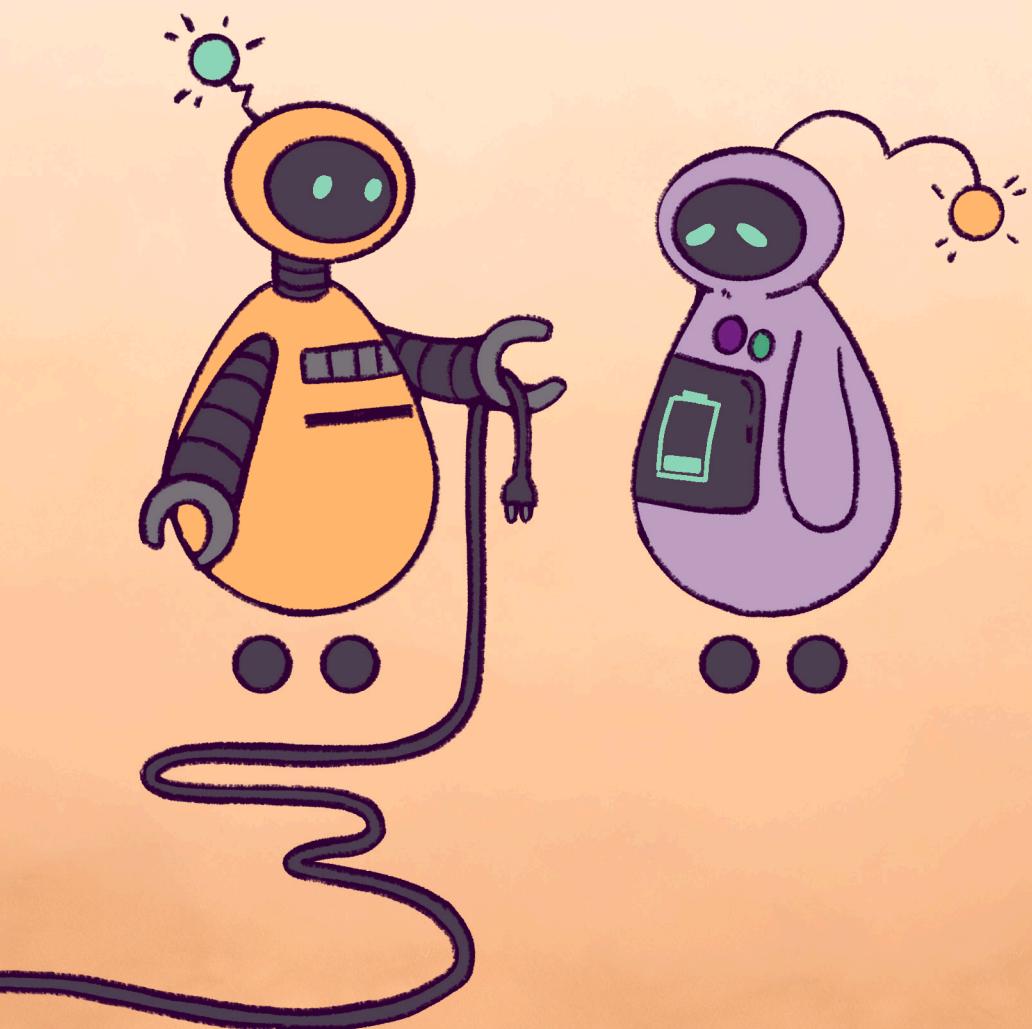


you mean?" or bring up the thing they forgot casually. A forgotten birthday can easily be addressed with a "It's my birthday!" rather than something more confrontational.

★ **Keep your relationship with the person in mind.** If being mean is out of character for them, it was likely accidental. Reconsider your relationship with the person if they have a pattern of being cruel to you or others.



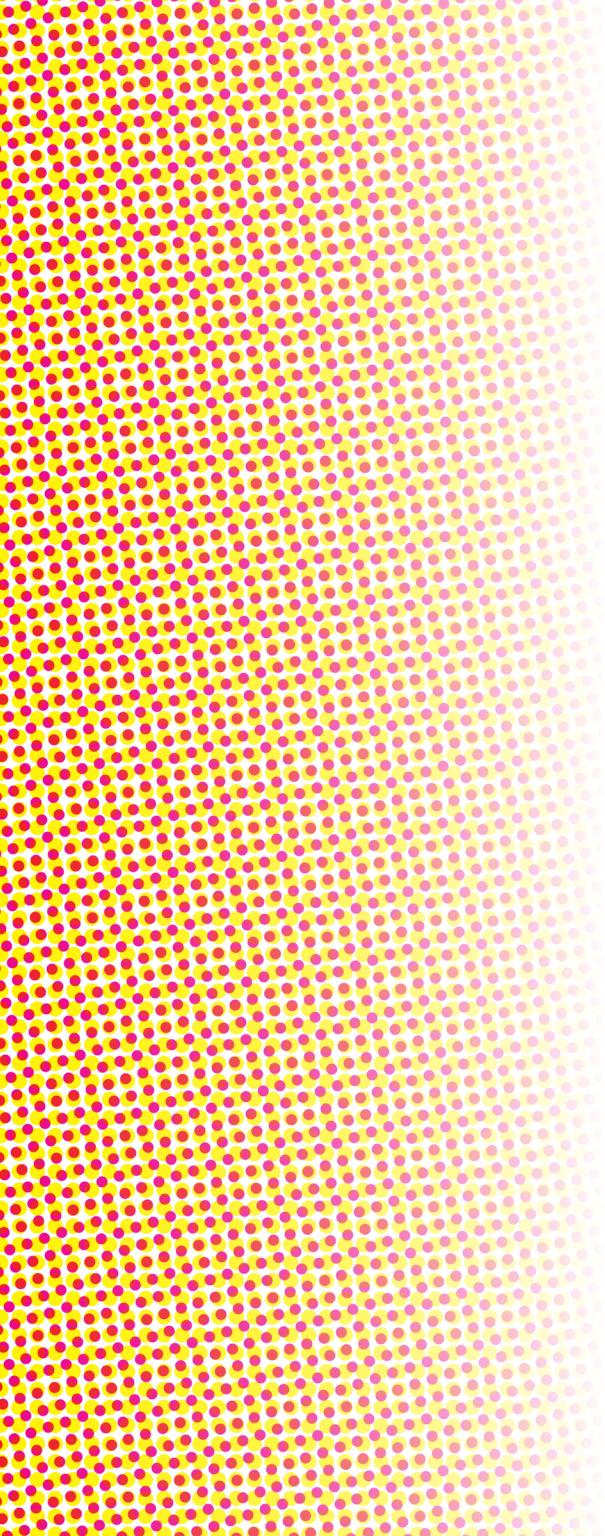
Sometimes a little reassurance from a friend can go a long way. Glitch is glad to have a friend like Disc who doesn't mind reassuring them.



ACCOMMODATE

YOUR DISABILITY

This chapter focuses on self-care and accommodating your ADHD.



PLANNING FOR YOUR ENERGY

ADHD can be an exhausting disorder. Between the exhaustion that can set in from overstimulation or hyperactivity and executive dysfunction (a category of symptoms that cover regulation, inhibition, and motivation, including the inability to initiate a task despite a desire to do so), getting the things you need to get done can seem impossible.

So what makes ADHDers so tired? Two things: having unregulated and wandering attention means noticing at least twice as many small details and smells and noises as you really need to. Processing and sorting all of that can be exhausting. Society is not built in a way that we operate in naturally, and skills that ADHDers often struggle with are often considered basic and everyday tasks; having to work against your natural inclinations can feel like trying to swim upstream, and that takes energy.

But how do you deal with it? First let's start with what doesn't work:

- ★ Neglecting self care and personal hygiene.
- ★ Relying on anxiety to motivate yourself.
- ★ Ignoring ADHD symptoms.

Having any disability can be exhausting and ADHD is no exception. This is why 'Spoon Theory' was invented by disability activist Christine Miserandino.

These are more likely to cause burnout and worsen your exhaustion, making things even harder. Like any animal, humans are more likely to thrive in a healthy environment where their needs are met.

Some things you can try:

★ **Plan out time to work.**

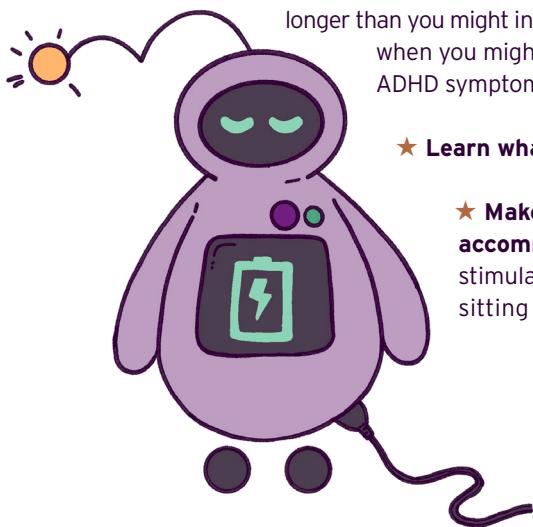
★ **Create artificial deadlines** if you need a deadline to get work done (keeping the real deadlines somewhere hidden can help fake deadlines feel more real).

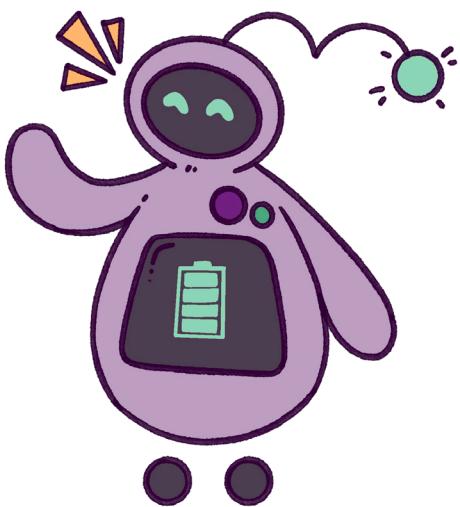
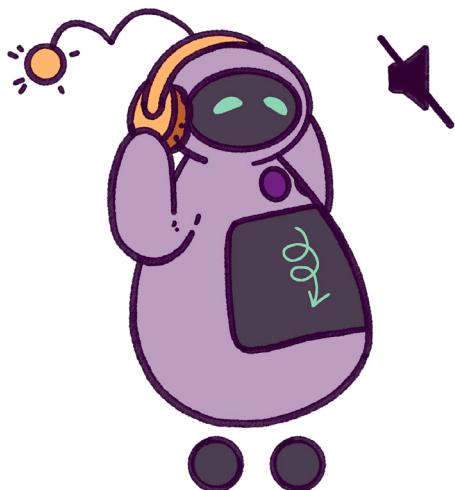
★ **Break larger tasks into smaller steps** to complete, in order to make them less overwhelming.

★ **Don't let deadlines dictate your schedule**, some tasks take longer than you might initially think, and you can't always predict when you might have a bad ADHD day (a day where your ADHD symptoms are more severe).

★ **Learn what helps you recharge.**

★ **Make tasks less exhausting with sensory accommodations** like earbuds, extra stimulation like a podcast or audiobook, or sitting to do tasks you might usually stand for.





HOW TO DEAL WITH OVERSTIMULATION

Overstimulation is the state of being overwhelmed and often upset or irritable after taking in a large amount of stimuli. Because people with ADHD often have their attention split in many places, we're often taking in a lot of stimuli and filtering out a lot less of it. The brain is an amazing organ, but even a really great computer has limits to how much it can process.

Dealing with overstimulation as an ADHDer can be difficult because having too little stimulation can feel like torture for a brain that struggles to regulate itself. Understimulation is not the answer to overstimulation, it's a new problem. So you need to find a balance.

These are a few things you can try:

★ **Go through the bodily needs checklist**, do you need water, to use the bathroom, to eat, are you tired? Hyperfocus or poor interoception (the ability to recognize your bodily needs) can mean that ADHDers sometimes accidentally neglect their needs, and taking care of them can go a long way towards feeling better.

★ **Limit stimulation but replace it**—using a pair of headphones or earbuds can help eliminate the offending

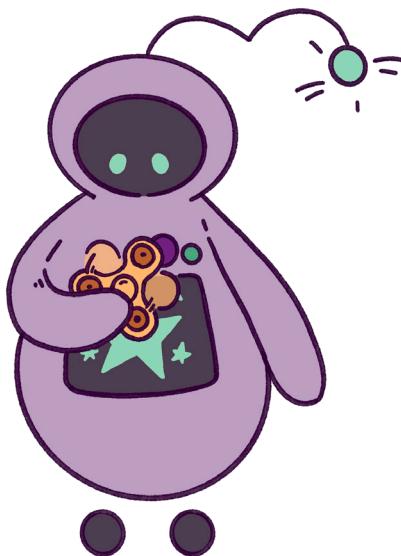


*Stim or fidget toys
(sometimes called
stim or fidget tools)
can be a helpful
tool for sensory
regulation and help
replace potentially
harmful stims.*

noises, but putting on familiar music helps stave off understimulation but listening to a familiar song and having control of the volume is much less information to take in.

★ **Try stimming,** stimming is inducing a sensation like moving your leg, smelling something, touching a fabric, rubbing the back of your hand, and many other things; stimming is an external method of sensory regulation and can help your brain when it's struggling with regulation on its own.

★ If all else fails, **take yourself out of the place or situation causing your overstimulation.** Head to the bathroom or leave if you can and need to.





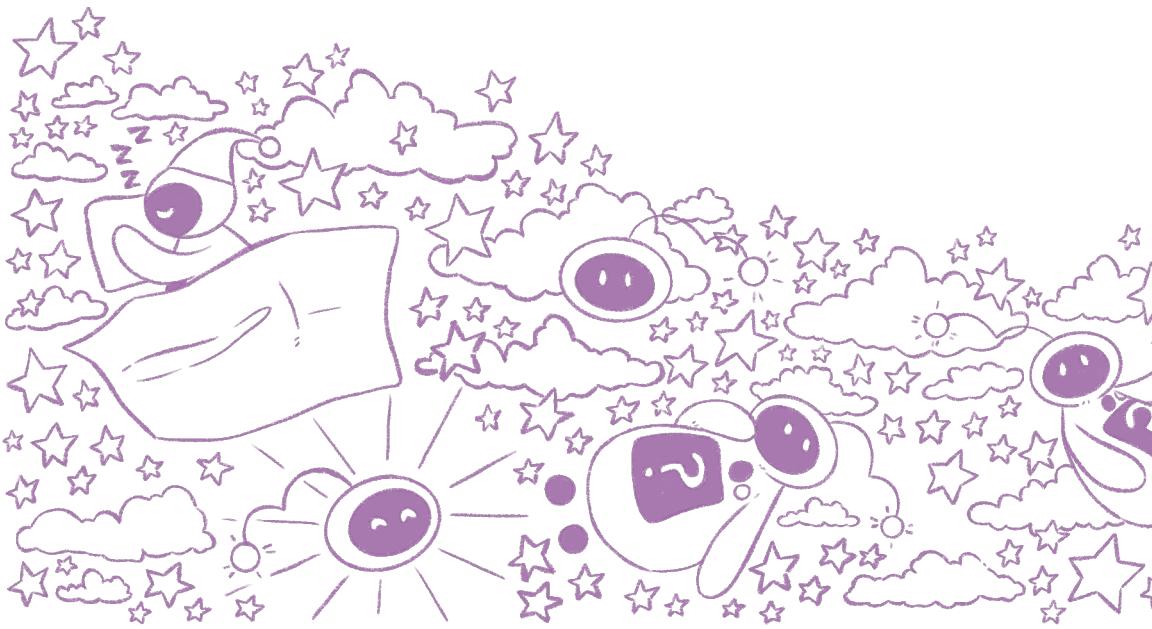
*Like Glitch,
sometimes turning
your brain off and
on again with a
short snooze can
help you get back to
full working order.*

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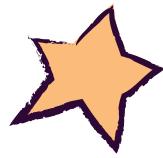


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