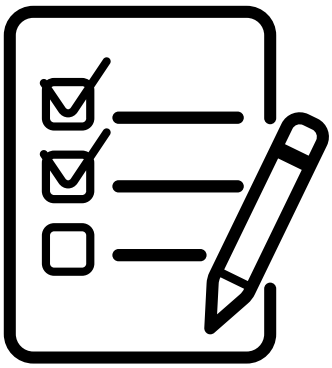
Mastering To-Do Lists



Introduction

For many women with ADHD, planning and task execution pose significant challenges.

Why?

This might be due to inherent executive functioning challenges, societal pressures, or just daily life.

However, by understanding these challenges, creating a tailored task management system, and employing effective strategies, you can find task planning and execution systems that work for them.

Mastering To-Do Lists

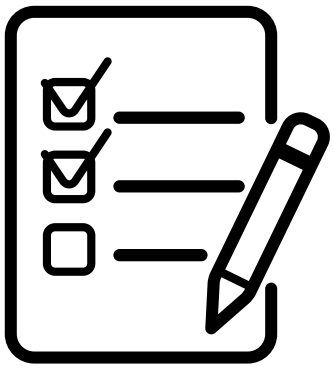


Here is a checklist of some common struggles. Do any of these resonate with you?

Keep these in mind as we are going through our group or as you are looking through our workbook. It will help you know what to pay attention to.

- [ ] I do not know how to plan
- [ ] I'm overwhelmed so I don't do it
- [ ] I get excited to start then give up
- [ ] I don't know how to get started
- [ ] I get started and my list is too long and I get overwhelmed with it
- [ ] I start with new planners and systems and then can't keep it up
- [ ] I lose my lists
- [ ] I'm not consistent with it
- [ ] I ignore the alerts
- [ ] I tell myself "I will do it later" or "I don't need to write it down" and then I forget
- [ ] I have so many tasks to do and it overwhelms me to think about.
- [ ] It makes me feel worse to use a list
- [ ] Other

About Task Management Systems



About task management systems
Creating a task management system that works for you requires:

- [ ] A list of tasks that you want to or need to do stated in such a way that you understand how or what you need to do (Be specific)

- [ ] A calendar (Monthly, Weekly, Daily) or all three

- [ ] A way of getting tasks in your calendar

- [ ] A way to follow through with your tasks

In our group today we will have a planning session and walk through the model I teach my clients.

It's very important to understand that there is no one right way to plan. The way that is right for you is the way that works for you. This is just a guideline.

About Task Management Systems



If your goal is to plan or improve your planning it requires some other things as well:

- [ ] Setting aside time to plan and review your plan.



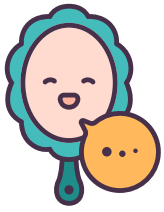
- [ ] Assessing if tasks are lingering.

- [ ] Using self-awareness to adjust tasks and task management systems





- [ ] Using self-compassion and self-advocacy to encourage yourself and keep yourself going with systems.





- [ ] Using self-accommodation to help yourself do tasks when necessary.



Self Compasson and Task Management Systems

Please remember that living in the neurotypical world as an adhd woman is challenging.

You are like a goldfish on a bike!

You have a different brain that does not thrive in this world and it makes it hard to “plan” and live your life traditionally.

Executive functioning differences are hugely responsible for your struggles with keeping a to-do list and getting tasks done in traditional ways.

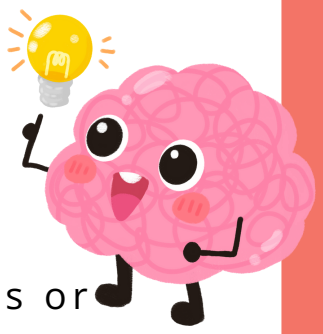
Unfortunately, most of us have to live in this world. It’s hard to escape needing things like to-do lists and calendars to function.

It will likely take a lot of work to function in a way that isn’t natural for you.

The ability to initiate nonpreferred tasks like planning and creating a task management system will be HARD.



6 Reasons for Problems with Task Management Systems



Dopamine and Motivation: Low dopamine levels or activity in certain brain circuits, like those linking the prefrontal cortex with the basal ganglia (especially the striatum), can reduce the desire to start or complete tasks, especially difficult, overwhelming, or disliked ones. This can make it difficult to plan and execute tasks.

Noradrenaline (Norepinephrine) and Attention: This neurotransmitter affects attention, arousal, and alertness. Imbalances can make it harder to start tasks.

Interconnected Brain Regions: The prefrontal cortex is linked to other brain regions, such as the parietal cortex, basal ganglia, and cerebellum. Disruption can cause difficulty starting tasks, especially when they are nonpreferred or overwhelming.

Self Compasson and Task Management Systems

Glutamate and GABA: Glutamate is the main excitatory neurotransmitter and GABA is the main inhibitory neurotransmitter in the brain. They are important for neural signaling and an imbalance can affect cognitive functions and task initiation.



Lived experience shapes the brain:

- Unsuccessful attempts to meet neurotypical expectations
- Negative feedback and
- Chronic stress can shape the neural circuits in the brain and make it more challenging to initiate tasks.

But positive experiences and training can enhance the brain's ability to initiate tasks too. We refer to this as neuroplasticity.

Habits

How are some people with adhd able to keep and implement task management systems?

Habits.

🔑 A habit is a regular practice or routine that is often performed unconsciously. It's a behavior, thought, or action that one repeats frequently and automatically in response to a specific situation or context. Over time, due to neural pathways that get strengthened with repetition, habits can form and become more automatic, reducing the need for decision-making or extensive thought when executing the behavior.

Habits can be beneficial (like brushing teeth daily) or detrimental (like smoking).

ADHD people that have been able to keep task management systems that work long enough have kept them sustained enough to make them a habit and part of their life in such a way that it happens unconsciously and easily.

Habits

It is our habit as humans to avoid things that are unpleasant and overwhelming to us.

- Keeping task lists and executing them is overwhelming emotionally and confusing for adhd brains.
- Task management systems can also be emotionally dysregulating.

Neurotypicals are better at incorporating task management systems into their routines because they can stick with them for longer periods. However, even neurotypical individuals also struggle with procrastination, ignoring reminders, or failing to complete tasks on their to-do lists.



Be careful not to hurt yourself with systems

Be careful with task management systems

🔑 For a task management system to be healthy stay on guard that :

1. Your tasks aren't overloading you and are connected with your values.

2. You aren't using systems to push yourself beyond whats comfortable for your body. Check-in with your body to make you are comfortable with how much you are doing. You can burn out if you push too much.

3. You are using your to-do list in service of what matters to you and not others.

4. You aren't being a perfectionist



Emotional Regulation and Task Management

Planning can trigger anxiety, overwhelm, and self-doubt.

Recognizing these emotions with self-awareness and having strategies in place to cope can help you sustain a system.

Here are some ways emotions can become overwhelming during the process:

- [ ] You might be afraid to fail so why even start planning
- [ ] You might be overwhelmed by too many planning processes to choose from
- [ ] You might get overwhelmed by the planning process
- [ ] You may look at tasks or make a to-do list and get overwhelmed
- [ ] You may get triggered by looking at a task and have thoughts that you can't do it or aren't capable
- [ ] You might get overwhelmed by the difficulty of a task



Emotional Regulation and Task Management

All these things (and more) can dysregulate your emotions when we are talking about keeping to-do lists, calendaring tasks, and following through on them. It's no wonder task management is so difficult!

You have to keep and practice your system for long enough to override all of this. That can be hard. You need to be tenacious and believe that it's worth it. Creating a task management system will take a lot of support from yourself and the people around you. Next, we will look at some things you can do to help with this.



Support Yourself Until You Create the Habit of a System

🌸 **Self-Compassion Break:**

The self-compassion break consists of:

- [ ] noticing what you are feeling
- [ ] remembering you are not alone
- [ ] choosing to put your hand on your heart
- [ ] offering some words of kindness to yourself.

🗣️ **Externalizing Language: Cogntive Defusion**

Swap "I am overwhelmed" with "I'm noticing I feel overwhelmed".
This creates a little space, which can make all the difference.

💌 **Kind Phrases: Use nurturing words with yourself.**

Phrases like, "I'm trying my best with this," or "One step at a time" can help. This is part of self-compassion.

💌**Self Distancing Talk: using your name to coach yourself through things.**

"Kristen, you need to just remember tomorrow to use your planning time. You got off track today."
This is emotionally regulating and encouraging.
"Kristen, you are having a hard day today." You simply use your name instead of I

.

Support Yourself Until you Create the Habit of a System

.

👯 **Accountability Buddy:** Partner with someone who gets it and you are both working on the same thing. You report your progress together to one another.

📓 **Journaling:** Chronicle your emotions, hurdles, and little wins. Every achievement is worth a celebration.

🔍 **Focus & Experiment:** Direct your energy here. If one approach doesn't resonate, pivot to another. Remember, it's about the journey, not just the destination.

🏡 **Enlist Family Support:** Inform your family about this endeavor. Their encouragement can make a huge difference. Advocate for the kind of support you might need.

Daily check-ins, such as "How was planning today?" or affirmations like "I'm proud of you" can uplift you. You also might request they **body double** for you to help you with planning or give you space and **quiet during this time.**

Before we talk about a system:

We need to keep in mind 2 things when planning:

1. Executive Functions Get Depleted

For women with ADHD: Your executive functions (focus🎯, memory, task-switching) are like batteries 🔋. They deplete, especially after intense 😓 or busy days🔄.

Unexpected drainers can arise❗
If you are Feeling mentally tired:

1. Be kind to yourself 🤗.
2. Skip tasks if overwhelmed ❌🗂️.
3. Always choose rest 🛌.

📅 When planning, follow high-drainers ⬆️🔋 with rest 🛌 or low-drainers ⬇️🔋 for balance



Before we talk about a system:

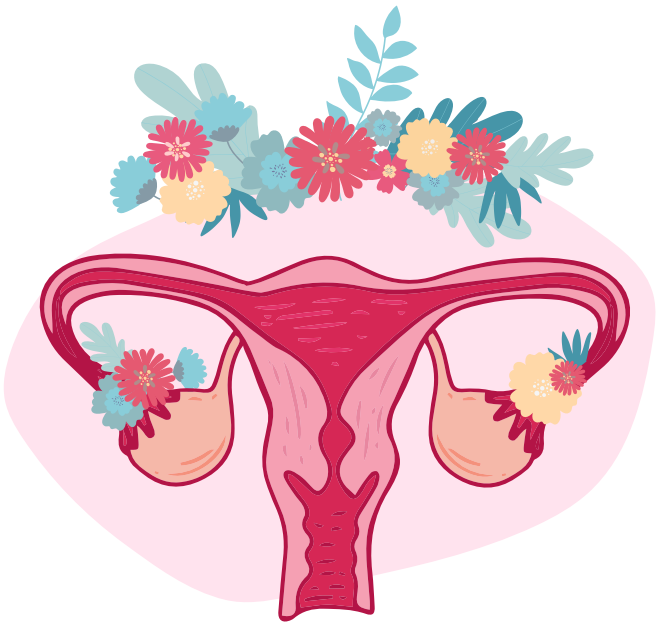
2. Map Your Hormonal Cycle to Your Calendar

🚺 For women with ADHD, the hormonal cycle 🔁 greatly affects energy ⚡, mood 😋/😞, and thinking 🧠.

Not considering these changes can cause issues like mood swings or extra fatigue 😴.

To stay in tune, add your menstrual cycle to your calendar. This helps forecast low-energy days or emotional times .

By aligning with your cycle, you optimize tasks 🗂️ for better harmony 🎵 and sustainability 💚.



Suggestions for 3 step System



A) Dump List

Start by sitting down and creating an ongoing list:

[ ] Write down all of your responsibilities for the week.

- Work, childcare, daily routines.
- Eating breakfast, taking a shower, cooking dinner.

[ ] Write down all of your tasks & projects.

- Anything pending with deadlines.
- Note due dates next to tasks and projects.

[ ] Note things to do, like making appointments and paying bills.

[ ] Examine the list. If overwhelmed:

- Specify tasks: "do dishes" not "clean kitchen".
- Break big tasks into smaller steps.
- Break big projects into baby steps. Seek clarification if confused.

Note: Continuously update this list. If on paper, take a picture.



Suggestions for 3 step System



b) Weekly Plan

[ ] Pull out your weekly calendar.
[ ] Review your 'Dump List'. Insert all upcoming week's responsibilities into the calendar.
[ ] Schedule a daily 15-30 min personal time.
[ ] Insert all appointments.
[ ] Schedule tasks or projects with deadlines on their due dates.
[ ] Dedicate 30 minutes on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday for weekly planning.
[ ] Set aside 10 minutes daily, AM or PM, for daily planning and review.
Note: Overestimate task durations. If 10 minutes, plan for 20 or 30.
Tasks: Choose one task from the Dump List daily. Prioritize by values, deadlines, or importance.

Suggestions for 3 step System

Daily Life

c) Daily Plan

Review your daily plan every evening or morning, setting aside 10 minutes.

Questions:

- What's my main goal today?
- Which task is crucial today?
- Am I overscheduled?
- Am I forgetting something?
- Can I use a strategy against procrastination?
- Any lingering tasks?
- What's today's schedule?
- Need to reshuffle tasks?

Common Failures in Implementing Task Management Systems:

- Giving up before forming a habit.
- Using multiple calendars.
- System distrust.
- Self-deception.
- Over-complicated systems.
- Succumbing to emotional overwhelm.

Conclusion

Planning might not come naturally. Yet, with understanding, strategy, and self-compassion, it becomes more feasible. Every small step matter

