

Fundamental Strategies to Overcome Inattention, Hyperactivity & Impulsivity

Adapted, with much gratitude, from Ari Tuckman, Psy.D. www.adultadhdbook.com

We Live in a Complicated World

- The challenge is to do the right thing, at the right time, most/enough of the time
 - Need to filter out extraneous stimuli and thoughts, and figure out where your attention and energy now will serve you best
 - Need to consider the past, present, and future:
 - What will you wish you'd remembered?
 - In the future, what will you wish you'd done now?
 - What's most important isn't always the stickiest
- Improve your Batting Average
 - Sometimes you'll get a hit, sometimes you'll miss, sometimes you'll strike out
 - Necessary to do the best you can with what you have, over and over
 - Look at how you're doing overall and over time – are things going better or worse?
- Increase your probability of success by setting up situations ahead of time
- **Be better, not perfect**

There are six fundamental strategies that underlie all the 'how-to manage' lists:

1. **Reduce extraneous stimuli – limit your exposure to distractions**
2. **Amplify relevant stimuli – keep the important stuff in front of you**
3. **Seek out situations that allow safe expression of hyperactivity**
4. **Minimize situations that require more restraint than you can muster**
5. **Create barriers to problematic actions by reducing tempting stimuli**
6. **Set up cushions to reduce the damage done from impulsive acts**

Cut through the Noise

- Lists and lists of ADHD-friendly strategies can be overwhelming
- Pre-fab strategies also may not fit your specific situation
- The fundamental strategies
 - are simpler
 - help you make sense of all those ADHD-friendly strategies
 - can help explain why unsuccessful strategies *didn't* work
 - enables you to create your own tailored strategies

Catch Your Own Fish

- Give a person a fish... just being told what to do each time limits your ability to respond to and overcome new challenges or unfamiliar situations

- Teach a person to fish. . .you're ready to take on life's next challenge(s)
- Developing strategies to fit actual situations in your life— that's the *real* goal

ADHD's Trifecta - Three core deficits, with many overlapping and interactive effects

- **Inattention:** key to ADHD is a deficit in the ability to regulate attention — to keep attention on the best thing for that moment
 - Sometimes attention shifts too soon (distraction)
 - Sometimes sticks too long (hyper-focus)
 - The most important thing isn't necessarily the stickiest or most interesting
 - You can be distracted externally (noises, movement) and internally (thoughts)
- **Hyperactivity**
 - Some people with ADHD are primarily inattentive, so hyperactivity may not be apparent
 - If you were hyper as a kid, you're probably less visibly hyper now - it can become internal restlessness and impatience
- **Impulsivity:** can be physical or mental. Ready, FIRE, Aim. Leads to:
 - Spending money and straining the budget
 - Blurting things out (O.M.O.M. – “On Mind Out Mouth”)
 - Jumping mentally to distractions, getting off-track - wasting time/running late
 - Jumping to conclusions
 - leads to bad judgment or over-reacting
 - miscommunication / misunderstandings
 - not noticing or following important instructions

Fundamental Strategies for Inattention

- Reduce the chances of getting off track / increase the chances of doing the right things at the right times via:
 - **Reducing extraneous stimuli**—e.g., reducing clutter, noise, temptations, etc.
 - **Amplifying relevant stimuli**—e.g., setting alarms, written reminders, etc.
- Reduce extraneous stimuli - examples:
 - Turning off the TV when talking with someone
 - Turning off your devices' notifications / alerts (sounds & vibration) manually or with an app
 - Sit facing the wall in a restaurant
 - Reduce the number of objects that you acquire or allow others to give
 - Get rid of extra objects and activities – reduce clutter and being over-committed
 - Determine what generally helps you to concentrate (may depend on the task)
 - Screening out distractions via 'white noise' or
 - Finding / creating quiet zones for work requiring focus

- Amplifying relevant stimuli – examples:
 - Sticky notes in relevant places
 - Schedules, planners
 - Alarms
 - Writing out multi-step calculations
 - Written budget vs. mental calculations
 - Making eye contact when talking

Fundamental Strategies for Hyperactivity

- **Minimize situations** that require more restraint than you can muster, like long meetings or classes without breaks; **build tolerance** for repetitive or mundane activities; look for ways to reward yourself for hanging in
- **Seek out situations** that allow safe expression of hyperactivity
- Examples of strategies for hyperactivity
 - Minimize situations requiring restraint
 - Watch movies at home, not in the theater
 - Pick the right job
 - Choose classes that meet for 3 times a week for 75 minutes vs. once for 4 hours
 - Be okay with not enjoying sedentary activities as much as others do
 - Find active friends
 - Safe expression of hyperactivity
 - Job that involves physical activity
 - Regular exercise
 - Active leisure pursuits
 - Seize opportunities to be active throughout the day: walk at lunch, take the stairs vs. elevator
 - Build tolerance by planning ahead:
 - Tell people that you'll need to move around or fidget a bit
 - Bring a fidget object, make arrangements to take a (quiet) stretch break
 - Get some physical activity before a situation where you must sit for a long period
 - Entertain and reinforce yourself to increase tolerance for unstimulating and boring activities
 - Listen to music or podcasts/audiobooks while doing repetitive tasks that don't require close focus, e.g., housework, chores
 - Commit for 10 minute blocks – just get started
 - Lay on the praise – coach yourself in a positive way before, during & after
 - Visualize the benefit to you of the completed task, ex.: for laundry, the convenience of having your favorite clothes clean and ready to wear
 - Look at what did get done vs. focusing on what didn't

Impulsivity

- People with ADHD tend to leap without looking—get pulled in by a stimulus before thinking it through
- Looks like bad judgment, but there often isn't enough time to judge

Fundamental Strategies for Impulsivity

- **Create barriers** to problematic actions by reducing tempting stimuli
 - Lead me not unto temptation. . .
 - Whenever possible don't expose yourself to temptation to begin with
 - Stop expecting yourself to remember to stop
 - "I'll just do this for a minute..." is self-deception – don't fall for it!
- **Set up cushions** to reduce the damage done from impulsive acts
 - Work on self-control and forethought, to the extent possible – plan ahead for what you're going to do before entering a 'slippery situation'
 - Don't even try to rely on willpower – it's just too inconsistent, too limited and too vulnerable to fatigue and distraction
 - Often, the most effective form of self-control is to set up external limits that run automatically to catch you from going over the edge later
- **Set up cushions** to reduce the damage done from impulsive acts
 - Acknowledge, back up and start again; request a do-over when appropriate
- Examples of strategies for impulsivity
 - Barriers
 - Avoid stores/websites where you spend too much money
 - Avoid websites where you spend too much time
 - Set up blocking apps/extensions to limit your access to a particular website, e.g., StayFocsd, or to the internet altogether for a specified time, e.g., Freedom
 - Have someone poke you when something you say comes out wrong
 - Close down web browser and email alerts
 - Cushions
 - Leave credit cards at home and bring set amount of cash
 - Hang around people who roll with interruptions and comments that come out wrong
 - Learn and practice a few light/humble things to acknowledge screw-ups
 - Avoid situations that tend to get out of control (you know some of these and your family can probably tell you the rest)

Work the process and the progress will follow...

More information available via Dr. Tuckman's podcasts,

<http://adulthoodbook.com/?s=Fundamental+Strategies+to+Overcome+Inattention> &

<http://adulthoodbook.com/?s=Fundamental+Strategies+to+Overcome+Impulsivity>