



Coping Strategies for Adult ADHD



Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health disorder that includes a combination of persistent problems, such as inattention, disorganisation, impulsivity and hyperactivity. If left untreated, it can lead to unstable relationships, poor work or school performance, low self-esteem, and other problems. Treatment may include the use of medication and/or psychological therapy. In this article I want to share some psychological coping strategies for people with Adult ADHD based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Compassionate Inquiry (CI).

Inattention & Disorganisation

Adults with ADHD may have a range of inattention and disorganisation symptoms such as: problems prioritising, poor time management, problems focusing on a single task, trouble with multitasking, poor planning and ineffective task completion. Of course everyone can have problems in these areas – especially when they're feeling stressed – however the severity of these problems is much worse for people with ADHD and can occur in the absence of stress.

There are some really useful coping strategies we teach adults with ADHD including: task scheduling, activity load planning and pacing, problem solving, triaging for urgent vs important, and background noise reduction techniques. The goal for using these strategies is to be able to self-regulate to 'optimal attention' (optimal focus) instead of either an attention deficit (under focus) or attention surplus (over focus).

Deficit (under focused)

Optimal Attention

Surplus (over focused)

Impulsivity & Hyperactivity

Adults with ADHD may have a range of impulsivity and hyperactivity symptoms such as: excessive activity or restlessness, low frustration tolerance, irritability, mood swings, impulsivity, procrastination, and trouble coping with stress. Again, these are problems everyone may have from time to time – however the severity of these problems is much worse and more frequent in adults with ADHD.

There are some really useful coping strategies we teach adults with ADHD to effectively self-manage impulsivity and hyperactivity. These include: progressive muscle relaxation, breath work, mindfulness, and a fantastic Compassionate Inquiry strategy called 'making friends with your stress' which is an absolute game changer! The treatment goal is for people to self regulate their energy from either hyper or hypo active to an optimal level.

Baselining Normal: The Role of Personality

It is important to recognise that each adult with ADHD is unique and will have a different baseline of what is 'normal' according to their own underlying personality type. What one person may consider as 'excessive' may not be 'excessive' for another person who has a different underlying personality type. Thus, it's important to factor in your own personality when establishing what is 'normal' or 'problematic' and not just rely on other people's opinions.

