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WELLBEING QUICKSTART

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 which can lead to significant improvements in their day-to-day life. These include: task scheduling, activity load planning and pacing, 6 step problem solving and triaging for urgent vs important, background noise reduction techniques and refocusing and pacing strategies. Harnessing the power of pacing against realistic workload expectations, managing background noise/distractions effectively and triaging the important from the urgent have been life changing coping strategies for people I have worked with who have ADHD.

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 Compassionate Inquiry. Beyond learning how to engage in progressive muscle relaxation, slow deep breathing and mindfulness meditation, there is a wonderful Compassionate Inquiry technique called 'making friends with your stress' which is an absolute game changer for adults with ADHD in mastering stress-related impulsivity and hyperactivity!

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.

