



The ADHD Regulation Toolkit

A practical guide to calming overwhelm, managing emotional intensity, and stabilising your nervous system

(For ADHD & AuDHD adults)

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Read This First (Important)

If you have ADHD or AuDHD, **your nervous system reacts faster and harder** than most people's.

This toolkit exists because:

- You cannot “logic” yourself out of dysregulation
- You cannot regulate if you feel unsafe, shamed, or overwhelmed
- Trying harder often **makes things worse**

This is **not about becoming calm.**

It is about becoming **safe enough to function again.**



SECTION 1: What Is Actually Happening When You're Dysregulated

When you are dysregulated:

- your brain prioritises **survival**, not reasoning
- emotional signals are amplified
- your body reacts *before* your thinking brain catches up
- shutting down or exploding are **protective responses**

This means:

- You may say things you don't mean
- You may be unable to speak at all
- You may feel flooded, numb, panicked, or detached
- You may feel "too much" or "not there"

None of this is a failure.

**Dysregulation is not misbehaviour.
It is a nervous-system state.**

SECTION 2: Identify Your State FIRST (This Matters)

Different states need different tools.
Using the wrong tool will **not help...** and may increase distress.

State A: Hyperarousal (Overloaded / Activated)

You might notice:

- racing thoughts
- irritability or anger
- panic or urgency
- sensory overload
- urge to escape, argue, fix, or explain
- feeling "on edge" or explosive

Your system is saying:

"This is too much. Something is unsafe."

State B: Hypoarousal (Shutdown / Collapse)

You might notice:

- numbness or emptiness
- foggy thinking
- exhaustion
- disconnection from emotions
- inability to start or respond
- feeling flat or unreal

Your system is saying:

“I’ve gone offline to protect you.”

State C: Window of Regulation (Functional Enough)

You might notice:

- emotions without overwhelm
- ability to think and respond
- some flexibility
- ability to communicate

Goal:

Not to stay here permanently... but to **return here more quickly and gently.**

SECTION 3: EMERGENCY REGULATION (When You Are Overwhelmed RIGHT NOW)

Use this section **in the moment.**

Step 1: Stop Trying to Fix or Explain Anything

Say (out loud or internally):

- “I am dysregulated.”
- “This is not the time to solve anything.”
- “My only job right now is to stabilise.”

Trying to explain, justify, or push through **keeps the system activated.**

Step 2: Ground the Body FIRST (Not the Mind)

Choose **one** of the following.
Do not do all of them.

Option A: Cold or Pressure

- hold something cold (glass, ice pack, cold tap)
- press feet hard into the floor
- wrap tightly in a blanket or hoodie
- hug a pillow firmly

Why: strong physical input interrupts emotional overload.

Option B: Sensory Override

- chew something crunchy or sour
- smell something strong and familiar
- listen to low, steady sound
- dim lights or reduce noise

Why: sensory clarity reduces nervous-system chaos.

Option C: Orientation

Slowly name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear

No rush. No “doing it right”.

Why: it tells your brain you are in the present, not danger.

Step 3: Language That Calms the System

Use **simple, neutral phrases**:

- “I’m safe right now.”
- “This will pass.”
- “I don’t need to decide anything yet.”

Avoid:

- “I’m overreacting”
- “I should be able to handle this”
- “Why am I like this?”

Shame increases dysregulation.

SECTION 4: REGULATING INTENSE EMOTIONS (AFTER THE SPIKE)

Once intensity reduces slightly, use **containment**, not analysis.

Containment Comes Before Processing

If emotions still feel big:

- write freely (no editing, no fixing)
- voice-note what you want to say
- pace, rock, or move rhythmically
- squeeze or push against something

**You are not trying to understand yet.
You are preventing emotional overflow.**

Lower the Emotional Load

Ask yourself:

- “What can wait?”
- “What expectation can I drop today?”
- “What decision does not need to be made now?”

Reducing demand **is regulation**, not avoidance.

Co-Regulation (If Available)

If you have access to a safe person:

- sit together quietly
- do parallel activities
- receive reassurance without fixing
- let someone else hold steadiness

Humans regulate **together**.
Needing this is not weakness.

SECTION 5: RECOVERING AFTER DYSREGULATION

After a dysregulation episode, your system is **tired**.

You may need:

- sleep or rest
- reduced interaction
- familiar routines
- comfort food or warmth
- reassurance

Do **not**:

- replay everything you said
- analyse your reactions immediately
- punish yourself for needing time

Recovery is part of regulation.

SECTION 6: PREVENTATIVE STABILISERS (To Reduce Future Episodes)

1. Predictability Anchors

Your nervous system calms with *familiar patterns*.

Examples:

- same morning drink
 - same music during transitions
 - same wind-down routine
 - repeated sensory comforts
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2. Energy Tracking (Not Time Management)

ADHD systems run on **energy**, not clocks.

Track:

- what drains you
- what restores you
- what costs more than you realise

Plan days around **capacity**, not expectation.

3. Environment Is Regulation

Adjust:

- lighting
- noise
- clothing comfort
- visual clutter
- temperature

You are allowed to design your environment to support you.

SECTION 7: YOUR PERSONAL REGULATION PLAN

Fill this in slowly.

My Early Warning Signs

(e.g. snapping, withdrawing, urgency, numbness)

My Best Grounding Tools

(1–3 that reliably help)

Things That Make It Worse

(e.g. explaining myself, being rushed, noise)

What Helps Me Recover

(e.g. sleep, space, reassurance, routine)

SECTION 8: Important Truths to Remember

- Dysregulation is information, not failure
- You are not broken
- You don't need to be calm to be valid
- You are allowed to pause and step away
- Regulation happens **after safety**, not before

**Your nervous system is not the problem.
It is trying to protect you.**



The ADHD Regulation Toolkit

Step-by-Step Checklists & Scripts

A practical manual for emotional overwhelm, shutdown, and nervous-system recovery

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT (READ THIS FIRST)

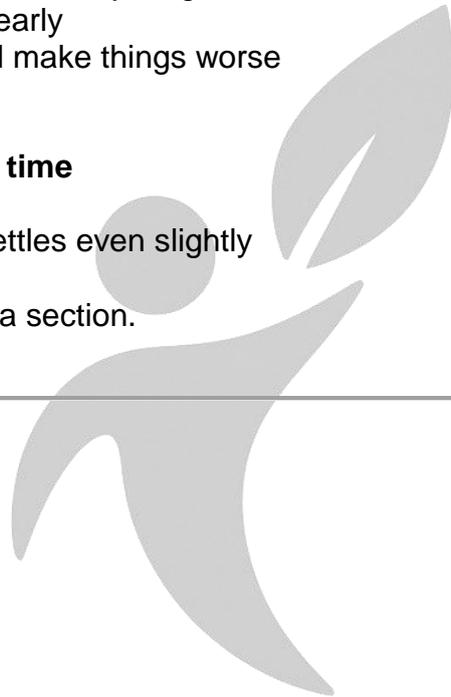
When you are dysregulated:

- you will not remember everything
- you will not think clearly
- choice overload will make things worse

Rule:

- Use **one checklist at a time**
- Do steps **in order**
- Stop when your body settles even slightly

You do **not** need to finish a section.



PART 1: FIRST CHECK... WHAT STATE AM I IN? (30 SECONDS)

Read the statements and tick the closest match.

I am in OVERLOAD (Hyperarousal)

Tick if you notice:

- racing thoughts
- irritability / anger
- panic or urgency
- sensory overwhelm
- urge to argue, escape, fix, or explain
- feeling “on edge” or explosive

Go to PART 2A

I am in SHUTDOWN (Hypoarousal)

Tick if you notice:

- numbness or emptiness
- foggy thinking
- exhaustion
- dissociation / zoning out
- inability to start or respond
- feeling flat or unreal

Go to PART 2B

I am FUNCTIONAL BUT FRAGILE

Tick if you notice:

- I can think, but not clearly
- emotions feel close to the surface
- I could tip either way

Go to PART 2C

PART 2A: OVERLOAD REGULATION CHECKLIST (DO IN ORDER)

STEP 1: STOP ESCALATION (SCRIPT)

Say **one** of the following (out loud or silently):

- “I am dysregulated.”
- “This is overload, not danger.”
- “I do not need to fix anything right now.”

- Said it once
 - Said it twice
 - Said it slowly

 - Do **not** explain, justify, or decide anything yet.
-

STEP 2: BODY FIRST (CHOOSE ONE ONLY)

Pick **one** option and do it for **60–120 seconds**.

Cold / Pressure

- hold something cold
- press feet into the floor
- wrap tightly in a blanket or hoodie
- squeeze a pillow firmly

Sensory Override

- chew something crunchy or sour
- smell something strong and familiar
- listen to low, steady sound
- reduce light or noise

Orientation

Slowly name:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear

- Stop when intensity drops **even slightly**.

STEP 3: SAFE LANGUAGE ONLY

Repeat **one** phrase slowly:

- “I am safe right now.”
- “This will pass.”
- “Nothing needs to be solved yet.”

- Once
- Twice
- Three times

- If intensity rises again, return to **STEP 2**.
-



PART 2B: SHUTDOWN REGULATION CHECKLIST

Shutdown needs **gentle activation**, not calming.

STEP 1: CONFIRM SHUTDOWN (SCRIPT)

Say:

- “My system has gone offline.”
- “This is protection, not failure.”

Said it

Do **not** force motivation.

STEP 2: VERY SMALL BODY INPUT

Choose **one**:

- wiggle fingers or toes
- hold something warm
- sip a drink
- sit in sunlight or near a window

Do for **30–60 seconds**.

STEP 3: MICRO-CONNECTION

Choose **one**:

- sit near someone
- send a neutral message (“Thinking of you”)
- pet an animal
- listen to a familiar voice

No deep conversation required.

STEP 4: PERMISSION SCRIPT

Say:

- “I am allowed to be slow.”
- “Rest is part of regulation.”

Said it



PART 2C: FUNCTIONAL-BUT-FRAGILE CHECKLIST

Use this to **prevent escalation**.

STEP 1: LOWER DEMAND

Ask:

- What can wait?
- What can be dropped today?
- What does not need to be perfect?

Lower **one** expectation.

STEP 2: STABILISE ENVIRONMENT

Adjust **one**:

- lighting
- noise
- clothing comfort
- visual clutter

Small changes count.

STEP 3: ANCHOR

Choose:

- familiar music
- same drink/snack
- repeated routine

Stay with it for **5–10 minutes**.

PART 3: EMOTIONAL CONTAINMENT (AFTER INTENSITY PEAKS)

Use this **instead of analysing**.

CONTAINMENT OPTIONS (CHOOSE ONE)

- write everything without editing
 - voice-note unfiltered thoughts
 - pace, rock, or move rhythmically
 - squeeze or push against something
- Stop when emotion feels **contained**, not resolved.
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IMPORTANT RULE

- Do not replay conversations
 - Do not self-criticise
 - Do not decide anything major
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PART 4: CO-REGULATION SCRIPT (IF SOMEONE IS WITH YOU)

You can show or say this:

“I’m not looking for advice or fixing.
I just need steadiness / company / quiet support.”

If speaking is hard, send it as a message.

PART 5: POST-EPIISODE RECOVERY CHECKLIST

After dysregulation, your system needs **recovery time**.

Tick what applies:

- rest or sleep
- reduced interaction
- warmth or comfort
- reassurance
- predictable routine

Recovery is **not optional**... it prevents relapse.

PART 6: BUILD YOUR PERSONAL REGULATION PLAN

Fill this in when regulated.

My Early Warning Signs

(e.g. snapping, urgency, numbness)

My TOP 3 Grounding Tools

- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
-

Things That Make It Worse

(e.g. explaining myself, being rushed)

What Helps Me Recover

(e.g. sleep, space, reassurance)

PART 7: FINAL REMINDERS (READ WHEN SHAMED)

- Dysregulation is a nervous-system state
- You are not broken
- You are not weak
- You are allowed to stop
- Safety comes before insight

**Your nervous system is doing its best to protect you.
Regulation is learning how to listen to it.**