



# **Time Blindness in ADHD Isn't Poor Planning... It's a Different Relationship With Time**

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There is a particular kind of shame that follows people with ADHD throughout their lives.

It shows up in phrases like:

- *You're always late.*
- *You never plan ahead.*
- *You underestimate how long things take.*
- *You leave everything to the last minute.*

Over time, these observations harden into character judgements.

Careless.

Disrespectful.

Disorganised.

Irresponsible.

Eventually, many people with ADHD begin to describe themselves this way too.

But there is a problem with this story.

If poor planning were the issue, it would improve with practice.

If disorganisation were the cause, tools would solve it.

If time management were the problem, awareness would fix it.

For many people with ADHD, none of these things happen.

They plan repeatedly.

They buy planners, calendars, apps, alarms.

They understand time perfectly well... intellectually.

And yet the same problems persist.

This tells us something important.

**Time blindness in ADHD is not a skill deficit.  
It is a perceptual and regulatory difference.**

Most systems assume a shared relationship with time.

Time is linear.

Time moves evenly.

Future consequences exert pressure on present behaviour.

Deadlines motivate action well in advance.

This assumption is so deeply embedded that it is rarely noticed.

Schools rely on it.

Workplaces enforce it.

Productivity culture is built around it.

But many ADHD nervous systems do not experience time this way.

For them, time is not primarily linear.

It is **experiential**.

Experiential time does not move at a steady pace.

It expands and contracts depending on internal state.

When engagement is high, time compresses.

When boredom dominates, time stretches.

When anxiety rises, time distorts.

When overwhelm hits, time collapses entirely.

The clock may be moving predictably.

The nervous system is not experiencing it that way.

This is why people with ADHD can lose hours to something absorbing... and then struggle to tolerate ten minutes of something neutral. Not because they lack discipline, but because their nervous system is not receiving consistent temporal signal.

Time, for them, does not become real simply because it is measured.

It becomes real when it is **felt**.

This is where most misunderstandings begin.

People assume that knowing about time should produce behaviour.  
They assume awareness equals regulation.

But awareness is cognitive.

Regulation is physiological.

Many people with ADHD know exactly what time it is... and still cannot act as if that time has meaning.

A deadline next month feels abstract.

A deadline next week feels distant.

A deadline tomorrow begins to register.

A deadline in two hours finally becomes real.

This is not procrastination by choice.

It is a **threshold-based system**.

Time only becomes regulating once it crosses a point of emotional or physiological activation.

Before that point, it remains informational... not mobilising.

This explains one of the most confusing features of ADHD time blindness.

Why urgency works.

When urgency arrives, it brings with it:

- emotional charge
- physiological arousal
- a narrowing of attention

In other words, it pushes the nervous system into a state where time finally matters.

Action becomes possible.

From the outside, this looks like irresponsibility followed by last-minute heroics.

From the inside, it feels like waiting for the world to come into focus.

The cost of this pattern is rarely acknowledged.

When urgency becomes the only reliable time regulator, anxiety becomes the engine of productivity.

And anxiety is not a sustainable clock.

The reliance on urgency creates a cycle that many people with ADHD know intimately.

A task exists in the future.

It feels abstract or overwhelming.

Avoidance reduces immediate discomfort.

Time passes without registering.

Urgency finally hits.

Action happens under pressure.

Exhaustion and shame follow.

This is not a planning failure.

It is a nervous system using threat to replace time.

Over time, the nervous system learns a dangerous association:

Calm equals inertia.

Panic equals movement.

This is how time blindness becomes entangled with burnout.

Another piece of the puzzle is transition cost.

Most planning systems assume that tasks exist in isolation.

Finish one thing.  
Start the next.

But for many people with ADHD, **transitions are expensive.**

Shifting tasks requires:

- disengaging attention
- changing emotional state
- reorienting cognitively
- recalibrating sensory input

These costs are rarely factored into time estimates.

So people underestimate not how long tasks take... but how much regulation it takes to *move* between them.

By the time attention collapses, the system has already been taxed repeatedly.

Again, time blindness is not carelessness.

It is unaccounted-for load.

This is also why clocks and reminders so often fail.

A reminder provides information.

It does not provide regulation.

Without emotional engagement or physiological readiness, information alone does not mobilise action.

This is why people with ADHD can set ten alarms and still not move.

The alarm rings.  
The signal is heard.  
The body does not respond.

This is not defiance.

It is disconnection between clock time and lived time.

Once we see this clearly, the moral weight attached to lateness begins to unravel.

Lateness is often treated as disrespect.

But most people with ADHD are acutely aware of how their lateness affects others. Many carry intense shame around it. The issue is not indifference.

It is that **time does not regulate them in the way others expect.**

Shame does not repair this difference.

It increases threat... and threat destabilises time perception further.

By now, the original framing has fully collapsed.

Time blindness is not about planning tools.

It is not about effort.

It is not about caring more.

It is about a nervous system that experiences time through engagement, emotion, and safety... not abstraction.

The question, then, is no longer:

- *Why can't I manage my time?*

It becomes:

- *How do I design time so my nervous system can feel it?*

Once time is understood as an experiential and regulatory phenomenon rather than a purely cognitive one, the failure of most time-management advice becomes obvious.

Most tools are designed to **represent time.**

Very few are designed to **regulate a nervous system in time.**

Calendars, planners, lists, and reminders all assume that seeing time will make it real. They assume that once information is presented clearly enough, action will follow.

For many ADHD nervous systems, that assumption simply does not hold.

Time can be visible and still feel unreal.

A schedule can be clear and still feel inaccessible.

A reminder can be heard and still not move the body.

This is not because the tools are badly designed.

It is because they are designed for a different relationship with time.

If time is not consistently felt internally, it must be **externalised.**

Externalised time is not about more alerts or tighter control.  
It is about making time **tangible, embodied, and relational**.

When time is externalised well, it stops being an abstract demand and becomes a shared structure the nervous system can orient to.

This can take many forms.

Visual timers that show time passing, rather than merely announcing its arrival.  
Auditory cues that mark beginnings and endings.  
Movement-based anchors that link time to the body.  
Social time... working alongside others... where time is held collectively rather than individually.

What all of these have in common is that they allow time to be *experienced*, not just known.

This is where the idea of rigid scheduling begins to fall apart.

Schedules assume predictability of energy, focus, and regulation.  
Many ADHD nervous systems are not predictable in that way.

When a schedule demands performance at a specific time regardless of internal state, it creates immediate friction. That friction is often misread as resistance.

In reality, it is a mismatch.

For many people with ADHD, what works better are **anchors and rhythms**, rather than fixed routines.

Anchors are non-negotiable points that orient the day:  
waking, sleeping, meals, medication, school drop-offs, meetings, fixed commitments.

Around these anchors, time can remain flexible.

This creates structure without constant internal tracking.

Rhythms replace rigid routines.  
They allow variation while maintaining flow.

Instead of asking, "*What should I be doing at 2:00?*"  
the nervous system asks, "*Where am I in the day's rhythm?*"

This is a very different relationship with time.

Another crucial shift comes when we stop treating lateness as a moral failure.

For many people with ADHD, lateness is one of the most shaming experiences of their lives. It is often framed as disrespect, lack of care, or selfishness.

This framing ignores what is actually happening.

Lateness usually reflects:

- transition difficulty
- underestimation of regulatory cost
- sensory or emotional load before departure
- difficulty disengaging from the previous state

None of these are solved by shame.

Shame increases threat.

Threat destabilises regulation.

Dysregulation worsens time perception.

The problem compounds.

Understanding lateness through a regulatory lens allows for accountability **without humiliation**. It opens the door to practical adjustments rather than character judgement.

When people with ADHD are supported to externalise time, reduce transition load, and work with their natural rhythms, something important happens.

Time stops being the enemy.

It becomes something they can collaborate with.

This does not mean deadlines disappear.

It does not mean commitments don't matter.

It means time is designed to be *felt*, not enforced.

This reframing also restores something that is often lost early: **self-trust**.

Years of being told you are bad with time erodes confidence. People begin to assume they cannot be relied upon, even by themselves.

They over-commit.

They over-explain.

They avoid situations where time matters.

All of this further damages the relationship with time.

When time blindness is understood as a difference rather than a defect, people can begin to build strategies that work *with* their nervous system instead of against it.

Not perfect strategies.

Sustainable ones.

By the end of this chapter, one conclusion should be clear.

Time blindness in ADHD is not poor planning.  
It is not carelessness.  
It is not immaturity.

It is a different way of experiencing time... one that is mediated by emotion, engagement, and safety rather than abstraction.

When time is treated as a moral test, people fail.  
When it is treated as a design challenge, people adapt.

If you have spent your life feeling as though time slips through your fingers, this was never because you didn't try hard enough.

It was because you were expected to relate to time in a way your nervous system does not naturally support.

Once that difference is recognised, time can stop being a source of shame.

And start becoming something workable.

