



The Emotional Regulation Toolkit for ADHD & AuDHD

Grounding, mapping, sensory strategies & nervous-system stabilisers

A practical guide for when emotions feel too big, too fast, or too much.

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Before we begin (please read this first)

This toolkit is **not about controlling your emotions**.
It is about **supporting a nervous system that reacts quickly and intensely**.

If you have ADHD or AuDHD:

- Your emotions are **real**
- Your reactions make sense **in context**
- You are not failing at regulation... you were likely **never taught how to do it in a way that fits your brain**

This guide is designed to be used **in real moments**, not just understood intellectually.

You do not need to use every tool.
You do not need to “do it right”.
You only need to find **what works for you**.



Part 1: What emotional dysregulation actually is (and what it isn't)

Emotional dysregulation in ADHD & AuDHD is **not**:

- immaturity
- lack of self-control
- overreacting
- a personality flaw

It is:

- a nervous system that activates **faster**
- emotions that arrive **stronger**
- recovery that takes **longer**
- thinking that goes **offline** under stress

When you are dysregulated:

- logic does not help
- reassurance may not land
- explanations feel impossible
- urgency feels real and immediate

This is not because you are “bad at coping”.
It is because **your nervous system is in charge** in that moment.

Regulation must start with the body.

Part 2: How to tell *which state* you're in

You cannot use the same tools for every state.

Regulated state

- You can think, reflect, plan
- Emotions move without overwhelming you
- You can pause before reacting

Activated state

- Emotions feel louder
- Irritation, anxiety, urgency or agitation rise
- You still have *some* access to thinking

Overwhelmed / shutdown state

- Thinking collapses
- Emotions feel unbearable or numb
- You may freeze, explode, dissociate, withdraw, or shut down

Key rule:

If thinking feels hard → stop trying to think.

Use **grounding and sensory tools first**.

Part 3: Grounding tools (for emotional spikes)

Grounding is not about “calming down”.

It is about telling your nervous system: **“I am here. I am safe enough.”**

Tool 1: Physical anchoring

When emotions surge, do something **physical and deliberate**.

Options:

- Press your feet firmly into the floor for 5 seconds, release, repeat
- Push your hands together firmly
- Sit with your back against a wall and notice the pressure

Why this works:

Pressure and contact help the nervous system locate the body in space.

Tool 2: Temperature regulation

Temperature shifts can interrupt emotional flooding quickly.

Options:

- Cold water on wrists or face
- Hold a cold or warm object
- Wrap yourself in a blanket

You are not “distracting yourself”.

You are regulating your nervous system through sensation.

Tool 3: Orientation statements

Say (out loud if possible):

- “I am [name].”
- “It is [day/time].”
- “I am in [location].”
- “This feeling will pass.”

This helps the brain move out of threat mode and back into the present.

Part 4: Breathing that works for ADHD & AuDHD

If slow breathing feels impossible, **that is not failure.**

Option A: Extended exhale breathing

- Inhale for 4
 - Exhale for 6
- Repeat 5–10 times.

Longer exhales signal safety to the nervous system.

Option B: Physiological sigh

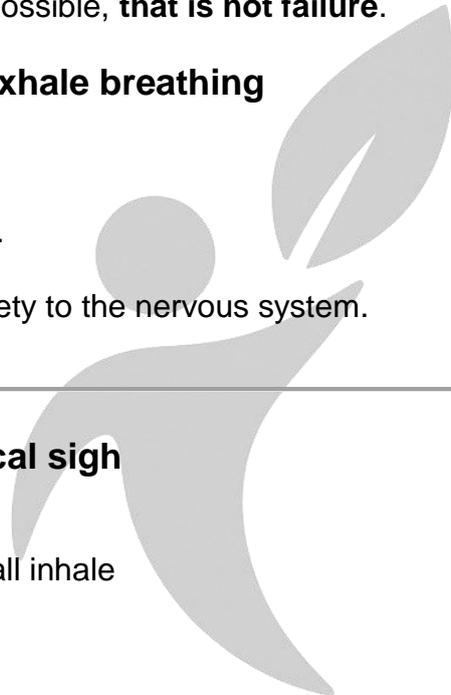
- Inhale
 - Take a second small inhale
 - Long, slow exhale
- Repeat 3–5 times.

This is especially helpful when emotions feel stuck or overwhelming.

Part 5: Nervous system mapping (this changes everything)

Most people try to regulate **too late.**

Mapping helps you catch dysregulation **earlier.**



Step 1: Identify your early warning signs

These are often subtle.

Examples:

- sudden impatience
- urge to fix something immediately
- irritability without a clear reason
- body tension
- racing thoughts
- mental looping

These signs mean: **intervene now**.

Step 2: Identify what makes it worse

This matters just as much as what helps.

Common “unhelpful” responses:

- being told to calm down
- being questioned or challenged
- having to explain yourself
- being rushed
- loud or chaotic environments

Knowing this helps you **protect yourself** and communicate needs.

Part 6: Sensory regulation (especially important for AuDHD)

Sensory input is not background noise.
It is **direct nervous-system input**.

Auditory regulation

- noise-cancelling headphones
 - predictable background sound (brown noise, rain)
 - reducing competing sounds
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Tactile and pressure input

- weighted blankets or lap pads
- firm hugs (if comfortable)
- resistance bands or squeezing a pillow

Pressure often helps the nervous system settle.

Visual regulation

- softer lighting
 - reducing clutter in your main environment
 - limiting visual overload when overwhelmed
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Movement as regulation

Movement is not avoidance.

Helpful options:

- pacing
- rocking
- stretching
- slow repetitive movement

Stillness is not required for regulation.

Part 7: When emotions are overwhelming (crisis tools)

When emotions peak:

- decision-making is offline
- explanations are unavailable
- urgency feels absolute

Your goal is **not to resolve the issue**.
Your goal is to **lower intensity slightly**.



Containment phrases

Repeat one:

- “This is intense, not dangerous.”
- “I don’t need to solve this right now.”
- “I can pause.”

Short, neutral, repetitive.

The 90-second principle

Strong emotional surges often peak within 60–90 seconds.

During this time:

- don’t argue
- don’t explain
- don’t decide

Regulate first. Reflect later.

Part 8: Aftercare (this is not optional)

After dysregulation, your system needs recovery.

Body care

- drink water
 - eat something grounding
 - rest or gentle movement
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Reflection (only when regulated)

Ask gently:

- What triggered this?
- What was my nervous system responding to?
- What helped even a little?

This is information, not judgement.

Relationship repair (if needed)

You do not owe explanations while dysregulated.

Helpful scripts:

- “I was overwhelmed and needed to regulate.”
- “I’m ready to talk now.”
- “Next time I’ll step away earlier.”

Part 9: Build your personal regulation kit

Keep this simple. Too many tools overwhelm the system.

Write down:

- My earliest warning sign:
- My fastest grounding tool:
- My best sensory stabiliser:
- What others can do to help me:
- What makes things worse:

Keep this somewhere visible.

Final reminder

You are not broken.
You are **high-sensitivity, high-responsiveness**.

Emotional regulation is not about suppressing emotion.
It is about **supporting the system that carries it**.

With practice, patterns become clearer.
With support, regulation becomes faster.
With safety, your nervous system learns it does not have to stay on high alert.

