ND-Friendly Planning Tools

A nervous-system-first planning system for ADHD & AuDHD

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This guide is for you if:

- Traditional planners make you feel worse, not better
- You start with good intentions and end in shutdown or avoidance
- You've been told you're "bad at time management" when you're actually overwhelmed
- You need planning tools that **reduce stress**, not create more

You are not broken.
Your nervous system is responding accurately to overload.

These tools are designed to **support safety, momentum, and energy**, not force performance.

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1. Time Anchors

Planning without relying on clocks or motivation

Why clocks don't work for many ND people

Clocks are abstract.
ADHD brains struggle with:

- time blindness
- delayed reward
- "later" feeling unreal

This makes clock-based planning unreliable… even when you care deeply.

Time anchors solve this by attaching tasks to things that already happen.

What a Time Anchor is

A **time anchor** is:

- a predictable event
- something you already do
- something your body recognises, not just your brain

We're not asking "what time?"
We're asking "what happens before or after this?"

Step 1: Identify your daily anchors

Write down things that happen on *most* days (not perfect days).

Examples:

- waking up
- first drink
- first meal
- taking medication
- leaving the house
- arriving at work
- opening your laptop
- finishing dinner
- getting into bed

If it happens even on low-energy days, it counts.

Step 2: Attach ONE small task to each anchor

This is critical.
Overloading anchors causes avoidance.

Use this formula:

After / Before / When [anchor] → I will [small task]

Examples:

- After I make coffee → I take medication
- When I open my laptop → I check today's top 1 task
- Before I leave the house → I check keys + headphones
- After dinner → I set out clothes for tomorrow

Step 3: Permission rules

- One task per anchor (two maximum)
- Tasks must be **doable even on low-capacity days**
- You're allowed to skip anchors on shutdown days
- Anchors are supports, not obligations

If you miss one:

"Nothing went wrong. My system needed something else."

2. Weekly Rhythm Planner

Planning around energy, not expectations

Why weekly planners often fail

Most planners assume:

- equal energy every day
- linear productivity
- recovery happens "after work"

For ADHD & AuDHD people, **energy fluctuates**… and ignoring that leads to burnout.

Step 1: Label your days by capacity

Look at your week *without adding tasks yet*.

For each day, ask:

- How much capacity do I *usually* have?

Use:

- High capacity
- Medium capacity
- Low capacity

There is no "wrong" distribution.

Step 2: Understand what belongs on each day

High capacity

- thinking
- creating
- decision-making
- emotionally demanding work

Medium capacity

- admin
- maintenance
- familiar meetings
- routine tasks

Low capacity

- rest
- recovery
- gentle tasks only
- care, not output

Low-capacity days are not wasted days.
They prevent collapse.

Step 3: Plan *lightly*

- Put **no more than 1–2 key tasks** on any day
- Leave white space
- Build in recovery after demanding days

If your energy shifts:

"I didn't fail the plan. The plan adjusts to me."

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3. Momentum-Based Task Breakdown

Starting without overwhelm

Why "break it into steps" isn't enough

Even broken-down tasks can feel impossible if:

- the nervous system feels unsafe
- the task feels too big emotionally
- perfection pressure is present

Momentum-based planning starts with **movement**, not completion.

The Momentum Ladder

For any task, identify:

1. **Entry Step…** the easiest possible action
2. **Momentum Step…** what keeps movement going
3. **Completion Step…** only if energy allows

Example: "Reply to email"

- Entry: open inbox
- Momentum: read the email
- Completion: write reply

You are allowed to stop after *any* step.

Example: "Clean room"

- Entry: pick up 3 items
- Momentum: clear one surface
- Completion: vacuum

Stopping early is **not failure**.
Stopping early is **nervous-system-aware pacing**.

Reframe

Starting counts.
Movement counts.
You don't need to finish to be successful.

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4. Emotional Pacing Tracker

Planning with emotional energy in mind

Why emotional load matters

Emotional work drains energy faster than cognitive work.

Ignoring emotional load leads to:

- irritability
- shutdown
- emotional flooding

Step 1: Categorise emotional load

Before committing to something, ask:

Is this:

- Emotionally light
- Emotionally moderate
- Emotionally heavy

Examples:

- Light: familiar admin, routine tasks
- Moderate: meetings, collaboration

- Heavy: feedback, conflict, high-stakes conversations

Step 2: Pace emotional tasks

Rules that protect you:

- Never schedule two tasks back-to-back
- Always add recovery after tasks
- Reduce other demands on heavy days

Step 3: Daily emotional check-in

Ask yourself:

- How full is my emotional cup?
  - Empty
  - Half
  - Full

Plan *from that answer*, not from guilt or pressure.

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5. Sensory Load Map

Preventing overload before it happens

Why sensory overload sneaks up

Shutdowns often happen because of **accumulated sensory input**, not one big thing.

Mapping makes invisible stress visible.

Step 1: Identify environments

Examples:

- home
- workplace
- commuting
- social spaces

Step 2: Rate sensory inputs

For each space, list sensory factors and rate them:

- Regulating
- Neutral
- Draining

Example:

- Overhead lights → Draining
- Noise-cancelling headphones → Regulating
- Crowded spaces → Draining

Step 3: Use the map proactively

- Add supports *before* overload
- Reduce sensory input on high-demand days
- Treat sensory care as **essential**, not optional

Bringing It All Together

This system supports you by:

- attaching tasks to reality (time anchors)
- planning around energy (weekly rhythm)
- starting gently (momentum planning)
- protecting emotional capacity
- preventing sensory overload

You are not lazy.
You are not disorganised.
You are navigating a system that was not built for your nervous system.

These tools don't fix you…
they **support you**.