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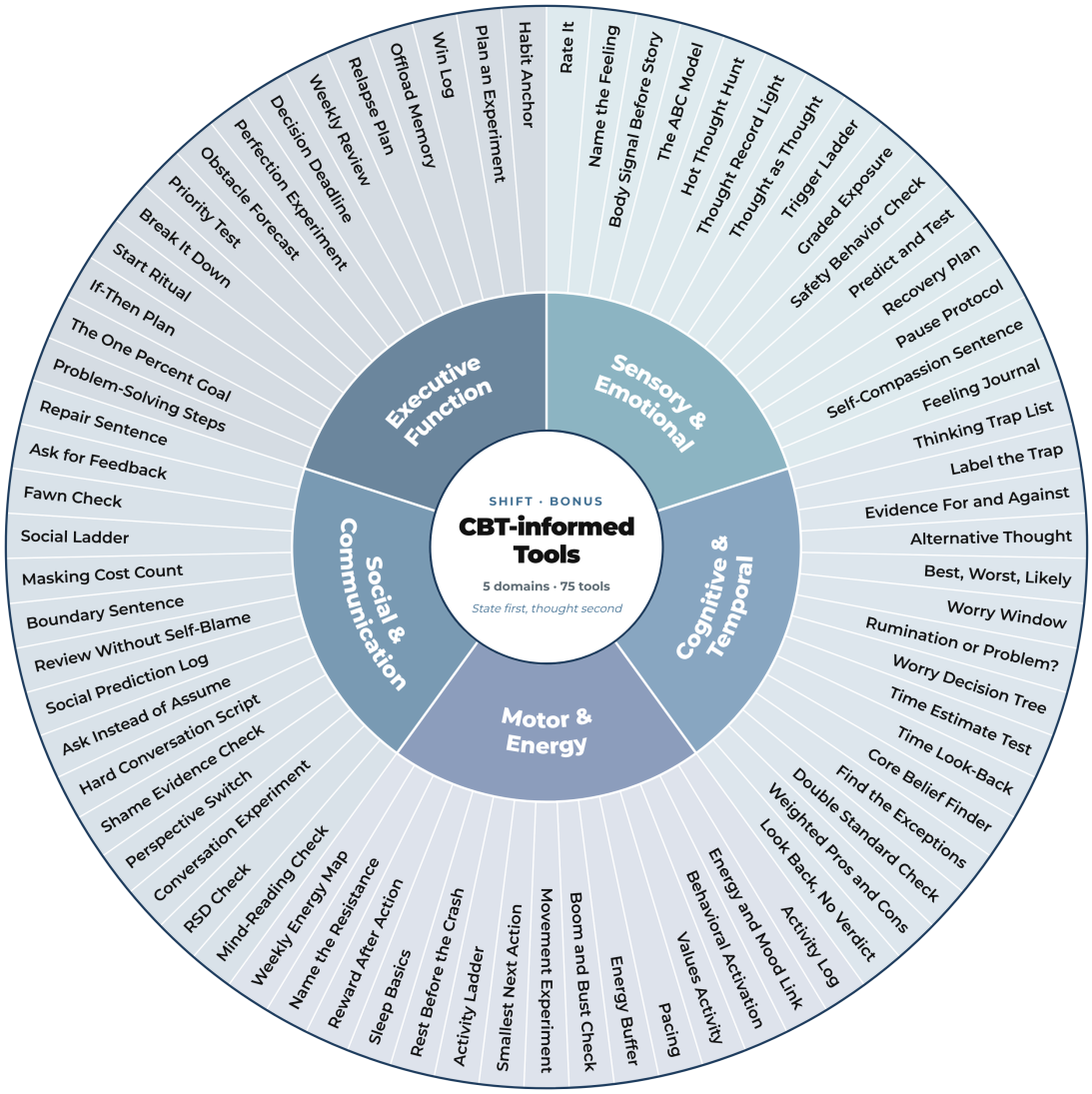
NEUROINCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP & NERVOUS SYSTEM DESIGN

CBT-informed Tools

Seventy-five tools for a neurodivergent brain, written out in full. The bonus module to the SHIFT part of the Access Institute.



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FIVE DOMAINS · 75 TOOLS · STATE FIRST, THOUGHT SECOND, ACTION THIRD

HOW TO READ THIS

Every tool has the same seven parts

So you can skip to the part you need instead of reading the whole entry.

- **WHAT IT IS.** A few sentences. Enough to know whether this is the one.
- **WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT.** The situation. If it does not match yours, move on.
- **HOW TO DO IT.** Numbered steps you can follow while you are doing it, with the time it takes and what it needs at the top.
- **WORKED THROUGH.** One run of the tool on a real-shaped situation, so you can see what the output looks like.
- **THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE.** The failure that makes people decide the tool does not work.
- **FOR YOUR BRAIN.** What changes when your brain is neurodivergent.
- **WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN.** The mechanism underneath — why this particular shape gets in where the standard version does not.

THE RULE OVER ALL OF IT

State first. Thought second. Action third.

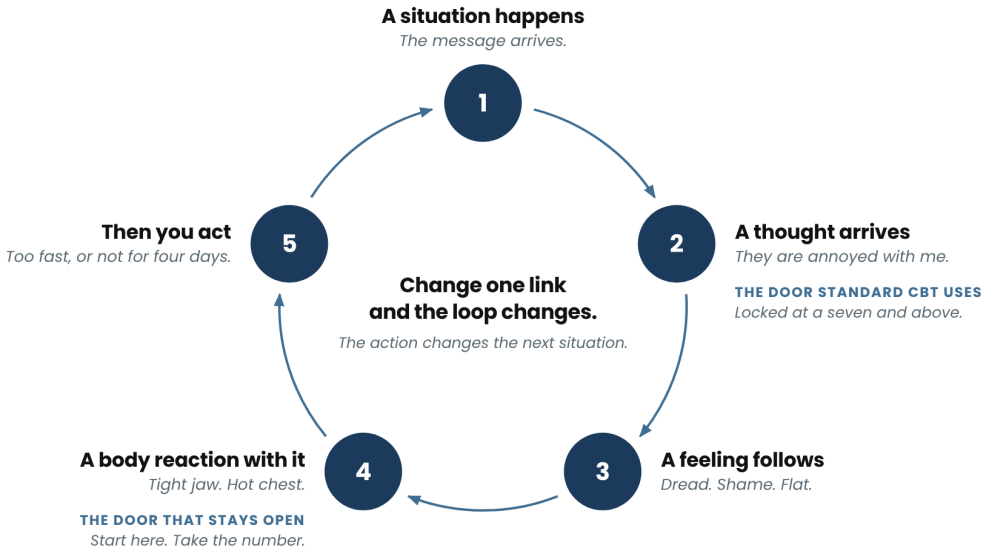
BEFORE ANY TOOL IN THIS BOOK

Give the feeling a number from 0 to 10.

At seven or above you reset, and you do not reason. At six or below you use a tool.

Every unit opens with a reset. The rule is simple. If your feeling is a seven out of ten or higher, you reset first and you do not reason. If it is a six or lower, you go on to the tool. You will learn how to rate that number in Unit 1. It is the first tool in the module, and it decides when every other tool is available.

Resets come from your Reset Languages. Think, Move, Touch, Listen, Space and Connect. A sharp clap, a cold pack on the neck, a closed door. Nothing clever. They are there to bring you back into range.



Standard CBT always asks you to enter at the thought. On a bad afternoon that door is locked. The question is not what you should think instead, it is **which link you can reach right now** — and at a seven the answer is the body.

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The seventy-five

Every entry is a link. Tap a tool to jump to it, and the arrow at the end of each tool brings you back here.

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UNIT 1 OF 5

Sensory and Emotional

15 tools for the moment the signal is too loud. The supermarket at five o'clock.

Fluorescent light. A cart with a bad wheel. Someone's phone playing music, someone else's child crying, a voice on the speaker. You came for oat milk.

By aisle three your skin feels too small. By the checkout you are snapping at a stranger and you do not know why. Later you replay the whole thing and decide something is wrong with you.

Nothing is wrong with you. Your gatekeeper let everything in at full volume. This unit gives you 15 tools for the moment when the signal is too loud, and for the hours after.

THE NETWORK UNDER IT

Sensory and emotional processing is the first SNIP domain. In my teaching map it matches the salience network, the brain's gatekeeper. It decides what counts as important right now. When it runs hot, everything is urgent, feelings arrive large, and recovery takes long. That map is simplified, and it cannot diagnose anyone.

This is also the domain where state decides everything. So this unit has the most resets and the shortest tools.

START WITH A RESET

Before any tool, bring the number down. Choose one reset that works on your body and keep it ready.

If you regulate through motion, clap once, sharply. The sound and the impact interrupt a spiral faster than thinking does. Or push against a wall for ten seconds. If you regulate through touch, hold something cold against your neck, or change the temperature of your hands. If you regulate through fewer inputs, close a door, dim the lights or step outside for two minutes. If sound is your language, hum for thirty seconds or play your song.

You do not need all of them. You need the one that works on you. Use it when your number is a seven or higher. Tool 1 shows you how to find that number.

1.1 Rate It

10 SECONDS · NOTHING

A number from 0 to 10 for how strong a feeling is right now. Zero is nothing. Ten is the worst you can imagine. Therapists have used this kind of rating for decades, because a number is quick and it does not need the right word.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Before every other tool on the wheel, and any time you notice a reaction without knowing how big it is.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stop for ten seconds.
2. Ask your body, not your head, how loud this is.
3. Say the number out loud or write it.
4. Set your anchors once. Pick a real memory for a 3, a 7 and a 10, so the numbers mean the same thing next month.

The rule. At seven or above, reset. At six or below, continue with a tool.

WORKED THROUGH

> *A message arrives, your chest tightens, and you are about to reply. You stop. Body, not head: this is a 7. Anchor check, yes, a 7 is the night before the review. So you do not reply. You reset first, and the reply waits twenty minutes.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Rating what you think the situation deserves rather than what your body is actually doing. A small event at an 8 is still an 8.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A number skips language, which helps when naming a feeling is hard. If numbers feel arbitrary, use a color or the height of your hand.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Alexithymia makes the question "what am I feeling" expensive and sometimes unanswerable, and a demand you cannot meet stops the whole sequence. A number needs no emotion word, no interoceptive precision and no comparison to other people. It is the cheapest possible entry point into a model that normally opens with the most expensive one.

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1.2 Name the Feeling

30 SECONDS · ONE WORD, OR THE STATE | EMOTION WHEEL

One word for what you feel. Brain imaging by Lieberman and colleagues in 2007 found that putting a feeling into words lowers activity in the amygdala, the brain's alarm.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Once the number is down far enough to think, and the feeling still has no name.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Take your number from Tool 1.
2. Say one word. I feel anxious. I feel flat. I feel annoyed.
3. If no word comes, use the State Emotion Wheel and point to the closest one.
4. Say the word out loud once.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You have been short with everyone since lunch. Number is a 6. You try the word: not angry. Not sad. Flat. Naming it as flat is enough to stop reading it as other people being annoying.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Hunting for the perfect word. The approximately right word does the work; the search for the exact one is what burns the capacity.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If naming feelings is hard, start from the body. Tight, hot, buzzing, heavy. Those count as words. A feeling you name in body language is still a named feeling.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Lieberman and colleagues found in 2007 that putting a feeling into words lowers amygdala activity. That effect does not require the right word, which matters because many neurodivergent people have a smaller reliable vocabulary for internal states and a much larger one for texture. Tight, hot, buzzing and heavy all count as names.

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1.3 Body Signal Before Story

2 MINUTES · SOMEWHERE TO SIT OR STAND STILL

Finding where the feeling sits before you explain why you have it. The story comes second.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When something is clearly wrong and the explanation arriving in your head feels suspiciously complete.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Scan from top to bottom. Jaw, throat, chest, stomach, hands.
2. Pick the loudest spot.
3. Describe it with a texture. Tight rope, hot stone, static.
4. Only then ask what happened.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You are convinced the meeting went badly. You scan instead: jaw tight, throat closed, hands cold. Tight rope across the chest. Only then the question — and the honest answer is that you have not eaten since seven.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Scanning and narrating at the same time. The story will wait; let the scan finish before you let the explanation in.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

For many neurodivergent people the body signal arrives late, or arrives as a wall. That is why people say they were fine until suddenly they were not. Two minutes of scanning a day builds the signal over time.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

For many neurodivergent people the interoceptive signal arrives late, faint, or all at once as a wall, which is why people say they were fine until suddenly they were not. Scanning on purpose puts a deliberate read where an automatic one is unreliable, and two minutes a day builds the resolution the signal does not come with.

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1.4 The ABC Model

3 MINUTES · PAPER OR A PHONE NOTE

The core of CBT in three lines. A is the activating event. B is the belief or thought. C is the consequence, which means the feeling and what you did.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After something has landed and you want to see the parts separately instead of as one lump.

HOW TO DO IT

Write three lines on paper or in a phone note.

1. A — what happened, as a camera would see it. Facts only.
2. B — what went through your mind, in a full sentence.
3. C — what you felt, with its number, and what you did. Then look at B and ask one question. Is this a fact, or my interpretation?

WORKED THROUGH

> *A — my manager wrote "we need to talk" with no other text. B — I have done something wrong and this is the start of it. C — dread, 8, and I reread the message fourteen times. Looking at B: that is an interpretation, not a fact.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Letting interpretation leak into A. "He was cold with me" belongs in B. A camera cannot film cold.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A is usually easy for literal thinkers. B is the hard part. If you get stuck, finish this sentence: and that means that.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Literal and detail-focused thinking makes A unusually easy and unusually accurate for many autistic people, which is the opposite of how CBT normally goes. The gain is that a precise A makes the interpretation in B visible as an interpretation, rather than as the situation itself.

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1.5 Hot Thought Hunt

2 MINUTES · YOUR B LINES FROM THE ABC MODEL

Finding the one thought that carries the charge. A moment usually holds several thoughts, but only one makes the number jump.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you have several thoughts about one moment and no idea which one is doing the damage.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Read your B lines from Tool 4.
2. Take each one in turn and imagine it is completely true.
3. Notice which one raises the number the most. Circle that one. That is your hot thought.
4. Work on that thought only.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Three thoughts about the same email. "He is annoyed" moves the number by one. "I have messed this up again" takes it from 4 to 8. That second one is the hot thought, and it is not actually about the email.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Arguing with each thought as you test it. You are only measuring here. The work on the thought comes later, and only on the one that moved.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Hot thoughts are usually short and old. I am too much. I always get this wrong. They sound like facts because you have heard them for years.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Hot thoughts in neurodivergent adults are very often old and global — "I am too much", "I always get this wrong" — laid down over years of being corrected for things that were not choices. Testing by number finds the old one underneath the current one, which is usually not the thought the situation would predict.

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1.6 Thought Record Light

3 MINUTES, TIMED · AN INDEX CARD, OR A VOICE MEMO

A short version of the classic thought record that Greenberger and Padesky made popular. The full one has seven columns. This one has four.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On any day when you need the work done and the long version will not happen.

HOW TO DO IT

On an index card, write four things.

1. The situation in one line.
2. Your hot thought and your number.
3. One other way to see it.
4. Your number now. Set a timer for three minutes and stop when it rings.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Situation: left the party after forty minutes. Hot thought: everyone noticed and thinks I am rude, 7. Another way: two people left before me and nobody mentioned it. Number now: 4.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Adding a fifth field. The whole design is that it fits on a card and finishes before the timer.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A long record costs executive function that you may not have on a hard day. Short is the point. You can also say it into a voice memo.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

A seven-column thought record costs sustained working memory, writing and sequencing — three things that are often stretched on exactly the day the record is needed. Four fields on a card can be completed in a depleted state, and a short record that gets done beats a thorough one that does not.

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1.7 Thought as Thought

1 MINUTE · NOTHING

A practice from acceptance and commitment therapy, called defusion. You do not argue with a thought. You change your relationship to it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When a thought keeps returning and arguing with it has stopped working.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Take the hot thought.
2. Put a sentence in front of it. I am having the thought that I am too much.
3. Add one more layer. I notice I am having the thought that I am too much.
4. Say it slowly, or sing it. The thought stays. It just loses its grip.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"I am too much." Becomes: I am having the thought that I am too much. Becomes: I notice I am having the thought that I am too much. The thought has not changed. Your distance from it has.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Using it to mean the thought is false. Defusion changes your relationship to a thought, and works just as well when the thought happens to be accurate.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

This works well for people who take thoughts literally, because it turns a statement into an event. If the silly voice feels like mockery, skip it. The sentence frame is enough.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Taking language literally is common in autistic cognition, and it cuts both ways: a thought that arrives as a sentence is also received as a statement of fact. Putting a frame in front of it turns the statement back into an event that is happening, which is what it actually is.

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1.8 Trigger Ladder

15 MINUTES, ONCE · PAPER, AND THE 0 TO 10 SCALE

A map of your sensory and emotional triggers, ranked by number. It is the first step of exposure work, and it is useful on its own.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When "I cannot handle anything any more" needs to become something specific enough to work with.

HOW TO DO IT

1. List ten situations that hit you. The supermarket. A loud restaurant. Critical feedback. A phone call from an unknown number.
2. Give each a number from 0 to 10.
3. Order them from lowest to highest.
4. Mark the rungs where you cope well. Those are as important as the hard ones.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Ten situations listed. The supermarket at five is a 9. The same supermarket at nine in the morning is a 4. That gap is the whole finding, and it is about the conditions rather than about shopping.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Ranking how bad things should be rather than how bad they are. The ladder is only useful if the numbers are embarrassing.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

The ladder is a map. Whether you climb it is a separate decision, and the next tool explains why.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

A global sense of not coping is hard to act on and easy to turn into a verdict about yourself. Breaking it into ten rated situations almost always reveals that the variable is a condition — time of day, noise, notice, exit — which is a thing that can be designed, unlike a personality.

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1.9 Graded Exposure

VARIES. START UNDER 10 MINUTES. · THE LADDER, AND AN EXIT

Facing a feared situation in small steps, one rung at a time, until it loses its charge. It is a proven part of CBT for fear and avoidance.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Only after the ladder, and only on a rung you have decided is fear rather than pain.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Ask one question. Is this fear or is this pain? Fear of a phone call means exposure helps. A noise that hurts your ears means you adjust the environment, with earplugs or a different room, and you leave exposure alone.
2. If it is fear, pick a rung at a 3 or 4.
3. Plan how long and how you will leave.
4. Do it and notice the number.
5. Repeat the same rung until it drops to a 2, then move up one.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Phone calls are a 7. You start at a 3: leaving a voicemail for someone you know, with a written script, in your own room. Twice this week. Then a 4.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Climbing a rung that hurts rather than frightens. Fluorescent light that physically hurts is not a rung; it is a condition to change.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

This is where standard CBT can go wrong with sensory differences. Forcing yourself through a stimulus that physically hurts does not build tolerance. It can build dread, and it can drain you for days. Fear gets exposure. Pain gets accommodation.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

This is where standard exposure work goes wrong with sensory differences, and it goes wrong hard. Habituation applies to fear responses, not to pain or to genuine sensory overload. Pushing through a hurting stimulus does not build tolerance, it builds dread and can drive the autistic burnout pattern Raymaker and colleagues described in 2020.

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1.10 Safety Behavior Check

5 MINUTES · A LIST OF WHAT YOU DO TO GET THROUGH THINGS

A look at the things you do to prevent a feared outcome. Salkovskis described these safety behaviors in the early 1990s. They keep fear alive, because you never learn what would have happened without them.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you have got through something difficult and want to know what actually helped.

HOW TO DO IT

1. List what you do to get through a hard situation. Rehearse sentences. Sit by the door. Wear headphones. Check your phone.
2. Ask of each one whether it serves your access or your fear.
3. Label it a support or a crutch.
4. Pick one crutch and drop it once, in a low stakes situation, and see what happens.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You rehearse every sentence before a meeting, sit near the door, and wear headphones on the way. Checking each: headphones are access. The door is access. Rehearsing every sentence costs an hour and keeps the belief alive that unscripted you is unacceptable.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Treating every support as a safety behavior and stripping it out. That is how people end up with no fear and no capacity.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Headphones, stimming, scripts and exits are often real access tools. Do not remove them. This check is only for the things that keep you afraid.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Salkovskis described safety behaviors as the things that keep fear alive by preventing disconfirmation. For neurodivergent people the category is genuinely blurred, because stimming, scripting, headphones and planned exits are frequently real accommodations. The question to sort them is not whether it looks avoidant but whether it serves your access or your fear.

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1.11 Predict and Test

2 MINUTES BEFORE, 3 AFTER · PAPER, AND THE SITUATION ITSELF

A behavioral experiment. Bennett-Levy and colleagues made this a core CBT method. You write down what you expect to happen, then compare it with what happens.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When a prediction has been running your decisions for long enough that nobody has checked it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Before the situation, write your prediction in one line.
2. Rate how sure you are, from 0 to 100.
3. Go.
4. Afterwards, write what actually happened.
5. Compare the two lines and write one sentence about what you learned.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Prediction: if I say I need to leave at eight, they will be offended. Sure: 85. What happened: two people said they wished they could do the same. Gap: large, and the prediction was from 2014.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Running the experiment without writing the prediction down first. Memory quietly edits the prediction to match the outcome.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If your prediction comes from past overload, it is data, not a distortion. The experiment asks whether this time will be different with the right supports in place, such as a quiet corner, a time limit or a person you trust.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Predictions built from genuine past overload are data, not distortions, and telling someone their accurate memory is a cognitive error is both wrong and insulting. The experiment asks a different and fair question: whether this time is different now that the supports are in place.

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1.12 Recovery Plan

5 MINUTES TO PLAN · A CALENDAR

A plan for after the hit. You decide before the event how you will recover from it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Before the demanding thing, not after it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Put a recovery block in your calendar right after the event. Thirty minutes is a good start.
2. Choose two resets from your Reset Languages and note where you will do them.
3. Afterwards, write how long it took for your number to get back to a 3. Over a few weeks you learn your own recovery time.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The family dinner is Saturday at six. You put Sunday morning in the calendar as blocked before you accept, choose a dark room and a long shower as the two resets, and tell one person that Sunday is gone.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Planning recovery for after you have collapsed. By then you are not choosing recovery, you are in it.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

In the SNIP map this is the friction called regulation recovery time. Many neurodivergent people need longer than others expect. Knowing your number lets you plan around it, and plan the next day too.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Regulation recovery time is a friction in its own right, and for many neurodivergent people it runs considerably longer than the people around them expect or budget for. Scheduling it in advance turns an invisible cost into a visible appointment, which is also what makes it defensible to other people.

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1.13 Pause Protocol

UNDER A MINUTE · NOTHING

Four moves before you speak or send. It is adapted from the STOP skill in dialectical behavior therapy.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

In the four seconds between wanting to say it and saying it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stop. Hands off the keyboard, mouth closed.
2. Take one slow breath out, longer than the breath in.
3. Check your number.
4. Choose. Reply now, reply later, or reset first.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The message lands wrong. Instead of replying: you stop, notice the heat in your face, take one breath that is longer going out, and then decide. The reply you send ten minutes later is the one you would still defend tomorrow.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Using the pause to rehearse the reply. The pause is for the state, not for the script.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Take a moment is vague. Make it concrete. Ninety seconds on a timer. A written rule on your screen. Never send anything while the number is above a six.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Adapted from the STOP skill in dialectical behavior therapy. It suits ADHD specifically because the problem is rarely judgement and almost always latency: the right assessment arrives, it just arrives after the message has been sent. Four fixed moves buy the window the assessment needs.

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1.14 Self-Compassion Sentence

30 SECONDS · ONE SENTENCE YOU HAVE PREPARED IN ADVANCE

One sentence you say to yourself after a hard moment. It comes from compassion focused therapy and from Kristin Neff's work on self-compassion. It has three parts. This is hard. Other people feel this too. I can be kind to myself.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

The moment you notice the tone in your own head has turned.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write your own version on a card. For example: this is a hard moment, a lot of people feel this, and I can go easy on myself.
2. Read it when your number is five or higher after a mistake.
3. Say it in your own voice.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Written in advance, on a card: "This is hard, and I am not the only one who finds it hard." Said out loud in the car after the thing went badly. Not believed, and used anyway.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Waiting until you believe it. The sentence works as a practice long before it works as a conviction.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

After years of criticism, kindness can feel strange, or even unsafe. Start with the first part only. This is a hard moment. It is a fact, and facts are easier to accept than warmth.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Years of being corrected for traits rather than choices produce a practised inner commentary that is faster than any reply you can improvise. A sentence written in advance, while regulated, is the only one available at speed later — and speed is the whole contest.

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1.15 Feeling Journal

3 MINUTES · A NOTEBOOK OR A NOTE APP

One line a day that shows your patterns over weeks. It is a data log, and it is not a diary.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

A few minutes at the same point each day, rather than when something happens.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Each day add one line. The time, your number, one word, the trigger and the reset you used.
2. Use a phone widget or a note. One tap or one line.
3. After two weeks, read it back. Look for three patterns. When is the number highest? What sets it off? What brings it down?

WORKED THROUGH

> *Three lines a day for two weeks. Reading it back: every single 8 and 9 happened between four and six in the afternoon, on days with more than two meetings. Nothing in the entries said that; the pattern only showed up across them.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Writing only on bad days. A record of your worst days is a record of your worst days, and it cannot show you a pattern.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

You are looking for your own weather system. Once you see it, you can plan around it. That is what the other 14 tools are for.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Pattern recognition is frequently a strength in neurodivergent cognition, and this tool simply gives it something to work on. Day to day the signal is too noisy to read from the inside; across two weeks on paper, the conditions that actually drive the numbers become obvious.

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UNIT 2 OF 5

Cognitive and Temporal

15 tools for loops, worry and time. Three in the morning.

You wake at three. A conversation from last Thursday is playing again, with a new ending where you say the wrong thing. Then the list starts. The email you did not send. The appointment you might have missed. Whether you left the stove on.

By four you have solved nothing, and you have worn yourself out. The clock says you have two hours left to sleep, and you cannot tell how long you have been awake.

This unit is for that mind. The one that loops, forecasts the worst and loses track of time.

THE NETWORK UNDER IT

Cognitive and temporal processing is the second SNIP domain. In my teaching map it matches the default mode network, the part of the brain that runs when you are not focused on a task. It replays the past, rehearses the future and builds the story of who you are. When it runs hot you get loops, time slippage and a very loud inner narrator. That map is simplified, and it cannot diagnose anyone.

This unit has two jobs. One is to catch thoughts that mislead you. The other is to deal with time, which many neurodivergent brains experience differently.

START WITH A RESET

If your number is a seven or higher, thinking will not work. Use a reset first.

If you regulate through language and structure, flip a coin. Do not follow what it says. Notice your reaction. The flinch or the relief is the answer you already had. Or say the thought out loud. Speaking anchors it in the present, while silent thinking lets it drift and loop. Another reset is to ask, true, or just loud? Urgency and importance feel identical from the inside.

If your loop is made of sound, say stop out loud. Sound breaks a loop that thought alone will not.

Then check your number again. At six or below, pick a tool.

2.1 Thinking Trap List

10 MINUTES, ONCE · THE LIST, SOMEWHERE FINDABLE

A short list of the common ways thinking goes wrong. Aaron Beck described them, and David Burns made the list famous. They are habits that every brain has. Neurodivergent brains often have a few favorites.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Once, as a reference. Then kept somewhere you can reach it quickly.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Read the list once. All or nothing. Catastrophizing. Mind reading. Fortune telling. Should statements. Emotional reasoning, where a feeling counts as proof. Personalizing.
2. Circle the two that sound most like you.
3. Put them on a card and keep it where you work.
4. When your number rises, look at the card.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You write out the traps that are actually yours, in your own words. Four of the ten standard ones never happen to you. Three happen daily. You keep those three on a card and ignore the rest.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Learning all of them. You need the three that are yours, named in language you will recognise at speed.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

These are not flaws. If you have been criticized for years, a mind that expects trouble is a mind that learned from experience. The list only helps you check.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Naming is cheaper than analysing, which matters on a depleted day. A short personal list also avoids the common failure of generic CBT material, where someone spends their remaining capacity deciding which of ten categories applies instead of using the one that does.

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2.2 Label the Trap

15 SECONDS · YOUR TRAP LIST

Naming the trap in the moment. A trap with a name loses some of its pull.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

The moment a thought has been identified as hot and before you argue with it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write down the thought that is bothering you.
2. Look at your card from Tool 1.
3. Ask which trap it fits.
4. Write the label next to the thought. That is all. You do not have to argue with it yet.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"Nobody wants me there." You label it: mind reading. The thought does not go away. It is now a known type of thought rather than an announcement.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Using the label as a dismissal. Labelling says what kind of thought it is, not whether it is true.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If you are literal, you will like this tool, because it turns a vague unease into a category. If you find yourself arguing about whether the label is right, pick the closest one and move on.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Putting a category on a thought converts it from something you are inside to something you are looking at. For people who take their own sentences literally, that shift does more work than any argument, and it costs almost nothing in a state where argument is unavailable.

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2.3 Evidence For and Against

10 MINUTES · PAPER, TWO COLUMNS

The classic CBT move. You treat the thought as a claim and look at the evidence.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On one hot thought, when you have the capacity to be fair to both columns.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the claim in one sentence.
2. Draw a line down the middle of a page. On the left, write the facts that support it. On the right, write the facts that go against it. Facts only. What a camera would record.
3. Read both sides.
4. Write one sentence that fits both columns.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"I am bad at my job." For: two mistakes this quarter. Against: three pieces of unprompted praise, a contract renewed, and the fact that both mistakes happened in the same overloaded fortnight.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Writing the against column as reassurance. Evidence means things that happened, with dates, not things that sound encouraging.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Do not skip the right column because it feels like pretending. If nothing comes, ask someone you trust to name one fact. Rejection sensitive minds often cannot see the right column alone.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Literal, specific thinking makes this unusually productive if the brief is strict: facts only, both columns, no comfort. Vague positive reframing tends to be rejected outright by people who detect imprecision, which is why the standard "think more positively" advice lands so badly.

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2.4 Alternative Thought

5 MINUTES · BOTH COLUMNS FROM THE PREVIOUS TOOL

A second, believable way to read the same situation. It is not a positive affirmation. It has to be something you can accept.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After the evidence is on the page, never before.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Take your thought and your number.
2. Ask what else could be true. Write two or three options.
3. Pick the one you believe most, even at a small level, and rate how much you believe it, from 0 to 100.
4. Check your number again.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Instead of "I am bad at my job": I made two mistakes in a fortnight where I was running at a nine, and I have not made one since the load came down. That is longer, uglier, and true.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Reaching for a nicer thought rather than a more accurate one. The test is whether you believe it, not whether it is kind.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A forced positive thought will bounce off. If I will be fine is too far, try I do not know yet. That is a legitimate alternative thought, and it is often the honest one.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

An alternative thought that overstates will be rejected and will take the method down with it. Accuracy, including unflattering accuracy, is the only version that survives contact with a brain that notices when it is being managed.

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2.5 Best, Worst, Likely

5 MINUTES · PAPER

A way to cut a catastrophe down to size. It is sometimes called decatastrophizing.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When a worry has grown to fill all the available space.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the worst case in a sentence.
2. Write the best case.
3. Write the most likely case.
4. For the worst case, ask what you would do and who could help.
5. Ask how likely each case is, from 0 to 100.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Worst: I lose the contract and cannot pay rent. Best: they extend it. Likely: they ask for changes, I make them, it runs another quarter. Writing all three shrinks the worst from inevitable to one of three.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Doing only the worst case, or only the best. The middle column is the one that does the work, and it is the one people skip.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Minds that forecast the worst skip the second half of the question. What would I do then? The plan is the part that calms the body.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Catastrophising runs on a single vivid track, and vivid tracks are persuasive to brains that visualise well. Writing three outcomes next to each other replaces an argument about whether the worst case is realistic with a comparison, which needs far less capacity to carry out.

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2.6 Worry Window

15 MINUTES A DAY, FIXED · A TIME, AND AN ALARM

A set time for worrying. Thomas Borkovec developed this in the 1980s. You do not fight the worry. You give it an appointment.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When worry is spreading across the whole day rather than sitting in one part of it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose a daily window of 15 minutes. Not close to bedtime.
2. During the day, when a worry comes, write it on a list with a few words and tell yourself you will come back to it at the window.
3. At the window, sit with the list.
4. For each item, ask whether it can be acted on. If it can, write a next step. If not, let it go for today.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Worry window is six to six fifteen. At eleven in the morning the worry arrives, and you write it on the list and go back to work. By six, four of the six items have resolved themselves.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Making the window last the evening. Fifteen minutes with an alarm is the mechanism; an open-ended window is just worrying with a name.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Most people find the list is shorter at the window than it felt during the day. If you cannot tell time passing, set an alarm for the start and the end.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Postponing rather than suppressing works better for a brain that reads "stop thinking about it" as an impossible instruction, which it is. Writing the worry down also moves it out of working memory, which is the resource it was eating.

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2.7 Rumination or Problem?

1 MINUTE · ONE QUESTION

A fast test to tell the two apart. Rumination goes around in circles. A problem can be acted on.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Every time a worry has been circling for more than a few minutes.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Ask whether you are thinking about this to find a next step, or to feel the feeling again.
2. Check whether you are asking why or what. Why questions tend to loop. What questions tend to move.
3. If it is a problem, write the next action. If it is rumination, use a reset or move to Tool 8.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"What if the test comes back wrong." Is there an action? No, the appointment is Thursday. So it is rumination, and it goes to the worry window. "What if I have not sent the form." Yes, there is an action. You send the form in ninety seconds.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Calling something rumination when there is in fact a small action, and calling something a problem when the action is actually someone else's.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A mind that finds patterns can get stuck in them. This test gives you a way out that does not depend on willpower.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Rumination and problem-solving feel identical from the inside, and monotropic attention makes both extremely sticky once entered. One external question sorts them without requiring you to assess your own thinking from inside the loop, which is not a reliable instrument while the loop is running.

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2.8 Worry Decision Tree

5 MINUTES · PAPER

A short flow for deciding what to do with a worry. The idea comes from worry treatments by Michel Dugas and Adrian Wells. The format is mine.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After a worry has been identified as a real problem with a possible action.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the worry.
2. Ask if it is about something that is happening now or something that might happen.
3. If it is happening now, ask whether you can do something today, and then do the next step.
4. If it might happen, ask whether you can prepare. If so, prepare once and stop. If not, put it in the worry window.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Can I do something about it? Yes. Now, or later? Later, it needs an email on Monday. So the item becomes a calendar entry on Monday, and the worry has somewhere to go that is not your head.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Stopping at "yes, something can be done" without naming when. An unscheduled action keeps the worry active.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Print it as a card with three boxes. A tree on paper takes less working memory than one in your head.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Prospective memory — remembering to do a thing at a future time — is a frequent friction, and an unscheduled intention stays in working memory precisely because the brain does not trust it to resurface. Giving it a date and a place lets it be put down.

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2.9 Time Estimate Test

2 MINUTES PER ESTIMATE · A NOTE OF ESTIMATE VERSUS ACTUAL

A behavioral experiment about time. Time perception differs in many neurodivergent people, and ADHD is the best studied case. You find out how your estimates compare with reality.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Before committing to any deadline, and any time a task has eaten a day you did not have.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Before a task, write how long you think it will take.
2. Use a timer and record the real time.
3. Repeat this for ten tasks.
4. Divide the real time by your estimate to get your multiplier. If your tasks take twice as long, your multiplier is two.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You estimate the report at two hours. It takes five. Three weeks of logging gives you a personal multiplier of about two and a half, and from then on you quote accordingly and stop being late.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Correcting the estimate with willpower. The multiplier is measured, not decided, and it will not improve because you want it to.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

After ten tasks, use the multiplier for planning. It turns a failure of will into a measurement. You are not late because you are careless. You are using a clock that runs at a different rate.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Time estimation differences are well documented in ADHD, and no amount of effort converts a systematically short estimate into an accurate one. Measuring your own ratio turns an apparently moral failure — always late, overpromising — into an arithmetic correction you apply before you commit.

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2.10 Time Look-Back

10 MINUTES · YOUR CALENDAR, MESSAGES AND FILES FROM THE PERIOD

A short review of where time went. It helps with time blindness, which means losing track of how much has passed.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you are convinced you did nothing all week.

HOW TO DO IT

1. At the end of the day, write three blocks. Morning, afternoon, evening.
2. For each, write what you actually did. Do not judge.
3. Note one block where time ran faster or slower than you thought.
4. After a week, look for the pattern.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The week felt like a write-off. The evidence: eleven messages answered, one draft finished, a doctor's appointment made that had been pending for a month, and two days that genuinely were a write-off.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Counting only the things that look like output. Appointments made, decisions taken and things recovered from all count.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If writing is hard, take a photo of your screen or your desk at set times, and look back at the photos.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Poor episodic recall of ordinary days is common, and what gets recalled instead is the emotional tone of the week, which on a hard week is uniformly bad. Going to the artefacts rather than the memory replaces a feeling about the week with a record of it.

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2.11 Core Belief Finder

15 MINUTES · SEVERAL THOUGHT RECORDS, AND SOME QUIET

A method called the downward arrow. It follows one thought down to the belief underneath. Many of your hot thoughts grow from a few core beliefs.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When the same hot thought has shown up in four unrelated situations.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write a thought that bothers you.
2. Ask, and if that were true, what would it mean about me? Write the answer.
3. Ask the same question again. Repeat three or four times until you reach a short sentence about yourself, such as I am a burden.
4. Rate how much you believe it, from 0 to 100.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Across four records: left a party early, did not send a draft, over-apologised to a colleague, cancelled a call. Underneath all four: if they see me properly, they will go.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Doing this on a bad day. A core belief excavated while depleted reads as a confession rather than as a hypothesis.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Stop if the number jumps to an eight or higher. Use a reset, and take this tool to a coach or therapist if it keeps pulling you. Core beliefs are tender ground.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Pattern-finding across instances is a strength worth using here, and the beliefs it surfaces in neurodivergent adults are very often accurate reports of history rather than distortions — people did leave, things were held against you. Naming it as a belief with a source is different from treating it as a flaw.

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2.12 Find the Exceptions

10 MINUTES · THE BELIEF, WRITTEN DOWN

A search for the times your belief was not true. Solution focused coaching uses this a lot.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Immediately after a core belief has been named, in the same sitting.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the belief. For example, I always forget things.
2. Ask when it was less true. A day, a task, a week.
3. Ask what was different. The room, the person, the time of day, the amount of sleep.
4. Write one thing you can repeat.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Belief: I cannot be relied on. Exceptions: eleven years at the same job, the friend who calls you first in a crisis, the fact that you have never once forgotten your kid at school.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Letting a single exception be explained away as not counting. Write it down before you argue with it.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Exceptions are your design data. They show you the conditions where your brain works well.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

An absolute belief survives by filtering, and a brain good at pattern matching is also good at matching only the confirming cases. Exceptions are not an argument against the belief; they are evidence that it is conditional, which is already a smaller and more workable claim.

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2.13 Double Standard Check

1 MINUTE · A SPECIFIC PERSON IN MIND

You judge yourself by rules you would never apply to a friend. This tool makes that visible.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

The moment you notice you are being harder on yourself than you would be on anyone else.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write what you are telling yourself.
2. Imagine a close friend or a client said it about themselves in the same situation.
3. Write what you would say to them.
4. Compare the two answers. Which one is kinder? Which one is more accurate?

WORKED THROUGH

> *"I should have known that would overwhelm me." Applied to your closest friend in the same situation, the sentence is unsayable. What you would actually say to her is the sentence that applies.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Picking a vague "someone". It has to be a named person, or the comparison stays abstract and changes nothing.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If you are used to being the one who gets blamed, you may never have seen what a fair standard looks like. This tool gives you one to borrow.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Internalised ableism is specific: the standard applied to yourself is one built for a brain you do not have. Routing the sentence through a real person makes the double standard concrete and visible in a single step, with no argument required.

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2.14 Weighted Pros and Cons

20 MINUTES · PAPER, FOUR COLUMNS, AND A WEIGHTING

A decision tool. A plain list of pros and cons treats a tiny point and a huge one as equal. Weighting fixes that.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On a decision you have been circling for more than a week.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the options at the top.
2. List the pros and cons of each.
3. Give each point a weight from 1 to 5.
4. Add up the weights.
5. Notice your reaction to the result. If you feel disappointed, that tells you something too.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Taking the role. Pros and cons listed, then each weighted out of ten. The commute scores a 9 against on sensory load alone, and that single number explains a hesitation you had been calling indecisiveness.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Leaving the weights off. An unweighted list makes nine small pros beat one enormous con, which is how people end up in jobs that break them.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If deciding is hard, set a deadline first. Tool 9 in the executive unit covers that.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Weighting lets sensory and recovery costs enter a decision as numbers rather than as a vague reluctance that is easy to dismiss and easy to be shamed out of. It also externalises a comparison that is genuinely hard to hold in working memory all at once.

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2.15 Look Back, No Verdict

10 MINUTES · PAPER, AND ENOUGH DISTANCE TO BE FAIR

A way to review an event without turning it into a trial. I use it when someone replays the past and finds themselves guilty.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Afterwards. Specifically, after something that did not go well.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write what happened in three sentences.
2. Write what you knew at the time.
3. Write what you needed and did not have.
4. Write one thing you would arrange differently, as a condition and not as a character flaw.
5. Close the page.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The presentation went badly. What happened: three interruptions, a broken projector, four hours of sleep. What I would change: the sleep and the projector check. What is not available to change: the interruptions. No verdict about whether you are bad at presenting.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Letting the review end in a judgement. The moment a verdict appears, the useful part stops.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

You did the best you could with the information, the state and the support you had. The review is about conditions. You are not on trial.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Rejection sensitivity turns review into prosecution very quickly, and a prosecution produces no usable information. Forbidding the verdict is not softness; it is what keeps the review doing the only thing a review is for, which is finding the conditions that were in play.

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UNIT 3 OF 5

Motor and Energy

15 tools for your body, your batteries and your pacing. The good week and the crash.

On Monday you feel great. You clear the inbox, cook, tidy the closet, answer the messages you owed for a month. Tuesday, still going. Wednesday you are a little wired. By Friday you cannot get off the sofa, and by Saturday you are sure something is wrong with you.

Nothing is wrong. You spent the whole week's energy in three days and then paid for it. People call this boom and bust, and neurodivergent adults know it well.

This unit gives you 15 tools for your body, your energy and your pacing.

THE NETWORK UNDER IT

Motor and energy is the third SNIP domain. In my teaching map it matches the interoceptive network, which reads the inside of your body. Hunger, tiredness, heartbeat, tension. When that signal is faint or noisy, you miss the warnings and run past your limits. That map is simplified, and it cannot diagnose anyone.

Research on autistic burnout, such as the study by Raymaker and colleagues in 2020, describes exactly this pattern. Long stretches of overextension, followed by exhaustion, loss of skills and reduced tolerance for input. This unit helps you spot the pattern earlier.

START WITH A RESET

In this domain, your body is the way in. Pick a reset that uses it.

If you regulate through motion, walk before you answer. Around the block, before the hard email. Or push against a wall for ten seconds as hard as you can. It discharges activation without needing space to move. Or change rooms. The room you are stuck in is part of what you are stuck in.

If you regulate through touch, hold something warm or cold, or sit with a weighted object on your lap. Steady pressure calms many nervous systems.

Check your number. At six or below, pick a tool.

3.1 Activity Log

30 SECONDS, A FEW TIMES A DAY · A NOTE APP OR A PRINTED GRID

A simple record of what you do and how you feel while doing it. It is the first step of behavioral activation, a method developed by Neil Jacobson and colleagues in the 1990s.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

For one week, when you have no idea where the energy is going.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Take a page with the hours of the day.
2. Every few hours, write what you were doing.
3. Give your mood a number from 0 to 10, and your energy a number from 0 to 10.
4. After a week, read it back. Which activities came with higher energy? Which cost the most?

WORKED THROUGH

> *A week logged in single lines. Reading it back: the two hours after any phone call are always empty, every time, and you had been blaming the afternoons.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Logging what you planned rather than what happened. The gap between those two is the finding.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If a log feels like too much, do three entries a day. Morning, afternoon and evening. Or use a photo and a one word voice memo.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Recall of ordinary time is unreliable, and ADHD in particular tends to remember intentions as if they were events. A log written at the time is the only version that survives, and it catches the recovery costs that never appear in anybody's calendar.

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3.2 Energy and Mood Link

15 MINUTES, ONCE · YOUR LOG, AND A HIGHLIGHTER

A look at how your energy and your mood move together. They are often tied closer than they feel in the moment.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After a week of the activity log, once there is something to read.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Take your Activity Log from Tool 1.
2. Mark each entry as high, medium or low for energy and for mood.
3. Look at the pairs. Low energy with low mood often means rest or food or movement, not a thought to argue with.
4. Write one line about what each pair needs.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Mood drops get marked. Three of four land within an hour of an unplanned social interaction. Not the workload, which is what you had assumed for two years.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Looking for one cause. Most patterns here are a combination, and the useful finding is usually the one you were not already suspecting.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

This keeps you from treating a depleted body as a flaw in your character. Check the body before the story.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Low or late interoceptive signal means the connection between an event and the state that follows it often cannot be felt in real time. On paper, across a week, the link is visible from outside — which is the only place it is reliably visible.

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3.3 Behavioral Activation

PICK SOMETHING UNDER 15 MINUTES · A LIST MADE IN ADVANCE

The central idea of the method. When you feel low, you tend to do less. Doing less lowers your mood more. You break the loop by acting first and letting the mood follow. It is well supported by research on depression.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On a flat day, when waiting to feel like it has stopped working.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Pick one small activity from your log that came with at least a little lift.
2. Schedule it for a specific time, and write it in your calendar.
3. Do it for ten minutes.
4. Rate your mood and energy before and after.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You do not want to do anything. You go to the list made last week, pick the shortest thing on it, and walk to the corner and back. The mood does not lift before you leave. It lifts about four minutes in.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Waiting for motivation to arrive first. In this tool the action comes first and the feeling follows, which is the entire mechanism.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Choose activities that fit your sensory needs. A walk in a quiet park will work for some people and a busy street will not. This tool is not for severe, lasting depression. If low mood stays most days for two weeks, see a professional.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Behavioral activation inverts the usual order, and that matters for ADHD where activation is often the missing piece rather than intent. The list has to be made in advance, because choosing what to do is itself an executive demand and it is not available on the day you need this.

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3.4 Values Activity

20 MINUTES, ONCE · PAPER

An activity chosen because it matters to you, not because it should be done. The idea comes from acceptance and commitment therapy.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When the days are full and none of it feels like yours.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write three things that matter in your life. Connection, creativity, learning, being outside, craft.
2. For each, write a small action you can do this week. Fifteen minutes is enough.
3. Schedule one of them.
4. Afterwards, note whether it felt meaningful. That is a different question from whether it felt fun.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Four values named. Then the week audited against them: eleven hours on the one you ranked fourth, forty minutes on the one you ranked first. Nothing is wrong with you; the allocation is wrong.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Choosing values that sound right. The ones that work here are the ones you would defend when tired.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Special interests often sit right here. If an interest gives you energy and meaning, it counts as a values activity and deserves a place in your week.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Chronic masking makes it genuinely hard to tell your own preferences from learned ones, and the question "what matters to me" often returns other people's answers. Auditing the actual hours sidesteps that, because the calendar is not performing for anyone.

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3.5 Pacing

PLANNING, 10 MINUTES · A TIMER

Spreading your effort across the day or week so you stay inside your limits. It comes from the treatment of chronic pain and fatigue.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On anything that has previously ended in a crash.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Find your baseline. How much can you do on a normal day without paying for it the next day? Second, choose a plan at about 80 percent of that.
2. Break tasks into blocks with rest between them.
3. Stop at the planned time, even if you feel good.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Garden day. Instead of six hours until it is finished: forty minutes on, twenty off, three rounds, and then stop whether or not it is done. The job takes two days. There is no Tuesday lost to recovery.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Pacing only until it starts going well. The break is not a reward for struggling; it is the thing that prevents the bill.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Stopping while you feel good is the hardest part. If a good day tempts you to double the plan, write down in advance that the extra goes to tomorrow.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Hyperfocus removes the internal stop signal, and when the body's own warnings are faint there is nothing left to interrupt the run. An external timer substitutes for the signal that is not arriving, which is why it has to be set before you start and not during.

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3.6 Energy Buffer

5 MINUTES · A CALENDAR WITH EMPTY SPACE IN IT

A reserve you leave in your day for the unexpected. Surprise costs energy, and a schedule without a buffer breaks at the first change.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Whenever you are planning a day with a known demanding thing in it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Look at your week.
2. Leave about a quarter of your time free of plans.
3. Put the buffer in the middle of the day, not only at the end.
4. If the buffer is unused, rest or do something you enjoy. You have not wasted it.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The appointment is at two. You block noon to two and two to four, and accept that the day holds one thing. Previously this day held four things and ended at a nine.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Filling the buffer with something small. A buffer with a task in it is not a buffer.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Transitions, noise and social contact eat energy that does not show on a to do list. The buffer covers the costs you cannot see.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Transitions and recovery both cost more than they appear to, and neither shows up in a calendar that only records appointments. Making the buffer a visible block is what stops it being quietly spent, including by you.

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3.7 Boom and Bust Check

15 MINUTES · TWO MONTHS OF CALENDAR OR LOG

A quick check for the early signs of a boom, before it turns into a bust.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Monthly, or any time someone says you are inconsistent.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write your own boom signs. Fast speech. Too many projects. Skipped meals. Little sleep. Saying yes to everything.
2. Write your bust signs. Heavy limbs. Dread of the phone. Cannot decide what to eat.
3. Put the list where you will see it.
4. When you notice a boom sign, shrink the plan for the next day by a third.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Plotted across eight weeks: three enormous weeks and then five days of almost nothing, twice. The pattern is not random and it is not laziness. It is the same cycle running on a three-week period.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Reading the bust as the problem. The boom is where the bust was generated, and that is the half you can act on.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Your boom signs feel wonderful. That is why they are hard to catch. The list is for the version of you who is not in the boom.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Raymaker and colleagues described exactly this shape in autistic burnout in 2020: long overextension, then exhaustion, loss of skills and reduced tolerance. Seeing it as one cycle rather than as a good period followed by an unrelated failure changes which end you intervene at.

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3.8 Movement Experiment

A WEEK OF TRIALS, 10 MINUTES EACH · A NOTE OF WHAT YOU TRIED

A behavioral experiment about movement. You test what a short burst of movement does to your state, instead of assuming.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you have been told movement helps and it has never helped you.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Pick one kind of movement. A ten minute walk. Stretching. Dancing in the kitchen.
2. Before it, write your number and your energy.
3. Do it.
4. Afterwards, write both again.
5. Repeat on three different days and compare.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Running: worse, every time. Walking with headphones: slightly better. Carrying something heavy upstairs: noticeably better within two minutes. You now know which one to reach for, and it is not the one in the advice.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Running one trial on one day and concluding. State varies, so each thing needs trying more than once.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Choose movement that fits your body. Some people need rhythm, some need strong pressure, some need gentle stretching. If an activity hurts or overwhelms you, change the activity.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

General exercise advice assumes a shared response that does not exist here. Proprioceptive input — pushing, carrying, pressure — regulates many neurodivergent people far more reliably than cardiovascular exercise does, and nobody finds that out without testing it on themselves.

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3.9 Smallest Next Action

UNDER 2 MINUTES · NOTHING

The tiniest step that moves a task. It is small enough that there is no reason to refuse it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you know exactly what to do and you have not moved for an hour.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Name the task.
2. Ask what the very first physical action is. Open the file. Put on your shoes. Fill the kettle.
3. Do only that.
4. Notice whether continuing is easier than it was.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The task is "do the taxes". The smallest next action is not "gather documents". It is: open the drawer. That is it. You open the drawer and the next thing becomes available.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Choosing something that is still a project. If you can picture the first physical movement, it is small enough. If you cannot, it is not.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Starting is often the wall, not the task. If you cannot move, make the step even smaller. Touch the object. Stand next to it.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Task initiation is a distinct friction from motivation, and it does not respond to wanting it more. Shrinking the step until it is below the threshold where initiation is required is a mechanical solution to a mechanical problem, which is why it works on days when nothing else does.

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3.10 Activity Ladder

PLANNING, 15 MINUTES · PAPER, AND HONESTY ABOUT THE STARTING POINT

A set of steps from very easy to demanding, for an activity you have been avoiding or lost. It is the movement version of the trigger ladder in Unit 1.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When returning to activity after a long flat stretch or a burnout.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose an activity, such as walking.
2. Write six steps. Stand at the door. Walk to the corner. Walk around the block. Walk for ten minutes. Walk for twenty. Walk with a friend.
3. Start at the step where you succeed easily.
4. Move up only after three good rounds.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Rungs written from "stand outside the front door" to "a full day out". You start three rungs lower than feels dignified, hold each for a week, and arrive somewhere in two months rather than crashing in four days.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Starting at the rung you used to manage. Where you were is not a starting point, it is a destination.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Going up is optional. Staying on a step you like is a result.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

After burnout, capacity returns on its own timescale and effort does not accelerate it — pushing mostly re-triggers the cycle. A ladder gives the climb a shape that is slow enough to hold, which also makes it describable to other people who are waiting for you to be fine.

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3.11 Rest Before the Crash

SCHEDULED, NOT DECIDED IN THE MOMENT · A CALENDAR, AND A DEFENCE

Scheduling rest before you need it. It prevents the bust, which is cheaper than repairing it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Before the crash, which means while you still feel capable.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Look at your week and mark the heavy days.
2. Put real rest on the day before and the day after.
3. Define rest in your own terms. Lying down in a dim room. A show you know by heart. A bath.
4. Protect those blocks like appointments.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Rest is in the calendar at four, and at four you feel fine. You rest anyway. Three weeks of doing that and the Thursday collapses stop happening.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Moving it because you feel fine. Feeling fine at four is the condition under which it works, not a reason to skip it.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Rest is a part of the plan. People who regulate through fewer inputs often need low stimulation rest, with no phone and no talking.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

If depletion only registers once it has arrived, rest triggered by feeling tired will always be too late to prevent anything. Scheduling it against the clock rather than against a sensation removes the need for a signal that is not reliable.

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3.12 Sleep Basics

SETTING IT UP, 20 MINUTES · WHATEVER DARKENS, QUIETENS OR WEIGHTS

A short list of habits that support sleep. They come from CBT for insomnia, and this is the light version.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When sleep has been an obvious variable in the log for more than a week.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Keep a fixed wake time, even on weekends.
2. Get daylight within an hour of waking.
3. Dim the lights and put screens away for 30 minutes before bed.
4. Use your bed for sleep only. If you cannot sleep after about 20 minutes, get up and do something quiet.
5. Write tomorrow's list before bed so your mind can put it down.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The standard advice fails. What works: the room much darker, a podcast on a sleep timer rather than silence, and going to bed later than recommended but at the same time every night.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Following generic sleep hygiene exactly and concluding you are broken when it does not take. Consistency matters more than the particular rules.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Many ADHD and autistic adults have a delayed body clock and trouble winding down. If sleep stays poor for weeks, talk to a doctor. This tool does not replace treatment.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Standard sleep advice assumes a sensory baseline many neurodivergent people do not share, and silence, darkness and an early bedtime are not universally regulating. If sleep stays disrupted after the conditions are genuinely adjusted, that belongs with a clinician rather than with a coaching tool.

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3.13 Reward After Action

UNDER 5 MINUTES · SOMETHING YOU ACTUALLY WANT, AVAILABLE NOW

A small reward right after a task, to make the task easier to start next time. It follows the same principle that behavioral therapy has used for decades.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Immediately after finishing something, not at the end of the week.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose a reward that costs little and arrives fast. A tea, a song, five minutes outside.
2. Decide the reward before you start.
3. Take it right after the task, not at the end of the day.
4. Notice what works. Drop rewards that do not.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Draft sent. Coffee and twenty minutes of the thing you like, right then, before the next task. Not banked for Friday, where it will never be collected.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Delayed rewards. A reward that arrives on Friday is not attached to anything you did on Tuesday.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Immediate reward works better than a distant one for many brains. Do not wait for the big prize at the end.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Delay discounting is steep in ADHD: a reward loses most of its pull with time, which is a property of the wiring rather than a character issue. Putting the reward immediately after the action is the only placement where it reliably connects to the behaviour.

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3.14 Name the Resistance

2 MINUTES · ONE SENTENCE

A check on what is really blocking you. Labeling the block often shrinks it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you are refusing to start something and cannot say why.

HOW TO DO IT

1. When you cannot start, ask what the resistance is made of. Boredom. Fear of getting it wrong. Too many steps. A demand that feels forced. Tiredness.
2. Write one word for it.
3. Match a response. Boredom needs a change of setting. Fear needs a smaller step. Too many steps needs Tool 9. Forced demand needs choice. Tiredness needs rest.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"I do not want to make the call." Named more precisely: I do not know how it opens and I cannot improvise the first ten seconds. That is not avoidance, it is a missing script, and a script takes four minutes to write.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Settling for "I am being lazy". That names nothing and points at no action.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Demand avoidance is real for many people. If a task feels like an order, rephrase it as your own choice and say it in your own words.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Demand avoidance and unnamed resistance are frequently a specific missing condition rather than a general unwillingness — no script, no exit, an unclear ending, an unpredictable person. Naming it precisely usually converts an immovable refusal into a solvable logistics problem.

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3.15 Weekly Energy Map

20 MINUTES · A WEEK GRID, AND YOUR ACTIVITY LOG

A one page overview of your week, with energy costs and refills. It shows where you drain and where you recover.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Once, then revisited each month.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Draw seven columns.
2. In each, mark the energy costs. Meetings, travel, noise, people.
3. Mark the refills. Walks, quiet, interest time, sleep.
4. Compare. Which days run in the red? Move one cost or add one refill.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The map shows mornings reliably good, a dead zone from two to four every day, and Thursdays worse than any other day. Meetings get moved to mornings. The dead zone gets admin, which it can hold.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Mapping the week you want instead of the week you have. Build from the log, not from intention.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

You learn your weekly rhythm once. After that you plan with it instead of against it.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Energy in many neurodivergent people follows a shape that is personal, fairly stable, and almost never the standard working day. Matching demands to the real shape produces more change than any amount of discipline applied against it.

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UNIT 4 OF 5

Social and Communication

15 tools for reading people, being read and the cost of masking. The reply that took four minutes.

You sent a message and the answer is one word. Okay. You read it eleven times. Is it cold? Is it tired? Did you offend someone three messages ago? You start drafting an apology for something you cannot name.

Or the other way around. You say exactly what you mean, and the room goes quiet. Somebody looks at someone else. You learn later that you were rude.

This unit is for both sides of that. Reading people, being read, and the price of managing it all.

THE NETWORK UNDER IT

Social and communication is the fourth SNIP domain. In my teaching map it matches the social brain network. That map is simplified, and it cannot diagnose anyone.

One idea belongs here from the start. Damian Milton called it the double empathy problem. When an autistic person and a non autistic person misread each other, the gap runs in both directions. It is not a deficit sitting only on one side. Many of the tools below work because they check an assumption instead of trusting it.

START WITH A RESET

Social alarms run on the body. Use a reset before you decide what a message means.

If you regulate through presence, text someone without asking for fixes. Just to say you are struggling. Naming it to someone else is part of the relief. Or sit near someone quietly. Co-regulation does not need conversation.

If you need fewer inputs, close a door, dim the lights or put your phone in another room for 20 minutes. If sound helps, hum for 30 seconds.

Check your number. At six or below, pick a tool.

4.1 Mind-Reading Check

1 MINUTE · NOTHING

Mind reading is one of the classic thinking traps. You decide what another person thinks without asking. This tool catches it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

The moment you catch yourself knowing what someone else is thinking.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write what you believe the other person thinks. For example, she thinks I am incompetent.
2. Write the facts you have. What did she say or do, in words a camera could record.
3. Write two other explanations. She was busy. She was thinking about something else.
4. Rate how much you believe the first story, from 0 to 100.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"She is annoyed with me." Evidence: she replied with one word. Other explanations: she was driving, she was in a meeting, she replies with one word to everyone. The reading had one piece of evidence and three alternatives.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Replacing the reading with a cheerful one. You are not deciding she is happy, you are noticing you do not know.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If reading faces and tone is hard, you have more reason to check, not less. Treat your guess as a guess.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Milton's double empathy problem means the misreading runs in both directions, so the gap is real even when your specific interpretation is wrong. Checking the evidence treats the uncertainty honestly instead of resolving it in either direction by default.

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4.2 RSD Check

2 MINUTES · THE 0 TO 10 SCALE

A check for a very strong reaction to perceived rejection. Rejection sensitivity is well studied in psychology. The name rejection sensitive dysphoria comes from clinical practice and is not a diagnosis. Many people with ADHD say it describes their experience.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

In the minutes after something small has landed enormously.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Rate the pain, from 0 to 10.
2. Ask what you think just happened. Write the sentence.
3. Ask whether the size of the reaction matches the size of the event. If not, say to yourself, this is a very strong alarm, and the alarm is not the same as the facts.
4. Use a reset and wait before you reply.

WORKED THROUGH

> *A colleague says "we will come back to that" and you are at a 9. Size of reaction against size of event: not matched. So: this is a very strong alarm, and the alarm is not the same as the facts. You reset and reply in the morning.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Using it to tell yourself the pain is not real. The pain is real. It is the conclusion attached to it that is being checked.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

The pain is real. Checking it is not the same as dismissing it. You are giving the alarm a second opinion.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Rejection sensitivity is widely described in ADHD, and it arrives at full volume before any appraisal has happened. Nothing available in the moment will reduce the intensity, so the tool works on the only thing that is reachable: whether the alarm gets to decide what happens next.

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4.3 Conversation Experiment

PLANNING 5 MINUTES, THEN THE CONVERSATION · A WRITTEN PREDICTION

A behavioral experiment in a conversation. You test a fear in real life, in a small and safe way.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On a social prediction that has been shaping your behaviour for years.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the fear. If I ask a question in the meeting, people will think I am stupid.
2. Rate your belief, from 0 to 100.
3. Choose a small test. Ask one question to one colleague.
4. Watch what actually happens.
5. Write the result and rate your belief again.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Prediction: if I say I did not follow that, they will think I am slow. You say it. What happens: two other people say the same. The prediction was 90 percent confident and wrong.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Testing it in the hardest possible setting first. Pick a person who is safe and a stake that is low.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Choose people and places that are fairly safe. The experiment tests a prediction. It does not prove anything about everyone.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Social predictions here are often built on real history, so they feel like knowledge rather than guesses. Running one deliberately, in a low-stakes setting, is the only way to find out whether it still holds with this person, in this room, now.

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4.4 Perspective Switch

10 MINUTES · PAPER, AND SOME DISTANCE

Looking at a situation from the other person's side. You do this to widen your view, and you do not have to agree with them.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After a conversation that went wrong and you cannot see how.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write what happened from your side.
2. Write it as the other person might tell it. What did they want? What pressure were they under? Third, write a third version, as a neutral observer.
3. Note where the three versions differ.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Written from their side: she had thirty seconds, asked a direct question, and got four minutes of context before the answer. From your side: you were answering the question properly. Both accounts are accurate.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Using it to decide who was right. The point is that two accurate accounts can produce one bad conversation.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If imagining other minds is hard, use facts about the person. Their role, their workload, their history with you. You do not have to feel what they feel to estimate what they needed.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

This is double empathy made practical. Writing the other account without conceding yours keeps the gap visible as a gap, rather than collapsing it into a deficit on one side — which is the reading neurodivergent people usually get handed by default.

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4.5 Shame Evidence Check

10 MINUTES · PAPER, TWO COLUMNS

A check on thoughts that say you are bad, not that you did something wrong. Shame treats a mistake as proof of who you are.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When shame has arrived and is presenting itself as fact.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the shame thought. I am a mess. I always ruin things.
2. Split it. What did I do, and what am I saying about myself? Third, look for evidence on the second part, from the last year.
3. Write one sentence that describes the behavior without a verdict.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"Everyone saw me lose it and thinks I am unstable." Evidence: two people were in the room. One of them messaged afterwards to check you were okay. Nobody has mentioned it since.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Running this while the shame is at a 9. Above a seven it reads as cross-examination, and reset comes first.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

After years of being corrected, shame often arrives faster than facts. This tool slows it down. If shame feels overwhelming or constant, take it to a therapist.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Years of correction build shame responses that are fast, physical and global, and that arrive with the certainty of a memory. Requiring evidence does not argue with the feeling; it just prevents an unexamined conclusion from being filed as something that happened.

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4.6 Hard Conversation Script

15 MINUTES · PAPER, AND THE OPENING WRITTEN OUT WORD FOR WORD

A script for a conversation you dread. Scripts are good for many neurodivergent people, because they save working memory in a moment of stress.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Before any conversation you have already rehearsed four times.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write your goal in one sentence. What do I want to be different afterwards? Second, write an opening line that states the topic and your intent.
2. Write two or three key points, each in a single sentence.
3. Write one question that invites the other person in.
4. Practice it out loud once.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Opening line written and read twice. Three points, in order. One sentence for if it goes sideways: "I need a minute, I will come back to this." The conversation takes nine minutes instead of the planned forty.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Scripting the whole exchange. You can only script your half, and the parts that matter most are the opening and the exit.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Bring the script. Say so at the start. I wrote some notes so I can say this clearly. That is a strength.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Improvising under social and emotional load draws on exactly the resources that load is consuming. A written opening and a written exit remove the two moments where the whole thing usually fails, and leave the middle to be had live.

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4.7 Ask Instead of Assume

30 SECONDS · ONE QUESTION, ASKED PLAINLY

Turning a guess into a question. It works for the one word reply and the unclear tone.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Any time you are about to act on something you worked out rather than heard.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Notice your guess.
2. Write a neutral question. Is everything okay with the plan? I want to check that I understood.
3. Send it or say it.
4. Take the answer as data, and wait for it.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Instead of spending a week deciding the silence means you are being managed out: "Can I check what the plan is for my role?" Ninety seconds, and the answer is a restructure that has nothing to do with you.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Asking a question that is actually an accusation. "Is something wrong between us?" is a different question from "did my message come across badly?"

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A direct question is a legitimate move, and plenty of people appreciate it. Keep it short and without blame.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Inference under uncertainty is expensive and, across a neurotype gap, frequently wrong in both directions. Asking is cheaper than deducing, and for people who have been told their readings are unreliable it also replaces self-doubt with information.

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4.8 Social Prediction Log

2 MINUTES PER ENTRY · A RUNNING NOTE

A record of what you expect from social situations and what happens. You build a track record against your inner forecast.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Over a few weeks, alongside the conversation experiment.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Before an event, write your prediction and rate how bad it will be, from 0 to 10.
2. Afterwards, write what happened and rate it.
3. After five events, compare the columns.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Eleven predictions logged over a month. Nine were wrong in the same direction: you consistently predicted irritation that did not happen. One was right, and it was about the person everyone finds difficult.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Logging only the predictions that turn out badly. The whole value is in the base rate.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Many people find that events are less bad than predicted, but not all of them. If an event was as bad as you feared, you learn which conditions to change. That is useful too.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

A single disconfirmation does not shift a belief built over years, and treating it as if it should is how this work gets abandoned. A log produces a rate rather than an anecdote, and a rate is the thing a pattern-matching brain will actually accept as evidence.

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4.9 Review Without Self-Blame

10 MINUTES · PAPER, AND THE RULE THAT NO VERDICT IS ALLOWED

A short review after a social event, without the long replay. Researchers describe the habit of replaying events as post event processing. Clark and Wells described it in their model of social anxiety in 1995.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After any social event you are replaying.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Set a timer for five minutes.
2. Write what went fine.
3. Write one thing you would change, as a plan for next time.
4. Write what you could not have known.
5. Stop when the timer rings, and use a reset.

WORKED THROUGH

> *What happened: you talked too long about one subject and noticed halfway. Conditions: four hours of sleep, three hours in, no break. What to change: a break at ninety minutes. What is not up for discussion: whether you are fundamentally too much.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Letting the review drift into the verdict. The ban is the tool.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

The replay can last for days. The timer gives you a legitimate way to stop.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Post-event rumination is heavily reinforced by rejection sensitivity, and without a rule it reliably ends in a judgement about the self rather than a note about conditions. Banning the verdict keeps the review producing the only output that can be used next time.

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4.10 Boundary Sentence

10 MINUTES TO WRITE · THREE SENTENCES ON A CARD

One short sentence that sets a limit. It is ready before you need it.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Before you need it. Written while regulated, used while not.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the situation where you need a limit.
2. Write a sentence in plain words. I cannot take that on this week. I need until Thursday to answer. I will leave at nine.
3. Add an alternative if you have one.
4. Practice saying it aloud.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Written in advance: "I am not able to take that on this month." Used on a Tuesday when the usual answer would have been yes, and it works because it is already a sentence rather than something you have to compose.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Writing boundaries that need a justification attached. A reason invites a negotiation of the reason.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

You do not owe a long explanation. A short, calm sentence is clear, and clear is kind.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Composing a refusal in real time needs language, social modelling and regulation at once, which is why the answer defaults to yes under load. A prepared sentence moves all of that cost to a moment when the resources exist, and leaves only delivery for the moment they do not.

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4.11 Masking Cost Count

10 MINUTES · HONEST ARITHMETIC

A count of what masking costs you. Masking, also called camouflaging, means hiding your natural ways of being to fit in. Studies link heavy camouflaging with exhaustion and poorer mental health in autistic adults.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After a social stretch that left you flattened for longer than the event itself.

HOW TO DO IT

1. List the situations where you mask.
2. For each, write the cost afterwards. Hours to recover. Headache. Shutdown.
3. Write what you gain. A job, safety, belonging.
4. Pick one place where you could mask a little less, and test it.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The conference: two days attending, five days unable to work. The real cost is seven days, not two. Next year you go for one day, and you say so when you accept.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Counting only the hours in the room. The recovery days are part of the price and belong in the total.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

This is not about stopping masking. Sometimes it protects you. It is about choosing where to spend the energy.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Camouflaging is effortful and its cost is deferred, which makes it almost invisible in the moment of agreeing to something. Cage and Troxell-Whitman found higher anxiety and depression associated with higher camouflaging, and counting the recovery days is how the cost becomes something you can weigh in advance.

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4.12 Social Ladder

PLANNING, 15 MINUTES · PAPER, AND THE 0 TO 10 SCALE

A ladder of social steps, from easy to hard. It is the social version of the trigger ladder.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When social contact has narrowed and you want it back without a collapse.

HOW TO DO IT

1. List ten social situations that feel hard. A text. A call. A small group. A party.
2. Rate each, from 0 to 10.
3. Order them.
4. Start with a rung at a 3 or 4. Plan an exit and a recovery block.
5. Repeat before you move up.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Rungs from "reply to one message" through "coffee with one person for forty minutes with a stated end time" up to "a group of six". Each rung twice before moving up.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Jumping to the group event because it is the one being asked of you. The ladder is yours, not the invitation list.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Choose what matters to you. If a party is not a goal of yours, leave it off the ladder.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Social load is cumulative rather than per-event, and recovery from it runs long. A graded return with stated end times keeps the cost of each rung predictable, which is what makes the next one possible instead of producing another withdrawal.

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4.13 Fawn Check

5 MINUTES · HONESTY ABOUT THE MOMENT YOU SAID YES

A check for people pleasing under pressure. Pete Walker described the fawn response, where you manage a threat by giving in.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After you have agreed to something and felt immediately wrong about it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Notice the moment. Did I say yes while my body said no? Second, rate your body signal, from 0 to 10.
2. Ask what I would answer if I were not afraid. Write it.
3. Choose whether to say it now, later, or in writing.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You said yes to hosting. Checking: at the moment of agreeing, you felt relief as the tension in the room dropped. That is the fawn signature, and relief is not the same as wanting to.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Reading every yes as fawning. Plenty of agreement is just agreement; the marker is relief at the other person's state rather than interest in the thing.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Many people who learned to mask also learned to fawn. The first step is to notice. You do not have to change in the moment.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Appeasement is a common learned strategy after long exposure to being misread and corrected, and it runs faster than deliberation. Checking what you felt at the moment of agreeing separates a preference from a threat response, which cannot be told apart later from the decision alone.

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4.14 Ask for Feedback

2 MINUTES · A NARROW QUESTION AND A SPECIFIC PERSON

A request for specific feedback, before you guess what people think.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you are guessing at how something is being received and the guessing has gone on long enough.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose one trusted person.
2. Ask a narrow question. Was the email clear? What is one thing I could say shorter? Third, listen without defending. Write it down.
3. Thank them, and decide later what to use.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Instead of "how am I doing": "In Tuesday's meeting, did the way I pushed back come across as rude?" Narrow enough to answer, and the answer takes ten seconds.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Asking broadly. An open question invites a general assessment of you, which is both less useful and much harder to hear.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A narrow question gets a useful answer. How am I doing is too wide to answer.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Ambiguity is the expensive part, and a wide question returns more of it. A narrow question also protects against the rejection-sensitive reading, because there is far less room in the answer for something to be inferred.

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4.15 Repair Sentence

5 MINUTES · TWO SENTENCES, NO THIRD ONE

A short sentence to mend a rupture. You use it when you said something sharp, withdrew or missed something.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After you have got something wrong with another person.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Wait until your number is below six.
2. Write the sentence. I was short with you earlier. I was overloaded, and I am sorry.
3. Add what you would like to do differently.
4. Say or send it.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"I cut you off three times in that meeting. I am sorry, and I am going to write my points down instead next time." Then stop. No explanation of the executive function behind it.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Attaching the explanation. The repair and the explanation are two different conversations, and combining them turns the repair into a defence.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Repair works with a plain account and a plain plan. It does not need a long speech.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Shame tends to produce either silence or an over-long apology that asks the other person to do the reassuring. Two sentences — what happened and what changes — is short enough to say under shame and complete enough to count as a repair.

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UNIT 5 OF 5

Executive Function

15 tools for starting, planning and finishing. The tab that stays open.

There is one task you have been meaning to do for nine days. It is not hard. It would take twenty minutes. Every morning you see it, and every morning something else comes first.

By day nine the task is no longer a task. It has become evidence. Of what you cannot do, of what you always do, of who you are.

It is a starting problem. This unit has 15 tools for starting, planning and finishing.

THE NETWORK UNDER IT

Executive function is the fifth SNIP domain. In my teaching map it matches the central executive network, which holds goals in mind, plans steps and switches between tasks. When that network is stretched, you know what to do and cannot begin. That map is simplified, and it cannot diagnose anyone.

A rule helps here. The tools in this unit move work out of your head and into the world. Paper, alarms, objects, people. Your working memory is the scarcest resource you have.

START WITH A RESET

A stuck brain wants a state change before a plan.

If you need fewer inputs, put your phone in another room for 20 minutes. The space you are missing may be attentional, not physical. Or close a door. Sometimes the fix is fewer inputs.

If you move to think, walk before you start. If you freeze on decisions, flip a coin and notice your reaction.

Check your number. At six or below, pick a tool.

5.1 Problem-Solving Steps

20 MINUTES · PAPER, AND A WILLINGNESS TO WRITE BAD OPTIONS DOWN

A structured method from problem solving therapy, developed by Thomas D'Zurilla and Arthur Nezu. It turns a vague problem into a plan.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On a problem you have been turning over without getting anywhere.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the problem in one sentence.
2. List every possible solution, even silly ones, for two minutes.
3. Give each a rating for how well it would work and how doable it is.
4. Pick one.
5. Write the steps.
6. Try it and review the result in a week.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Problem: the mornings are a disaster. Six options written, including two obviously stupid ones. The one you pick — clothes and bag done the night before — was not in your head before the list, because it only appeared after the stupid ones.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Evaluating each option as you write it. Generating and judging at the same time stops the generating at about option two.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Brainstorming without judging matters. The silly options sometimes lead to the real one.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Holding several candidate solutions in mind and comparing them is a working-memory task, and working memory is the resource under pressure. On paper the comparison becomes visual rather than held, which is why options appear that genuinely were not available in your head.

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5.2 The One Percent Goal

VARIES, BUT SMALL · A DEFINITION OF ONE PERCENT

A goal that is one percent of the big one. It is my own version of an old principle, which is that a step small enough to do is better than a big step you avoid.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On anything that has defeated you repeatedly at full size.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the big goal.
2. Ask what one percent of that would be. Write a step so small it feels almost silly.
3. Schedule it.
4. Do it.
5. Do the same tomorrow.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The book you have not started for two years. One percent is one paragraph. You write one paragraph on eleven days out of fourteen, and there is now a chapter that did not exist.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Redefining one percent upward once it starts working. That is the move that ends the streak.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If the step feels too small, it is the right size. The goal is to make the start easy.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

The fast track to a result is appealing and, for a brain that runs on interest and novelty, unsustainable past the point where the novelty goes. A step small enough to survive a depleted day is the only step that accumulates, and accumulation is the thing that has been missing.

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5.3 If-Then Plan

5 MINUTES · ONE SENTENCE IN THE FORM IF X THEN Y

A plan that links a cue to an action. Peter Gollwitzer called these implementation intentions. They help people start the thing they intend to do.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On a recurring failure point you can describe precisely.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose the action.
2. Choose a cue that you will certainly meet. After I pour my coffee. When I sit at my desk.
3. Write the sentence. If it is eight o'clock, then I open the file.
4. Say it out loud and put it where you will see it.

WORKED THROUGH

> *If I open my laptop before eight, then I write for twenty minutes before email. Written on a card on the laptop. The decision is made once instead of every morning.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Writing a goal rather than a trigger. "Write more" is not an if-then; "if the kettle goes on, then I open the file" is.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

The cue does the remembering for you. Pick a cue in the world, not in your head.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Implementation intentions have a solid evidence base, and they work here for a specific reason: they move the decision out of the moment. A decision made in advance does not need initiation or deliberation at the point of action, which is exactly where both tend to fail.

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5.4 Start Ritual

3 TO 5 MINUTES · THE SAME SEQUENCE EVERY TIME

A short, fixed routine that tells your brain it is time to begin.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On work you keep failing to begin, as opposed to work you fail to finish.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose three steps. Clear the desk. Put on a certain song. Open the document.
2. Do them in the same order every time.
3. Keep the ritual under two minutes.
4. When the ritual ends, set a timer for ten minutes and work.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Same three things, in order: fill the water glass, put the one playlist on, open the file and read the last paragraph you wrote. After two weeks the sequence starts the work rather than preceding it.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Changing the ritual to keep it interesting. The sameness is the mechanism, and novelty here defeats the purpose.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A ritual lowers the cost of starting. After a few weeks the first step triggers the rest.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Initiation is a separate friction from motivation and does not respond to wanting the outcome. A fixed sequence becomes a cue over time, so the start stops requiring a decision — which is the part that was expensive, not the work.

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5.5 Break It Down

10 MINUTES · PAPER

Cutting a large task into small, concrete steps. Each step has to be visible and doable in one sitting.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When a task is so large that no first step is visible.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the task at the top.
2. Write the steps as actions that begin with a verb. Draft the outline. Find the invoice. Email Sam.
3. Estimate a time for each, using your multiplier from Unit 2.
4. Mark the first step in bold.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"Sort the finances" becomes eleven items. Item one is "find the login". That is doable now, and the other ten stop being a single wall.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Breaking it into items that are still projects. If you cannot picture yourself doing it in one sitting, break it again.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If a step contains the word and, split it. If a step takes more than an hour, split it again.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

A large undefined task reads as one undifferentiated demand, which for many neurodivergent people produces freeze rather than planning. Decomposition on paper gets the sequencing out of working memory, and the first visible item is usually enough to break the freeze.

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5.6 Priority Test

10 MINUTES · YOUR LIST, AND ONE QUESTION

A short test to separate what matters today from what only feels urgent.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When everything is urgent and the list has stopped meaning anything.

HOW TO DO IT

1. List everything on your mind.
2. For each item ask two questions. What happens if this waits a week? Who is waiting on it? Third, mark items as today, this week or later.
3. Pick the top one for today. If you can do two, choose the second.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Nine items, all flagged important. The question: what actually happens if this is not done this week? Six of nine, nothing happens. Two are genuinely time-bound. One has already passed and nobody noticed.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Prioritising by how loud an item feels. Loudness tracks anxiety rather than consequence.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Urgency and importance feel the same from the inside. The test pulls them apart. If you cannot tell, ask someone you trust.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Salience running hot flattens the difference between urgent and important, so everything arrives marked critical. An external criterion — what happens if this waits — replaces an internal sort that is currently not discriminating.

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5.7 Obstacle Forecast

10 MINUTES · THE PLAN, AND SOME PESSIMISM

A look ahead at what will probably get in your way, with a plan. Gabriele Oettingen's research on mental contrasting is behind the idea.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

After the plan is made and before you need it to work.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Picture the goal and write what you want.
2. Ask what is most likely to stop you. Be honest. Tiredness. A phone call. Perfection.
3. Write an if then plan for the top obstacle. If I get tired at three, then I take a ten minute walk and finish at four.
4. Review it the day before.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Plan: gym three mornings a week. Forecast: the first cold morning, a bad night, and the week the kids are off. Each one gets a response written now, including "that week it is two mornings".*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Forecasting only dramatic obstacles. The ones that end plans are small, boring and recurring.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Naming obstacles feels like pessimism, but it is planning. You are building a bridge before the gap.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Plans here fail far more often at an unhandled ordinary obstacle than at a dramatic one, and the failure then gets filed as poor follow-through. Naming the obstacles in advance turns the first bad morning into an expected event with a response rather than evidence that it is over.

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5.8 Perfection Experiment

THE LENGTH OF THE TASK · A DELIBERATELY LOWER STANDARD

A behavioral experiment on perfectionism. You do one thing at a lower standard, and watch the consequences.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On something you have been polishing well past the point of return.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose a small task. An email, a slide, a meal.
2. Write your prediction. If I do this at 70 percent, something bad will happen. Rate your belief, from 0 to 100.
3. Do it at 70 percent.
4. Afterwards, write what actually happened.

WORKED THROUGH

> *You send the email after one read instead of six. You note what happens. Nothing happens. You run it four more times before you believe it, which is fine, because that is what an experiment is for.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Running it once and discounting the result. One trial does not shift a belief this old.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Many neurodivergent adults learned that mistakes cost a lot. The experiment collects fresh evidence under today's conditions.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Perfectionism here is often learned, not temperamental: when your work has been scrutinised more than other people's, over-checking was a reasonable adaptation. Testing it as a prediction rather than arguing with it respects that it was once accurate, and finds out whether it still is.

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5.9 Decision Deadline

SETTING IT, 1 MINUTE · A DATE, AND SOMEONE TOLD

A set time by which you decide, with a rule for what happens if you cannot.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

On a decision that has been open longer than it deserves.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write the decision.
2. Choose how much information you need and where to get it.
3. Set a date and a time.
4. If you still cannot decide at the deadline, use the rule. Flip a coin. Ask one person. Pick the option that is easier to reverse.

WORKED THROUGH

> *"I decide about the course by Friday at noon." Told to one person. On Friday at noon you decide, and the decision is better than four more weeks of circling would have produced.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Setting a deadline you can move silently. Telling someone is what makes it real.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

An open decision keeps taking energy. A deadline lets you close the tab.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Without an external endpoint, deliberation expands to fill whatever time exists, and for a brain that generates options readily that is unlimited. A stated deadline supplies the stopping condition the process does not contain, and borrowed accountability supplies the urgency that arrives too late on its own.

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5.10 Weekly Review

20 MINUTES · CALENDAR, LIST, AND THE LOG IF YOU KEEP ONE

A fixed time each week to look back and plan ahead. It keeps small problems from growing.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Same time each week, whether or not the week went well.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose a time and a place. Thirty minutes on Friday afternoon is fine.
2. Look at the week. What was done? What slipped? Third, move unfinished items to a new date or delete them.
3. Write three priorities for next week.
4. Put them in your calendar.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Friday at four. What got done, what moved, what is dead, what is next week. Twenty minutes, and Monday starts from a page instead of from a standing start.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Skipping it on bad weeks. The bad weeks are the ones carrying the information.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

The review is a routine. You do not have to feel like doing it. Use a template and the same order each time.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Prospective memory and week-to-week continuity are frequent frictions, and without a fixed review the thread is genuinely lost rather than neglected. A standing slot means continuity does not depend on remembering to maintain it.

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5.11 Relapse Plan

15 MINUTES · PAPER, AND YOUR OWN EARLY WARNING SIGNS

A plan for the days when your systems fall apart. Relapse prevention is a standard part of CBT. A slip is expected. A plan keeps it small.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

While things are going well, which is the only time you can write it.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write your early warning signs. Skipped meals. Late nights. Mail piling up.
2. Write your minimum list. Three things that keep life going on a bad day. Eat, take medication if you use it, answer one urgent message.
3. Name one person to tell.
4. Set a date to restart, such as Monday.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Written in May: the first signs are cancelling things and the kitchen. The plan is two named resets, one person to tell, and two commitments that come off immediately. In October you read it and do it without having to think.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Writing it during a slump. What you produce then is a description of the slump, not a plan for it.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

A bad week is information about conditions. It does not cancel what you built.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Depletion removes exactly the capacities a plan would need: sequencing, decision-making and self-assessment. A plan written while regulated is a message to a version of you who cannot write it, and that asymmetry is the whole reason the timing matters.

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5.12 Offload Memory

ONGOING · PAPER, ALARMS, OBJECTS, OTHER PEOPLE

Moving what you need to remember out of your head. Researchers call this cognitive offloading.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Continuously, and particularly for anything you are trying to remember.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose one place for tasks and one for dates. A notebook, a phone app, a whiteboard.
2. Write things down the moment they come.
3. Put objects where you need them. Keys by the door. Medication by the kettle.
4. Review the places once a day.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Keys on a hook by the door. The appointment as an alarm with the address in it. The thing to tell your partner written on the fridge rather than held until you see them.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Trusting yourself to remember just this once. That is the exception that reestablishes the rule.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

One place is the key. Five apps make a new problem.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Working memory is the scarcest resource in this domain, and every item held in it is capacity not available for anything else. Moving items into the world is not a workaround for a weakness, it is the correct use of a limited resource — and it frees the capacity for the part that actually needs thinking.

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5.13 Win Log

2 MINUTES · A SINGLE RUNNING LIST

A record of what you did. Brains that are tired or critical remember the misses and forget the rest.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Daily, and especially on the days when it feels pointless.

HOW TO DO IT

1. At the end of the day, write three things that you did. Small counts.
2. Mark one you are glad about.
3. Once a week, read the log.
4. When you doubt yourself, read the last month.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Three lines a day. Read back after a month during a bad week, it is the only available counter-evidence to "I have done nothing since September", and it is specific enough to be believed.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Only logging things that look impressive. Sent the email, made the appointment and recovered properly all belong on it.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

The log is data. It is not praise. It shows what your days actually hold.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Negative events are recalled more readily than neutral ones, and rejection sensitivity sharpens that further, so the internal record runs consistently worse than the actual week. A written log is the only version that does not get edited by state.

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5.14 Plan an Experiment

5 MINUTES TO DESIGN · A TRIAL PERIOD, AND A REVIEW DATE

A way to try a change as a test, not as a vow. Experiments are easier to start and easier to drop.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

Any time you are about to commit to a new system or routine.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Write what you want to try.
2. Set a length. One week.
3. Write what you will measure.
4. Write your prediction.
5. Do it, and review at the end of the week. Keep it, change it or drop it.

WORKED THROUGH

> *Not "I am now someone who meal preps", but "I am trying meal prepping for two weeks, and on the fourteenth I decide". The review date means abandoning it is a result rather than a failure.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Running it without a review date. An experiment with no endpoint is just a new obligation.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

Calling it an experiment lowers the pressure. If it fails, you learned something.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

Framing a change as permanent makes stopping it a personal failure, and that framing is particularly costly for people who already have a long list of things they could not sustain. A trial with a decision point makes "this did not fit" an ordinary outcome, which is what keeps the next experiment available.

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5.15 Habit Anchor

5 MINUTES TO SET UP · AN EXISTING HABIT THAT NEVER FAILS

Attaching a new habit to one you already have. A habit that rides on an existing one needs less effort to remember.

WHEN YOU REACH FOR IT

When you want a new habit and the reminders are not holding.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Choose an anchor that happens every day. Brushing teeth. Making coffee.
2. Choose a tiny new action. One minute.
3. Write it. After I brush my teeth, I take my pills.
4. Do it for two weeks. Research by Phillippa Lally and colleagues found that forming a habit took a median of about two months, with big differences between people.

WORKED THROUGH

> *The tablets go next to the coffee machine. You make coffee every morning without exception, so the tablets are now taken every morning. No alarm, no decision, no willpower.*

THE MISTAKE PEOPLE MAKE

Anchoring to something you do most days. It has to be something you do every day without thinking, or the anchor is as unreliable as the habit.

FOR YOUR BRAIN

If you miss a day, restart the next one. One miss does not reset the clock.

WHY THIS WORKS FOR A NEURODIVERGENT BRAIN

A new habit normally depends on prospective memory and initiation, and both are stretched here. Riding an existing automatic sequence borrows a cue that already works, which is why this succeeds where reminders and intention have already been tried and failed.

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THE PART PEOPLE SKIP

What this is not

This is not therapy. It is not treatment, and it does not diagnose anything. These are structured tools that coaches, educators, leaders, parents and neurodivergent people can use. A therapist does something different. A therapist builds a full picture of one person and treats a condition. A tool does neither.

Know where the line sits. Some things need more than a tool. Low mood on most days for two weeks or more. Panic attacks. Memories of a trauma that keep forcing their way in. Eating that has become a struggle. Alcohol or drugs that have taken over. Any thought of ending your life or hurting yourself.

When you meet one of these, in a client or in yourself, stop using the tools as the main support. Say it plainly. This is beyond what coaching tools can carry, and I want you to have more support than I can give. Then help them find a qualified professional.

IF SOMEONE IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

Call or text **988** in the United States, or call your local emergency number.

WHERE THE TOOLS COME FROM

Some tools do not come from classic CBT. A few come from acceptance and commitment therapy, compassion focused therapy or dialectical behavior therapy. When that happens I say so. The title of the module says CBT informed because it is honest about that.

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What this leans on

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