

ADHD CHILDHOOD STRUGGLES CHECKLIST

Sometimes what looked like a behavior problem was a brain-based challenge. ♥

Check the experiences you remember from your childhood or notice in a child today. This is an educational tool, not a diagnostic assessment. Many of these challenges can occur in ADHD and can impact self-esteem, learning, relationships, and daily life.

1 ATTENTION & FOCUS

- ☐ Daydreaming or staring out the window
- ☐ Difficulty paying attention in class
- ☐ Missing instructions, even when listening
- ☐ Making careless mistakes on schoolwork
- ☐ Starting assignments but struggling to finish
- ☐ Easily distracted by noise or movement

Brain regions: Prefrontal cortex + frontoparietal networks

2 EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

- ☐ Forgetting homework or school supplies
- ☐ Losing jackets, shoes, or belongings
- ☐ Difficulty organizing a backpack or room
- ☐ Not knowing where to start on a task
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed by assignments
- ☐ Knowing what to do but having difficulty doing it

Brain regions: Prefrontal cortex + executive networks

3 IMPULSIVITY & SELF-CONTROL

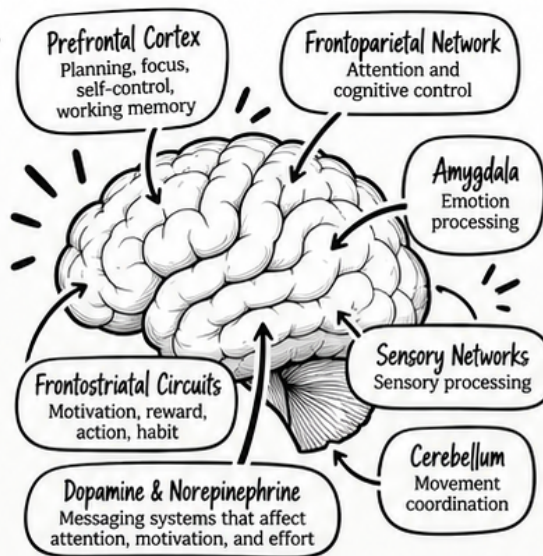
- ☐ Blurting out answers in class
- ☐ Interrupting conversations
- ☐ Difficulty waiting for a turn
- ☐ Acting before thinking through consequences
- ☐ Grabbing things without asking
- ☐ Getting in trouble for reacting too quickly

Brain regions: Prefrontal cortex + frontostriatal circuits

4 HYPERACTIVITY & RESTLESSNESS

- ☐ Constantly moving, wiggling, or fidgeting
- ☐ Difficulty sitting still
- ☐ Talking excessively
- ☐ Climbing, running, or moving when expected to be still
- ☐ Feeling uncomfortable during quiet activities
- ☐ Being told to calm down or slow down

Brain regions: Prefrontal cortex + motor networks



5 EMOTIONAL REGULATION ♥

- ☐ Crying easily when frustrated
- ☐ Intense reactions to small problems
- ☐ Going from happy to upset quickly
- ☐ Difficulty calming down after becoming upset
- ☐ Feeling emotions more intensely than peers
- ☐ Meltdowns after holding it together at school

Brain regions: Prefrontal cortex + amygdala + emotion networks

6 WORKING MEMORY

- ☐ Forgetting what was just said
- ☐ Forgetting steps in a direction
- ☐ Walking into a room and forgetting why
- ☐ Losing track of thoughts while speaking
- ☐ Needing instructions repeated
- ☐ Forgetting information one day but struggling to retrieve it later

Brain regions: Prefrontal cortex + working-memory networks

7 MOTIVATION & TASK INITIATION

- ☐ Putting off homework until the last minute
- ☐ Struggling to start tasks that seem boring
- ☐ Needing frequent encouragement
- ☐ Able to focus for hours on a favorite activity but struggling with schoolwork
- ☐ Avoiding tasks that require sustained effort
- ☐ Completing work only when a deadline is near

Brain regions: Frontostriatal reward circuits (including dopamine) + prefrontal cortex

8 SENSORY PROCESSING

- ☐ Easily distracted by background noise
- ☐ Overwhelmed in crowded or noisy places
- ☐ Irritated by clothing tags or certain textures
- ☐ Struggling to concentrate with multiple people talking
- ☐ Bothered by bright lights or strong smells
- ☐ Needing quiet time after a busy day

Brain regions: Thalamic sensory pathways + sensory networks

9 SOCIAL STRUGGLES

- ☐ Interrupting friends without meaning to
- ☐ Talking excessively about favorite interests
- ☐ Missing social cues when excited or distracted
- ☐ Becoming impatient during games
- ☐ Feeling misunderstood by peers
- ☐ Friendships affected by impulsive reactions

Brain regions: Prefrontal networks + social cognition networks

10 SELF-ESTEEM & THE INNER CRITIC

- ☐ Frequently hearing you were lazy or not trying
- ☐ Feeling like you were always in trouble
- ☐ Comparing yourself to other children
- ☐ Believing you were not as smart as others
- ☐ Feeling embarrassed when corrected
- ☐ Working harder to hide your struggles
- ☐ Feeling like you disappointed your parents

Brain regions: Emotion-regulation + self-referential networks

💡 WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

ADHD involves differences in how multiple brain networks work together, including attention, executive functioning, impulse control, emotion regulation, reward/motivation, and sensory processing. These challenges are real, valid, and not character flaws. ♥

A different brain, not a broken one. ♥

Understanding changes everything. ♥



This checklist is for educational purposes only and is not a diagnostic tool. A professional assessment considers symptom history, developmental appropriateness, impairment across settings, and other possible explanations.

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