

# Seeing AD

## Permission



# HD in Full

## as a Foundation of ADHD Care

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**O**ne foundational step in managing ADHD is giving yourself permission to do what needs to be done about it. At first, this may feel counterintuitive—after all, no one asked for ADHD, and no one sought your consent to have it. But in this context, permission means something deeper: recognition, self-compassion, and insight.

The struggle with permission is especially evident in teenagers with ADHD, but applies at any age. Teens often reject the very support that could help them—refusing medication, coaching, or accommodations for fear of standing out. Adults, too, may resist helpful strategies due to internalized stigma, self-doubt, or the lingering belief that they *can* or *should* just do it on their own.

Permission means acknowledging ADHD while letting go of self-judgment regarding both the diagnosis and the interventions needed to manage it. Motivation, emotions, and beliefs profoundly shape behavior. Decision-making around ADHD is often clouded by internalized judgment or giving up too soon when strategies don't work right away.

Granting yourself permission—or withholding it—creates a logical chain of cause and effect. Denial and avoidance limit possibilities, keeping ADHD's challenges unmanageable. But recognizing ADHD for what it truly is, with self-compassion, staying proactive, and caring for yourself allows for precision in planning and problem solving.

By giving yourself permission to manage ADHD—such as acknowledging feelings of shame or resistance—you transform intention into action, and action into progress.

### Permission to acknowledge the fullness of ADHD

Managing ADHD effectively requires meeting ADHD exactly as it is. Below are common ways people avoid addressing their ADHD and how permission can open the door to change.

#### 1. Permission to have ADHD

*Josue, a devoted father, often jokes in session about feeling like home is total chaos. Between work, household responsibilities, and caring for his children, he constantly feels like he's falling behind or not doing a good enough job. Yet, despite these struggles, he dismisses the idea that an ADHD diagnosis would make any real difference in his life. As he says, "I've managed this long—what's a label going to do?"*

Many people dismiss their struggles with ADHD, believing the thought that they *should* be able to manage without help—or worse, something is inherently wrong with them. Some avoid diagnosis out of fear, skepticism, or the mistaken belief that ADHD isn't a *real* medical condition. But ADHD is a real and chronic condition that impacts every aspect of life—from academics and career to relationships, to physical health and overall well-being.

If someone had asthma or diabetes, no one would suggest they *try harder*. They'd encourage seeking appropriate treatment. As a medical disorder, ADHD is no different. Giving yourself permission to acknowledge ADHD means setting aside self-judgment and exploring evidence-based solutions without bias.

Managing ADHD isn't about blame; it's about care. Just as other medical conditions require a combination of pharmacology, behavioral, emotional, and lifestyle interventions, ADHD thrives on a multifaceted approach. The first step is seeing ADHD for what it is—not a personal failing, but a condition that requires intentional management.

ADHD potentially affects every aspect of life—mentally, physically, and situationally. The real power any of us has lies in how we choose to relate to our reality. Permission to acknowledge ADHD isn't surrender—it's the beginning of real, meaningful change.

**Patience and clarity  
allow for navigating difficult situations  
with precision and skill.**

## 2. Permission to experience emotions

*Monique, a high-achieving university professor and mother of three in a blended family, struggles with ADHD. She reports she's always busy and when stress builds up, she snaps at her kids—something she feels embarrassed about. She constantly criticizes herself for losing patience, replaying these moments in her mind long after they've passed. As a result, she feels caught in a cycle of guilt and exhaustion.*

Emotions shape how we think, feel, and behave—even when we're not fully aware of them. For individuals with ADHD, emotions can be especially difficult to notice and manage. Impulsivity and executive function challenges make it more difficult to regulate feelings, leading to heightened reactivity, anxiety, and overwhelm. When emotions become too intense or unpredictable, navigating daily life becomes significantly more challenging.

It's understandable that you feel embarrassment or shame when ADHD-related challenges lead to mistakes, forgotten commitments, or a sense of misalignment with your core values. Comparing yourself to others who seem to navigate life effortlessly can exacerbate those feelings as well. Societal misconceptions about ADHD—questioning its legitimacy or minimizing proven treatments—only reinforce self-doubt, making it even harder to trust yourself and honor your needs.

In response, some internalize blame, believing they're lazy, irresponsible, or lacking self-discipline. Others direct their frustration outward, attributing their struggles to work demands, technology, or unsupportive bosses or spouses. While both reactions are common, they create further emotional turbulence that

significantly impacts thoughts and actions. Without emotional awareness, these patterns can take over, hindering problem-solving and stalling change.

Emotions are not obstacles to be suppressed or ignored—they are signals to be understood. Granting yourself permission to experience emotions without judgment fosters greater emotional self-regulation. When you acknowledge your feelings instead of pushing them away or ignoring them, you create space to respond with clarity and insight to your moment-to-moment experiences.

This shift is life-changing. Emotional awareness empowers you to make better decisions, communicate more effectively, and stay aligned with your intentions and goals. When you meet emotions with acceptance and care, they become guides rather than obstacles—something you can work with instead of something working against you.

**Recognizing emotions cultivates self-regulation.**

**Self-regulation creates a space. Space lets us connect with our best intentions.**

## 3. Permission to need help with your ADHD

*Maya, a college student, wants to improve her test scores and writing assignments. However, by the end of the day, she feels exhausted and lacks the motivation to study or work on long-term projects until the last minute. Despite this, she doesn't consider taking an afternoon dose of medication or using it at all on weekends. Maya reports feeling both lazy and guilty for spending the evening or weekends gaming but believes she should simply push herself to work harder.*

One of the biggest barriers to ADHD care is the internal voice of *should*. *I shouldn't need so much structure. I should be able to handle things on my own. I shouldn't need reminders, alarms, or to-do lists.* These beliefs create resistance to the very strategies that could make life easier. Proven interventions—whether medication, coaching, or external supports—can feel *too* simple to work or not how life *should* be for you. But granting yourself permission to use what genuinely helps, even if it feels uncomfortable at first, is essential to managing ADHD effectively.

For many, even recognizing ADHD-related challenges can feel frustrating and discouraging. Impulsivity, procrastination, and avoidance often amplify that resistance. And yet, struggles with prioritization, time management, and routines aren't personal shortcomings—they're symptoms of ADHD that require intentional support. Granting yourself permission to manage ADHD gives you the freedom to recognize its impact without minimizing or ignoring it.





Asking for help can feel like an admission of inadequacy rather than a necessary step toward growth. Yet, skill development in any area—whether learning a language, playing an instrument, or excelling in a sport—relies on knowledgeable guidance. Managing ADHD is no different. Support from coaching, therapy, peer accountability, or connecting with others who share similar experiences fosters self-awareness and provides practical strategies and accommodations for navigating challenges.

Recognizing ADHD's impact without judgment allows you to fully embrace the strategies that support your growth. Managing ADHD isn't about meeting unrealistic expectations—it's about discovering what truly works for you and allowing yourself to use it without hesitation.

**Awareness without self-judgment facilitates learning and connection. Connection supports growth and resilience.**

#### 4. Permission to be inconsistent

*Alex, a talented graphic designer, is passionate about creativity but struggles to stick with projects once the initial excitement fades. He jumps between hobbies only to abandon them when the novelty wears off. While he worries that this pattern makes him flaky and unreliable but has tried productivity apps and says they just don't work for him.*

Unrealistic expectations in the face of uneven progress often leads to frustration and burnout—eventually causing people to give up. Inconsistency doesn't have to be a sign of failure; in fact, it's a natural part of skill-building and growth.

Think of how you'd encourage a child learning something new. You'd likely offer universal advice: *Ask for help when you need it. Don't expect to excel right away. Focus on effort, not perfection.* As with learning an instrument or sport, the same principles apply to ADHD. Long-term progress comes from small, sustainable steps—not instant mastery.

When ADHD-related strategies don't work every time, it's easy to feel like you're doing something *wrong*, or that the plan itself isn't *right*. In reality, inconsistency is an expected part of the process. A strategy that works *some* of the time often just needs adjustment and practice to become more reliable. Managing ADHD requires daily flexibility—experimenting, evaluating, problem-solving, and refining – because that's what works.

In the meantime, give yourself credit for incremental progress. It's easy to focus on what hasn't been done rather than what has. A simple practice: after completing any task, take a moment to acknowledge your effort and accomplishment before moving on to the next task on your calendar. Honoring your strengths and achievements reinforces a positive self-image and cultivates persistence.

Permission to try, fail, and keep going is key to long-term success. Progress isn't linear and letting go of rigid expectations allows for the adaptability ADHD demands. Progress with ADHD isn't about perfection—it's about learning, adapting, and finding what works for you. Strategies won't always work the same way every time, and that's okay. Growth happens through experimentation, small wins, and the cognitive flexibility to keep going.

**Letting go of perfection creates space to experiment, supporting problem-solving and persistence.**



## 5. Permission to be kind to yourself

*Ann, a business executive, notices she is significantly more focused when working from home than in the office. The open workspace environment is filled with constant noise—chatter, ringing phones, and background movement—that make it difficult for her to concentrate. She knows that wearing noise-canceling headphones would help, but she feels too self-conscious to use them in front of her colleagues. As a result, she struggles to complete deep-focus tasks and often feels drained by the end of the day.*

Most of us are familiar with the inner critic, a habitual mental commentary that fuels self-doubt, leading to frustration, discouragement, and giving up too soon. We talk to ourselves far differently than we would anyone else we care about. For those with ADHD—who often face daily struggles—that kind of self-criticism can be especially intense. The alternative of staying kind to ourselves may feel unnatural, yet research shows it increases happiness, persistence, and problem-solving ability.

Many believe their inner critic keeps them motivated, but the opposite proves to be true. Self-judgment drains energy, while learning to treat ourselves more as we'd treat a loved one fosters resilience and efficiency. Fostering self-compassion also decreases a sense of defensiveness, changing how we communicate and navigate interpersonal challenges—even in situations which relate to ADHD, like forgetfulness or running late. Granting yourself permission to be kind in this way is another foundational skill for managing ADHD effectively.

Since ADHD inherently creates challenges, negative self-talk can become a default pattern. Thoughts like *You always mess up* or *You're not capable of change* feel true in the moment but only reinforce the struggle. Thankfully, we don't have to believe everything we think. Research provides an alternative based on fact: mindfulness-based practices of self-compassion enhance emotional regulation, reduce stress and anxiety, and promote motivation and productivity.

### Practicing self-compassion

Self-compassion isn't about forcing positivity—it's about shifting your inner dialogue toward kindness, realistic encouragement and engagement. Here's a practice to try:

#### Cultivate awareness.

Focus your attention on the body's natural movement with each breath. Guide yourself with the silent reminder, *Breathing in, I am aware I'm breathing in. Breathing out, I am aware I'm breathing out.* When your mind wanders to a thought, image or memory, gently return to your breath, without any need for frustration or criticism. This simple practice is an act of kindness—allowing yourself to experience whatever is happening, without resistance.

#### Acknowledge connection and common humanity.

After a few minutes, add a reminder for yourself with each out-breath, *Everyone experiences moments like this.* ADHD may bring unique struggles, but difficulty is part of our shared human experience.

#### Set an intention for self-kindness.

After a few minutes, with each breath silently repeat a phrase that resonates for you right now, as you'd wish for a loved one: *May I meet this moment as a friend. May I be strong and kind with myself.*

There's no need to force anything—simply practice and notice what unfolds. Over time, self-compassion rewires the brain, replacing harsh self-judgment with a more motivationally supportive inner voice.

**Treating ourselves with kindness improves well-being while increasing persistence and problem-solving ability.**

#### Discovering and allowing

There are no *shoulds* in ADHD care—only the process of discovering what truly works for *you* and *allowing for those supports*. When you allow yourself to see clearly, free from shame or comparison, you can connect with your innate strengths, resilience, and wisdom and manage ADHD more skillfully. **A**



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