

ADHD-Friendly Focus Toolkit

A practical, evidence-informed toolkit for starting tasks, sustaining attention, and managing distraction when standard productivity advice doesn't stick. Built around external structure rather than willpower.

1. Task Initiation

- ☐ **Use the two-minute rule to start**
If a task feels large, commit to just two minutes of it. Starting — not motivation — is usually the actual barrier; momentum tends to follow once begun.
- ☐ **Body double for hard-to-start tasks**
Working alongside another person (in person, on a call, or via a virtual coworking room) reliably increases task initiation for ADHD brains, even with no direct help given.
- ☐ **Externalize the first step**
Write the literal next physical action ('open laptop, open doc') rather than the goal. Vague goals ('write report') don't trigger action the way concrete first steps do.
- ☐ **Pair boring tasks with stimulation**
Music, standing, or fidgeting during low-interest tasks can raise arousal enough to make starting easier — this is a legitimate self-regulation strategy, not a distraction.

2. Sustaining Attention

- ☐ **Use short work intervals with real breaks**
10–20 minute focus blocks with a full break (not screen-switching) between them tend to outperform standard 25-minute Pomodoro blocks for ADHD attention spans.
- ☐ **Keep a 'distraction pad' next to you**
When an unrelated thought or task pops up, write it down instead of acting on it immediately. This offloads the urge to switch tasks without losing the idea.
- ☐ **Set a visible, physical timer**
A countdown you can see (not just a phone alarm) creates external time pressure that supports task persistence when internal time-sense is unreliable.
- ☐ **Single-tab, single-window work**
Close everything except what's needed for the current task. Visual field competition for attention is a bigger cost for ADHD attention systems than for neurotypical ones.

3. Managing Distraction

- ☐ **Put friction between you and your biggest trigger**
Log out of the specific app or site that pulls you away most, rather than relying on willpower alone. Removing a step at the moment of temptation measurably reduces switching.
- ☐ **Batch notifications instead of banning them**
Total notification blackout often backfires by creating anxiety about what's being missed. Scheduled check-in windows (e.g., every 90 minutes) tend to hold up better long-term.
- ☐ **Plan for the attention dip, don't fight it**
Attention naturally cycles. When focus drops, switch to a lower-stakes task on your list rather than forcing the original one — then return to it.
- ☐ **Use 'if-then' plans for known triggers**
Implementation intentions ('if I open my phone during work, then I put it in another room') convert vague intentions into automatic responses, and are well-supported in the self-regulation literature.

4. Structure That Doesn't Rely on Memory

- ☐ **Externalize the whole day, not just tasks**
A visible timeline (paper or digital) that includes transitions and breaks — not just a task list — reduces the executive-function load of deciding what's next.
- ☐ **Build in a weekly reset**
A short, recurring review of what worked and what didn't catches drift early. ADHD systems tend to decay gradually, not all at once, and a weekly check catches that before it compounds.
- ☐ **Lower the cost of restarting after a lapse**
Missing a day or a system isn't a sign to abandon it. Treat restarting as the actual skill being practiced, since perfect consistency isn't the realistic baseline for anyone.

This guide is educational and not a substitute for a clinical ADHD diagnosis or treatment plan. If focus difficulty is significantly disrupting daily functioning, a licensed clinician can help determine whether behavioral strategies, therapy, or medication are appropriate.