



ADHD, Connection, and Boundaries

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR THE NON-ADHD PARTNER

ADHD may help explain forgetfulness, procrastination, distractibility, and sensitivity to criticism. It does not erase the impact on you or remove your partner's responsibility to participate in the relationship.

Separate the Explanation From the Impact

Remind yourself:

- Their difficulty following through may be related to ADHD.
- The impact on me is still real.
- I do not have to decide that they do not love me in order to acknowledge that I feel hurt.
- Understanding ADHD does not mean accepting an arrangement that is not working.

Try saying:

"When this keeps being postponed, I begin to feel unimportant. I understand that forgetting may not mean you do not care, but we still need to find a way for important things to get addressed."

Check the Trauma Alarm

Past experiences may cause a present-day delay to feel like the beginning of an old pattern.

Pause and ask:

1. What happened today?
2. What does this remind me of?
3. What am I afraid will happen next?
4. What evidence belongs to my current relationship?
5. What do I need now: reassurance, action, space, or a boundary?

Grounding statement:

"This feeling is connected to something real from my past. I can take it seriously without assuming that the past is repeating exactly."

Do Not Become the Reminder System

Repeated reminders can create a parent-child pattern:

- You track, prompt, and monitor.
- Your partner waits for another reminder.
- You become increasingly resentful.
- Your partner experiences the reminders as criticism.



Instead:

Agree on the task, the timeframe, and who is responsible for following through. You may offer one reminder if you choose, but you are not responsible for repeatedly tracking the task.

Try saying:

"I am willing to discuss the task and agree on when it needs to be done. I am not willing to keep reminding you or managing it for you."

Make the Request Concrete

Avoid broad requests such as:

- "Please handle this soon."
- "I need you to prioritize me."
- "Can you remember this time?"

Use a specific request:

- What needs to be done?
- Who owns it?
- When does it need to be completed?
- What counts as completed?
- How will the other person know it is done?

Example:

"Please make the call by Thursday afternoon, find out what needs to happen next, and let me know when it is complete."

Focus on Responsibility, Even Without a System

Your partner may not currently have a reliable calendar, reminder system, task list, or treatment plan. You cannot build or maintain that system for them.

Your role is to make the request clear. Their role is to decide how they will follow through.

Try saying:

"I understand that remembering and getting started may be difficult. I also cannot be responsible for figuring out how you will remember. What is your plan for getting this done?"

If they do not know, you may ask:

- "What is the first step?"
- "When will you start?"
- "Would doing the first step now help?"
- "How will you know it is finished?"



You may support the conversation without becoming the manager of the task.

Use a Boundary, Not a Threat

A boundary describes what **you** will do. It is not an attempt to frighten or control the other person.

Boundary formula:

"When _____ happens, it affects me by _____. I need _____. If it is not completed by _____, I will _____."

Example:

"When important shared responsibilities remain unfinished after we agree on them, I feel alone and overwhelmed. I need this addressed by Friday. If it is not completed, I will stop reminding you and make the decision I need to make about my own next step."

Choose a response that is realistic, respectful, and within your control.

Respond to Defensiveness Without Abandoning the Issue

Your partner may hear a request for change as:

- "I am failing."
- "I am not good enough."
- "You think everything is my fault."

You can acknowledge the feeling without withdrawing the request.

Try saying:

"I am not saying that you are a bad partner. I am describing one pattern that is hurting us."

"I hear that you feel criticized. I am willing to adjust how I say this, but we still need to address the issue."

"This is not a conversation about your worth. It is a conversation about what needs to happen."

Keep One Conversation About One Issue

When emotions rise, avoid combining the current problem with every previous disappointment.

Stay with:

- One behavior
- One recent example
- One emotional impact
- One concrete request
- One next step

Try saying:



"I have several feelings about this, but right now I want us to focus only on this one issue."

If the conversation becomes circular:

"We are no longer solving the problem. Let's pause and return to it at an agreed time."

Schedule Relationship Check-Ins

Do not let every unfinished task become an unexpected conflict.

Set aside a regular, limited check-in to discuss:

- Tasks that affect both partners
- What was completed
- What remains unfinished
- Obstacles
- The next specific action
- Any support being requested

The purpose is coordination, not supervision.

Helpful question:

"What do you own, what do I own, and what do we need to do together?"

Decide What Help You Will and Will Not Give

Support can be collaborative without becoming overfunctioning.

Possible support:

- Sitting together while each person completes separate tasks
- Helping clarify the first step
- Agreeing on a shared deadline
- Offering one reminder when previously agreed upon
- Completing a task together when it truly requires both people

Possible limits:

- No repeated reminders
- No taking over every delayed responsibility
- No accepting blame for another person's lack of follow-through
- No arguing for hours about whether your feelings are valid
- No making yourself responsible for whether your partner seeks treatment

Recognize Repair, Not Only Completion



After a missed commitment, repair may include:

- Acknowledging the impact without becoming defensive
- Giving a direct apology
- Completing the task
- Naming what will be done differently next time
- Following through more consistently afterward

Try saying:

"What would help me repair trust is not only hearing that you are sorry. I need to know what will be different next time."

Trust is usually rebuilt through repeated follow-through, not one urgent response after the situation reaches a breaking point.

A Short Conversation Script

"I love you, and I want us to function as partners. When something important is delayed after we have discussed it several times, I feel alone and unimportant. I understand that ADHD may make starting and remembering tasks harder, and I do not want to interpret every delay as proof that you do not care. At the same time, repeated reminders are harming our connection. I need us to agree on a specific timeframe and for you to decide how you will follow through. I can support you, but I cannot be responsible for remembering and completing your responsibilities."

Before Raising an Issue

Ask yourself:

- Am I calm enough to speak clearly?
- Am I addressing the present issue rather than trying to resolve my entire history?
- Is my request specific?
- Have I identified what I will do if the agreement is not followed?
- Am I asking for partnership rather than taking responsibility for changing my partner?

You can be compassionate about ADHD, attentive to your trauma history, and firm about the kind of partnership you need.