



How to Thrive with Adult ADD / ADHD

by

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Throughout this course material, the terms “ADD” and “ADHD” will be used interchangeably to refer to Attention Deficit Disorder.

Class 1: Keys to Successful Self-Coaching

Be “Intentional” in Setting up Successful Conditions

Coaches often use the phrase “intentional” to mean creating specific plans and conditions around performing an action. It differs from simply having “good intentions” which are vague and unlikely to be fulfilled.

Compare these two approaches:

- **Good intentions:** “I’ll work on my taxes this week.” (*Probably won’t happen!*)
- **Intentional Plan:** “I’ve set aside Saturday morning to work on my taxes. I’ve arranged to have the kids taken care of, and I’m gong to turn off the phone. On Thursday evening I’m going to go through my records and take everything I need down to my basement office, so on Saturday I’ll be ready to dive right into it. My goal is to get my expenses entered into categories on Saturday. Based on past experience, I think this will take around three hours. I plan on taking a break in the middle.”

Notice how nothing is left to chance in the Intentional Plan! If this person doesn't do her taxes on Saturday, she'll be able to identify exactly why, and can take specific steps to remedy the situation.

Taking an Intentional approach means thinking through the basics, asking yourself such questions as: **who, what, when, where, how, how long and why**. In the example above, note the underlined phrases:

When	Saturday morning
Where	In the basement office
What	The goal to finish breaking out tax categories
How	Prepare on Thursday evening by taking the materials to the office. Arrange for the kids to be out of the way on Saturday. Turn off the phone to eliminate distractions. Plan on taking a break in the middle
How Long	Estimated 3 hours for this step
Who	No one else involved in the task, but arrangements had to be made in advance for the kids

There are steps you can take to **be intentional in taking this course**. If you follow these steps you're likely to get the most benefit from it.

Preparation Steps – Start Good Habits

These steps will get you off to a solid start in the course and will benefit you in most other aspects of your life as well!

Keep a FOLDER for all printed notes relating to this course. This will contain your homework assignments, observations, and any written exercises or notes. You might prefer a 3-ring binder or a flat folder.

Determine where you are going to keep the folder, so you don't have to search for it next week.

DOWNLOAD all course materials to one file on your computer. You can store recordings, handouts, notes, and any information you've typed into the file.

Name the file with something easy to find if you're looking for this information years from now. For example, the file name "ADHD Solutions" might make more sense to you later than "Thrive with ADD"

Keep ONE CALENDAR where you can see all obligations at a glance, both personal and business. This will allow you to plan and make commitments based on the reality of time available to you. If you have to maintain an "open" calendar on your computer at work, download it to a personal one where you can also enter personal commitments.

STOP writing on SCRAPS of PAPER. Keep one or more notebooks to capture anything that you now write on miscellaneous pieces of paper. You could have a notebook for phone messages, to-do's, ideas or thoughts you need to remember. Keep this notebook in the same place on your desk for easy access.

You may want to also have a tiny notebook for carrying in your pocket or purse at all times. If so, get in the daily habit of transferring information into your main notebook.

Use a pocket-sized recorder to capture your thoughts if that is easier than writing them down.

Get a TIMER. We're going to be discussing a number of strategies that involve the use of a timer. One most useful for ADDers is the "Invisible Clock" (see it at http://www.thrivewithadd.com/products/useful_resources109). You may also be able to use your PDA as a timer if you can set it multiple times in advance.

DETERMINE YOUR STRATEGY for taking the course.

By Phone: If you're going to be taking it by phone, set up successful conditions in advance. These include how you'll start on time, what you want to have with you, how you'll eliminate distractions.

- Put every Tuesday evening's start time in your calendar for the next 10 weeks. (Remember, 10 minutes BEFORE the hour!)
- Set a timer to give you transitional warnings, telling you when the class will start in 10 minutes, 5 minutes, etc.
- Have the current call-in phone number handy. Check your email before the course to make sure the number or passcode hasn't changed.
- Have the course materials handy to refer back to.
- Take care of potential distractions in advance. Inform your family that you'll be on the phone; make sure young children will be taken care of and not interrupting. Undue "call waiting" signals if they will distract you.
- Stay offline during the call!! You won't need a computer while the class is going on. Doing email is a guarantee you'll miss much of what is said.

Virtual Self-Study: For classes that you'll be taking self-study (downloading from computer), you may do best to commit to a time and place each week to listen and read. That will make it more like committing to a real course, and more likely that you'll follow through with it.

Practice Self-Awareness

In order to change your habits, you first need to become aware of them in a new way. The most important thing to know, when you don't fulfill your intention, is:

What exactly got in your way? What derailed you?

In the beginning of coaching yourself, your focus should be on gaining new self-awareness. This often comes about through examining your FAILED attempts to fulfill an intention. You can learn more from NOT succeeding than in succeeding, if you go about it with the intention to learn something.

You'll gain this self-awareness through keeping an "Intention Log," one of the most important keys to successful habit change.

Intention Log

Intention: An action to be taken in a way that has been intentionally set up with conditions most likely for success

Intention Log: Record of particular "Intentions" that you had planned, whether or not they were completed as intended, and what kept them from happening as intended.

Purpose: To clearly see patterns that get in the way of carrying out intentions.

The most typical patterns of derailment for those with ADD come from a number of common ADD challenges. Although the triggers can appear to be very different, there is usually a pattern that you'll be able to see in how you respond.

Common Ways ADDers get thrown off track:

- forgetting
- getting distracted
- feeling overwhelmed
- feeling impatient or bored
- being paralyzed by ambiguity
- stopping because something needed is missing
- not knowing where to start

Identifying the pattern of what derails you from following through on your intention leads you to create alternative intentions or develop solutions.

There is no reason too silly or trivial to post in the Intention Log. Things that may seem like lame “excuses” to non-ADDers are actually vitally important for you to identify. Your first step towards change is to become aware of YOUR reality. And your patterns of boredom and distraction are very real for causing your intentions to get off-track.

Format doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter if your Intention Log is a chart, free-style writing, typed or hand-written. The important information to track is what gets in the way of your fulfilling your intentions. That will help suggest strategies for dealing with your roadblocks, and point to how you can create intentions in the future that are more likely to happen. The “right” format for you is the one that will make you most likely to do it on a regular basis.

Track your Intentions in the Log every day. The longer you have to think back on what happened in your day, the less likely you are to remember it accurately. So make it a habit of tracking your daily intentions every night. It could help to keep it by your bedside. Or, if your intentions are work-related, perhaps you would fill out the Intention Log before you leave work, or on the train home.

Example: See the chart below, which represents entries in an Intention Log. For each intention that was NOT completely done as intended, identify the key ADD-type challenge that can be derived from the comment on “What got in the way.”

Date	Intention	Done as Intended?			What got in the way
		Yes	No	Some-what	
5-5-08	Pick clothes and prepare briefcase for meeting tomorrow	√			
5-6-08	Enter receipts into expense database while listening to “Law & Order” on TV			√	Answered phone during “Law & Order”, didn’t start until movie was on... then paid too much attention to movie and didn’t finish.
	Pack briefcase and put by door before bed	√			

5-8-08	Make small talk with boss's assistant (to get on her good side)		√		Colleague was outside her desk so talked to him instead.
5-9-08	Sort pile of papers on desk, file / throw away			√	Started after lunch, felt overwhelmed, interrupted by phone & never got back to it

Can you identify any patterns of behavior / derailments from this log?

Comments can be open to interpretation, especially when you don't know the source. For example, on the 5-9 entry, one could interpret what got in the way of paper sorting as overwhelm, distraction, avoidance, or forgetfulness.

Intention Log Guidelines

Identify just a few specific "Intentions" per day to log. Trying to write about everything in your day can be interesting at first, but you'll probably tire of it quickly.

Clarify each Intention. Identify exactly how and under what conditions or circumstances you will perform the intention. It you keep the action vague, it won't be as likely to be completed, and won't tell you anything about your behavior patterns.

For the sake of space on your log, you may want to write down the complete explanation of the Intention in a coaching notebook or planner.

Be as specific as possible in identifying the problem. In your comments on "What got in the way" it helps to specify what ADD-type challenge you experienced.

Forgetting to get back to the paper sorting is a different challenge than avoiding getting back to the papers. A pattern of forgetting requires a different type of solution than one of avoiding or procrastinating.

Don't make an interpretation on what you *think* a psychologist or family member would say. Only report on what you know you felt or experienced.

For example, if you were reporting on the paper-sorting intention, don't assume that you deliberately avoided resuming after you were interrupted; if it never entered your mind afterwards, you simply forgot. If you're not sure what type of challenge you

experienced, simply report on the facts. You'll see a pattern over time that will help you identify what's happening to derail you.

Change Behavior with New Habits

People with ADHD / ADD have a group of traits and tendencies that lead them to behave in a certain way. That behavior leads to results which can be frustrating. Although there are some typical results that are common to many ADDers, the exact set of behaviors that lead to the results differ for each person.

Behavior encompasses both what we DO and what we DON'T DO. In some situations, when you sit and do nothing at all, others can interpret that as meaning something about you or your attitude.

Are your defaults faulty? Consider the way you act as your "default behavior," the behavior that you fall back on when you don't think about it. The term "default setting" is usually used to refer to computers that are set to automatically do a certain thing until the setting is changed. In some cases, ADDers could consider their defaults to be "faulty" – that is, their automatic behavior brings about negative results.

You can change your defaults, much like you can change the automatic rules in your computer. Since we're human, not computers, we can't switch our defaults as easily as clicking on a setting. But we can change our behavior by changing our habits.

What comes first, the behavior or the habit? Do you do what you do because it's your habit... or have you formed the habit by engaging in the behavior?

Which do you try to change first?

It usually takes a lot of deliberate repetition of a new behavior before you can create a new habit. It probably will require a lot of awareness and attention at first. That's why we use the strategy of intentionally creating rituals.

Rituals to Change Habits

Ritual: An activity that you perform in a similar way, on a regular basis. It can be done consciously in order to form a habit.

Purpose: To intentionally change your behavior in a desired direction.

Rituals should go with your flow, not be forced. Forcing yourself into new habits or obligatory activity doesn't work. Create rituals to “flow” into effective behavior changes in a pleasant way.

To set up conditions for success:

- tie your desired habitual activity to something you already do regularly
- include components that give you serenity or pleasure
- create a reminder that you'll associate with performing the ritual activity

Examples of Rituals:

- Plan your work week with your calendar every Monday morning. - Start by shutting off your phone, getting coffee, put on music and headphones, take extra paper and week-at-a-glance calendar into conference room and shut the door.
- Do expense report every Sunday night. - Prepare to do it while watching favorite TV show at 9:00. Set timer for 8:45 to remind you to gather expense receipts, form, and calculator to be ready.
- Pack briefcase or backpack to take with you the next day. Set timer for 11:00 p.m. When timer goes off, look at next day's calendar, gather appropriate material that will be needed, pack bag, put bag next to front door.
- Keep home clutter at bay. Before going to bed, sweep your eyes over the room you're leaving. Put away objects that are out.

It can take a lot of repetition before a new ritual becomes an automatic habit.

People vary in the degree of repetition they need before a ritual becomes entrenched as a habit. You may find yourself that some habits are easy to form, while others require much more conscious ritual and repetition.

Reward yourself with your ritual. We'd do well to follow the example of cats, known to be strong creatures of habit. Cats pick up a new ritual very quickly if it serves their self-interest. The ritual becomes such a strong habit that they expect to perform that ritual even when the situation doesn't require it. Make your rituals rewarding, and become "cat-like" in serving your own interests!

Expect set-backs in your new habits when you break your routine. You may be pleased to see how well a new planning habit is working out, then go on vacation and find you're back to the beginning once you return. This is to be expected! Remember, you're overcoming years of inattentive default behavior, and just a short time with a new habit. Be patient, resume the ritual and the new habit will come back quickly.

Break it Down!

People with ADD often tend to experience "**brain overwhelm**," whether they consciously realize it or not. The brain gets flooded with information, taking in the big picture, seeing many possibilities all at once.

- **For some, it feels positive...** For some, this leads to a positive feeling of excitement... but with so many ideas, you don't actually act on any of them.
- **For some, it feels overwhelming...** For others, their brain immediately goes into overwhelm and shuts down. The feeling is more like anxiety and panic, rather than elation.

Whether you tend to experience elation or overwhelm, your productivity suffers.

The desired result is action, not paralysis! So you need to start practicing a different automatic response.

Think of Steps, not the Whole Project

Rather than continuing to feel the totality of your project or idea, immediately begin breaking the big picture down into small steps of action.

Advantages of breaking the project into action steps:

- Takes you out of overwhelmed paralysis
- Starts concrete thought about what is actually required to be done
- Breaks you out of procrastination mode when you can identify an easy step to start with
- Makes it easier to plan when and how you'll get everything done, and to identify potential roadblocks
- Allows you to get make progress, filling smaller holes in your calendar with small steps that don't tax your attention span
- Gives you the opportunity for variety if you can move back and forth between this project and another, while completing a step on each

Break it down in writing. Only thinking of the different steps can be just as overwhelming as thinking of the big picture. You need to capture your thoughts in writing, so that you can refer back to the steps and create an action plan with them.

Use a mind-mapping approach. If you're familiar with mind-mapping, you know this is a way to capture thoughts intuitively, rather than trying to think through steps in order. We'll learn mind-mapping in detail later in the course. For now, just consider writing down all the steps you can think of as they come to you.

Visualize a step to find what comes first. Once you have the steps written, pick any one of them and imagine yourself doing it. Is there something else you have to do first? Continue to think backwards until you've reached the beginning. That will tell you what comes first.

As you visualize performing the actions, you may find that several steps can be done in any order, without it mattering what comes first.

PRACTICE

These suggested assignments are optional. Naturally, the more you practice incorporating what you're learning into your life, the faster you'll experience change. Trying these strategies will make your class experience much more valuable, and give you a chance to find out what gets in your way!

- **Create an Intentional strategy for taking this course, taking your reality into account.** You may have a different strategy for weeks that you'll attend on the phone versus taking it virtually.

If you've tried self-improvement courses before without success, answer the question: "What will you do differently to make this class work for you?"

- **Maintain an Intention Log** on at least one specific intention per day. Be as specific as possible as to exactly how you will carry out your intended action. At the end of a week, determine what patterns you've discovered about what got in your way.
- **Create a new ritual** for the purpose of starting a new habit that will help you move in a desired direction. (Performing the ritual counts as an Intention!)
- **Practice breaking down a project or goal into smaller steps.** Write down the steps and try to figure out what order they would go in. Keep track of what was the most challenging part of the exercise, and if / when you started to feel frustrated or overwhelmed.