

15 Ways to Tame ADHD Emotions

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People with ADHD feel emotions more intensely than others do. When ADHDers feel happiness and excitement, it makes them more interesting and engaging. But strong emotion has its downside as well. ADHDers are impulsive. They get carried away by what they are feeling, and act on it without considering how it will affect other people or themselves. If you see something interesting at the store, you may get excited and buy that item and forget the rest of your shopping list.

This is the challenge of emotional self-control — having the appropriate emotion and feeling it at the right intensity. When it comes to getting things done, people with ADHD struggle with both sides of the equation.

They get excited about distractions and get bored with the tasks they should be doing. They can't hunker down. They can't get things done.

Lack of emotional control creates common and predictable struggles in daily life:

- **Sharing too much** — there are times when it's better not to reveal too much, such as at a work meeting or when trying to manage a frustrating child.
- **Behaving spontaneously** — without stopping and thinking before acting.
- **Having "motivational deficit disorder"** — people with ADHD have a harder time motivating themselves to start and finish tasks that aren't interesting. Giving in to emotions brings this disorder on.
- **Losing the big picture** — leading to decisions that they may later regret.
- **Losing the other person's perspective** — leading to self-centeredness or stepping on a friend's feelings.
- **Saying something you later regret.**
- **Showing anger or frustration** — undermining relationships with friends, family, or your boss.
- **Quitting a job on an impulse** — research has found that adults with ADHD are much more likely to quit a job than those without the condition.

Tap the Brakes on Runaway Emotion

Good solutions begin with a clear understanding of the problem. Most of the strategies for emotional self-control discussed here are based on three basic

ideas: manage your stress, have strategies to control your emotions in situations that set them off, own up to your reactions.

1. Manage your stress. Everyone feels stressed out and overwhelmed sometimes. To the extent that you can, try to limit how many demands you have pressing on you at any one time.

2. Avoid over-committing yourself. Everything seems interesting until we find that we have too much going on. You can minimize crunch-time stress by taking less on and by graciously bowing out of some commitments when necessary — and with enough warning.

3. Get enough sleep. We are more positive and less reactive when we've gotten enough shut-eye.

4. Exercise regularly. Physical activity is a great stress reliever. It doesn't matter how you exercise, as long as you do it regularly. Even doing a set of push-ups or going for a quick walk around the block can clear your head and put things in perspective.

5. Make time for yourself. It's important to set some time aside for you to do something for your own pleasure. If you don't recharge the batteries, you will burn out.

6. Treat co-occurring anxiety and depression. Adults with ADHD are more likely to be anxious and depressed. Untreated, these conditions may make your emotional control worse, so it is smart to address these professionally.

7. Avoid emotionally provoking situations. It's harder to calm a strong reaction than it is to avoid it in the first place. This doesn't mean that you should avoid every uncomfortable or difficult situation, but you should know that some situations aren't worth the potential trouble.

8. Create a plan...ahead of time for how to respond to a situation that you know will evoke some strong feelings. Think about how you can respond to different things the other person might do, as well as what outcomes you hope to achieve. Review the plan right before you go into the situation and keep it in your mind during the situation. If possible, bring in some written notes.

9. Take a break. If your two choices are to blow up or walk away, it's better to walk away. Even five seconds may be enough to help you calm down and gather yourself. If you are feeling angry at someone with whom you have an ongoing

relationship, explain to him or her that a break will help you collect your thoughts and lead to a better outcome for everyone.

10. Train others to talk you down. If you know you will get emotional in certain situations — political discussions, sales at certain stores — train some of your family and friends to talk to you about the bigger picture, or another person's perspective, so that you can catch yourself earlier in the process of getting caught up in a feeling.

11. Remind yourself that, no matter how strong the emotion you are feeling, it will fade. This could be a positive feeling, like being excited over a potential purchase, or a negative feeling, like a date that went badly. You will still have the feeling, but know that you will feel differently.

12. Remind yourself of the other person's perspective. We react to people we are closest to. As much as we like to think that we're justified in our feelings, there are times when we react to someone for reasons that have little to do with that person. Don't take things personally that have little to do with you.

13. Separate feeling from acting. Our emotions often drive our behavior, but there doesn't have to be a direct connection between the two. Although it's easier said than done, it's possible to notice the feeling that you're having and what it makes you want to do without acting on it. Mindfulness training teaches people how to do this.

14. Educate others about your emotional patterns. Explain to family members, and close friends, and perhaps some coworkers, that your initial reaction tends to be stronger than that of other people, but that you settle down quickly and can have a productive discussion. This helps them not to overreact to your reaction. You may also coach them on how you would like them to respond to you when you have a strong emotional reaction.

15. After you cool off, explain what you really meant. If something came out wrong, or if you said something that you didn't really mean, tell the person what your rationale was and what you meant. Don't deny what the other person perceived, but let her know that you had better intentions than you conveyed.

*Excerpted from the book **Understand Your Brain, Get More Done**, by ARI TUCKMAN, Psy.D., MBA. Copyright 2012.*