

In a Funk? 17 Rules for Controlling ADHD Emotions

Powerful emotions can knock ADHDers off their feet. To keep your feelings under control, follow these 17 tips from Ned Hallowell.

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ADHDers find it hard to control their emotions and moods. If we don't understand how our emotions affect our lives, and we don't have ways to rein them in, our days can turn into a roller-coaster ride. We all need to be aware of our emotional triggers — and develop strategies to avoid pulling them — so that we can stay on an even keel.

1. **Have structured “blow-out time.”** Set aside time every week for letting go. Whatever you like to do — blasting loud music, taking a trip to the race track, having a feast — to let loose in a safe way.
2. **Recharge your batteries.** Most adults with ADHD need some time to waste every day without feeling guilty about it. Call it “time to recharge my batteries.” Take a nap, watch TV, or meditate.
3. **Choose good addictions, such as exercise.** Many adults with ADHD have an addictive or compulsive personality. Try to make your addiction positive.
4. **Understand your mood changes.** Know that your moods will change, no matter what's going on around you. Don't waste time figuring out the reason why or looking for someone to blame. Focus on learning to tolerate a bad mood, knowing that it too will pass — and find ways to make it pass sooner. Getting involved with some new activity (preferably one that involves people) — coffee with a close friend, playing tennis, or joining a reading group — will help.
5. **Recognize the following cycle,** which is common among adults with ADHD. Something “startles” your psychological system — a change or transition, a disappointment or a success. The cause of the “startle” may be trivial, but it is followed by a mini-panic, with a sudden loss of perspective. The world becomes topsy-turvy. You try to deal with the panic by obsessing and ruminating over one or another aspect of the situation. This can last for hours, days, even months.
6. **Plan scenarios to deal with the inevitable blahs.** Have a list of friends to call. Select a few videos that always engross you and get your mind off things. Have a punching bag or pillow handy if you have angry energy. Rehearse a pep talk you can give yourself, like, “You've been here before. These are the ADHD blues. They will soon pass. You are OK.”
7. **Expect depression after success.** People with ADHD complain of feeling depressed after a big success. This is because the stimulus of the chase, the challenge, or the preparation is over. The deed is done. Win or lose, the adult with ADHD misses the conflict, the stimulus, and feels depressed.
8. **Develop sayings as shorthand** ways of putting slip-ups, mistakes, or mood swings into perspective. When you turn left instead of right and take your family on a 20-minute detour, it is better to say, “There goes my ADHD again,” than to have a six-hour fight over your unconscious desire to sabotage the trip. These are not excuses. You have to take responsibility for your actions. It is good to know where your actions are coming from.
9. **Use “time-outs,” as with children.** When you are upset or overstimulated, leave the room, take a walk around the block, and calm down.
10. **Learn to advocate for yourself.** Adults with ADHD are accustomed to being criticized, so they wind up being unnecessarily defensive in putting their own case forward. If you find ways to stand up for yourself, you won't be as defensive when someone has a beef with you.
11. **Avoid premature closure** of a project, a conflict, a deal, or a conversation. Don't “cut to the chase” too soon, even if you want to.
12. **Savor your successful moments.** You'll have to train yourself to do this because ADHDers soon forget their successes. Remember that ADHD includes a tendency to hyperfocus at times. Hyperfocus can be used constructively or destructively. Be aware of its destructive tendency to obsess over an imagined problem.
13. **Exercise vigorously and regularly.** Exercise is one of the best treatments for ADHD. It works off excess

energy and aggression, quiets the mind, stimulates the hormonal and neurochemical system in a therapeutic way, and soothes and calms the body. Make the physical activity something fun, so you can stick with it for the rest of your life.

14. **Learn to joke with yourself and others** about your various symptoms, from forgetfulness and getting lost all the time to being tactless or impulsive. If you handle mistakes with a sense of humor, others will forgive you more quickly.

15. **Schedule activities with friends.** Stick to these schedules faithfully. It is crucial for you to stay connected to other people.

16. **Find and join groups** in which you are liked, appreciated, understood, enjoyed. On the other hand, don't stay too long where you aren't understood or appreciated.

17. **Pay compliments.** Take time to notice other people and talk with them. Get social training if you need it.

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