

A COUPLES AND PARENTING WORKBOOK

ADHD in the Family

A Marriage and Parenting Workbook

Separate tools for the partner with ADHD and their partner, plus shared activities for building a home life that feels more supported, less blamed, and easier to manage together.

ADHD can affect attention, working memory, planning, time awareness, impulse control, emotional regulation, and task follow-through. These differences are real, and they can be felt in a marriage and in parenting. They are not evidence that anyone is lazy, uncaring, or failing on purpose.

The goal is not to decide who is the problem. The goal is to notice the pattern, name the impact, and build supports that work for your actual family.

A GENTLE STARTING POINT

How to Use This Workbook

Start small. Pick one page, one conversation, or one experiment for this week.

For the partner with ADHD

Use the first section to notice patterns without shame, take ownership of impact, and choose supports that make follow-through more possible.

For their partner

Use the second section to name real needs, set kind limits, and offer support without becoming the manager of another adult.

For both partners

Use the shared exercises to move from repeated arguments into visible agreements, reliable cues, and quick repair.

For parenting

Use the family tools to lower decision fatigue, make transitions clearer, and create a steadier team response with children.

Before you begin: What would feel better at home?

One marriage pattern we would like to make less intense is:

One parenting or household moment that feels harder than it needs to be is:

If this workbook helped, the first small sign we might notice would be:

This workbook is educational and is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individualized care. If conflict feels unsafe, coercive, or frightening, seek support that prioritizes safety.

THE FAMILY FOOTPRINT

How ADHD Can Show Up in Family Life

The same trait can look different at work, in a relationship, and during a hectic parenting moment.

ADHD does not create one universal family experience. Still, many couples notice recurring friction around remembering, initiating, switching tasks, regulating under pressure, and tracking the invisible work of home and parenting. A useful question is: What support would make the desired action easier to do at the right time?

Working memory A request, school detail, appointment, or step in a routine can disappear after an interruption. This is different from not caring about it.	Time awareness Tasks may feel far away until they are urgent. A person may underestimate time, arrive late, or have difficulty shifting before the next transition.
Task initiation Knowing what needs to happen is not always the same as being able to start. A large, vague, or boring task can create a real internal stop sign.	Attention and switching Focus may lock onto one thing while other cues are missed. Interruptions or a sudden change in plans can feel more disruptive than expected.
Emotional intensity Frustration, shame, defensiveness, or overwhelm can rise quickly, especially when someone feels criticized, rushed, overstimulated, or behind.	Energy and sensory load Noise, clutter, decision fatigue, sleep loss, and constant demands can reduce capacity. Parenting can make these pressures especially visible.
What the pattern may be	The story partners may accidentally tell
A reminder did not stick after a busy day.	"You do not care about what matters to me."
Starting the task felt overwhelming or unclear.	"You are avoiding responsibility."
A tense tone triggered shame or urgency.	"You are making excuses or overreacting."
The household plan lives in one person's head.	"You should just know what needs to be done."
<i>Understanding the ADHD pattern is not the same as excusing hurt. Both the neurological difference and the relationship impact deserve room in the conversation.</i>	

PART ONE

For the Partner with ADHD

Accountability works best when it is specific, compassionate, and connected to a workable support.

You do not need to carry shame to take responsibility. A strong repair begins by naming what happened, naming the impact, and identifying what you will do differently next time. The next step does not have to be perfect. It needs to be visible and realistic.

1 Notice the repeat

Look for the predictable moment: the school morning rush, the bedtime handoff, the forgotten bill, the unfinished request, or the argument after a reminder.

2 Name impact without collapse

Try: "I can see how this left more on you." Avoid turning the conversation into a debate about whether you meant harm.

3 Choose one external support

Use a shared calendar, a written checklist, a timer, a visual cue, a task app, or a 10-minute body-double session. Do not rely only on memory.

4 Make the next action observable

Define what done looks like, when it will happen, and how your partner will know without having to chase you.

My Pattern Map

The home or parenting situation where I most often get stuck is:

Right before I get stuck, I usually feel, notice, or do:

The impact on my partner or family is often:

One support I am willing to try this week is:

A helpful phrase: "I am not asking you to trust a promise. I am showing you the system I will use so you do not have to hold this in your head for me."

CONNECTION AND FOLLOW-THROUGH

For the Partner with ADHD: Marriage Repair

The relationship improves when impact is acknowledged before solutions are negotiated.

ADHD can help explain why something happened. It does not erase the fact that a partner may feel alone, dismissed, overloaded, or uncertain. The most stabilizing response is often brief: acknowledge, regulate, agree on the next support, and return to connection.

When you hear a complaint

Pause before defending. Try: "I hear that this created more work for you. I want to understand the part that landed hardest."

When shame takes over

Name it without making it your partner's job to soothe it. Try: "I feel ashamed, and I still want to stay with your experience."

When you need a reset

Ask for a specific short pause and a return time. Try: "I need 10 minutes to regulate. I will come back at 7:30 and we can decide the next step."

When you miss the mark again

Repair quickly. Try: "This was not the plan. I see the impact. I am resetting the reminder now and I will complete the next step by tomorrow at 6."

PRACTICE TOGETHER

The 10-Minute Relationship Reset

Use this after a small rupture. Save big, complex decisions for a calmer planned time.

1 One fact

Each person states one observable fact without a diagnosis of the other person. Example: "The permission slip was still on the counter at 8:00 a.m."

2 One impact

Each person names the effect. Example: "I felt rushed and alone trying to fix it."

3 One ownership

The partner with ADHD names the part they can own. The other partner names any support or clarity they can offer.

4 One next action

Agree on one visible next step and decide when you will check whether it worked.

Our next repair conversation

The fact we need to talk about is:

The impact on each of us is:

The one next action and support we agree to try is:

MAKE IT EXTERNAL

For the Partner with ADHD: Parenting Support

Parenting asks for repeated transitions, invisible planning, and regulation under pressure. Build the support before the hard moment.

Most parenting routines become easier when fewer steps must be remembered internally. The goal is not a perfectly organized home. The goal is a predictable enough system that children and parents know what happens next.

Before the transition Set a timer, use a visual list, gather needed items, and decide who owns the next step. Examples include leaving for school, bedtime, bath time, and appointments.	During the transition Reduce words. Offer one direction at a time. Keep the visual plan visible. If emotions rise, return to the smallest next action instead of adding more instructions.
After the transition Notice what worked. Reset supplies for tomorrow. A two-minute reset now can prevent a 20-minute scramble later.	When you are overloaded Ask for a concrete handoff rather than disappearing. Try: "I am at capacity. Can you take bedtime for 15 minutes while I reset, then I will pack lunches?"

One Routine We Will Make Easier

Choose one routine: morning, school pickup, homework, dinner, bedtime, weekend planning, or another transition.

The steps we can put where everyone can see them are:

The adult responsible for starting the routine is:

Our backup plan when one parent is overwhelmed is:

Parenting is not a test of who remembers more. It is a team activity. External tools protect the relationship by moving the plan out of either partner's memory.

PART TWO

For Their Partner

Your needs are real. Support does not require you to become the reminder system, project manager, or parent of your partner.

Living alongside ADHD patterns can be tiring. It can mean carrying more planning, repeating yourself, bracing for last-minute changes, or feeling as if a request only counts when it becomes urgent. Validation does not mean pretending this has no impact. It means making room for both realities at once.

Support can sound like	Overfunctioning can sound like
"Would a shared reminder help you hold this?"	"I will keep reminding you until it gets done."
"What is your plan for getting this on the calendar?"	"I will add it and make sure you do it."
"I can help define the first step. You choose the tool."	"I will break down every step and manage the follow-up."
"I care about you and I need this to be reliable."	"It is fine. I will just do it myself again."

Name the need, not the character

Try: "I need the school information to be handled without me checking twice," rather than "You are irresponsible."

Ask for a system, not a promise

Try: "What support will help you remember this? I need to see the plan, not hold it for you."

Set a kind limit

Try: "I can remind you once. After that, I need you to use your own system."

Protect your own capacity

Notice resentment as information. It may mean the division of labor, the communication method, or the recovery time needs to change.

My Needs Without Blame

The responsibility I feel most alone carrying is:

The impact on me is:

The boundary or support request I want to make is:

One thing I am willing to stop doing for my partner is:

BOUNDARIES AND CONNECTION

For Their Partner: Stay a Teammate, Not a Manager

The goal is collaboration. A parent-child dynamic usually creates shame, resistance, and less closeness for everyone.

You can be clear and compassionate at the same time. The most useful boundaries describe what you will do, what you need, and what happens next. They are not punishments. They are a way to make the relationship more predictable.

1 Choose the right moment

Discuss systems when neither of you is already activated. A calm 15-minute planning conversation beats a long argument during a rushed transition.

2 Make requests concrete

Name the task, the standard for done, the due time, and the support tool. Vague requests invite mismatched expectations.

3 Leave ownership where it belongs

You can share information and collaborate. You do not need to monitor, rescue, or absorb every consequence of your partner's task.

4 Return to warmth

After problem-solving, do something that reminds you that you are partners: a brief check-in, a shared show, a walk, appreciation, or physical affection that feels good to both of you.

My Boundary and My Connection Plan

A task or pattern where I need clearer ownership is:

My clear request is:

The support I can offer without taking over is:

The connection practice I want to protect this week is:

A helpful phrase: "I want to be on your side. I also need a system that does not require me to carry this for both of us."

BUILD THE TEAM

Shared Marriage and Parenting Activities

Small, repeatable practices create more change than a single intense conversation.

Activity 1: The two truths check-in

Each person completes: "What is hard for me is..." and "What I appreciate about your effort is..." Keep both statements specific and brief.

Activity 2: The Sunday 15

Once a week, review the calendar, school needs, meals, appointments, one household priority, and one relationship priority. Stop at 15 minutes.

Activity 3: The transition rehearsal

Choose one stressful routine. Walk through it when calm. Decide the first cue, each adult's role, and the backup plan before the next real attempt.

Activity 4: The repair replay

After a hard moment, each person says what they were trying to protect, what they needed, and one thing they will do differently next time.

WORKSHEET

Our Weekly Family Operating System

Keep it visible and simple enough to repeat.

Week of: _____

The three non-negotiable family tasks this week are:

The person starting each task and the support tool they will use are:

The one parenting transition we will prepare for is:

The one connection moment we will protect is:

If a plan did not work, ask "What got in the way?" before asking "Why did you not do it?" Curiosity creates better systems than blame.

Start With One Small Experiment

Families often get stuck because they are trying to solve the whole pattern at once. Pick one recurring moment. Make one support visible. Practice it for two weeks. Then review what helped and what still needs adjusting.

Our Two-Week Experiment

The one pattern we are working on is:

The support or system we will try is:

The partner with ADHD owns this next action:

Their partner will support without taking over by:

We will check in on this date and ask: What worked, what got in the way, and what should we adjust?

YOU DO NOT HAVE TO FIGURE IT OUT ALONE

When Extra Support Can Help

A therapist, prescriber, ADHD-informed coach, or skills group can help turn recurring conflict into a shared plan.

Consider more support when

Arguments repeat without repair, resentment is growing, parenting stress is high, one partner feels chronically managed or alone, or both partners feel discouraged.

Bring this workbook with you

Circle the patterns that fit. Write down what you have tried. A good support conversation starts with real examples and a clear hope for what changes.

ADHD may be part of the story. It does not have to be the whole story. With honest ownership, kind boundaries, and practical supports, couples can build a family life that works better for both partners.

A Note From Dr. Natalie Ellis

A supportive family system is not built by demanding perfect memory, perfect organization, or perfect patience. It is built by noticing what is hard, making care visible, and returning to each other with honesty and respect.

Ready to create a plan that fits your family?

Schedule a free consultation with Dr. Natalie Ellis, LCSW-QS

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Book online: sagesoltherapy.clientsecure.me/request/service