

# ADHD Context Switch

Stop Losing Your Day Every Time You Switch Tasks

A Practical Field Guide for ADHD Adults

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## How to Read This Guide If You Have ADHD

You're not going to read this cover to cover. That's fine. That's the point.

- **Each section is self-contained.** Skip to what you need right now.
- **Bold text = the actual technique.** Everything else is context.
- **Templates are at the back.** Print them. Tape them to your wall. That's what they're for.
- **Short paragraphs only.** No walls of text. We promise.

If you're in a spiral *right now*, go to Chapter 4. Everything else can wait.

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# Introduction: Your Brain Isn't Broken — It Just Changes Contexts Badly

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Here's what nobody tells you about ADHD and productivity: the problem usually isn't focus. You can focus. You've hyperfocused so hard you forgot to eat. You've locked into a project at 11pm and looked up at 4am.

The problem is *transitions*.

Getting out of one thing and into another. That's where the day falls apart.

## The Context Switch Tax

Every time you switch tasks, your brain has to:

Disengage from the current task (hard when hyperfocused, hard when avoidant — hard either way)

Clear the mental workspace (ADHD brains don't do this automatically)

Load the new context (what was I doing? where was I? what's the first step?)

Build momentum from zero (the warm-up tax)

Neurotypical brains do this in 5-10 minutes. ADHD brains can take 30-90 minutes — *per switch*. If you switch tasks 6 times a day, you can lose 3-9 hours just to transitions.

That's not a discipline problem. That's architecture.

## What This Guide Is

A toolkit. Specific techniques for the specific moments where transitions break down:

- **Ending tasks** without leaving a mess in your head
- **Re-entering tasks** without starting over from scratch
- **Making transitions cleaner** so they cost less time and energy
- **Recovering from spirals** when the day already went sideways
- **Designing your environment** so it stops forcing bad switches on you

## What This Guide Isn't

- A cure for ADHD
- A productivity system you have to maintain
- Advice from someone who thinks you just need to "try harder"
- Long

Let's get into it.

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# Chapter 1: The Shutdown Ritual — Ending Tasks on Purpose

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Most bad transitions start with a bad exit.

You're deep in something. A notification fires. Someone needs you. A meeting starts. You rip yourself out of the task and shove it into the back of your mind, half-finished, context bleeding everywhere.

Then three hours later you come back and you can't remember where you were, what you were thinking, or what the next step was. So you start over. Or worse — you don't come back at all.

**The fix isn't willpower. It's a shutdown ritual.**

## The 3-Minute Shutdown Protocol

When you're about to leave a task — whether by choice or by interruption — take 3 minutes:

### 1. Park, don't abandon. (30 seconds)

Save your work in whatever state it's in. Don't try to finish the thought. Don't try to reach a clean stopping point. Just save.

### 2. Write the breadcrumb. (90 seconds)

Open a sticky note, a text file, or the template in Appendix A. Write:

- **What I was doing:** (one sentence)
- **Where I stopped:** (specific — line number, paragraph, step)
- **What the next action is:** (the very next thing, not the big picture)
- **What I was thinking:** (the idea that was forming, even if half-baked)

Example:

|                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>What I was doing: Writing the Q2 report, section on customer retention.</i>                               |
| <i>Where I stopped: Halfway through the third paragraph about churn rates.</i>                               |
| <i>Next action: Finish that paragraph — the point is that churn dropped 12% after the onboarding change.</i> |

*What I was thinking: Might need to pull the March numbers separately because the dashboard combines them.*

That's it. That's the breadcrumb. It takes 90 seconds and it will save you 45 minutes when you come back.

### **3. Clear the mental workspace. (60 seconds)**

Stand up. Take three breaths. Look at something that isn't a screen. Say out loud (or in your head): "That task is parked. I can come back to it." This sounds silly. It works. Your brain needs a signal that the old context is closed before it will fully open the new one.

## **Shutdown by Task Type**

Not every task shuts down the same way. Here's what to emphasize:

### **Deep work (writing, coding, design):**

The breadcrumb is everything. Write down the *idea in progress*, not just the location. Deep work context is the hardest to reconstruct.

### **Admin (email, forms, scheduling):**

Star or flag where you stopped. Write one line: "Next: reply to Sarah's email about the invoice." Admin context is easy to lose because it all looks the same.

### **Creative work (brainstorming, art, music):**

Capture the *energy*, not just the content. "I was in a flow state exploring the color palette — warm tones were working, cool tones felt dead." Creative context is emotional, not just informational.

### **Meetings/calls:**

Write your one takeaway and your one action item before you do anything else. Meetings are context grenades — they scatter your attention across 15 topics. Capture the one thing that matters before it dissolves.

## **When You Get Interrupted Before You Can Shut Down**

Sometimes you don't get 3 minutes. Someone walks in. The phone rings. A kid needs you *now*.

**The 10-second emergency park:** Say this in your head as you turn away:

*"I was doing [X], I was at [Y], the next thing is [Z]."*

That's it. One sentence, three pieces. You'll lose some context. You won't lose everything.

If you can, grab your phone and type those three things into a note. Takes 10 seconds. Worth 30 minutes later.

***The Rule:*** *Never leave a task without at least saying — out loud or in your head — what you were doing and what comes next. That's the minimum viable shutdown.*

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# Chapter 2: The Re-Entry Protocol — Getting Back Into a Task Without Starting Over

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You're back at your desk. You know you were working on something earlier. You vaguely remember it was important.

Now what?

The ADHD re-entry problem isn't about remembering *what* the task is. It's about rebuilding the mental state you were in when you left. The context. The momentum. The "oh right, *that's* what I was thinking."

Without that, you stare at the screen. You reread things you already read. You reorganize instead of producing. You open a new browser tab. Thirty minutes disappear.

## The 5-Minute Re-Entry Sequence

### Minute 1: Read the breadcrumb.

If you wrote a shutdown note (Chapter 1), read it now. Not skim — *read*. Let the context reload. This is the single most powerful re-entry tool you have.

If you didn't write one, look at the last thing you produced. The last paragraph you wrote. The last file you edited. The last message you sent about this task.

### Minute 2: Skim the last output.

Open your work and scroll to where you stopped. Don't read everything — just skim the last 5-10 minutes of output. Your brain will start pattern-matching. "Oh right, I was going in this direction."

### Minute 3: Reset your physical environment.

- Close every tab, window, and app that isn't related to this task
- Put your phone face-down or in another room
- If you were in a different physical position when you left the task (standing, different desk, different room), go back to it
- Put on the same music/noise you had on before, if any

Your environment is a context cue. Match it to the task.

#### **Minutes 4-5: Do one small action.**

Don't try to pick up where you left off at full speed. Do *one small thing*:

- Write one sentence
- Fix one bug
- Answer one email in the thread
- Sketch one element

The action doesn't have to be good. It has to be *real*. Momentum comes from motion, not from readiness. You will not feel ready. Start anyway. The feeling follows the action, not the other way around.

### **Re-Entry by Task Type**

#### **Writing:**

Reread your last paragraph. Delete the last sentence (it's probably where your momentum died). Write a new one. You're back.

#### **Coding:**

Read the breadcrumb. Run the code as-is. Look at the output. The error message or the result will snap you back into context faster than rereading the code.

#### **Admin:**

Check the last 3 things you completed in the task. Your brain will infer the pattern and know what's next.

#### **Creative work:**

Don't think. Put your hands on the tools. Start moving. The creative state comes from physical engagement, not mental preparation. Open the file, touch the instrument, pick up the pen. Give yourself 5 minutes of bad output. The good stuff follows.

#### **Calls/meetings:**

Reread your notes from the last related call. If you don't have notes, text the other person: "Quick refresh — where did we land on X?" No shame in asking. Better than faking context you don't have.

## When You Genuinely Can't Remember Where You Were

It happens. You left no breadcrumb. You can't find your last output. The task is a blank wall.

**Don't start over.** Starting over feels productive but it's a trap — you'll redo work you already did, and you'll hit the same wall again.

Instead:

**Open the file/project/document.** Just look at it.

**Scroll to the end.** Whatever's there is where you stopped.

**Ask yourself: "What's the one thing this needs next?"** Not the big picture. Not the whole plan. Just the next single action.

**Do that one thing.** Context will rebuild itself through the doing.

If you truly have zero context and zero artifacts, call a 5-minute thinking session: set a timer, write bullet points about what you *think* the task needs, and pick the smallest one to start with.

***The Rule:*** *Re-entry is not about remembering everything. It's about doing one small thing until your brain catches up. Action first. Memory follows.*

# Chapter 3: Context Switch Hygiene — Making Transitions Cleaner

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Chapters 1 and 2 are about individual transitions. This chapter is about the *pattern* — how you structure your day so transitions are less frequent, less jarring, and less expensive.

## Task Residue: The Invisible Productivity Killer

After you leave a task, part of your brain stays behind. Psychologists call this "attention residue." Your body moved on. Your thoughts didn't.

You're in a meeting but thinking about the email you didn't finish. You're writing a report but mentally replaying the conversation you just had. You're technically on Task B but your brain is still chewing on Task A.

ADHD makes this worse because:

- Emotional tasks leave stronger residue (that difficult email is still buzzing in your chest)
- Incomplete tasks leave stronger residue (the Zeigarnik effect, amplified by ADHD's need for closure)
- Interesting tasks leave the strongest residue (you were in flow and got ripped out — your brain *wants* to go back)

### How to flush task residue:

**Name what you're carrying.** "I'm still thinking about that client email." Naming it reduces its grip. This is a real cognitive mechanism, not just self-help talk.

**Write it down to let it go.** If the lingering thought is actionable, write it as a to-do and put it somewhere you trust. Your brain holds onto things it's afraid you'll forget. Give it a reason to release.

**Physical pattern interrupt.** Walk to a different room. Splash water on your face. Do 10 jumping jacks. Change your body state and your mental state follows. This works because ADHD brains respond to physical novelty.

**Transition ritual.** Create a consistent action that signals "mode change" to your brain:

- Make a specific type of tea/coffee for each work mode
- Change your desktop wallpaper or lighting
- Put on a specific playlist

- Say a specific phrase ("Closing this. Opening that.")

The ritual doesn't have to make logical sense. It has to be *consistent*. Your brain will learn to associate it with the transition.

## Time Buffers: The 15-Minute Gap

**Never schedule tasks back-to-back.**

This is the single most impactful structural change you can make. Put 15 minutes between every task block. Not 5 minutes. Not "I'll transition quickly." Fifteen minutes.

Use the buffer for:

- Shutdown ritual for the previous task (3 min)
- Residue flush (2 min)
- Bio break / movement (5 min)
- Re-entry setup for the next task (5 min)

If you have 6 task blocks in a day, that's 90 minutes of buffer time. It feels like you're "losing" 90 minutes. You're actually *saving* 2-3 hours that would otherwise be lost to bad transitions.

***If your calendar doesn't have gaps, your brain doesn't have room to switch. Build the gaps first. Then fill the blocks.***

## Batching: Fewer Switches, Fewer Costs

Every switch costs time and energy. The math is simple: fewer switches = less waste.

**Batch similar tasks together:**

- All emails in one block (not scattered throughout the day)
- All meetings in one window (not alternating with deep work)
- All admin in one session (not one form here, one invoice there)
- All creative work in one continuous block (creative momentum is the hardest to rebuild)

**The ideal ADHD day structure:**

| Block           | Type                          | Duration  |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Morning Block 1 | Deep work (your hardest task) | 60-90 min |

| Block             | Type                            | Duration  |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Buffer            | Transition                      | 15 min    |
| Morning Block 2   | Secondary deep work or creative | 60-90 min |
| Lunch             | Actual break, not working lunch | 30-60 min |
| Afternoon Block 1 | Meetings/calls (batch them)     | 60-90 min |
| Buffer            | Transition                      | 15 min    |
| Afternoon Block 2 | Admin/email/loose ends          | 45-60 min |
| End of Day        | Daily shutdown (see Chapter 1)  | 10 min    |

That's 4 task switches. Not 12. Not 20. Four.

You won't hit this every day. That's fine. The structure is a target, not a cage.

## The Incompleteness Trap

Sometimes the problem isn't switching *to* a new task. It's that ADHD hyperfocus won't let you stop the current one.

You know you need to move on. The meeting starts in 5 minutes. But you're *so close* to finishing this section. You just need 10 more minutes. Which becomes 20. Which means you're late. Which means you enter the meeting frazzled, and *that* transition is terrible.

### How to break the trap:

**Set a physical alarm** (not a screen notification — a sound that makes you physically react) for 5 minutes before you need to switch.

**When it goes off, immediately write the breadcrumb.** Don't finish the thought first. Write the breadcrumb *about* the thought. "I was about to conclude that the data supports X because Y."

**Stand up.** Physical movement breaks hyperfocus more reliably than any mental trick.

**Remind yourself: the task will be there.** The breadcrumb guarantees you can pick up exactly where you left off. The urgency to finish *now* is a feeling, not a fact. The work is parked. It's safe.

***The Rule:*** *Protect your transitions like you protect your focus blocks. The space between tasks is as important as the tasks themselves.*

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# Chapter 4: Recovery Mode — When the Spiral Already Happened

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You're reading this because the day went sideways.

Maybe one bad transition cascaded into three. Maybe you got interrupted during deep work and never recovered. Maybe you've been sitting here for two hours doing nothing because your brain seized up and you can't figure out where to start.

This is the spiral. ADHD adults know it well. One disruption leads to overwhelm, overwhelm leads to paralysis, paralysis leads to guilt, guilt makes the paralysis worse.

**You are not going to fix the day. You're going to recover it.**

## How to Recognize You're in a Spiral

A spiral isn't the same as a slow day. Here are the signs:

- You've switched between 3+ tasks in the last hour without completing anything
- You're opening apps and closing them without doing anything in them
- You feel a physical tension — chest, jaw, shoulders — that isn't about the work itself
- You keep restarting the same task from the beginning
- You're mentally narrating how unproductive you are (the internal critic has taken over)
- Time is passing and you can't account for what you did with it

If 3 or more of these are true, you're in a spiral. Stop trying to power through. Switch to recovery mode.

## The RESET Sequence

**R — Recognize.** "I'm in a spiral. This is a known state. It has a name and it has exits."

Say this out loud if you can. Naming the spiral is the first step to exiting it. As long as it's unnamed, it feels like *you're failing*. Once you name it, it becomes *a thing that's happening* — external to your identity.

**E — Exit the environment.** Get up. Leave the room. Go outside if possible. Go to the bathroom if not. Change your physical context completely.

Do NOT bring your phone. Do not try to "just quickly check" something on the way. Leave the scene of the spiral.

**S — Settle your body.** Three deep breaths. Not performative deep breaths — real ones. Inhale for 4 counts. Hold for 4. Exhale for 6. The longer exhale activates your parasympathetic nervous system. This is physiology, not meditation culture.

Shake your hands. Roll your shoulders. Unclench your jaw (you were clenching your jaw).

**E — Evaluate honestly.** Ask yourself two questions:

"What *actually* needs to happen today?" Not everything on your list. Not everything that would be ideal. What is the one thing that, if you did it, would make today count?

"Am I in a state to do that?" If yes — go do it. If no — go to the next step.

**T — Triage to minimum viable day.** (See next section.)

## The Minimum Viable Day

When the spiral has eaten most of your day, you need a new definition of success. Not "get everything done." Not even "get back on track." Just:

### What's the minimum that makes today a win instead of a loss?

For most people, on most days, it's one of these:

- Complete one meaningful task (not email, not admin — one real deliverable)
- Have one important conversation you've been avoiding
- Make one decision you've been postponing
- Do 30 minutes of focused work on your highest-priority project

Pick one. Just one. Do it. When it's done, the day is a win. Everything else is bonus.

### Why this works for ADHD brains:

- One clear target eliminates the "where do I start" paralysis
- Small scope reduces the activation energy needed
- Completion gives you a dopamine hit that might unstick the rest of the day
- Even if it doesn't, you did the thing. The spiral didn't win.

## How to End a Spiral Day Without Making It a Spiral Week

The most dangerous moment in a spiral isn't during — it's *after*. The guilt from a lost day becomes the anxiety that causes a lost tomorrow. One bad day becomes a bad week becomes "I'm just not productive anymore."

**Before you close the day:**

**Do the daily shutdown** (Chapter 1) even if you feel like you did nothing worth shutting down. Park whatever you touched. Write the breadcrumbs. Close the loops.

**Write one sentence about tomorrow.** "Tomorrow, the first thing I do is [X]." Not a full plan. One sentence. One task. Make it small enough that you can start it in under 2 minutes.

**Acknowledge what you *did* do.** You survived a spiral. You're reading a guide about it. You're trying to get better at something that is genuinely hard. That counts.

**Set a hard stop.** Close the laptop. Leave the workspace. The day is over. No "just one more thing" at 11pm to make up for lost time. That's how spirals propagate — through guilt-driven overwork that exhausts you for tomorrow.

***The Rule:*** *A bad day is a data point, not an identity. Recover. Reset. Tomorrow is a new context.*

# Chapter 5: Designing Your Environment for Easier Switching

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Everything in Chapters 1-4 is about *you* managing transitions. This chapter is about making your *environment* do some of the work for you.

ADHD brains are disproportionately affected by environmental cues. This is usually discussed as a weakness (you're distractible). It's also a superpower: **if you design the environment right, it drives behavior without willpower.**

## External Structure as Cognitive Prosthetic

Think of environmental design as a prosthetic for your executive function. A cane isn't cheating — it's a tool that lets you walk. A well-designed workspace isn't cheating — it's a tool that lets you switch tasks without burning through your entire working memory.

The goal is to **make the right action the easy action** and **make distractions require effort.**

## Visual Cues That Mark Context Changes

Your brain uses environmental cues to determine "what mode am I in?" Give it clear signals:

### Physical workspace:

- Different locations for different task types (even different spots at the same desk)
- A specific object on your desk that marks the current mode (a colored card, a specific notebook, a particular pen)
- Different lighting for different modes (warm for creative, bright for admin, dim for deep focus)

### Digital workspace:

- Different browser profiles for different task types (one for work, one for research, one for communication)
- Different desktop wallpapers for different modes
- Virtual desktops (most operating systems support this) — one per task type
- A single, visible timer on screen showing how long you've been in this mode

### The "mode switch" ritual:

When you transition between task types, physically change something in your environment. Move the card. Switch the desktop. Change the light. This gives your brain a concrete signal: *the context has changed*.

## Notification Architecture

Your phone and computer are context-switch machines. Every notification is an uninvited transition. Most of them are unnecessary.

### The audit:

For one day, write down every notification that interrupts you. Next to each one, write: "Did I need this right now?" For most people, 80% of interruptions could have waited.

### The fix:

**Turn off all non-essential notifications.** All of them. Social media, news, most email, most Slack channels. If this feels extreme, you're measuring the wrong thing — measure the cost of interruptions, not the cost of missing updates.

**Create notification windows.** Check email at 10am, 1pm, and 4pm. Check Slack between tasks, not during them. Check social media after work, not during.

**Use "Do Not Disturb" aggressively.** Every focus block should start with DND on. On your phone. On your computer. Tell people how to reach you in emergencies (phone call, specific channel). Everything else waits.

**Put your phone in another room during deep work.** Not face-down on the desk. Not in your pocket on silent. In another room. The physical distance matters. Studies show that the mere *presence* of a smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity, even when it's off.

## Workspace Separation

If you do different types of work, try to do them in different physical contexts:

- Deep work: at the desk, clean surface, headphones on, door closed
- Admin: at the kitchen table, or a different chair, standing desk position
- Creative work: couch, floor, different room, outside
- Calls: standing up, walking if possible

You don't need a mansion with 5 offices. You need *different spots* that your brain associates with *different modes*. Even rotating your chair to face a different direction counts.

## The Parking Lot System

Interruptions are inevitable. The question isn't how to stop them — it's how to handle them without losing your current context.

**The parking lot** is a single place (physical notebook page, sticky note on monitor, pinned note on phone) where you dump every interrupting thought or request *without acting on it*.

Someone asks you something during deep work? "Let me write that down" — write it in the parking lot. Continue working.

You remember you need to call the dentist? Parking lot. Keep working.

A "great idea" for a different project pops into your head? Parking lot. Keep working.

At the end of your current task block, look at the parking lot. Process what needs processing. Move items to your actual task list. Cross off what was just mental noise.

### Why this works for ADHD:

Your brain interrupts you because it's afraid you'll forget. The parking lot gives it a trusted external memory. Once the thought is written down, your brain can release it. You don't have to hold it AND do your current task.

## Tools That Help

Brief and opinionated. No affiliates, no sponsorships.

- **Timer:** A physical timer you can see without unlocking your phone. The Time Timer (visual countdown) is excellent for ADHD brains.
- **Noise:** Brown noise or lo-fi beats. Not music with lyrics during deep work. Noise-canceling headphones if you can swing it.
- **Notes:** Whatever you'll actually use. Sticky notes beat a perfect app you never open. The best capture tool is the one within arm's reach.
- **Browser:** Use a separate browser profile for work. No bookmarks bar full of distractions. No social media logged in.
- **Blocker:** Cold Turkey or Freedom. Block distracting sites during focus blocks. Yes, you can override them. The point is to add *friction*, not to make it impossible. Friction is often enough.

***The Rule:*** *Your environment is either helping you transition or sabotaging you. There's no neutral. Design it on purpose.*



# Conclusion: The 10-Minute Daily Setup That Prevents Most of This

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You don't need to remember everything in this guide. You need to do one thing every morning.

## The Morning Context Map

Before you start working — before you check email, before you open Slack, before you look at your phone — take 10 minutes:

### 1. Write tomorrow's tasks on paper. (3 minutes)

Not a digital tool. Paper. Write the 3-5 things you intend to do today. Not everything on your master list. Just today's menu.

### 2. Sequence them by energy. (2 minutes)

Put the hardest thing first, while your brain is freshest. Put admin and email in the afternoon when you're lower energy. Put creative work wherever *you* are most creative (some people are creative in the morning, some at night — you know which one you are).

### 3. Mark the transitions. (2 minutes)

Between each task, draw a line. That line is your 15-minute buffer. Write one word next to each line describing your transition ritual: "walk," "tea," "stretch," "breathe."

### 4. Identify the Minimum Viable Day. (1 minute)

Circle the one task that, if you only do that, makes today a success. That's your fallback if the spiral comes.

### 5. Set your first breadcrumb. (2 minutes)

Open the first task. Set your environment for it. Write down what the first action is. Now you're not starting from cold — you're starting from *warm*.

## The One-Sentence Transition Note

Throughout the day, every time you leave a task, write one sentence:

*"I was doing [X] and the next thing is [Y]."*

That's the entire system. One sentence. Every transition. Thirty seconds per switch.

Over a day, that's maybe 3 minutes of writing. Over a day, it saves you 1-3 hours of re-entry friction.

## **What "Good Enough" Looks Like**

You're not going to do all of this perfectly. You're going to forget the breadcrumb sometimes. You're going to skip the buffer. You're going to check your phone during deep work.

That's fine.

Good enough context switching for an ADHD brain looks like:

- You lose 30 minutes to transitions instead of 3 hours
- You spiral once a week instead of every day
- You can re-enter a task in 5 minutes instead of 45
- You end most days knowing where to start tomorrow

That's the goal. Not perfect. Not neurotypical. Functional, sustainable, and designed for how your brain actually works.

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# Chapter 6: The SAGEFRAME Lens — A Decision Architecture for ADHD Transitions

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Everything before this chapter was tactical. Do this, then that. Breadcrumbs. Buffers. Reset sequences.

This chapter is different. This is the *why* underneath the *how*. And if you have ADHD, the *why* matters more than you've been told — because your brain doesn't follow instructions it doesn't believe in.

## Where This Comes From

SAGEFRAME is a philosophical framework I originally built for conscious parenting. It's a set of nine principles for raising sovereign human beings — kids who know who they are, can navigate uncertainty, and don't need external validation to function.

Then I realized something: **everything SAGEFRAME says about raising a child is exactly what an ADHD adult needs to do for themselves.**

We aren't broken systems that need better instructions. We are sovereign minds that need a better relationship with our own transitions. The gap between "I know what I should do" and "I can actually do it" isn't a discipline gap. It's a *self-trust* gap.

SAGEFRAME closes that gap. Not with more rules. With a different relationship to yourself during the moments when everything falls apart.

## The Nine Principles, Applied to Your Transitions

Here's the SAGEFRAME framework, rewritten for the ADHD brain navigating context switches:

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### S — Sovereignty

*Original: The child is the ultimate authority of their own inner life.*

Applied: **You are the authority on what your brain needs right now.** Not the productivity guru. Not the app. Not the person who told you to "just use a planner." If you need 20 minutes to transition instead of 5, that's not failure — that's your brain telling you the truth about what it requires. Stop overriding your own signals.

In practice: When you feel the resistance during a switch, don't fight it. Ask it what it needs. Sometimes the answer is "I need 3 more minutes on the old task." Sometimes it's "I need to move my body." Sometimes it's "I'm not switching because this new task is wrong for me right now." All of those are legitimate data. Sovereignty means you listen to them.

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## A — Authentic Connection

*Original: Relationship over performance, presence over output.*

Applied: **Connect to the task before you perform in it.** The re-entry problem isn't about remembering what to do — it's about caring enough to start. When you stare at the screen and can't begin, that's not laziness. That's disconnection. You haven't reconnected to *why this task matters to you*.

In practice: Before re-entering a task, take 15 seconds to answer: "Why does this matter?" Not why it's on the to-do list. Why it matters to *you*. If you can't answer, the task might not be yours. If you can, that answer is the ignition your dopamine system has been waiting for.

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## G — Gentle Growth Support

*Original: Challenge is essential; force is counterproductive.*

Applied: **Push yourself, but don't punish yourself.** The spiral gets worse every time you add self-attack to the mix. "Why can't I just do this? What's wrong with me? Everyone else can switch tasks like a normal person." That internal voice isn't helping you grow. It's forcing compliance, and force is counterproductive with ADHD brains.

In practice: Replace "Why can't I do this?" with "What would make this transition 10% easier?" That's gentle growth support. You're still moving forward. You're just not beating yourself to get there. Over time, the transitions get smoother — not because you got tougher, but because you stopped making them harder.

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## E — Emotional Balance

*Original: Emotions are data, not problems to be managed away.*

Applied: **Your feelings during transitions are information, not obstacles.** The dread before starting a boring task. The grief when you have to leave flow state. The anxiety when you're behind and every switch reminds you. These aren't bugs. They're signals. The dread says "this task needs a different approach." The grief says "protect this flow state better next

time." The anxiety says "your plate is too full."

In practice: During the 3-Minute Shutdown, add one line: "How do I feel about leaving this?" During re-entry, add: "How do I feel about starting this?" You're not journaling. You're reading your own gauges. A pilot doesn't ignore the instrument panel. Neither should you.

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## F — Future Vision

*Original: Every interaction is a vote for who this person will become.*

Applied: **Every transition is a vote for the kind of day you're building.** When you take the 15-minute buffer seriously, you're voting for a version of yourself that has space to think. When you write the breadcrumb, you're voting for a version of yourself that can re-enter cleanly two hours from now. These aren't productivity hacks. They're acts of future-self care.

In practice: When the temptation hits to skip the shutdown ritual — "I'll remember, it's fine" — ask: "Am I building a day for the person I want to be, or the person I'll resent being by 4pm?" That's Future Vision. It's not about guilt. It's about seeing clearly where each small choice leads.

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## R — Reflective Awareness

*Original: The parent who does not examine themselves cannot raise the unexamined.*

Applied: **If you don't study your own transition patterns, you'll keep repeating the bad ones.** Most ADHD adults have never mapped their own switches. They don't know which transitions cost the most, which ones go smooth, or what time of day their switching capacity falls off a cliff.

In practice: Use the Minimum Viable Day tracker (Appendix B) for two weeks. Not to judge. To see. When did the spirals happen? What triggered them? Which transitions were clean and why? The tracker isn't a performance tool — it's a mirror. Reflective awareness means looking at yourself without flinching and using what you see.

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## A — Aligned Action

*Original: Values without action are decoration.*

Applied: **Don't just know these techniques — use them.** You've read productivity books before. You've highlighted passages. You've nodded along. Then you didn't do anything different. That's not an ADHD problem — that's a human problem. But ADHD makes it worse

because the gap between intention and execution is wider for us.

In practice: Pick one technique from this guide. One. Use it for three days. Not the whole system — one breadcrumb note, one transition ritual, one 15-minute buffer. Aligned action means the smallest move that's actually real. If you try to implement everything, you'll implement nothing. That's not a limitation — that's SAGEFRAME's design philosophy: aligned beats ambitious.

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## M — Meaningful Integration

*Original: Life is the curriculum.*

Applied: **Your actual transitions are the practice ground, not some hypothetical future where you have it together.** The messy switch you're about to make right now — that's the real material. Not the version of you who reads this guide and feels momentarily inspired. The version of you who forgets the breadcrumb tomorrow, spirals on Wednesday, and tries again on Thursday.

In practice: Stop separating "learning about transitions" from "doing transitions." They're the same thing. Every real transition is a rep. Every failed transition is data. Every recovered spiral is proof the system works even when you don't run it perfectly. Integration means the practice *is* the life, not something you add to it.

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## E — Evolutionary Growth

*Original: Both parent and child grow — this is not a one-directional transfer.*

Applied: **Your relationship with transitions will evolve. What works now won't work forever, and that's fine.** The breadcrumb method might be everything for three months, then stop working. The buffer time might need to shrink or grow as your work changes. The spiral recovery sequence might need to adapt as you get better at catching spirals early.

In practice: Every month, spend 10 minutes asking: "What's working? What stopped working? What do I need that I didn't need before?" Your ADHD isn't static. Your life isn't static. The tools that serve you should evolve with you. That's not system failure. That's growth.

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## The Meta-Move: Parenting Yourself Through Transitions

Here's the deepest insight from SAGEFRAME applied to ADHD:

## **You are both the parent and the child in every transition.**

The parent in you sets up the breadcrumb, builds the buffer, designs the environment. The child in you feels the resistance, gets lost in the spiral, wants to stay in the thing that feels good instead of moving to the thing that needs doing.

The compliance model says: force the child to switch. Override the resistance. Push through.

SAGEFRAME says: **the child is sovereign**. The resistance has information. The feelings are data. The goal isn't obedience — it's a relationship between the part of you that plans and the part of you that lives inside the moment.

When that relationship is good, transitions feel less like violence and more like conversation. "Hey, we need to move to the next thing. What do you need to make that possible?"

That's the whole framework. Not more discipline. A better relationship with yourself during the moments that break down.

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# Chapter 7: SAGEFRAME for Context Switches — The Field Notes

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*This chapter is personal. It comes from raising my son.*

## Where This Really Comes From

My son is eight. He's ADHD and autistic. The world gives him a lot of instructions and very little patience.

I designed paper engineering projects for him — things you build with your hands, where the instructions are baked into the materials, not shouted from across the room. Folding, cutting, fitting things together. Structures that teach through structure.

And while doing that, I discovered three rules that changed how I approach everything — his transitions, my transitions, all of it:

**Sit beside, not in front. Model, don't lecture. Champion the try.**

That's not a parenting technique. That's a posture. And it works on eight-year-olds the same way it works on thirty-eight-year-old brains that won't switch tasks.

## Sit Beside, Not In Front

When my son is stuck between one thing and the next — when he can't leave the LEGO and come to dinner, when he can't stop drawing and start his reading — standing in front of him and giving instructions makes it worse. Every time.

But sitting beside him and doing the next thing *myself*? He follows. Not because I told him to. Because the new context became real when he saw someone inside it.

**For your own transitions:** Stop giving yourself instructions from a position of authority. "You need to switch to the report now." That's standing in front of yourself.

Instead, sit beside yourself. Open the report. Look at it. Don't command yourself to work on it — just be in its presence. Skim a paragraph. Read one line of your own notes. Let the context arrive instead of forcing it.

This works because ADHD brains don't respond to authority. They respond to *environmental reality*. The report on the screen is more real than the report on your to-do list. Make it real. Sit

beside it.

**The practical move:** When you need to switch tasks, open the new task in your environment before you close the old one. Let them coexist for 60 seconds. You're not switching — you're sliding. The new context becomes real while the old one is still warm. Then you let the old one go.

## Model, Don't Lecture

I used to explain to my son why he needed to transition. "We have to go now because the store closes at six and we still need to..." He'd hear the first four words and the rest became noise. ADHD brains — his and mine — don't absorb verbal instruction during transition stress. The bandwidth is already full.

What works: I start doing the transition myself. I put my shoes on. I grab my keys. I move toward the door. He sees the pattern and joins it. No lecture required.

**For your own transitions:** Stop narrating what you should do. "Okay, I need to close this, then open that, then review my notes, then..." That's lecturing yourself. And just like an eight-year-old, your ADHD brain tunes it out.

Instead, model the transition physically. Stand up. Close one thing. Open another. Move your body to a different position. Let the action be the instruction. Your brain will follow your hands before it follows your thoughts.

**The practical move:** Create transition actions that are physical, not mental:

- Switching to deep work? Put headphones on, even if you don't play anything yet. That's the model.
- Switching to admin? Open your email client and stand up. Walk back to the desk. Sit down. You're in admin mode because your body said so.
- Switching to creative work? Pick up the pen. Open the sketchbook. Touch the instrument. Don't think about creating. Just touch the tools. The modeling does the switching.

## Champion the Try

This is the one that changed everything.

My son would try to fold a paper structure and it wouldn't work. He'd crumple it. He'd push it away. He'd say "I can't do this" and he'd mean it — not as frustration, but as a factual statement about himself.

I learned not to say "Yes you can." That's a correction, and corrections during failure feel like more failure.

Instead: "That fold was close. Try the next one."

Not praising the result. Not pretending it worked when it didn't. Just *championing the attempt itself*. Making the try the thing that matters, not the outcome.

**For your own transitions:** When you lose an hour to a bad switch, when you forget the breadcrumb, when you skip the buffer and the afternoon falls apart — what does your internal voice say?

If it says "I failed again," that's the crumpled paper moment. And saying "No, you did fine" is gaslighting yourself.

Say this instead: **"That switch didn't work. The next one will be different."**

Not better. Not perfect. *Different*. Because you have data now. You know that particular transition broke at that particular point. That's information. That's a try that produced something. Champion it.

**The practical move:** At the end of any day where transitions went badly, write one sentence:

*"The hardest switch today was \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Next time I'd try \_\_\_\_\_."*

That's championing the try. You're not grading yourself. You're not committing to a perfect system. You're acknowledging that you showed up, that the switch was hard, and that you have one idea for the next attempt. That's enough. That's always enough.

## The Paper Engineering Principle

Here's why the paper projects work for my son:

**The instructions are in the materials, not in the teacher.**

The fold lines are scored into the paper. The tabs show where they connect. The structure teaches you how to build it by being built. You don't need to hold a plan in your head — the plan is in your hands.

That's what good transition design does. It puts the instructions in the environment, not in your executive function.

- The breadcrumb note is a fold line scored into your day. It tells future-you where to pick up, without future-you having to figure it out.

- The 15-minute buffer is a tab between sections. It's the space the structure needs to hold together.
- The different workspace for different tasks is the material itself — you're building in the right material for the right job.
- The shutdown ritual is the final fold. It closes the structure cleanly so the next one can begin.

When you design your transitions like paper engineering — where the environment does the remembering and the structure does the teaching — you stop relying on the one thing ADHD brains are worst at: holding the plan while executing the plan.

Let the plan live outside your head. Build it into the materials. Sit beside it. Model it with your body. And when the fold doesn't land clean, champion the try.

That's SAGEFRAME for context switches. That's what my son taught me.

## Quick Reference: The Three Rules

### 1. SIT BESIDE, NOT IN FRONT

Don't command. Be present in the next context.

Open the new task. Let it become real. Slide, don't switch.

### 2. MODEL, DON'T LECTURE

Don't narrate. Do.

Move your body. Touch the tools. Let action lead.

### 3. CHAMPION THE TRY

Don't grade. Acknowledge.

"That switch didn't work. The next one will be different."

## The Paper Engineering Principle:

Put the instructions in the environment, not in your head.

Breadcrumbs, buffers, workspace cues — these are fold lines in your day.

Build the structure. Let it teach.



# Appendix A: Quick Reference Cards

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*Print these. Cut them out. Tape them where you work.*

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## SHUTDOWN RITUAL (when leaving a task)

1. SAVE your work as-is (don't try to finish)

2. WRITE the breadcrumb:

- What I was doing: \_\_\_\_\_

- Where I stopped: \_\_\_\_\_

- Next action: \_\_\_\_\_

- What I was thinking: \_\_\_\_\_

3. CLEAR: Stand up. Three breaths.

"That task is parked. I can come back."

### Emergency version (10 seconds):

Say: "I was doing \_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_, next is \_\_\_\_."

---

## RE-ENTRY SEQUENCE (when returning to a task)

1. READ the breadcrumb (1 min)

2. SKIM your last output (1 min)

3. RESET environment – close other tabs,

match the workspace to the task (1 min)

4. DO ONE SMALL ACTION – one sentence,

one fix, one step. Momentum follows. (2 min)

**No breadcrumb?** Open the file. Scroll to the end. Ask: "What's the one thing this needs next?" Do that.

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## RESET — SPIRAL RECOVERY

R – Recognize: "I'm in a spiral."

E – Exit the environment. Leave the room.

S – Settle: 3 breaths (in 4, hold 4, out 6)

E – Evaluate: "What actually needs to happen today?"

T – Triage: Pick ONE task. Do it. Day = win.

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# Appendix B: Templates

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## Context Parking Note

| Field                | Entry |
|----------------------|-------|
| Task:                |       |
| Date/Time:           |       |
| What I was doing:    |       |
| Where I stopped:     |       |
| Next action:         |       |
| What I was thinking: |       |
| Open questions:      |       |
| Files/tabs I need:   |       |

## Re-Entry Checklist

- ☐ Read the parking note
- ☐ Open the relevant file/project/document
- ☐ Skim last 5-10 minutes of output
- ☐ Close all unrelated tabs and apps
- ☐ Phone face-down or in another room
- ☐ Set environment cues (music, lighting, position)
- ☐ Set timer for this work block
- ☐ Do one small action to build momentum
- ☐ Working. Don't check this list again.

## Day Structure Planner

| Time  | Task Block                     | Energy Level     | Transition Ritual |
|-------|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| _____ | _____                          | High / Med / Low | _____             |
|       | <i>15-min buffer</i>           |                  |                   |
| _____ | _____                          | High / Med / Low | _____             |
|       | <i>15-min buffer</i>           |                  |                   |
| _____ | _____                          | High / Med / Low | _____             |
|       | <i>Lunch — real break</i>      |                  |                   |
| _____ | _____                          | High / Med / Low | _____             |
|       | <i>15-min buffer</i>           |                  |                   |
| _____ | _____                          | High / Med / Low | _____             |
|       | <i>Daily shutdown (10 min)</i> |                  |                   |

Minimum Viable Day task (circle one above): \_\_\_\_\_

Tomorrow's first action: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Minimum Viable Day Tracker

One line per day. Track the pattern.

| Date | MVD Task | Did it? | Spiral? | Notes |
|------|----------|---------|---------|-------|
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |

| Date | MVD Task | Did it? | Spiral? | Notes |
|------|----------|---------|---------|-------|
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |
|      |          | Y / N   | Y / N   |       |

**End of week check:** How many MVDs did you hit? That's your real productivity score — not hours worked, not tasks completed, not inbox zero. Did you do the one thing that mattered, more days than not?

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## SAGEFRAME Transition Check — Quick Card

Before a switch, ask:

S – Am I honoring what my brain actually needs?

A – Am I connected to WHY this next task matters?

G – Am I pushing forward without punishing myself?

E – What am I feeling right now? (It's data, not noise.)

F – Is this transition building the day I want?

R – Do I see my pattern, or am I running blind?

A – Am I doing ONE real thing, or planning to do everything?

M – This messy moment IS the practice.

E – What worked last time? What needs to change?

**The one question:** "What does the part of me that's resisting need right now?"

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## About

Written by Drake Enterprise.

Built from lived experience, cognitive science, SAGEFRAME philosophy, and the specific understanding that ADHD isn't a focus problem — it's a transition problem. And transitions aren't a discipline problem — they're a self-relationship problem.

The SAGEFRAME framework was originally developed for conscious parenting. The ADHD application came from recognizing that the same sovereign, gentle, growth-oriented approach that transforms how we raise children also transforms how we navigate our own minds.

More resources at **[drakeent.gumroad.com](https://drakeent.gumroad.com)**

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*Stop losing the rest of your day. Start switching better.*

*And stop fighting yourself to do it.*