

Symptoms & Executive Dysfunction

The diagnostic criteria for ADHD in the DSM-5 are categorized as either inattention or hyperactivity/impulsivity. It is possible to connect each symptom with an executive function. Understanding which executive functions cause you difficulty can help lead you to the supports that will best help you manage your symptoms.

The charts on the next few pages give you the symptoms and related executive functions, with an example of each. The executive functions are also defined. After this you will find copies of the charts with empty boxes in the “examples” column, where you can write down examples of how you experience each symptom. Remember that, regardless of which type of ADHD you were diagnosed with, you likely show symptoms from both categories. In addition, these are considered to be symptoms of ADHD if they are a consistent problem in two or more settings—so at school, work, home, social settings, etc. For example, almost everyone loses important things sometimes; it’s losing things every day or multiple times a day that makes it a symptom of ADHD.

The last two pages of this printable are Executive Function Cards. They list and define all of the executive functions for easy reference. Print these double-sided on card stock, cut them out, and laminate them.

Inattention & Executive Dysfunction

<i>Inattentive Symptoms</i>	<i>Related Executive Functions</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Makes careless mistakes/lacks attention to detail	Attentional Control Self-Monitoring	Uncorrected typos in essays and reports
Difficulty sustaining attention	Attentional Control Cognitive Inhibition	Daydreaming during meetings or class
Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly	Cognitive Inhibition Cognitive Flexibility	Spacing out during conversations
Fails to follow through on tasks and instructions	Working Memory Planning Goal-Directed Behaviour	Starting a task and leaving it unfinished
Exhibits poor organization	Organizational Skills	Maintaining a chaotic living space, desk, locker, etc.
Avoids/dislikes tasks requiring sustained mental effort	Attentional Control Goal-Directed Behaviour	Postponing homework as long as possible
Loses things necessary for tasks/activities	Organizational Skills Goal-Directed Behaviour	Searching daily for shoes, toys, keys, etc., often multiple times a day
Easily distracted (including unrelated thoughts)	Attentional Control Cognitive Inhibition	Going off on tangents during conversations and in written work
Is forgetful in daily activities	Working Memory Planning Goal-Directed Behaviour	Walking into a room and not knowing why

Attentional Control is the ability to control what you pay attention to. It's basically being able to concentrate.

Cognitive Flexibility is the ability to change your behaviour and thought processes based on changes in your situation or gaining information.

Cognitive Inhibition is the ability to tune out unrelated stimuli and stay on task or follow a train of thought.

Goal-Directed Behaviour is about controlling your

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behaviour so that you're working towards achieving goals.

Organizational Skills are all that sorting, putting things away, etc.

Planning is the ability to think ahead and to break goals down into smaller steps.

Self-Monitoring is the ability to keep track of what you're doing and how you're coming across, as well as notice things like hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, the need to use the bathroom, etc.

Working Memory is the ability to hold information in your mind so you can use it to make decisions and complete tasks.

Hyperactivity/ Impulsivity & Executive Dysfunction

<i>Hyperactive/ Impulsive Symptoms</i>	<i>Related Executive Functions</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Fidgets with or taps hands or feet, squirms in seat	Inhibitory Control Self-Monitoring	Clicking a pen, chewing on a pencil, constantly adjusting sitting position
Leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected	Inhibitory Control Cognitive Flexibility Goal-Directed Behaviour Self-Monitoring	Pacing while thinking or talking through an idea
Experiences feelings of restlessness	Self-Monitoring	Always wanting to be in motion or to move on to a new job or living situation
Has difficulty engaging in quiet, leisurely activities	Goal-Directed Behaviour Self-Monitoring	Playing loud games, talking loudly when indoors
Is “on-the-go” or acts as if “driven by a motor”	Inhibitory Control Self-Monitoring	Moving constantly, particularly the whole body
Talks excessively	Inhibitory Control Self-Monitoring	Talking more than others in a group
Blurts out answers	Inhibitory Control Cognitive Flexibility Self-Monitoring	Answering questions in class without raising hand first
Has difficulty waiting their turn	Cognitive Flexibility Goal-Directed Behaviour Self-Monitoring	Going straight to the head of the line without being invited
Interrupts or intrudes on others	Inhibitory Control Cognitive Flexibility Goal-Directed Behaviour Self-Monitoring	Starting to talk during a conversation before someone else is finished saying their piece

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Goal-Directed Behaviour is about controlling your behaviour so that you’re working towards achieving goals.

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Inhibitory Control is the ability to stop before you act so you can choose the most appropriate way to behave in a given situation. It’s got a lot to do with self-control.

Self-Monitoring is the ability to keep track of what you’re doing and how you’re coming across, as well as notice things like hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, the need to use the bathroom, etc.

Inattention & Executive Dysfunction

<i>Inattentive Symptoms</i>	<i>Related Executive Functions</i>	<i>Examples</i>
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Difficulty sustaining attention	Attentional Control Cognitive Inhibition	
Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly	Cognitive Inhibition Cognitive Flexibility	
Fails to follow through on tasks and instructions	Working Memory Planning Goal-Directed Behaviour	
Exhibits poor organization	Organizational Skills	
Avoids/dislikes tasks requiring sustained mental effort	Attentional Control Goal-Directed Behaviour	
Loses things necessary for tasks/activities	Organizational Skills Goal-Directed Behaviour	
Easily distracted (including unrelated thoughts)	Attentional Control Cognitive Inhibition	
Is forgetful in daily activities	Working Memory Planning Goal-Directed Behaviour	

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Leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected	Inhibitory Control Cognitive Flexibility Goal-Directed Behaviour Self-Monitoring	
Experiences feelings of restlessness	Self-Monitoring	
Has difficulty engaging in quiet, leisurely activities	Goal-Directed Behaviour Self-Monitoring	
Is “on-the-go” or acts as if “driven by a motor”	Inhibitory Control Self-Monitoring	
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What are Executive Functions?—2

Organizational Skills are all that sorting, putting things away, etc.

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