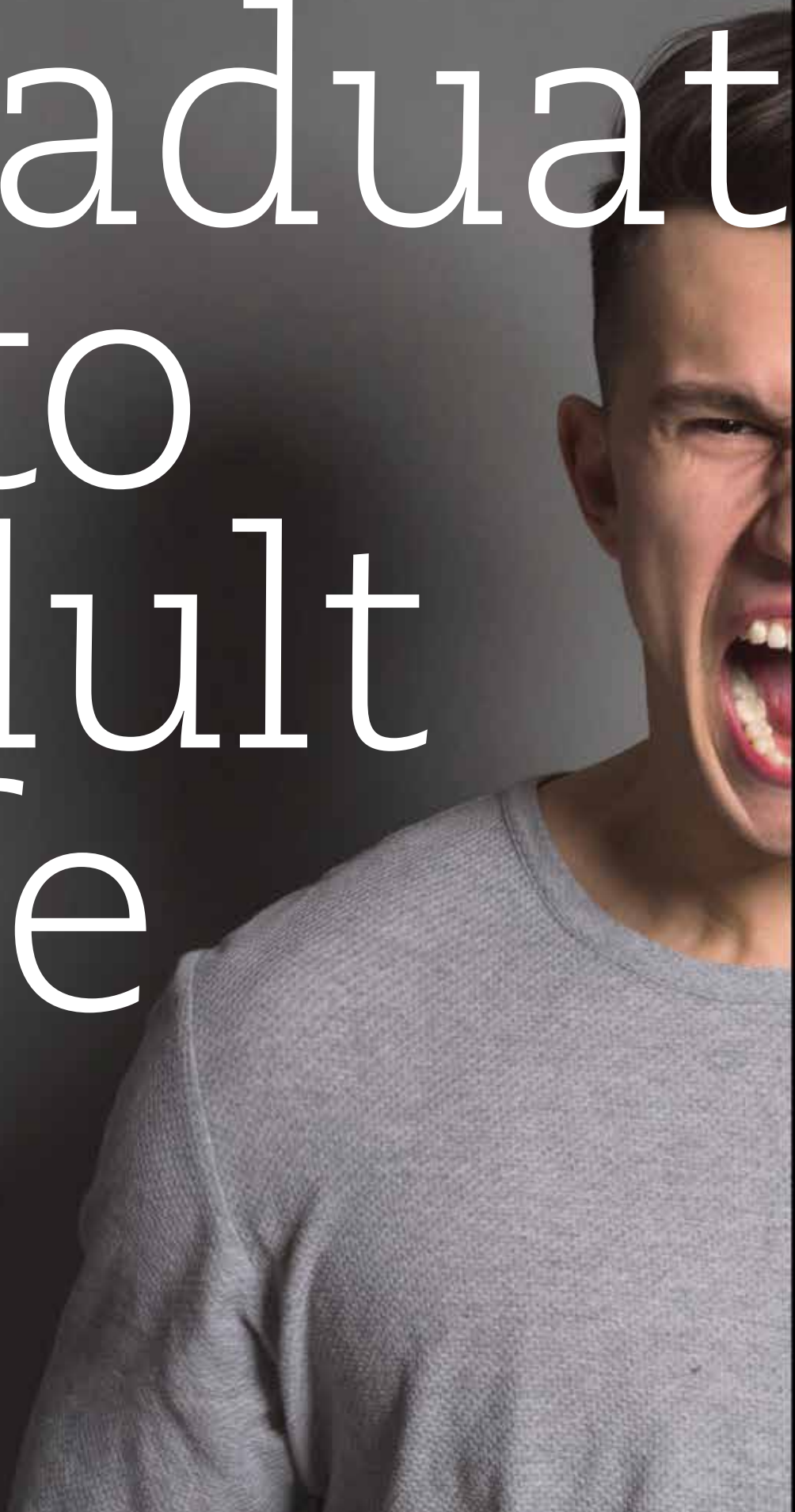


Graduate into Adult Life





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by Carey A. Heller, PsyD

FOR MANY YOUNG ADULTS, college graduation marks the start of real adult life with balancing a job, living in an apartment or group house instead of a dorm (or navigating living at home as an adult), planning out meals, paying bills, and having other responsibilities as well. For those who went straight from college to graduate school, real adult life, and at least some of the responsibilities that come with it, may get delayed even further.

While the onslaught of adult responsibilities can be anxiety provoking for the average young adult, entering this life phase with ADHD symptoms can wreak havoc on successful adjustment, for both the young adult and their parents. Young adults affected by ADHD may struggle to keep a consistent sleep schedule, eat healthy foods, complete necessary tasks (such as laundry and food shopping), manage money without overspending, and remember to pay bills. The list of potential pitfalls goes on and on.

Young adults with ADHD have the full ability to thrive, however. If you're an emerging adult, you can take a proactive approach to managing your new responsibilities. If you're a parent and your young adult implements strategies such as those outlined here, you can let them be independent knowing they have the tools to be successful.

Keep track of things to do

While most young adults own a smartphone, not all use it to keep organized. Electronic task lists—such as Reminders, Do!, gTasks, or Wunderlist—can be useful because they offer one place to list all your obligations.

- Set up different lists within the app for categories such as bills, household chores (food shopping, laundry), etc. This will help make a task list feel less overwhelming.
- Have a scheduled time to complete each task when one will likely be available to complete the given task (with a notification reminder). This will help improve the ability to follow through. Location reminders for things such as picking up something at the store when you walk by can also be helpful.

The calendar app is another feature you might not use as often as you could. It's important to have everything in one place in order to keep track of appointments and work events. Many people find the calendar beneficial even when making plans with friends. Both the standard phone calendar app and the Google Calendar app work well.

You may want to use a calendar and task list that are combined into one app. Fantastical (iPhone, iPad, Mac), iCalendar (iPhone, iPad), and gTasks (all platforms) serve this function and allow you to see task list items at scheduled times in your calendar as well as separately on the task list.

Plan set times to complete specific tasks

Holding a full-time job typically leaves adults limited hours during the week to run errands and do things. Therefore, planning is essential. Here are some suggestions you can use for typical activities.

- Grocery shopping
 - Pick a set time each week to shop.
 - Consider using an app or place orders online for pickup.
 - This saves you time in the store.
 - It also allows you to see how much you are spending before checking out. You can adjust your order accordingly if the bill is too high.
- Laundry
 - Like college, if you live in an environment with shared washers and dryers, having a set time to do your laundry increases the chances that the units will be free when you want to use them. This will help ensure that you don't run out of clean clothing.
- Working out
 - It can be difficult to go from being able to exercise at random times of the day while you are in school to having to fit it into a small window of free time.
 - It may be best to purchase a gym membership and strive to go at the same time each day.
 - Exercising before work has many benefits, including getting it out of the way, and making it easier to sit still during the day. Some people find that working out in the morning improves focus throughout the day.
 - Going to the gym right after work can also work well, especially if getting up early enough to go to the gym is not feasible.
 - The best option may be to pair going to the gym with a transition activity, such as on the way to or from work. If you struggle with task initiation, trying to get moving to go to the gym after resting awhile at home can be especially difficult.
 - Taking scheduled exercise classes may help young adults hold themselves more accountable for showing up. Participating with friends or making friends through classes can also help facilitate greater follow through and sticking with classes.

Maintain personal hygiene

The need for adequate sleep may seem obvious, but getting to bed early enough can be challenging. Here are some suggestions for proper sleep hygiene.

- Pick a set time to go to bed each night.
- Use the alarm clock app on Apple devices or other sleep apps such as Sleeptracker or Pillow. These apps send notifications



each night reminding you to begin getting ready or go to bed by a specific time. Automatic wake-up alarms are also very useful.

- To silence alerts during the night, set the do not disturb feature on your smartphone to turn on right before bedtime.
- Not sleeping within an arm's reach of your phone can help prevent you from checking it during the night. And having to get up to turn off the alarm in the morning may improve your ability to get going in the morning.
- Consider using blocking software such as Freedom or Cold Turkey if you find you truly cannot disconnect from electronic devices. These programs allow you to automatically block apps, websites, or computer programs during certain time frames.

It makes sense to eat regular meals and choose healthy options, but following through on this can be tough when you're affected by ADHD. Here are some suggestions to make it easier.

- Once a week, before you go food shopping, make a list of your intended meals for the week. Then fewer decisions have to be made each night on what to cook.
- When planning meals, factor in your schedule after work on each day. Reserve specific days for take-out meals if needed.
- If you are inclined to keep careful track of what food is being consumed, apps such as Lose It can provide you with a detailed log. You can track your meals as well as the specific nutrients and vitamins you consume each day.

Pay bills on time

Financial tasks are one of the most important challenges of adult life. Here are some strategies to guide you in managing money.

- First, make a list of all of your monthly bills (such as rent, cable television, online subscriptions) along with the due date for each one.

- If you have a salaried job, determine how much money will actually go into your bank account each payday after taking out taxes, benefits, etc. For you are employed in sales or other jobs where commission is a large portion of income, estimating on the low end, the average monthly income may be helpful.
- It can be useful to set up a simple system to pay bills at the same time each week or month (for example, each Saturday or Sunday morning at 11 AM).
- You may find it helpful to transfer money for regularly scheduled bills into one account and keep a separate account for spending money. You can use automatic bill pay features to set up automatic monthly payments for many bills.
- Use Mint or a similar program to get reminders to pay bills.
- You may find it helpful to set calendar or task list notifications to remind you when to pay specific bills.


Adjust socially

Going from a school environment where you have friends around all of the time to living in a place where you may not know anyone or likely don't live as close to friends can be difficult. Here are a few ways to ease the transition.

- Make friends who live near you. Consider joining a recreational or social sports league, participating in a meetup group, getting involved in a local religious organization, joining a running club, or finding another way to meet people and make friends.
- Accept that you may not have a job that makes it easy to go out during the week and stay out late. Make dinner plans and keep late-night outings reserved for the weekends.

People transition into true adulthood with differing levels of success. Coming into it with limitations due to ADHD symptoms and executive function weaknesses certainly can make the adjustment more difficult. However, if you take steps to plan how to keep track of everything, adjust systems when they are not working as effectively as needed, and seek professional assistance when warranted, you can truly thrive and enjoy life as an adult. **A**

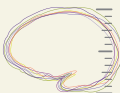
Carey A. Heller, PsyD, is a licensed psychologist based in Maryland and an assistant clinical professor of clinical psychology at The George Washington University. His assessment specialties include evaluations for learning disabilities, ADHD, and mood/behavioral disorders in children and adolescents. Learn more at www.hellerpsychologygroup.com. A board member for the Montgomery County chapter of CHADD, Dr. Heller also serves on Attention's editorial advisory board.



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