

Pre-Game Your Social Strategy

WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK? “Just showing up” is rarely a good plan, especially for adults with ADHD in social situations.

Bombarded by stimulation, swamped with anticipatory anxiety, flooded with emotions, and feeling you have lost the ability to self-regulate can make socializing both draining and overwhelming for people with ADHD. For many of them, being social can be so hard that they end up entering their own little cocoon or spending too much time ruminating and replaying social events, missed opportunities, and faux pas.

If you observe how the social world works, you’ll notice that we all have to reach out and connect with other people in order to develop relationships. And the more you do this, the more one little gaffe does not matter, and the more each thing you say or do is diluted by the number of interactions you have had.

Fraught with inner chaos, you may need to arm yourself with a ritual that signals you to pause and center yourself so you can become more present in the situation. Learning to self-regulate and process intense emotions will allow you to put your best foot forward.

So, how should an adult with ADHD face the next in-person or Zoom conference, meeting or social networking opportunity?

Preparation is the answer.

Pre-gaming routines, strategies, and rehearsed phrases in advance of big and small social events to address stimuli bombardment and social demands may keep you on the social circuit.

Don’t just wing it—prepare for your next event using these five strategies.

1) Have a social body double.

Ask a good friend or family member to help you make a game plan, reach out regularly, and ensure weeks do not go by without new or existing human contact. It’s easier to stick to a new routine when your body double is expecting you to hit collaborative milestones. You can set up a time to connect regularly, or you can each text one another out of the blue as a reminder to quickly reach out to someone or join a meetup.



2) Put yourself with people.

Proximity to people can be fairly easy in the neighborhood or at work, but it is also available with your tennis team, your kids’ school friends, etc. Yes, COVID has changed how closely we can get together, but emotional proximity is also crucial. Reaching out to a friend via video chat connects us as much, if not more, than chatting with a neighbor. Be sure to place yourself in physical and emotional proximity to folks as often as possible.

3) Identify and work on one core issue.

You may find that there are a few reasons why you struggle socially: an over-reaching feeling of shyness, inability to gauge social cues, tendency to interrupt, and so on. These may all be the case, but do your best to decipher which one you want to work on first. We can really take on only one major change at a time. Identify yours, and then look for suggestions on my website or in my book on how to tackle them.

4) Put on your “game face.”

Having a ritual to help you become centered and be more present to the social cues around you before a Zoom meeting or an in-person event can help you pause and enter without the nerves, stress, or overwhelm you experience due to past social struggles. By pausing, stepping away for a moment, engaging in a calming ritual, or even reading a chapter of a book, you are more likely to read



social cues, pay attention to the world around you, refuel your energy, and remember your intention for the social interaction.

5) Find a job or a role that provides an excuse to meet people.

Playing the role of volunteer, committee member, team leader, or running tours at a museum provides an infrastructure or framework to your socialization and can be a wonderful excuse to reach out to someone, get to know them, or to meet up. These roles present fertile opportunities to have a readymade position within a group that helps facilitate socialization. **A**

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