

Stop Taking Things Personally

If you live with ADHD, you probably know this moment well. A friend does not text back. Your partner sounds a little flat. A colleague is quiet in the video meeting and keeps their camera off. Before you know it, your brain has written a whole story: *They are mad at me. I messed up. I did something wrong.*

By the time you have replayed the interaction for the tenth time, you are flooded with shame, anxiety, and self-doubt. You might pull away, over-apologize, or send a long clarifying text that you immediately regret. It feels awful and yet also strangely automatic, like a reflex you did not choose.

If this is you, I want you to hear this clearly. You are not too sensitive, too dramatic, or overreacting. Your brain is trying to protect you; it's using a really painful method to do so.

Why do you take things so personally? ADHD brains are wired for intensity. You feel emotions quickly and strongly. You tend to pick up on tone, body language, and subtle shifts in energy. In many ways, this sensitivity is a strength. You are tuned in, and you notice when someone is off, unsettled, or out of sorts. In other words, you care.

But for many adults with ADHD, that sensitivity developed in an environment where they were misunderstood or corrected—a lot. Maybe as a child you were told to calm down, stop overreacting, or quit making such a big deal out of things. Maybe teachers and parents focused on your mistakes more than your efforts. Hearing these messages over and over can cause your

nervous system to stay on alert. Naturally, your mind scans for signs of danger or potential problems. When you sense that something is amiss, your mind asks questions like: Am I in trouble? Did I mess this up? Or are they upset with me?

What I want you to know is that this is not a weakness or being dramatic. It is emotional hypervigilance that stems from your lived experience in the world. And it is a very real, natural, and understandable reaction.

This is where examining the evidence becomes so important. In fact, it's my number-one go-to tool.

When your brain starts spinning with personal meaning, you need something that helps you step back from the story and look at what is actually in front of you. Examining the evidence is a way to gently fact-check your thoughts without shaming your feelings.

This does not mean you push your emotions away or tell yourself to get over it. Your feelings are real. At the same time, your feelings are not always accurate data. Instead of only asking, “How do I feel about this?” you can learn to also ask, “What do I truly know about this?”

How to examine the evidence before you spiral

- **Start with the bare facts.** What was actually said or done? What were the exact words? Did the other person actually say something critical, or were they simply brief, distracted, or in a hurry? Sometimes it helps to write this down. Seeing the interac-



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tion in plain language often reveals how much your brain filled in.

- **Zoom out and look at the pattern rather than at this singular moment.** How does this person usually act with you? Have they shown care, patience, or effort in the past? Are they short with everyone when they are stressed, or only with you? If, most of the time, they are kind and engaged, that larger pattern matters more than one off moment that felt off.

- **Ask yourself what else could be true.** Your ADHD brain is very creative. The problem is that it tends to default to the scariest story. So I encourage you to gently invite in other options. Maybe they had a bad day. Maybe they were rushed between meetings. Maybe something is going on in their own life that has nothing to do with you. If you can identify even one plausible alternative, then “they hate me” is no longer the only explanation.

- Just remember, you do not have to fully believe the new explanation yet. Simply allowing more than one possibility already loosens the grip of the spiral.

- **Sometimes, it also helps to borrow another person’s brain.** When you are triggered, your mind is not a neutral judge. It is more like a scared narrator. A trusted person, such as a partner, friend, therapist, or coach, can offer perspective. You might say, “Can I reality check something with you? I am worried I messed this up,” and simply describe what happened. Often this trusted person will help you see possibilities and patterns that your nervous system cannot access when you are flooded.

- **Finally, give yourself permission to pause before you respond.** That hot, urgent feeling of “I have to fix this right now” is a sign that you are flooded with shame and fear. Very little good comes from rapid-fire clarifying texts, long apology messages, or emotional confrontations when you are in that state. You can take a walk, journal out the evidence, do a grounding activity, and then decide what to do. You always get to choose your response later. It is much harder to take back a reaction that was sent in a moment of panic.

THE NEXT TIME you feel that familiar spiral beginning, see if you can slow down the story and turn toward the evidence instead. Name what happened. Separate what you know from what you are imagining and look at the larger pattern. See if there is at least one other possible explanation so you begin the process of no longer accepting that things are because of you or your fault.

That’s how you turn the tide on taking things personally and start to regain a sense of fairness in your life. If you have questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out. 📞



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