

Chapter 1



Break the Cycle of Overwhelm

OVERWHELM: THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

“I’m just so overwhelmed... I don’t even know where to begin.”

This is what many of my coaching clients tell me during our very first conversation. It’s a state of being that I am all too familiar with.

Adult ADD is more than distractibility, impulsivity, and inattention. While these *are* the 3 symptoms we hear about most often, ADD affects us all in different ways. You may or may not see your biggest challenges in these 3 symptoms. But I believe that there is one thing that we all do have in common, and that is *we become easily overwhelmed with everyday life.*

Our internal filters don't work the same way that other people's do, and we end up focusing our awareness on too many things at one time. What's worse is that some of the things we are paying attention to aren't even relevant in the present! Sometimes we don't even *care* about what we're paying attention to.

When your focus is on so many things at once, no matter what actually gets done, there's always much more waiting for your attention. There is so much to do at home, at work, at school, or wherever, that it feels like you just can't possibly do it all. **You feel like you're always running so far behind that you'll never catch up.**

This is the world of adult ADD.

Because of this, many of us end up feeling like we must move as fast as possible in order to hold everything together. Sometimes, the very thought of everything that needs to be held together is so overwhelming that we lose our motivation to make progress.

It doesn't take much for you to get overwhelmed, does it? You might have a lot going on in your life and find yourself holding it all together really well, and then something completely insignificant will throw you into overwhelm. Walking into a cluttered room can do it. Trying to get through your email Inbox can do it. Getting a new assignment at work or at school can do it. Sometimes, the smallest things can throw you completely off track.

That uncomfortable yet familiar state of over-

whelm sets in, and you become frantic. You might shift into “high” speed, working on overdrive to get it all done, feeling stressed the whole time. And at the end of the day, it feels like you’re no further along than when you started. How frustrating!

Or, you may have the opposite reaction to overwhelm. It may have you feeling depressed and confused, with no idea where to start. You find yourself procrastinating all day. You’re painfully aware of what you need to do, but just can’t muster up the motivation.

Have you ever sat on the couch, watching TV, eating ice cream, and metaphorically kicking yourself for not getting off your butt to clean the house like you promised yourself you would?

Either way, the result is that you feel guilty, lazy, disorganized, and stressed out because you’re just not being productive. Those feelings often lead to beating yourself up, because it “shouldn’t be this hard.” So now you add low self-esteem to this already awful mix of feelings and that, in turn, adds to the overwhelm!

Once you enter the state of overwhelm, it’s very difficult to break out of it. In fact, the state of overwhelm usually ends with a period of absolute burnout, in which you may find yourself losing your temper, shutting down, or even getting sick.

Now, here’s the worst part: even after the burn-out period, you know that it probably won’t be long until you go into overwhelm again.

It's not your fault. If you knew how to stop this cycle, you would have done it by now. Just because you haven't figured it out yet doesn't mean that there isn't hope! Getting out of overwhelm won't just help you feel more relaxed and together, it will allow you the time and energy you need to build other ADD management skills. Plus, it will free up some of your time to enjoy life, too!

THE GOLDEN RULE OF ADD MANAGEMENT

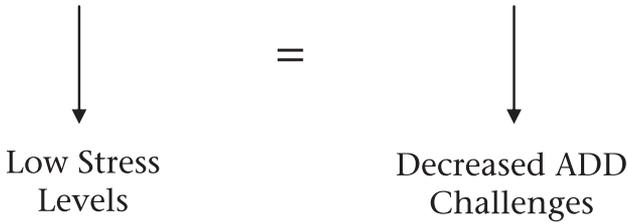
Arguably, the most important piece in learning how to break the cycle of overwhelm is remembering what I call 'The Golden Rule of ADD Management:' **Your ADD challenges directly correlate to your stress levels.**

The more stressed out you are, the more your ADD will challenge you and present problems.



Conversely, when you are calm, centered, and relaxed, your ADD will be much more manageable, and can even be used to your advantage.

BREAK THE CYCLE OF OVERWHELM



Have you ever noticed that when you're stressed out, it's more difficult to get to your appointments on time? You tend to forget more things, too—like where you put the keys—when you're *already* running late for that appointment.

During times like these, every traffic light you approach turns red, you're guaranteed to spill your drink, and you'll rush into your appointment in a discombobulated frenzy.

Admittedly, there is some humor in this when you remember these experiences from a distance. In the moment, however, it's awful.

The more stressed out you are, the more your ADD affects you in negative ways. And the more your ADD affects you in negative ways, the more stressed out you become. What a vicious cycle! And we all get caught up in it.

