

DIGITAL PLANNING GUIDE · ADHD & AUTISTIC ADULTS

# PLAN WITHOUT PRESSURE

A Soft Digital System for ADHD & Autistic Adults

Plan your days with calm, clarity, and self-kindness

Energy Planning

Soft Routines

Planner Paralysis

Mental Health Ally

+ Toolkit

Real-life strategies · Printable toolkit

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Your Complete Everyday Toolkit

Use what helps. Skip what doesn't. Start anywhere.

## Introduction - Why Most Planners Don't Work for Your Brain

If you have tried planner after planner and still feel like you're getting nowhere, you're not the problem — the system is.

### Sound familiar?

"This time I will stay consistent."

"This time I will be more organised."

"This time I will get it right."

But then life happened. You missed a day. Tasks piled up. The planner ended up on a shelf, and the guilt came back again.

If that sounds like your experience, you are not lazy, unmotivated, or broken. You're probably just neurodivergent — and traditional planners weren't built for the way your brain works.

### What Does 'Neurodivergent' Mean?

"Neurodivergent" describes people whose brains work differently from what's considered "typical". This includes people with:

- **ADHD** — who may struggle with focus, starting tasks, and managing time.
- **Autism** — which can affect communication, routines, and sensory sensitivity.
- **Executive Dysfunction** — when the brain has trouble organising, planning, or following through.

**There's nothing wrong with you. You just need a system that works *with* your brain, not against it.**

### This Planner Is Different

This isn't a productivity tool. It's a support system. You'll learn how to:

- Plan your day based on how much energy you have, not the time on the clock.
- Organise your tasks in a way that feels safe and flexible.
- Make progress without aiming for perfection.
- Recover from "off days" without feeling like a failure.

This planner is soft. It's calm. It's okay with slow progress. And it's ready to meet you where you are — not where you think you should be.

## How to Use This Guide

There's no right or wrong way to read this. Each chapter gives you something practical: a method, a mindset, or a page you can use right away. You don't need to read it all at once — skip around, come back later, or print the pages that help the most.

At the end of some chapters, you'll find:

- Simple real-life examples
- Light action steps (if you're ready)
- Optional pages you can print or fill in

Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. Start where you are. You're not behind.

## Chapter 1 · Understanding Your Brain Before You Plan

Before you try to organise your life — take a breath. Planning only works when it starts with honesty, not expectations.

If you're neurodivergent, you've probably been told your way of doing things is "wrong", "too much", or "not enough". But your brain isn't broken. It just works differently — and that difference matters.

### What's Going On in a Neurodivergent Brain?

#### ■ ADHD

You may struggle to start tasks, follow through, remember small details, or focus when you're not interested — and sometimes hyper-focus when you are.

#### ■ Autism

You might need routines, struggle with changes, feel overwhelmed by sensory input (noise, bright lights), or need more recovery time after social or busy days.

#### ■ Executive Dysfunction

When your brain has trouble with planning, prioritising, or switching tasks. You know what to do, but can't always get started or finish it.

#### ■ Low Energy / Spoonies

You may deal with fatigue, chronic illness, or burnout — and that impacts what you can handle on any given day.

### The Real Problem with Most Planners

Most planning tools assume:

- You can easily estimate time
- You'll feel motivated every day
- You can follow the same routine no matter how you feel
- If something doesn't work, you just need more discipline

### That's not your reality. And that's okay.

For neurodivergent people, the real challenges are often:

- Not knowing where to start
- Feeling mentally stuck even when there's time available
- Being overwhelmed by too many options
- Being afraid to open the planner because it's already "messed up"

### What If Planning Was Actually Supportive?

Imagine a planner that allows mess, pauses, and do-overs. That doesn't expect perfect habits. That helps you notice what works instead of forcing what doesn't. That feels calm, not demanding.

That's what this guide and system are here for.

### Real-Life Example: The "One Good Hour" Strategy

Alex has ADHD and a demanding job. Her old planner had 10 tasks a day — she'd freeze, shut it, and feel worse. Now she asks one question each morning: "Do I have a 'good hour' in me today?" If yes, she picks 1–2 medium-energy tasks. If no, she moves to a rest/reset plan. By planning based on how she feels, not how she "should" be, she ends the day with more wins and less guilt.

### Try This Today: A Gentle Brain Check-In

Write down your answers to these three things:

1. What's been hard about planning for you in the past?
2. When do you feel most focused or calm?
3. What would make planning feel less stressful?

No pressure to get it perfect. You're just getting to know how you work.

## Chapter 2 · Ditching Perfection

Planning as a support tool, not a test.

Let's get something out of the way:

### Planning is not about being perfect.

It's not about flawless habits, checking every box, or finally "getting your life together".

### What Perfectionist Planning Looks Like

You might have fallen into this cycle:

- You buy a shiny new planner
- You set huge goals and build a strict routine
- You stick with it for a few days
- Life happens — you miss a day
- You feel like you've failed
- The planner goes in a drawer. Again.

This happens not because you're undisciplined, but because most planning systems are built around **rigid consistency** — something neurodivergent brains struggle with due to energy changes, burnout, and sensory overload.

### Planning as a Tool — Not a Test

Imagine if your planner worked like a walking stick: you don't use it because you're weak — you use it because it supports your movement. That's how planning can work: a soft system that gives you structure when you need it but doesn't punish you when you don't.

- Planning in small, flexible blocks
- Allowing yourself to skip, reset, or rest
- Using lists as guides, not rules
- Accepting that some days will be light — and that's okay

### The 70% Rule

If you complete 70% of what you hoped for today, that's a win. The remaining 30% probably didn't match your energy, attention, or sensory needs at the time. That's not failure — that's information.

This mindset shift helps: reduce guilt, keep momentum going, and build trust in your own rhythms.

### Real-Life Example: Jamal's Sticky Notes System

Jamal is autistic with strong routines — but when something breaks the pattern, he feels completely thrown off. He used to write long, perfect to-do lists. If he couldn't do the first thing, he'd do nothing at all. Now he writes tasks on individual sticky notes and picks the one that feels most doable in the moment. This visual, flexible system helped him stay in motion without pressure to 'follow the list'.

### Try This Today: Create a "Soft Win" List

On a blank page, write: **"I will feel proud of myself today if I do at least one of the following..."**

- 2–3 low-pressure tasks (take a walk, eat a full meal, reply to 1 message)
- 1–2 medium-effort tasks (pay a bill, clean a space, check your calendar)

No strict plan. Just options. And the freedom to succeed your way.

## Chapter 3 · Planning by Energy, Not Time

Instead of asking 'What time should I do this?' — ask 'What can I handle right now, with the energy I have?'

Most traditional planners are built around time: 'At 9am, do this. By 11am, finish that.' This might work for some people — but if you're neurodivergent, it can quickly become a trap. You might plan a whole day only to wake up feeling foggy, unmotivated, or overstimulated. Suddenly, your perfect schedule feels impossible.

### Why Energy Matters More Than Time

If you have ADHD, autism, executive dysfunction, or chronic fatigue, your ability to complete tasks doesn't just depend on how much time you have. It depends on:

- How mentally or physically drained you feel
- How focused or scattered your mind is
- Whether you're sensory-overloaded or calm
- Whether your nervous system feels safe or tense

### The 3 Energy Zones

#### ■ High Energy

- Deep work, writing, designing, building
- Meetings or deep conversations
- Cleaning a whole space or intense admin
- You may only get 1–2 hours like this per day — and that's okay.

#### ■ Medium Energy

- Responding to emails
- Sorting out bills or admin
- Doing laundry or tidying up
- This might be your most common zone — not flashy, but productive.

#### ■ Low Energy

- Lying down with a podcast
- Making a list, stretching, or walking

- Folding socks, watering plants, texting someone back
- Low energy doesn't mean low value. These moments help you recover.

### Real-Life Example: Ben's Flow Chart

Ben has ADHD and fibromyalgia. He used to try strict hourly schedules, but every time a pain flare hit or his focus dipped, the whole plan collapsed. Now he uses a simple three-step flow: check energy level, pick a matching task, do one thing and then reassess. He's always working with his body and brain — not against them.

### Try This Today: Build Your Personal Energy Map

Write a quick list under these 3 headings:

**High Energy:** What do you want to do when you feel energised?

**Medium Energy:** Tasks you can handle when you're okay but not at 100%?

**Low Energy:** What's safe, light, and easy when you're worn out?

Stick this list in your planner or on your wall. Let it guide you — not pressure you.

## Chapter 4 · Daily Pages That Don't Judge You

A planner page designed for your worst days — because if it works then, it works on the good ones too.

Most planners are designed for people who wake up focused, get dressed without a fuss, and power through a colour-coded to-do list. But if you're neurodivergent, your mornings might look very different. You might wake up anxious, scattered, or frozen. You might have 20 tabs open in your brain before breakfast.

### What Makes a Planner Feel Judgy?

Traditional daily pages are full of pressure:

- "Top 5 Priorities"
- "Schedule from 6am to 10pm"
- "Habit Tracker (Don't break the chain!)"
- "Did you accomplish your goals today?"

These layouts can feel overwhelming, especially if you deal with executive dysfunction or fluctuating energy. Instead of helping, they become **evidence of failure**. Even seeing an unused box can trigger guilt.

### What's on the Gentle Daily Page

#### 1. Today's Energy Level

Circle High, Medium, or Low. This sets your expectations and helps you avoid pushing too hard.

#### 2. Top 3 Gentle Tasks

Just three. Not 'urgent' or 'important' — just the ones you'd feel good completing. Examples: 'Reply to one email', 'Drink water by noon', 'Sit outside for 10 minutes'.

#### 3. Brain Dump Space

Messy, unfiltered thoughts. What's stressing you out? What do you keep forgetting? No sorting — just release.

#### 4. Mood & Sensory Check-In

How are you feeling emotionally and physically? Your mood and sensory environment impact your ability to plan and act.

### 5. Reset Option (if needed)

If your day falls apart, that's okay. This space gives you permission to pause. Write: "What can I do now to feel supported?"

### Real-Life Example: Yasmin's Honest Planner Page

Yasmin is autistic and often wakes up overloaded. She used to avoid her planner because it felt like a list of failures. Now she just opens the page and circles 'low energy'. She writes one brain dump, picks one task, and notes her mood. She only 'completes' one thing — but the page still feels like progress, because it supported her.

### Try This Today: A Low-Pressure Plan

Open your planner (or any page) and fill out just these three things:

- Circle your energy level
- List 1–3 gentle tasks
- Brain dump what's weighing on your mind

If that's all you do, that's enough. You've used your planner as a helper, not a boss.

## Chapter 5 · Weekly & Monthly Planning Without Burnout

Your week isn't a checklist — it's a canvas. You're just setting intentions, not locking in strict schedules.

For many neurodivergent adults, long-term planning can feel overwhelming. When you look at a week or month in advance, your brain might say: 'How can I plan ahead when I don't even know how I'll feel tomorrow?'

You're not alone. Traditional calendars and goal trackers often don't make space for fluctuating energy, burnout, or brain fog. But that doesn't mean weekly and monthly planning are off-limits — they just need to work differently.

### A New Way to View Weekly Planning

#### 1. Set a Focus Theme

Choose a soft, guiding intention for the week: 'Rest & reset', 'Clear one mental corner', or 'Just survive this week (and that's fine).'

#### 2. Pick 3–5 Flexible Tasks

Across the whole week, not per day. These are maybe goals. Move them around depending on how you feel.

#### 3. Include Space for Rest

Leave blank blocks. Add: 'Do-nothing time', 'Recovery slot', 'Noise-free day'. Planning for rest is a survival skill, not a weakness.

#### 4. Gentle Week Review

Instead of 'Did I do everything?', ask: 'What worked?', 'What felt like too much?', 'What do I want to change next week?'

### Monthly Planning Without the Goal Spiral

Monthly planning often brings pressure to 'make big moves' or 'get on track'. But you don't need goals to make a month meaningful. Here's a softer approach:

- Use a blank monthly calendar — just add important dates and one gentle focus theme.
- Track one gentle metric: days you rested, times you said no, things that made you feel regulated.
- Leave room for recovery — ask 'Where is there space to reset?' and 'What can I take off my plate?'

### Real-Life Example: "Just Enough July"

Ari has ADHD and always overshoots when planning a new month — budget systems, health trackers, habit streaks, and workout plans. By week 2 she's exhausted. Now she does one thing: she names the month's theme. July was 'Just Enough'. Three intentions: go outside for 10 minutes each day, set inbox boundaries, don't over-schedule weekends. Her monthly page felt calm — and she actually stuck with it.

### **Try This Today: Make a Soft Plan for the Week**

On your weekly page, write:

- This week's theme (e.g. 'Gentle resets')
- 3 maybe-goals: things you might try
- 1 rest activity to protect
- How you'll check in at the end of the week

Keep it light. Keep it real. Even loose structure is better than none.

## Chapter 6 · Building Soft Routines That Actually Stick

Flexible patterns that stick because they fit your life, not someone else's.

The word "routine" often brings up pressure: wake at 5am, drink lemon water, work out, meditate, journal — all before breakfast. For many neurodivergent adults, that kind of routine is impossible — and honestly, unnecessary.

### What's a Soft Routine?

A soft routine is a gentle, low-pressure version of a habit. It works with your energy, sensory needs, and executive function. It's built on three key ideas:

- **Cues, not clocks** — You start when a natural event happens, not at a fixed time.
- **Progress, not perfection** — Doing part of it still counts.
- **Permission to adapt** — You change the routine when your needs shift.

### Why Hard Routines Break Down

Most traditional routines fail for neurodivergent people because they:

- Rely on willpower or discipline
- Expect every day to be the same
- Don't leave space for burnout or overwhelm
- Don't offer recovery when the routine is broken

When we break a streak, we feel like we've failed — so we give up entirely. Soft routines avoid this. They're based on compassion, not performance.

### How to Build a Soft Routine

#### Step 1: Choose a Trigger (Cue)

Pick something that already happens every day: after brushing teeth, when sitting on the bed, after taking meds.

#### Step 2: Add One Gentle Action

Attach one small, achievable task: put on clean clothes, make tea, write down one thought. It becomes a rhythm, not a schedule.

### Step 3: Add Optional Steps

Add 1–2 optional extras if you have capacity: stretch for 3 minutes, open the curtains, look at your daily page. You're not aiming for all — just something.

### Example: Jamal's Bedtime Reset

Jamal is autistic and often overstimulated by nighttime routines. His cue is plugging in his phone. He always dims the lights and takes his meds. Optionally, he writes one sentence about the day or plays white noise. Steps 1 and 2 happen 90% of the time. Steps 3 and 4? Just when he can. It still feels like a routine — even when it's brief.

### Try This Today: Create a Mini Soft Routine

Pick a moment in your day that feels messy — morning, post-shower, or before bed.

**Cue:** After I...

**Step 1:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional steps:** \_\_\_\_\_

Keep it light. Keep it doable. Doing something is enough.

## Chapter 7 · Overcoming Planner Paralysis

What to do when your planner stops feeling like a support system and starts feeling like a scoreboard.

You open your planner. You see empty pages, undone tasks, or a layout you haven't touched in days. Your chest tightens. You think: "I've failed again." So you close the planner. Or you toss it in a drawer. And the cycle starts again.

**This is planner paralysis.**

### What Causes Planner Paralysis?

Planner paralysis isn't laziness. It's usually triggered by:

- **Perfectionism:** You missed a day or two, and now it feels "ruined"
- **Overwhelm:** Too many tasks, not enough clarity
- **Shame:** You don't want to look at what didn't get done
- **Disconnection:** The planner no longer reflects how you feel or what you need

### How to Reset Without Starting Over

#### 1. Acknowledge Without Blame

"My energy shifted. That's normal. I didn't fail — I paused." Missing a day, a week, or even a month doesn't mean you've failed. You just stopped. Now you get to start again without pressure.

#### 2. Turn the Page (Literally)

Don't try to 'make up' missed days. Just flip to a fresh page. Or write 'RESET' on a sticky note and cover the last page. Clean slate. No guilt.

#### 3. Start Small, Then Smaller

Write just one task. Or circle your energy level. Even 'open the planner and close it again' can count. Start with the smallest possible action that feels safe.

#### 4. Update It to Reflect Your Current Needs

Maybe your needs changed. Ask: 'Do I need fewer boxes? Should I make a rest week layout?' Make your planner meet you, not the other way around.

### Real-Life Example: Rewriting the Rules

Sophie is autistic and tends to drop her planner for weeks when life gets overwhelming. She used to feel guilty and try to replan the missed days. Now she keeps a sticky note at the front that says:

**"Your planner is here when you're ready. Not before."** When she returns, she writes: 'Low spoon reset day. What's on my mind now?' No catch-up. No shame. Just presence.

#### Try This Today: Create a Reset Page

Use a blank page and write: **RESET START**

- What do I need today?
- What would support me this week?
- What can I let go of?

Then move forward. No backtracking.

## Chapter 8 · Your Planner as a Mental Health Ally

Not just a tool to get things done — a way to stay grounded and care for yourself over time.

For neurodivergent adults, the line between 'not being productive' and 'something's wrong' can be blurry. We often don't notice we're burning out until we're already deep in it. That's where your planner can help — not as a pressure tool, but as a quiet mental health ally.

### When used gently, your planner can:

- Help you notice patterns in your energy or mood
- Create space for rest and recovery
- Capture small wins and positive shifts
- Reflect your lived experience back to you without judgement

In other words, it can help you feel seen — even by yourself.

### What Mental Health Looks Like in a Planner

#### Mood + Sensory Logs

Use a mood or sensory check-in regularly — even just a number or emoji. Patterns over time reveal things like: 'Mondays are always rough — plan less', 'My mood drops when I skip lunch', 'Too much noise = brain shut down'. This gives you data — without pressure.

#### Highlight Rest Days

Mark days when you cancelled plans, took a mental health break, or had a low-spoon day and respected it. Instead of seeing 'nothing done', you'll start to see rest as resilience.

#### Journal Fragments

Use your brain dump section to write quick reflections — even one sentence. 'Today was loud and overwhelming.' 'Felt proud of how I handled that call.' You don't need full entries. Just presence.

#### Notice Burnout Early

Look for signs: several days of skipped tasks, flat mood ratings, many low-energy days in a row. When you spot them, add a burnout action plan: scale back, add recovery time, use the reset page instead.

### Real-Life Example: Avoiding the Spiral

Deji has ADHD and often runs on adrenaline until he crashes. By tracking mood and energy, he started noticing the crash signs earlier: irritability, task-dodging, forgetting meals. Now when he spots the pattern, he cancels 1–2 things, schedules recovery days, and asks a friend for help. Instead of spiralling, he recovers sooner.

### Try This Today: Set Up a Mental Health Support Block

Add one of these to your weekly page:

- "How am I doing really?"
- "What's helped me feel more stable?"
- "What might I need next week?"

This turns your planner into a check-in, not just a task list.

### Final Reminder: Your Planner Is On Your Side

This entire system was designed to help you feel less overwhelmed, more grounded, and more in tune with your own rhythms. You don't need to fill every box. You don't need to follow it perfectly. You just need to let it hold space for your real life — with all its ups, downs, slow days, and restarts.

You've made it to the end of this guide. That's a win in itself.

You're not behind. You're not doing it wrong. You're doing it your way, and that's more than enough.

## Conclusion · You're Not Behind — You're on Your Path

You've reached the end of this guide — but this isn't the end of your planning journey. It's the beginning of a different way of showing up for yourself.

### You've learnt that:

- Your brain doesn't need fixing — your system needs softening
- You don't have to plan like everyone else to move forward
- Rest, slowness, and resets are part of the process — not a detour from it

### You now have tools to:

- Plan based on energy
- Reset without shame
- Build routines that work with real life
- Track your wellbeing without turning it into a job

Your planner will change with you. Some weeks it'll be your anchor. Other weeks, it'll sit quietly while you recover. Both are okay. And every time you return to it, it will be ready — without judgement.

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You're allowed to start where you are.

You're allowed to go gently.

You're allowed to take up space without pressure.

**This is planning — without punishment. This is Plan Without Pressure.**

## Toolkit Section - Your Complete Everyday Toolkit

The toolkit is available as a separate download — a dedicated companion to this guide, designed to be printed or used digitally alongside your planning practice.

Everything in it is built around one idea: give your brain the gentlest possible entry point into any day — good, hard, or somewhere in between.

### What's Inside the Toolkit

#### 1 Toolkit Index & Navigation Guide

Your map for the whole system. Tells you exactly which tool to reach for depending on how you're feeling — overwhelmed, foggy, or ready to plan.

#### 2 Quick Start Guide — For Brain Fog Days

A 3-step plan for days when your brain won't cooperate. Body check, energy level, one small thing. That's all you need to do.

#### 3 Emergency Protocol — Crisis Support

A grounding tool for moments of overwhelm or shutdown. Breathing steps, sensory anchors, and the 5-4-3-2-1 technique to bring you back to the present.

#### 4 Daily Planner

A flexible daily page — fill it in any time of day. Energy check, 1–3 gentle tasks, a soft time flow, and space to note your wins.

#### 5 Brain Dump Page

Somewhere to offload everything swirling in your mind. No organising, no judging — just release. Optional tags help you sort later if you want to.

#### 6 Sensory Regulation Tool

A practical reference for when you're overstimulated, understimulated, or dysregulated. Organised by sense — sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, and movement.

#### 7 Task Breakdown Helper

Takes any big, vague, or paralyzing task and breaks it into tiny concrete steps your brain can actually follow. Includes a real-life example to get you started.

#### 8 Energy & Focus Matrix

Matches tasks to your actual state — not your ideal state. Four modes: Power, Flow, Scatter, and Rest. Because energy and focus don't always arrive together.

## 9 **Celebration Tracker**

A weekly tracker that counts everything — tasks completed, rest taken, boundaries set, and simply showing up. Includes space for a gentle weekly reflection.

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## 10 **How to Use This System**

A plain-language guide to getting started, wherever you are. Key principles, entry points for different days, and a reminder: there's no wrong way to do this.

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### **Download your free toolkit now**

Print it out, save it to your device, or fill it in digitally — use it in whatever way feels most manageable for your brain.