



Your Brain Isn't Broken

Understanding ADHD Overwhelm + Tools to Get Unstuck



Grounded Light Counseling
— Helping You Find Your Fire —

Created by Glenn Permar II, LPC-S, NCC



How to Use This Guide

This is a gentle, ADHD-friendly resource. You do not need to read it in order or finish it all.

Use it like this:

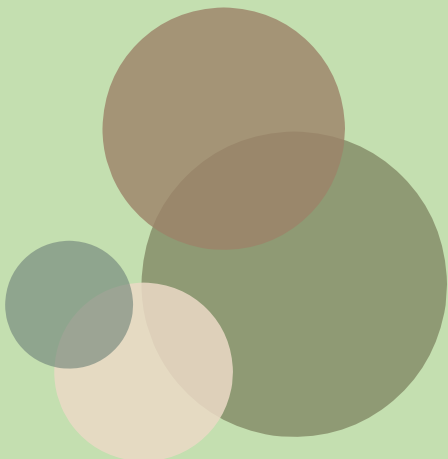
- **Skim first.** Flip through and notice which pages feel most helpful or interesting.
- **Pick one thing.** Choose just one tool to try today, even for 1–2 minutes.
- **Return when you can.** You can come back to this guide whenever overwhelm shows up again.

You are allowed to move slowly, repeat pages, and adapt everything to fit your brain and your life.

This Is for You If...

- Your brain feels “always on,” even when you’re exhausted
- You start tasks in your head but struggle to begin in real life
- You bounce between things and feel like nothing really gets finished
- You feel stuck in freeze, scrolling, or avoidance when things feel too big
- You’ve wondered if your brain is “broken,” “lazy,” or “too much”

If any of that sounds familiar, you’re in the right place.



Your Brain Isn't Broken



Your overwhelm is not proof that you're failing. It's evidence that your nervous system is stressed and doing its best to protect you.

An ADHD brain is not a broken version of a “normal” brain. It's a brain that processes information, emotion, and stimulation differently. When life feels demanding, confusing, or fast-paced, your brain may respond with overwhelm, shut-down, or avoidance — not because you don't care, but because your system is overloaded.

This guide is about understanding that response and finding ways to work with your brain instead of against it.

The ADHD Overwhelm Cycle

Here's a simple way to understand what often happens:

- **A task feels big, unclear, or emotionally loaded.**
- Your nervous system quietly flags it as “too much / too hard / too risky.”
- **Executive function** (planning, prioritizing, starting) gets clogged.
- You feel stuck, frozen, or pulled toward anything that feels easier or more stimulating.
- Shame and self-criticism show up: “Why can’t I just do it?”
- The shame and stress make it even harder to start... and the cycle repeats.

Nothing in this cycle means you are broken. It means your brain and body are trying to cope with overload.



What's Happening in Your Brain



Executive Function Bottleneck

ADHD can make it harder to organize steps, start tasks, and keep all the pieces in mind. When too many things need your attention, your brain hits a traffic jam.

Working Memory Overload

Holding details in mind (instructions, deadlines, steps) takes effort. When there's too much to remember, your brain drops pieces — and that can feel like chaos.

Sensitive Nervous System

Many ADHDers experience emotions and stress more intensely. Your brain may move faster into “threat” mode, even with everyday tasks. That's not drama or weakness; it's wiring.

Self-Compassion Is a Tool, Not a Luxury

When your brain is overwhelmed, harsh self-talk adds more stress. Your nervous system doesn't calm down when it's being yelled at — even if the yelling is coming from inside your own head.

Try using this gentle script when you notice overwhelm:

“My brain is overwhelmed, not defective.
I'm allowed to go smaller, slower, and get support.”



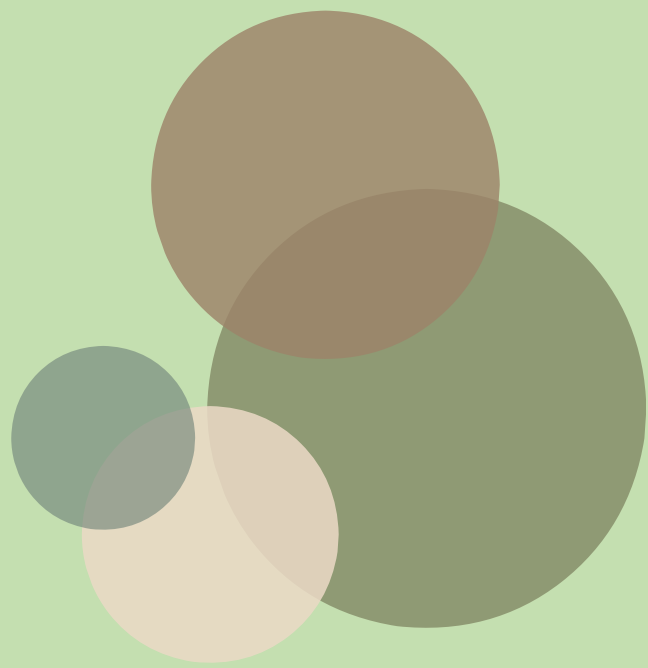
Now let's add some concrete tools you can use when overwhelm shows up.

ADHD Overwhelm Toolkit – What's Inside

In the next pages, you'll find:

1. A 60-Second Overwhelm Check-In
2. Tiny Starter Actions (to unfreeze when you're stuck)
3. Sensory Regulation Micro-Tools
4. A Task Triage Map (Must / Should / Could / Not Today)
5. A Low-Demand Day Planner
6. Gentle Reframe Scripts for Tough Moments

You do **not** need all of them at once.
Choose one that feels easiest to try.



Tool 1: 60-Second Overwhelm Check-In

When you feel frozen or scattered, pause and answer these prompts. You can think them, say them out loud, or write them down.

1. **What is the thing that feels overwhelming?**

(Example: “Starting my project,” “Replying to that email,” “Doing laundry.”)

2. **What about it feels hardest?**

- Too many steps
- I’m scared of doing it “wrong”
- I don’t know where to start
- I’m tired / drained

3. **What is the next smallest step?**

One step so small it feels slightly silly.

4. **What support would help?**

- Timer
- Body double / coworking
- Asking a question
- Breaking it into a list

You don’t have to fix the whole thing. Just choose one tiny next step.



Tool 2: Tiny Starter Actions

Pick **one** of these to “touch” the task without finishing it:

- Open the tab or document
- Put the item in front of you (basket, notebook, bill)
- Set a 1-minute timer and work only until it rings
- Write a messy first sentence or first bullet point
- Do 10% of the task (one drawer, five dishes, one email)
- Say out loud: “I am just starting, not finishing.”

Starting tiny tells your brain, “We’re safe, and we’re moving.”



Tool 3: Sensory Regulation Micro-Tools

When your nervous system is overloaded, it can help to calm your body first.

Cool (30–60 seconds)

- Splash cool water on your face or wrists
- Hold a cold drink or ice cube
- Step outside into fresh air

Move (30–60 seconds)

- Shake your hands, arms, and shoulders
- March in place or pace across the room
- Stretch your spine and take 3 slow breaths

Ground (30–60 seconds)

- Press your feet firmly into the floor
- Hold a pillow, stuffed animal, or weighted object
- Place a hand on your chest and one on your belly

Then return to your task and choose a tiny next step.

Tool 4: Task Triage Map

When everything feels urgent, **nothing** feels doable.
Use this to sort your tasks:

<p>MUST DO (today or truly soon)</p> <p>Things with real consequences if ignored.</p>	<p>SHOULD DO (important but can wait)</p> <p>Things that matter, but won't fall apart today.</p>
<p>COULD DO (nice if done)</p> <p>Bonus tasks, organizing, improvements</p>	<p>NOT TODAY</p> <p>Things you can consciously decide to release for now.</p>

Limit your **MUST DO** list to 1–3 items if possible.
Your nervous system will thank you.

Tool 5: Low-Demand Day Planner

On hard days, your job is not to be a productivity robot.
It's to move gently.

Today's Anchor Task (one thing):

Nice-If-Done Tasks (up to three):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Regulation Menu (check what you try):

- ☐ Drink water
- ☐ Move for 2 minutes
- ☐ Step outside
- ☐ 3 slow breaths
- ☐ Text or message someone

Tool 6: Reframe Scripts

Use these when shame or self-criticism shows up:

- “I’m overwhelmed, not lazy.”
- “My brain needs clarity before action.”
- “Small counts — even 1 minute.”
- “It’s okay to move slower than other people.”
- “I can come back to this later and that still counts.”

Circle or highlight the ones that feel most supportive.

You're Not Alone in This

If ADHD overwhelm has made you question your worth, you're not alone. Your brain has been working overtime in a world that isn't built for your wiring.

You deserve tools, support, and spaces that honor how your brain actually works. I hope this guide gives you a little more understanding, a little more compassion, and a few practical steps to reach for the next time everything feels like “too much.”



About the Creator

Glenn Permar II, Licensed Professional Counselor, is a therapist who specializes in supporting those navigating intense stress + overwhelm, anxiety, ADHD, and burnout recovery.

Website: www.groundedlightcounseling.com

Instagram: [grounded_light_counseling](https://www.instagram.com/grounded_light_counseling)



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