
— DR SARAH ANTICICH • CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST • EXECUTIVEFRAME.CO.NZ

Adult ADHD. Asked and answered.

Is ADHD real?

Yes. ADHD is a recognised neurodevelopmental difference, backed by decades of imaging, genetic and treatment research and acknowledged by every major health body. That it is often misunderstood says something about awareness — not about its reality.

What is it, actually?

A difference in how the brain's self-management system operates — a disorder of executive function and self-regulation: the processes that hold information in mind, inhibit impulses, track time, regulate emotion, and convert intentions into action. Attention isn't missing; the governance of attention is inconsistent.

Is it a willpower problem?

No. The gap between knowing what to do and doing it is neurological, not moral — like asking someone colourblind to try harder to see red. Enormous willpower in some areas alongside a routine task untouched for a month is the diagnosis, not a contradiction of it.

Why was I only diagnosed as an adult?

ADHD presents differently across the lifespan and between genders. Quieter, inattentive presentations get missed; capable people compensate — at private cost — until life's demands outgrow the workarounds. The system missed you. You didn't miss anything about yourself.

Why can I hyperfocus but not start boring tasks?

The ADHD initiation system runs reliably on four fuels — interest, urgency, novelty, and other people — and weakly on importance alone. Hyperfocus is executive function fully engaged; the difficulty is that engagement isn't voluntary. The move is not to care harder, but to get one fuel into the task's tank.

Why are my emotions so loud?

Emotional regulation is itself an executive function, and in ADHD it runs like the others: feelings arrive fast, at full volume, and leave slowly. This is regulation at a higher cost — not drama, not weakness. It responds well to skills, structure, and often medication.

Does ADHD go away?

No — it's lifelong wiring. But the relationship with it can change completely. Symptoms shift, skills compound, and with the right structure most adults function dramatically better. The aim is not cure; it is better architecture around the same brain.

Do I need medication?

Not necessarily — and the decision says nothing about your character. Medication tends to improve the availability of executive function; skills and structure decide what you do with it. Many use both. That conversation belongs with you and your prescriber.

What actually helps?

In order: regulation (nervous system first — sleep, movement, real-time settling), then external structure (one calendar, one list, visible time, small first steps), then connection (systems with witnesses survive). External structure isn't cheating — for an ADHD brain, it is the intervention.

Can I still be successful?

Plainly, yes. The same wiring that makes Tuesday admin expensive tends to make creativity, crisis calm, and pattern-spotting unusually available. The difference between struggling and thriving is rarely effort — it's whether your environment fits your brain.

Where do I start?

Understand your own pattern first: which executive functions cost you most, and under what conditions. Then change one small thing and let it hold before adding another. The Executive Frame™ Adult ADHD Series works through this in order — Center, Clarify, Choose, Repeat.

If things feel unsafe right now

Call 111 in an emergency. Lifeline 0800 543 354 • free call or text 1737, any hour. You don't need to be in crisis to use these lines.

