
— NEURODIVERSITY · ADHD ARM · FOR PARTNERS & FAMILY

When someone you love has ADHD

You are not imagining the friction — and it is not a lack of love or effort. A short guide to understanding the wiring, and turning "why can't you just..." into a team.

01 Start here: it's a performance gap, not a caring gap

The most important reframe in this whole document: ADHD is a **performance problem, not a knowledge problem**. The person you love almost always knows what needs doing, and usually *wants* to do it. The gap sits between intention and execution — and that gap is neurological, not a measure of how much they care about you.

"They did it when they wanted to" is real, but misleading. ADHD attention is **interest-based, not importance-based**. The energy that appeared for the thing they loved is not proof they could summon it on demand for the thing they found dull. That is the difference, not the excuse.

02 What actually helps

Do

- Externalise memory together — shared lists, calendars, visible reminders. It is scaffolding, not nagging.
- Be specific and kind: "Can you do X by Y?" beats "you never help".
- Tackle the system, not the person — "how do we stop this happening?" beats "why did you do this?"
- Protect sleep as a household. It is the load-bearing wall of regulation.

Go gently on

- Surprise demands and last-minute changes — transitions are genuinely hard.
- Feedback in the heat of the Tunnel; wait for calm.
- "Just try harder" — effort was rarely the missing ingredient.
- Keeping score. The invisible cost of coping is already high.

03 The emotional side

Emotions in ADHD often **arrive fast and at full volume**, and many adults are acutely sensitive to perceived criticism or rejection — which can make ordinary feedback, or

even an ambiguous text, land far harder than you intended. None of this means the feelings are wrong; they are usually accurate, just amplified and quick off the mark. Naming it gently ("I think we're both in the Tunnel — can we come back to this in ten minutes?") is often enough to change the outcome.

"When we understood the wiring, we stopped fighting each other and started tackling the problem together."

04 Look after yourself too

Loving someone with ADHD can mean carrying extra planning and emotional load, and your patience is a finite resource worth protecting. Support that is sustainable helps far more than support that quietly burns you out. Understanding the wiring is not the same as absorbing all of it — the goal is a team, with the load shared honestly.

ONE THING TO REMEMBER

A diagnosis explains a person — it does not add anything to them. Everything they have achieved, they achieved with this brain. Understanding it just gives the whole household a better set of instructions.

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