

The system audit: what works, what doesn't, what you've stopped trying

The useful question is not how much willpower you can summon. It's which conditions actually help you engage, and which ones never did, however often you were told they should.

This worksheet is for noticing the system around the task: what helped you get going, what didn't despite the advice, and what you've quietly stopped trying. **It's not a score, and nothing here is a test of how you're doing.**

WHAT THIS IS

A look at the conditions, not the willpower

- A way to notice which conditions help you engage
- A record of supports that work, and ones that never did
- Room to name what you've stopped trying, and why
- Useful alongside therapy, or as a first step on your own

WHAT THIS IS NOT

A score, a test, or a willpower check

- Not a measure of effort or discipline
- Not a test you can pass or fail
- Not a place to plan medication changes; that stays with your prescriber
- Not something to perfect; an honest, partial sheet is more useful than a tidy one

HOW TO USE THE AUDIT ON PAGE 2

- 1 One task or area per row**
Name something you were trying to do or keep up with. Eight rows is plenty. You do not need to fill them all.
- 2 Notice the conditions**
What actually helped you engage, what didn't despite the advice, and what you have stopped trying. A few words per cell.
- 3 Bring it to a session**
The point is the pattern across rows, not any single row. It is a starting point for a conversation, not a task to grade.

WHAT "CONDITIONS THAT HELP" TENDS TO MEAN

Research describes motivation less as a fixed amount of willpower and more as a quality that arises when certain conditions are met (Morsink et al., 2022). For many people, four conditions tend to make the difference. They are worth looking for as you fill the audit.

INTEREST OR CHOICE

When it feels like yours

The task connects to something you actually care about, or you get some say in how it is done, rather than it being handed to you whole.

A REAL DEADLINE OR STAKES

When it genuinely matters now

Something real is riding on it, soon. Not an invented deadline you can talk yourself out of, but one that means something.

ANOTHER PERSON

When you're not doing it alone

Working alongside someone, being expected somewhere, or company in the room. Connection often does what pressure cannot.

THE RIGHT SETTING

When the environment fits

The noise, the time of day, the sensory conditions that settle you rather than wind you up. The same task can go very differently.

i A note on medication, if it's part of your picture. Medication is one support among several, not the whole system. The evidence is that it can reduce core symptoms, and that on its own it does not build the life around them (Ostinelli et al., 2025). This audit is for mapping the other supports. Decisions about medication, including dose, stay with your GP or psychiatrist.

AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT ONE ROW MIGHT LOOK LIKE

THE TASK OR AREA	WHAT ACTUALLY HELPED YOU ENGAGE	WHAT DIDN'T, EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE TOLD IT SHOULD	WHAT YOU'VE STOPPED TRYING
Replying to emails	Doing it alongside a colleague, or a real deadline	"Just set aside 30 minutes", reward charts	To-do apps, after the fourth one

Notice that what helped was a condition, company or a real deadline, not more willpower.

REMEMBER

What you've stopped trying is information, not failure. You often stopped because it did not fit, not because you gave up.

Morsink, S., et al. (2022). Studying motivation in ADHD: The role of internal motives and the relevance of self-determination theory. *Journal of Attention Disorders*, 26(8), 1139–1158. · Ostinelli, E. G., et al. (2025). Comparative efficacy and acceptability of interventions for ADHD in adults. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 12(1), 32–43.

The system audit

Eight rows is enough. **One task or area per row.** If you cannot fill a column, leave it. The audit is more useful when it is honest and partial than when it is complete and tidy.

#	THE TASK OR AREA	WHAT ACTUALLY HELPED YOU ENGAGE	WHAT DIDN'T, EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE TOLD IT SHOULD	WHAT YOU'VE STOPPED TRYING
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				

i **For use alongside therapy, not as a substitute.** The audit gives you and a clinician something concrete to start from. It is for noticing the pattern, not for self-prescribing the fix.

If “what didn’t help” is hard to fill

Think of the advice you have been given most often, try harder, be more disciplined, just start, and whether it actually moved anything.

If “stopped trying” feels uncomfortable

A strategy you abandoned is not a personal failing. Most often it did not suit how your attention runs. That is worth knowing.

WHEN THE AUDIT IS FILLED IN

Bring it into a session. The pattern across rows is the useful part.

What helps you engage is information worth building on, whether or not you book a session. If you'd like to talk it through, the Meet and Greet is a short call to see if we're the right fit.

MEET & GREET
Free
15 minutes
Online or in-person
No obligation