2026

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The Adaptive Worry System

A Field Guide to the ADHD Inner Landscape

DAY 01

March 25

Welcome / Module 01 & 02

Introduction to the Adaptive Worry System. Module 01 explores worry as a messenger—not a malfunction. Module 02 begins mapping the signal, helping you see how your system organizes, scans, and responds.

DAY 02

April 1

Module 03 & 04

Module 03 introduces Anxiety Alchemy—learning how to work with the signal instead of against it. Module 04 explores inner archetypes, helping you meet and understand the parts within your system.

DAY 03

April 8

Module 05

Module 05 brings the system together—exploring the unified inner landscape of ADHD through creative, integrative practices.

Welcome

This is not a workbook to fix you. This is a place to listen. Your mind has been working very hard to protect you, to anticipate, to prepare, to make sure nothing important is lost. Sometimes that protection shows up as worry. Not as a flaw. Not as failure. But as a signal. This workbook is an invitation to slow down just enough to hear what that signal is trying to say.

> You don't need to complete every page.

> You don't need to get anything "right."

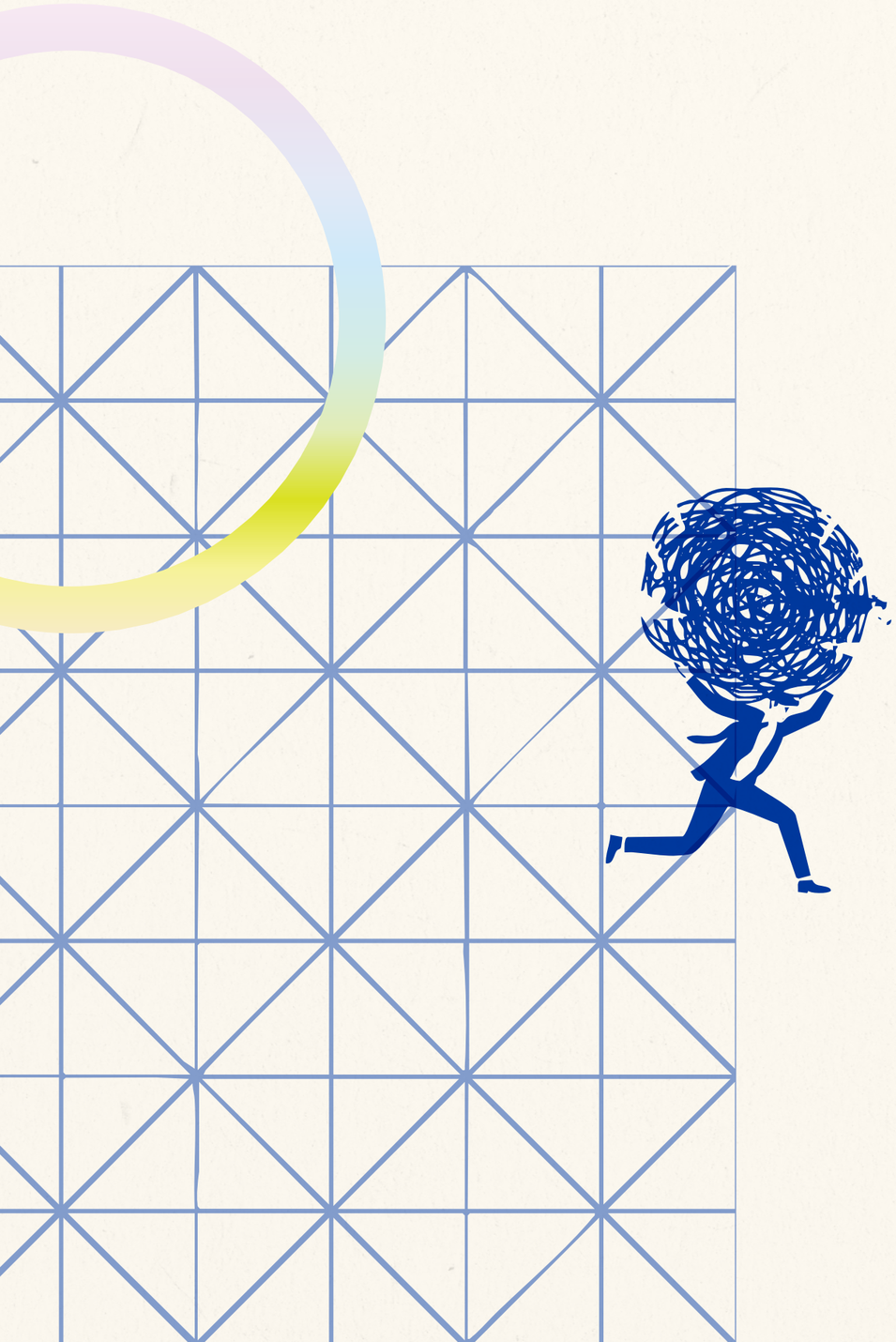
You are allowed to:

__ write __ draw __ collage
__ skip __ return later __explore
__ change your mind

> You are the expert on your own system.

How to Use This Workbook

Move gently. If something feels overwhelming, pause. If something feels meaningful, stay there longer. There is no correct path through this. This is not about control. This is about relationship.



MODULE 01:

Worry as a Messenger

Worry as a Signal, Not a Problem

Sometimes what we call "worry" is not excess, it is information arriving quickly, before we have a place to put it. For many individuals with ADHD, the nervous system is highly responsive to uncertainty, change, and perceived risk, often generating rapid predictive thoughts in an effort to prepare (Barkley, 2015; Dodson, 2022). This can feel overwhelming, but it reflects a system that is actively trying to protect, organize, and anticipate.
Research on executive functioning suggests that difficulties with task initiation and prioritization are often preceded, not caused, by emotional and cognitive overload (Brown, 2013). When worry is not understood, it can interrupt action. When it is mapped and translated, it can become a guide.

This section invites you to begin noticing worry not as something to eliminate, but as something to interpret.

For many individuals with ADHD, worry is not a flaw in the system, it is a fast-moving form of prediction. The brain is attempting to anticipate, prepare, and protect, often before conscious processing can organize the signal (Barkley, 2015; Dodson, 2022).

When this signal is not understood, it can feel overwhelming. When it is interpreted, it becomes useful.

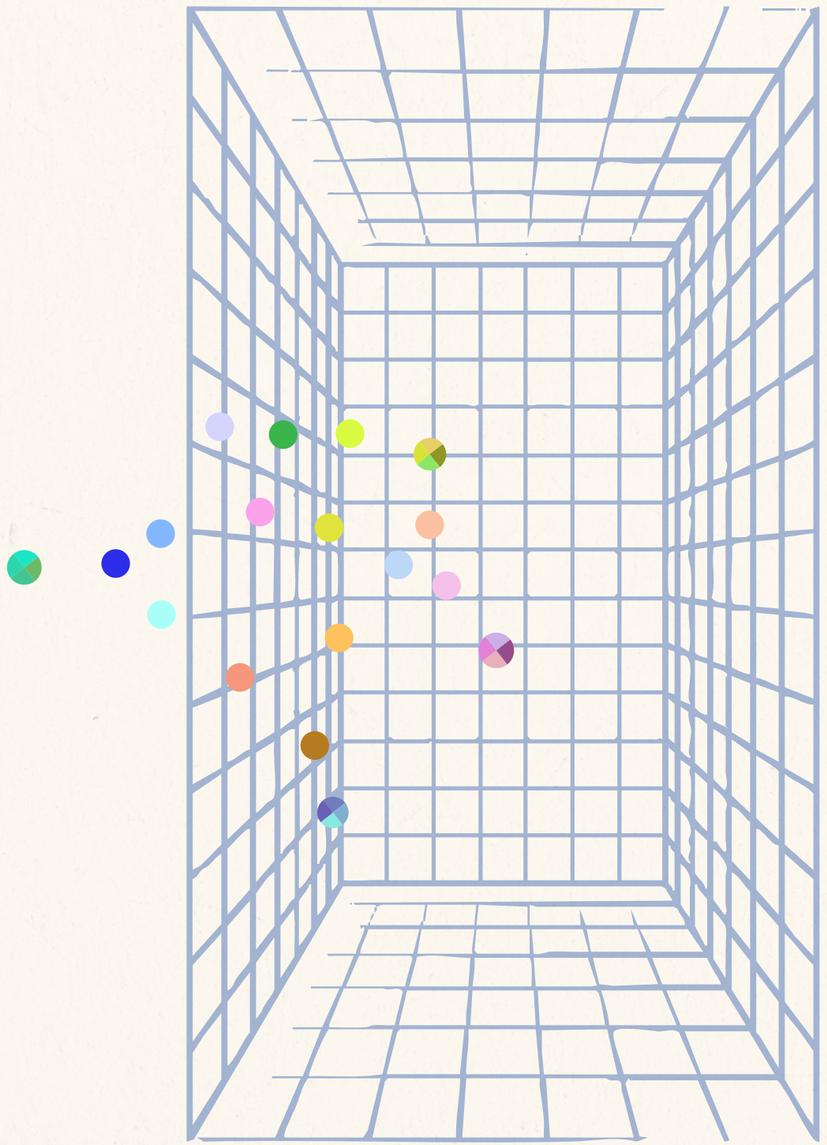
This section invites a shift from reacting to worry > to listening for what it is trying to say.

References

Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.

Brown, T. E. (2013). Smart but stuck: Emotions in teens and adults with ADHD. Jossey-Bass.

Dodson, W. (2022). Emotional regulation and rejection sensitivity in ADHD. ADDitude Magazine.



What is Worry for You?

> Before definitions… before strategies… Just notice.

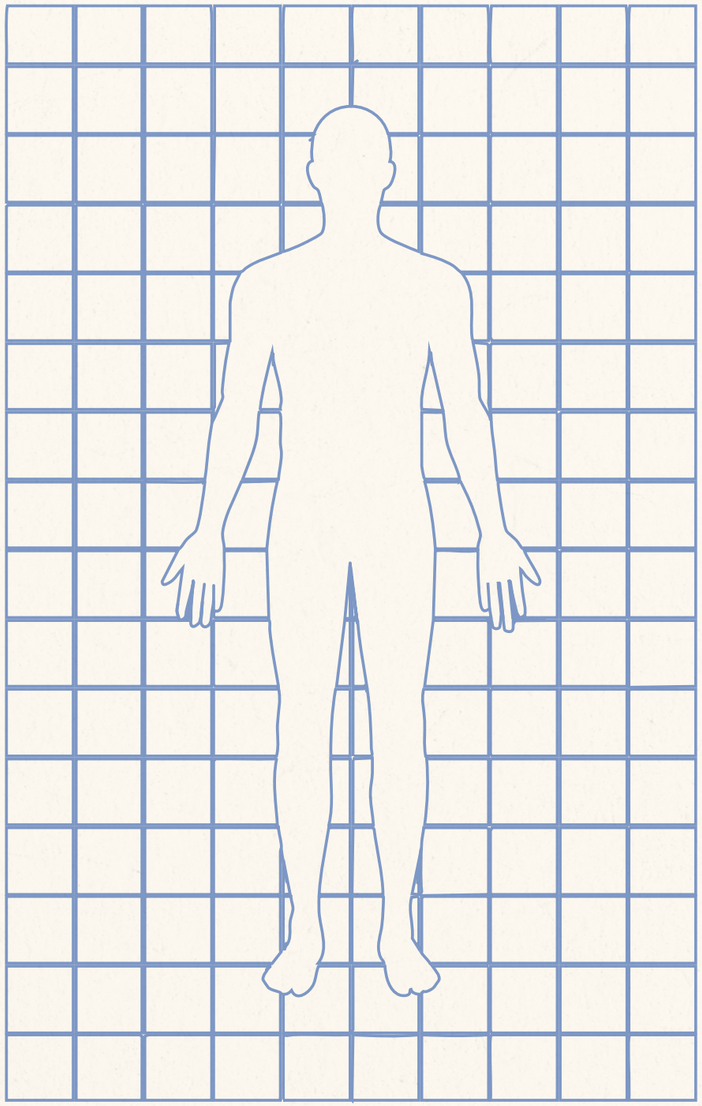
When worry shows up, what is it like?

__Q1: Is it loud or quiet?

__Q2: Fast or slow?

__Q3: Clear or tangled?

Write, draw, collage, or map what comes:



[_____]

/ Your Worry Voice

> Worry often speaks in a voice. Sometimes it sounds urgent. Sometimes critical. Sometimes protective. ***Complete the sentence:***

"My worry usually sounds like _____..."

/ What tone does it use?

Q: What does it seem most afraid of?

[_____]

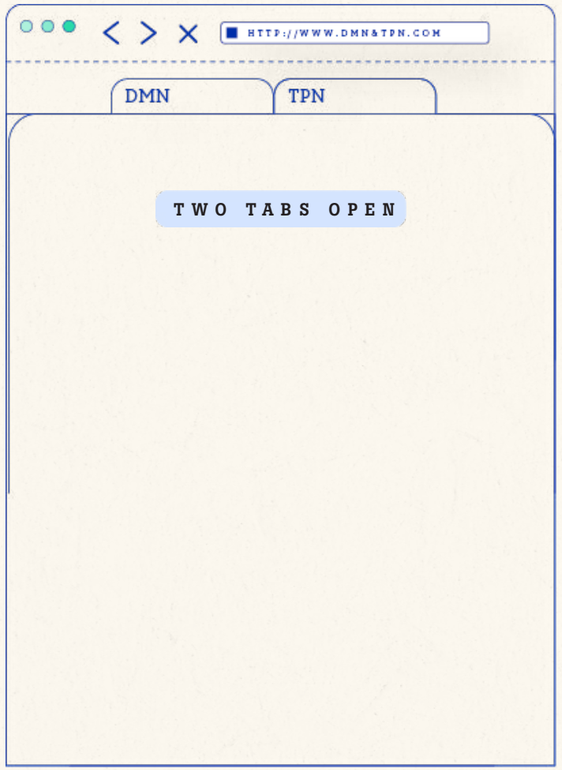
/ Where It Lives

> Worry is not just thoughts, it lives in the body. Take a moment.

Q: Where do you feel it?

[__] chest	[__] legs	[__] _____
[__] stomach	[__] feet	[__] _____
[__] throat	[__] toes	[__] _____
[__] shoulders	[__] arms	[__] _____
[__] face	[__] fingers	[__] _____
[__] somewhere else _____		

You can: / label / shade / circle / draw /



[ ]

/ Two Tabs Open

Many ADHD minds experience something like having two tabs open at once:
__. one focused on the task
__. one moving inward—thinking, imagining, remembering

Right now… What's open in your "other tab"?

[_____]

The Drift

Sometimes the mind moves without asking.
__. into the past
__. into the future
__. into imagined scenarios
__. into self-evaluation

This is not failure. This is a pattern.

What direction does your mind tend to drift?

[_____]

[~~~

Brain Dump

[ ]

Brain Dump

Q01 : Make a list of worries that surface for you:
"_____, _____, _____, _____…"

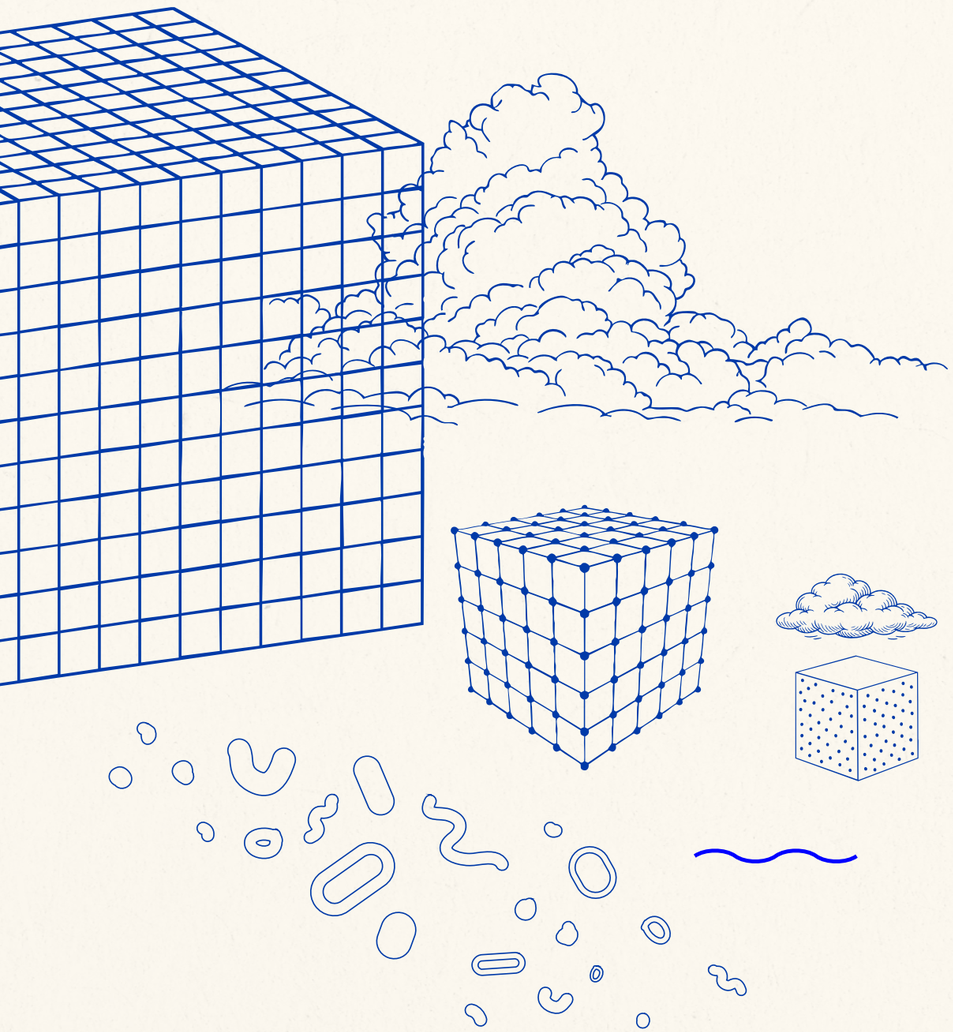
Q02: What is Worry for you?
"My worry usually sounds like…_____"

Q03: Where does worry show up in your body?
"Worry shows up in my…_____ [body/area]"

> Let everything out.

[__] No organizing.
[__] No filtering.
[__] No making it make sense.

>>> Just release what's in your mind.



A Gentle Pause

> Look back at what you wrote.

> Without judgment, just notice:

[__] ***What surprised you?***

[_____]

[__] ***What felt familiar?***

[_____]

[__] ***What feels most important right now?***

[_____]

/FIELD NOTES:
The Science Beneath the Signal

/ Understanding the Sensitivity of the System

Some ADHD nervous systems are highly responsive, especially to emotion, change, and perceived disconnection.

/ You might notice:

__. feelings that arrive quickly and intensely
__. a strong reaction to criticism or misunderstanding
__. a sense of urgency to repair, fix, or prevent loss

This is sometimes described as rejection sensitivity (Dodson, n.d.). Not as a weakness, but as a system that is deeply attuned to connection.

/ Why Worry Feels So Loud

For many people, worry is a background noise. For others, it becomes a full system response:
__. scanning for what might go wrong
__. anticipating outcomes
__. trying to prepare in advance

This is not overreacting. This is a brain that is trying to protect you, quickly (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013).

/ A Different Way to Understand This

Some researchers describe ADHD as involving differences in emotional regulation and intensity (Shaw et al., 2014; Surman et al., 2013).

Emotional responses may move quickly, feel amplified, or take longer to settle, not because something is wrong, but because the system is highly responsive.

But beyond labels, what matters is this: Your system is not broken. It is responsive, fast, and deeply invested in keeping you safe.

/ FURTHER READING
RESOURCE LIST

/ Foundational ADHD Texts

ADHD 2.0
Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (2021). ADHD 2.0.

Driven to Distraction
Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (1994). Driven to Distraction.

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Handbook for Diagnosis and Treatment.
Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Handbook for Diagnosis and Treatment.

/ Neurodivergence & Identity

Self-Compassion for Neurodivergent Minds
Neff, M. (2023). Self-Compassion for Neurodivergent Minds

Unmasking Autism
Price, D. (2022). Unmasking Autism
Emotional Regulation & ADHD

Dr. William Dodson + ADDitude Magazine
Dodson, W. (various articles; ADDitude Magazine)

Emotion dysregulation in ADHD
Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). Emotion dysregulation in ADHD

/ Online and Accessible Resources

ADDitude Magazine
(www.additudemag.com)

Divergent Insights
(Dr. Megan Neff)

CHADD
(Children and Adults with ADHD)

/ References:

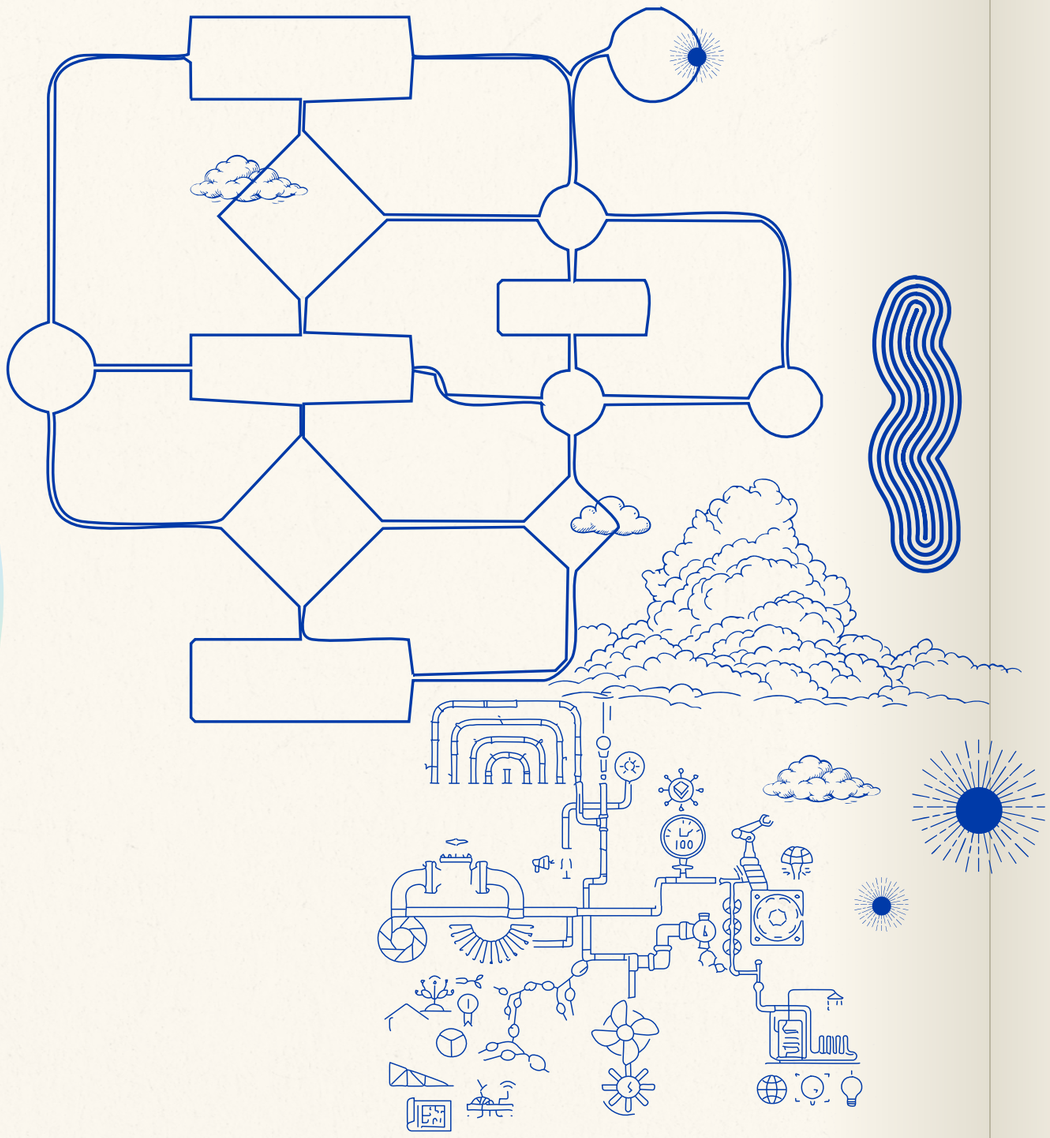
Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.

Brown, T. E. (2013). A new understanding of ADHD in children and adults: Executive function impairments. Routledge.

Dodson, W. (n.d.). Rejection sensitive dysphoria and ADHD. ADDitude Magazine.

Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). Emotion dysregulation in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. American Journal of Psychiatry, 171(3), 276–293. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.13070966

Surman, C. B. H., Biederman, J., Spencer, T., & Miller, C. A. (2013). Understanding deficient emotional self-regulation in adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A controlled study. Journal of Attention Disorders, 17(7), 557–567. https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054712437295



MODULE 02:

Mapping the Signals

Mapping the Inner Landscape

Before change can occur, there must be visibility. Many individuals with ADHD describe a sense of internal chaos, not because there is no structure, but because the structure has not yet been externalized. Cognitive neuroscience research suggests that the brain is constantly shifting between internally directed thought (default mode network) and externally focused engagement (task-positive network) (Raichle, 2015). For ADHD individuals, these shifts can be more rapid, more intense, or less regulated (Sonuga-Barke & Castellanos, 2007). What appears as distraction is often a dynamic internal landscape competing for attention.

Mapping is not about control, it is about orientation. When internal experiences are named, drawn, or located, they become more workable.

Attention is not a single state, it is a shifting system. The brain moves between internally directed thought and externally focused engagement, often rapidly and outside of conscious control (Raichle, 2015).

In ADHD, these shifts can feel unpredictable or difficult to regulate, leading to experiences of distraction or mental overload (Sonuga-Barke & Castellanos, 2007).

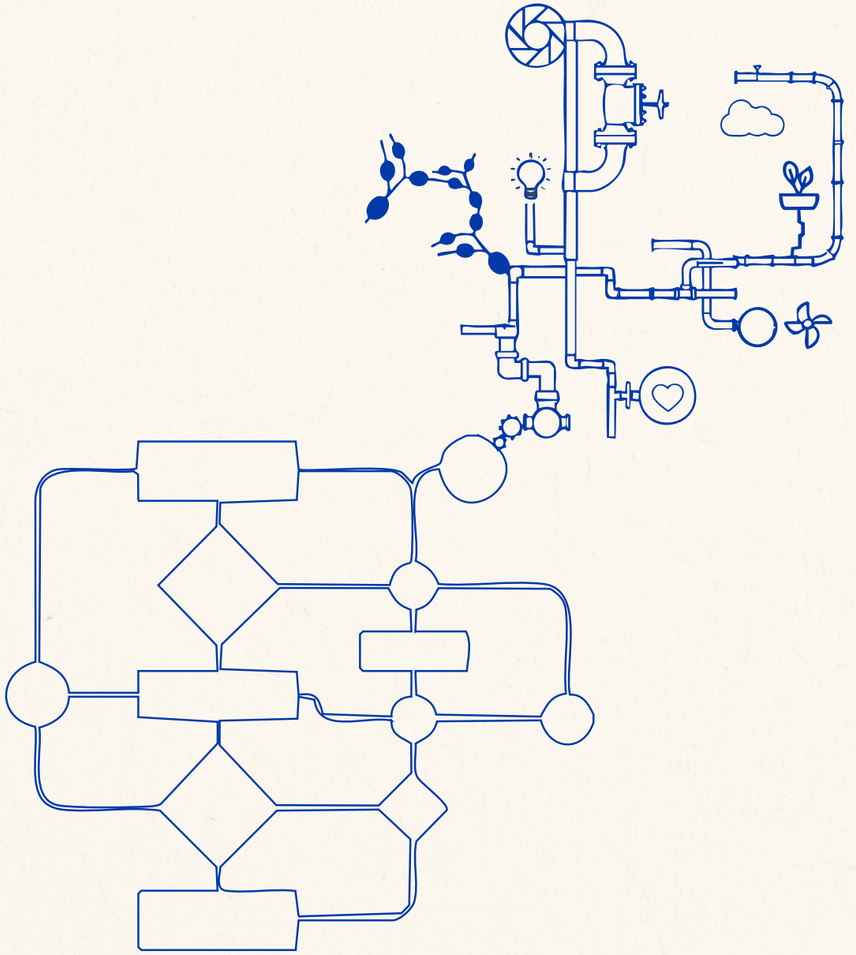
Mapping the inner landscape is not about control. It is about orientation, seeing what is already happening.

References

Raichle, M. E. (2015). The brain's default mode network. Annual Review of Neuroscience, 38, 433–447.

Sonuga-Barke, E. J. S., & Castellanos, F. X. (2007). Spontaneous attentional fluctuations in impaired states and pathological conditions: A neurobiological hypothesis. Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 31(7), 977–986.

Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (2021). ADHD 2.0: New science and essential strategies for thriving with distraction—from childhood through adulthood. Ballantine Books.



Understanding the System

> What we often call "struggle" is often a difference in how the brain:

__ . holds information
__ . organizes tasks
__ . shifts attention
__ . regulates energy

> This is not about laziness. This is about how your system works.

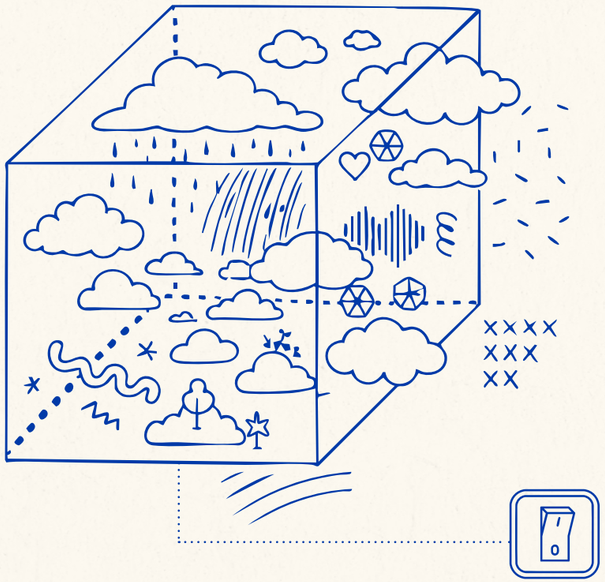
Where Do You Feel It Most?

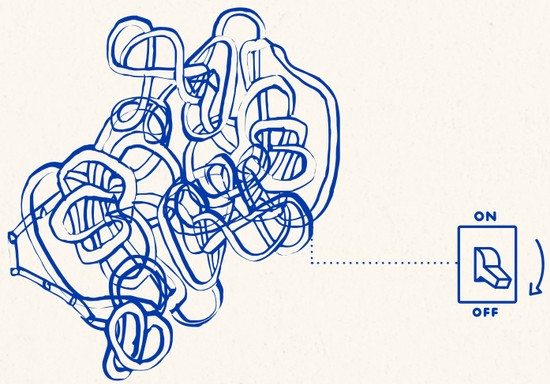
__Q: Which of these feels most challenging right now?

[You can circle, mark, or reflect]

[__] Working Memory (holding information in mind)
[__] Planning & Organization
[__] Prioritization
[__] Cognitive Flexibility

__Q: What do you notice as you choose?





__ *Q: When things feel hard, what story do you tell yourself?*

__ *Q: What might change if this was not a "personal failure," but a brain-based pattern?*

The Worry Map Structure

> Now we begin translating worry. Choose one worry from earlier. Just one.

__Q: 1. What I fear

__Q: 2. What this worry is trying to do for me

[What is it protecting? Preventing? Preparing for?]

__Q: 3. What this tells me I might need

[__] clarity
[__] structure
[__] reassurance
[__] support
[__] rest
[__] something else
[__] _____

__Q: 4. What I can try gently

Not perfectly. Not completely. Just one small step.

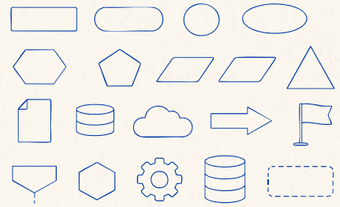
Your Worry Map

Your Worry Map

> You can also represent this visually.

> Use in your map:

[__] arrows
[__] shapes
[__] zones
[__] symbols



> Let this be intuitive.

SIGNALS

STRUCTURES

PARTS

Executive Function Map

/ Executive Function Map

> Let's imagine your brain visually. Not as a list of problems, but as a landscape.

> ***Draw or map your system using four regions:***

[__] Region 01. ***Memory Harbor***
Holding information in mind

[__] Region 02. ***Planning Mountain***
Organizing, starting, sequencing

[__] Region 03. ***Priority Compass***
Deciding what matters most

[__] Region 04. ***Flexibility Bridge***
Shifting, adapting, recovering

> ***Now, begin to map:***

[__] Where do traffic jams happen?
[Where does it feel stuck, slow, or overloaded?]

[__] Where do things flow more easily?
[Where does your system work with you?]

[__] What helps you navigate?
[Tools, supports, environments, people]

> You can draw this. You can label it. You can make it abstract or literal. This is not about accuracy. This is about noticing patterns.

Containment Ritual

> You do not have to carry everything in your mind.
> Take a moment to close this process.

You might:

[__] fold this page
[__] draw a container
[__] give this worry a title
[__] imagine placing it somewhere safe

> This is already held.

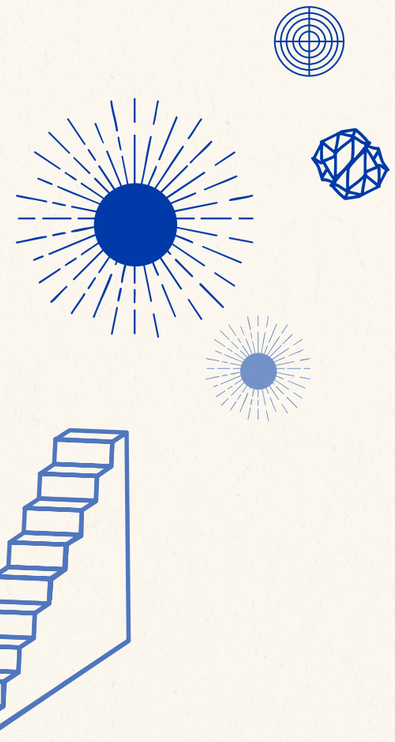
Integration

What Did You Notice? As you moved through this process:

[__] ***Q: What shifted?*** [_____]

[__] ***Q: What became clearer?*** [_____]

[__] ***Q: What felt different?*** [_____]



A Gentle Next Step

> You are learning how to listen,
to a system that has been trying
to care for you all along.

> Not a plan. Not a demand.

> Just a possibility.

> "One small thing I might try _____…"

Closing Reflection

Your worry is not the enemy. It is a signal. A system. A form of care that may have become overwhelming. But underneath it, there is intelligence. there is protection. there is something trying to help. You are not broken. You are learning how to listen.

MODULE 03:

Anxiety Alchemy :Translating the Signal

From Worry to Structure

Worry often contains an unspoken question:

What needs to happen so this turns out okay?

When left unprocessed, this question loops. When translated, it becomes action.

Executive functioning research suggests that individuals with ADHD benefit from externalized structure, systems that reduce the burden on working memory and decision-making (Barkley, 2015). This means that insight alone is not enough; it must be paired with tangible supports.
In this section, worry is not reduced, it is converted.
From signal to need to structure to action.

References

Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.

Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (1994). Driven to distraction: Recognizing and coping with attention deficit disorder from childhood through adulthood. Simon & Schuster.

Dodson, W. (2022). Emotional regulation and ADHD. ADDitude Magazine.

Bridge from Module 02 to Module 03

So far, you've done something really important. You've started to notice your worry…and map how your system moves. But there's still a question that tends to show up here: 'If I can see it… why does it still feel so hard to shift?' What we're going to introduce now is a way of understanding that. Not as a lack of effort…but as a question of sequence."

The ADHD Hierarchy of Needs

What Your System Might Be Asking For

Sometimes what feels like 'I can't do this' isn't about motivation. It's about something earlier in the system asking for support first. Before focus… before planning… before follow-through…the nervous system asks:

"Am I regulated?"
"Do I have enough support?"
"Is this clear enough to begin?"

This is not a failure of effort. It is a sequence. When you mapped your worry earlier, you may have noticed it was pointing toward something, rest, clarity, support. This hierarchy helps you locate where that need lives.

Q: When you feel stuck, where might your system be asking for support first?

[__] Regulation
[__] Support
[__] Clarity
[__] Structure
[__] Action

**** If action feels hard, return to the layer below. ****

7. Self-Trust / Expansion
[__] "what opens up now?"
[__] I can trust myself to do this again

6. Integration
[__] meaning making
[__] updating system

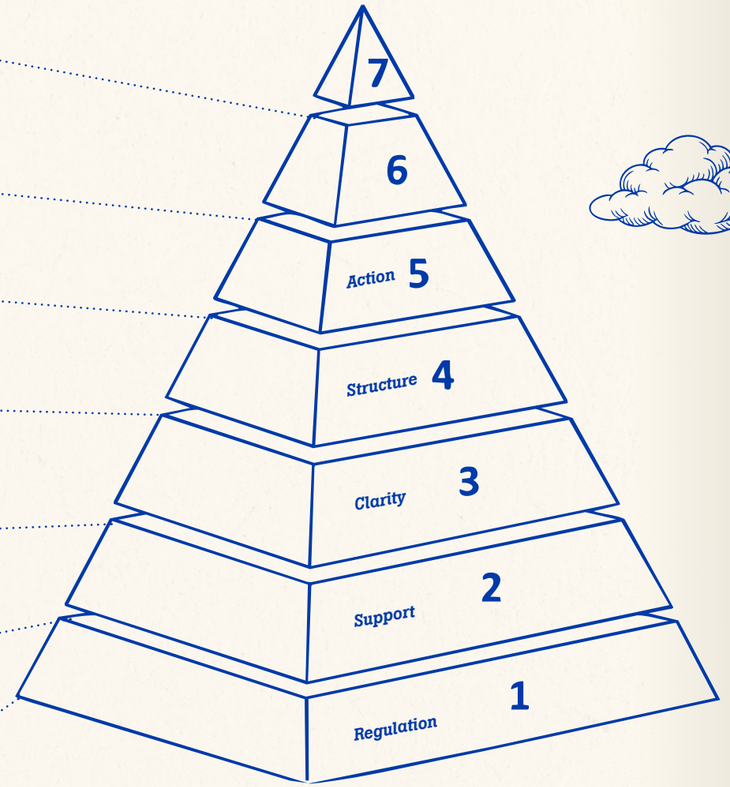
5. Action
[__] initiation
[__] follow-through

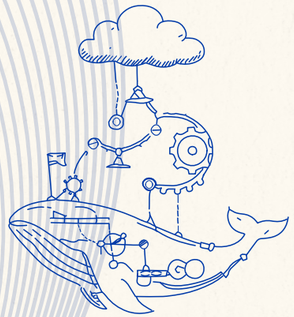
4. Structure steps
[__] external supports
[__] time scaffolding

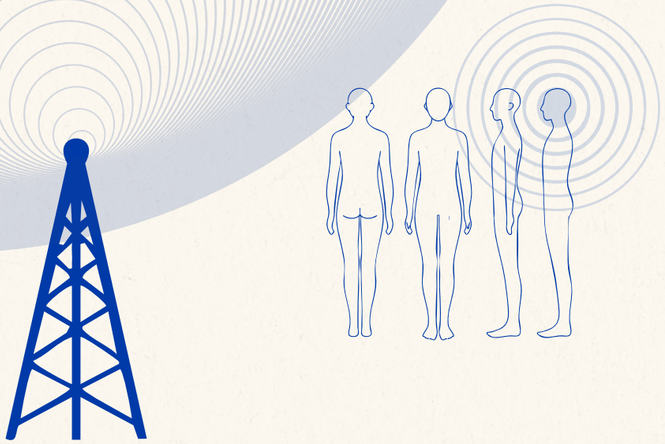
3. Clarity
[__] what is the task?
[__] where do I start?

2. Emotional + Relational Support
[__] reassurance
[__] shame reduction
[__] co-regulation

1. Safety + Regulation
[__] nervous system state
[__] overwhelm / shutdown
[__] sensory load







Anxiety Alchemy is not about pushing yourself into action. It's about listening to what the signal is asking for…and responding at the right layer."

Section 01

Notice the Signal

> Pause and write:

Q: What is one worry that has been repeating in your system?

[_____]

Real-Time Awareness

Track the Signal

> Pause. Drop into the present moment. Right now, what is your system doing?

[__] Scanning
[__] Avoiding
[__] Freeze / stuck
[__] Other: _____
[__] Overthinking
[__] Urgency / pressure

Q: What is the current worry signal?

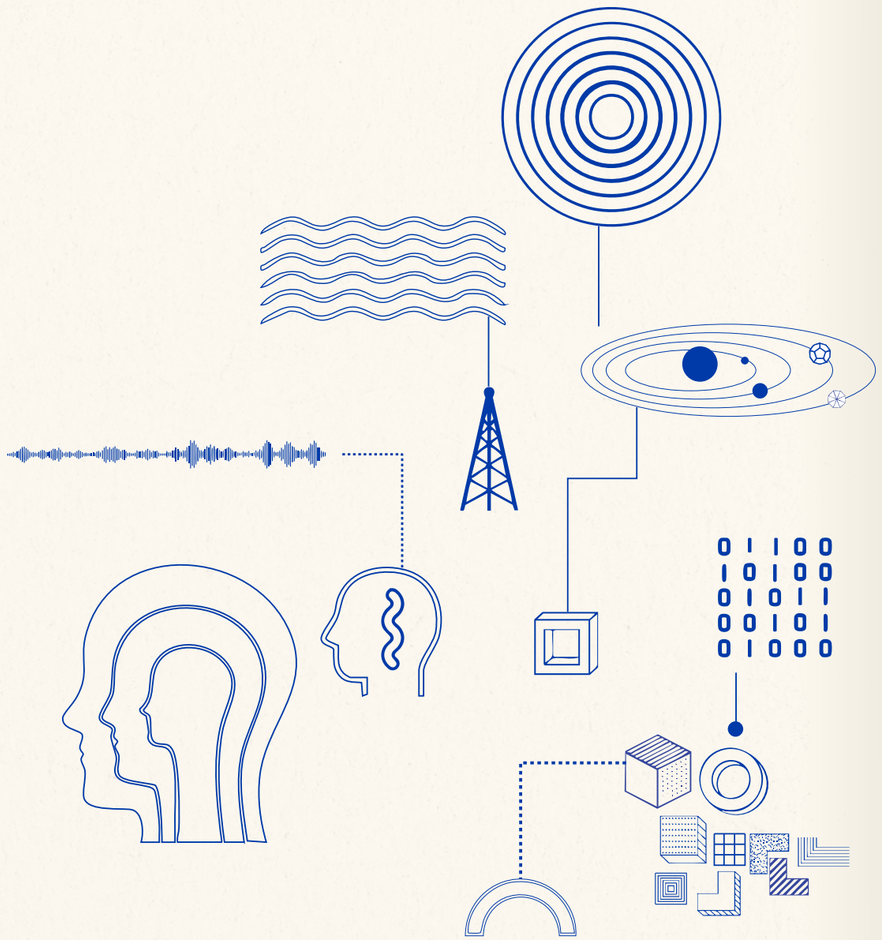
(write exactly how it shows up in your mind)

_____

_____

Q: Where do you feel this in your body?

[__] Chest
[__] Shoulders
[__] Hands
[__] Stomach
[__] Head
[__] Other: _____



Section 02

Decode the Signal

Instead of asking "How do I stop this?" We ask:

Q: "What is this trying to do for me?" [_____]

> This worry might be trying to:

[__] Prepare me
[__] Prevent something
[__] Help me remember
[__] Protect me from judgment
[__] Avoid failure
[__] Keep control
[__] Other: _____

> If this worry had a message, it might say:

_____

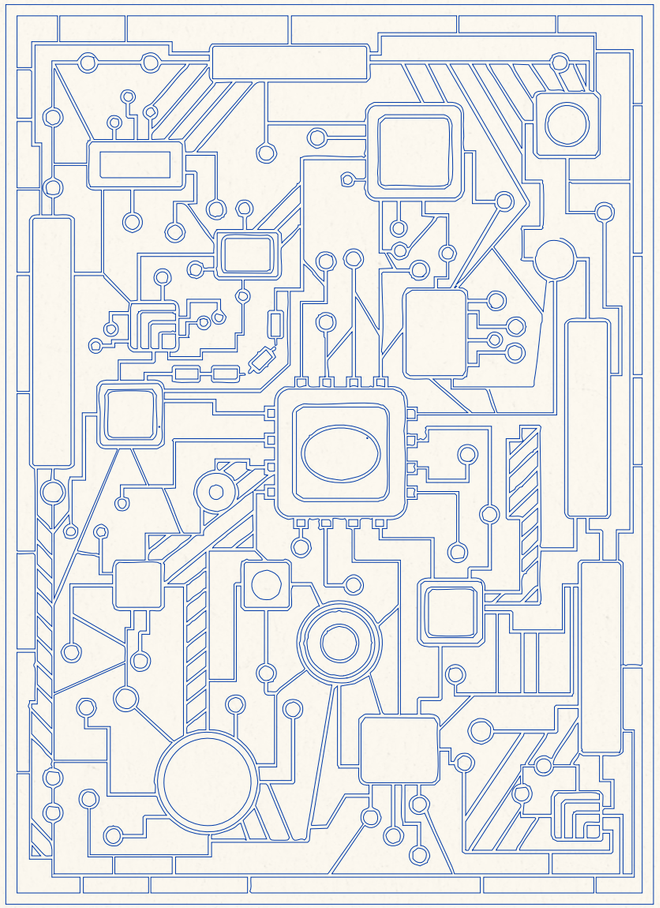
_____

Identify the Protective Intention

> Every worry carries a direction. It may not feel clear at first,
but underneath the noise, there is often a question:

Q: "What is this trying to prevent?" [_____]
Q: "What is this trying to prepare for?" [_____]

> This worry might be trying to protect me from:
It might be trying to help me prepare for: [_____]



Section 03

Translate into Information

> Now we gently shift from emotion information instead of:
"I'm overwhelmed", we ask:

Q: "What specifically needs attention?"

[_____]

> ***List what this worry is pointing to:***

01. _____

02. _____

03. _____

> Let's slow the signal down. Break the worry into pieces:

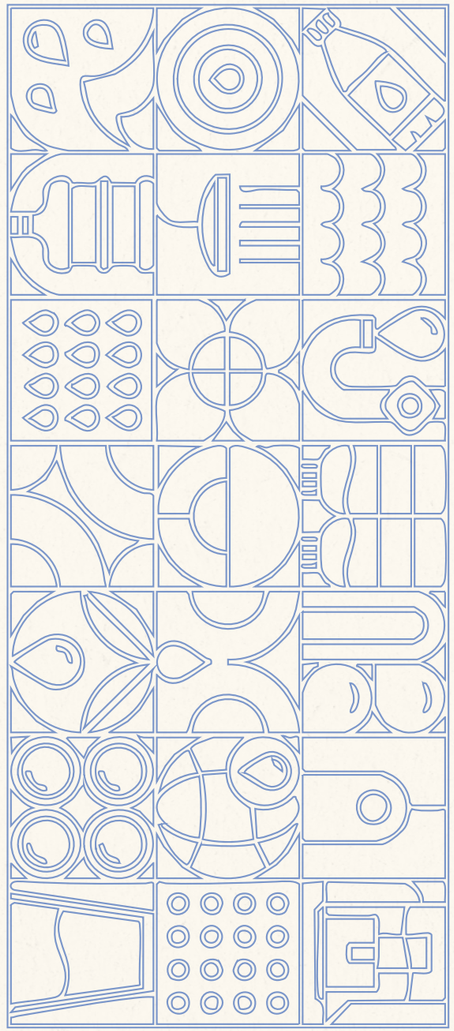
Q: What specifically needs attention?

01. _____

02. _____

03. _____

Circle what is actually within your control: (You can circle from the list above)



Section 04.

Create Structure

Worry often moves fast. Structure slows it down into something usable.
Small structure is enough. Worry becomes overwhelming when it stays internal.
We are moving it outside the system.

Choose one:

[__] Write it down
[__] Break into steps
[__] Set a reminder
[__] Ask for support
[__] Create a visual map
[__] Ask someone for help
[__] Checklist
[__] Calendar / time block
[__] Sticky note / visual cue
[__] Phone reminder
[__] Break into steps
[__] _____

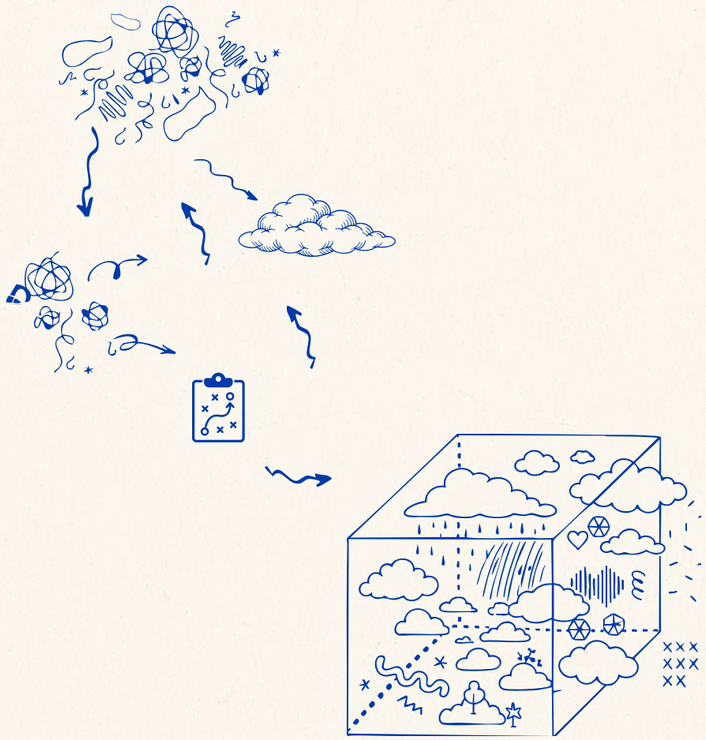
Q: What structure could support this?

Turn one worry into a plan:

Step 1 _____

Step 2 _____

Step 3 _____



Section 05.

/ Tool: The Anxiety Translator

> A way to work with the signal instead of getting pulled into it.
Worry often sounds absolute. Translation creates space.

Q01. What my anxiety says: [_____]

Q02. What it might actually mean:

What is this trying to protect,
prepare, or care about? [_____]

Q03. What I might try:

One small step. Not perfect. Just possible.

[_____]

04. What this part might need:

[__] structure [__] reassurance
[__] clarity [__] support
[__] rest [__] something else: _____

Closing Reflection

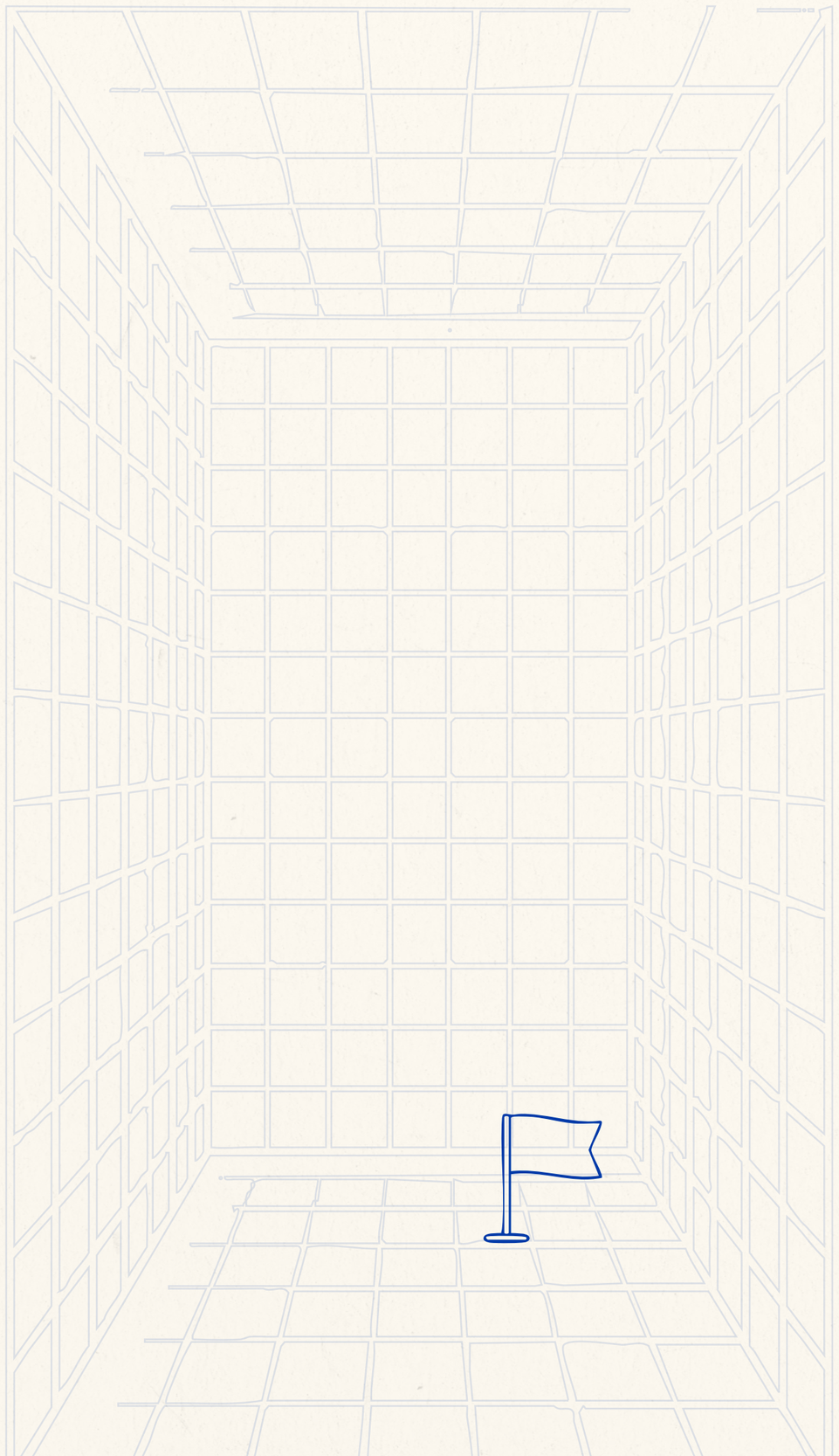
Reflection: What Shifted?

[__] Before _____
[__] After _____

What helped the most?

[__] Naming the worry [__] Understanding the intention
[__] Creating structure [__] Taking action
[__] Other: _____

Q: What changed when you moved from worry structure?



Section 05

Your 2-Minute Start Ritual

Choose a small action that signals your brain: "It's time to begin."

Examples:

__. lighting a candle
__. stretching or breathing
__. opening the document
__. setting a 5-minute timer
__. writing the first messy sentence
__. write or draw ritual.

Take One Small Action

Not everything needs to be solved. We are looking for movement, not perfection.

/ Choose one small action (under 5 minutes):

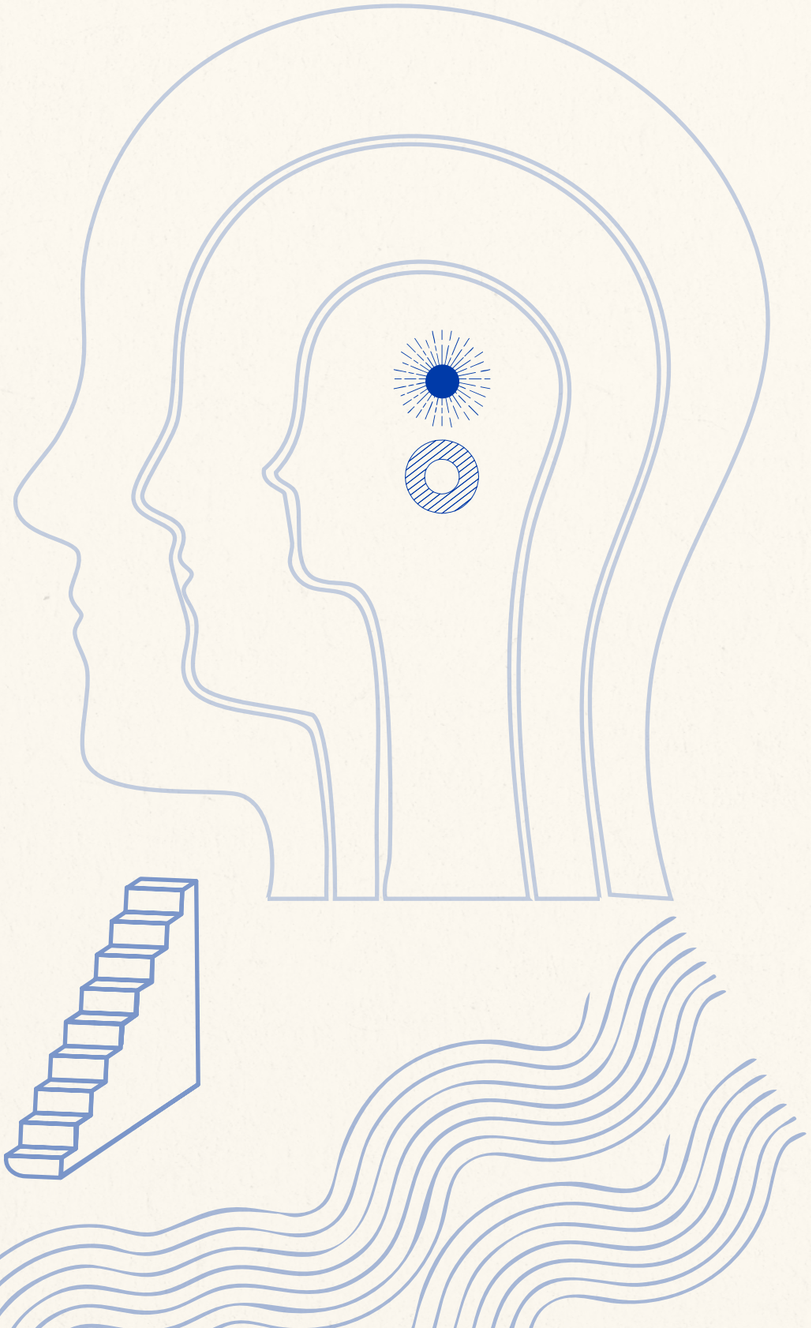
[__] Send one message
[__] Open the task
[__] Gather materials
[__] Write one line
[__] Set a timer

> Your action: _____

/ After doing it, check:

[__] I started
[__] I reduced overwhelm
[__] I still feel stuck (that's okay)

> One small next step: [_____]



MODULE 04:

Inner Archetypes

The Emotional System (RSD, Overwhelm, Freeze)

Emotional intensity in ADHD is often misunderstood as reactivity, when in reality it reflects differences in emotional regulation and processing speed (Shaw et al., 2014; Dodson, 2022).

Experiences such as rejection sensitivity, overwhelm, or shutdown are not character flaws—they are nervous system responses to perceived threat or disconnection.

From a trauma-informed perspective, these responses are adaptive. They are attempts to maintain safety, belonging, or control.

Understanding these patterns does not eliminate them.

But it changes the relationship to them.

References

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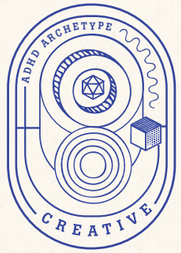
THE ADAPTIVE WORRY SYSTEM
Inner Archetypes



THE CREATIVE

"What if we tried it this way..."

How it shows up:
__. generating ideas, visuals, or connections
__. thinking in images, metaphors, or patterns
__. wanting to make, design, build, or express
__. nonlinear thinking (jumping between concepts)

What it's trying to do:
__. bring ideas into form
__. create meaning and expression
__. explore possibilities beyond structure

When it softens:
__. I can create without needing it to be perfect
__. I can follow ideas without losing myself in them

☐ **What helps:**
__. open-ended time without pressure
__. play-based exploration
__. capturing ideas quickly (notes/sketches)
__. reducing evaluation during creation
__. alternating structure + freedom
__. protecting creative energy from over-scheduling

THE ADVENTURER

"Let's go. Let's try it."

How it shows up:
__. desire for novelty or change
__. restlessness with routine
__. impulsive action or quick decisions
__. bursts of energy toward something new

What it's trying to do:
__. move you toward growth and experience
__. prevent stagnation
__. help you engage with life

When it softens:
__. I can move with intention, not just urgency
__. I can explore without abandoning stability

☐ **What helps:**
__. planned novelty (intentional change vs chaos)
__. safe risk-taking
__. movement and stimulation
__. variety within structure
__. channeling impulse into exploration, not escape
__. clear return points (anchors)

THE COMPASSIONATE WITNESS
(Self energy)

"I can sit with this."

How it shows up:
__. curiosity instead of judgment
__. ability to pause
__. noticing without reacting
__. internal steadiness

What it's trying to do:
__. create safety inside your system
__. hold all parts without rejecting them
__. support integration and choice

When it leads:
__. everything else becomes easier to work with
__. your system feels less like a battle, more like a conversation

☐ **What helps:**
__. intentional access (pause + notice)
__. mindfulness practices
__. IFS-style unblending
__. slowing down internal reactions
__. creating space before responding
__. self-to-part dialogue

THE VISIONARY
(your "Driven / Futuristic" energy)

"There's so much I could do..."

How it shows up:
__. big ideas
__. excitement about possibilities
__. starting many things at once
__. difficulty narrowing focus

What it's trying to do:
__. expand your life
__. create meaning and direction
__. move toward possibility

When it softens:
__. I can choose one direction at a time
__. I can bring ideas into form

☐ **What helps:**
__. grounding ideas into next steps
__. externalizing ideas (maps, diagrams)
__. choosing one direction at a time
__. collaboration to refine ideas
__. balancing ideation with execution
__. capturing ideas without needing to act on all of them

THE AVOIDER

"I'll start... just not right now."

How it shows up:
__. procrastination
__. shutdown or freeze
__. difficulty initiating tasks
__. waiting for the "right moment"

What it's trying to do:
__. protect you from overwhelm
__. reduce pressure
__. avoid failure or discomfort

When it softens:
__. I can take one small step
__. I can begin without needing to finish

⬡ **What helps:**
__. body doubling (shared space reduces activation barrier)
__. co-regulation (being near someone steady)
__. tiny entry points ("open the doc," not "finish the task")
__. reducing overwhelm visually (break tasks into visible steps)
__. gentle accountability (supportive, not pressure-based)
__. nervous system settling first (before task initiation)

THE OVERTHINKER

"If I can just think it through one more time..."

How it shows up:
__. looping thoughts
__. analyzing past conversations
__. difficulty making decisions
__. trying to find the "right" answer

What it's trying to do:
__. create certainty
__. prevent mistakes
__. solve the problem before it happens

When it softens:
__. I can choose without perfect clarity
__. I can move forward with "enough" information

○ **What helps:**
__. externalizing thoughts (write it out, don't hold it all mentally)
__. decision containers (limit options or time)
__. "good enough" thresholds
__. talking it through with someone
__. structured problem-solving (step-by-step instead of looping)
__. interrupting loops with action (small movement forward)

THE INNER CRITIC

"You should be doing better."

How it shows up:
__. harsh self-talk
__. comparison to others
__. shame after mistakes
__. feeling "not enough"

What it's trying to do:
__. push you toward improvement
__. prevent rejection
__. keep you aligned with expectations

When it softens:
__. I can speak to myself with respect
__. I can grow without shame

○ **What helps:**
__. compassionate reframe ("what is this part afraid would happen?")
__. externalizing the voice (naming it as a part)
__. counter-statements grounded in truth
__. shame reduction through sharing
__. self-talk modeling (how would I speak to a client?)
__. tracking effort, not just outcomes

THE ALARM SYSTEM

"Something's wrong. Fix it. Now."

How it shows up:
__. urgency in the body
__. scanning for what could go wrong
__. difficulty settling or relaxing
__. strong reactions to perceived shifts or disconnection

What it's trying to do:
__. protect you from harm
__. prepare you for what might happen
__. keep you alert and ready

When it softens:
__. I can pause without losing awareness
__. I can respond instead of react

⬡ **What helps:**
__. somatic grounding (butterfly hug, cold water, pressure)
__. orienting to present safety
__. predictability structures (knowing what's coming next)
__. slowing the body before solving the problem
__. reducing sensory overload
__. co-regulation when possible

[THE ADAPTIVE WORRY SYSTEM
Inner Archetypes]

THE PLANNER

(executive function scaffold part)

"Let's figure out how to do this."

How it shows up:
__. organizing steps
__. creating lists or systems
__. structuring time or tasks
__. trying to create order

What it's trying to do:
__. support follow-through
__. reduce overwhelm
__. translate ideas into action

When it softens:
__. I can keep structure simple
__. I can support myself without rigidity

△ What helps:
__. simple, visible systems (not overly complex)
__. prioritization limits (top 1–3 tasks only)
__. flexible structure (not rigid perfection)
__. external tools (lists, calendars, visual maps)
__. starting before fully ready
__. review + adjust (not abandon)

THE PERFECTIONIST

"It has to be right."

How it shows up:
__. over-editing or over-preparing
__. fear of making mistakes
__. difficulty finishing or submitting work
__. high internal pressure

What it's trying to do:
__. protect you from criticism
__. maintain a sense of control
__. ensure you are seen as capable

When it softens:
__. I can complete instead of perfect
__. I can allow things to be "good enough"

△ What helps:
__. "done > perfect" anchors
__. time limits for tasks
__. drafting mindset (first version allowed to be messy)
__. exposure to imperfection (intentionally leaving small things imperfect)
__. redefining success criteria
__. self-compassion practices

THE PEOPLE-PLEASER

"Don't let anyone be upset."

How it shows up:
__. prioritizing others' needs over your own
__. difficulty saying no
__. anxiety around conflict
__. over-explaining or over-accommodating

What it's trying to do:
__. maintain connection
__. avoid rejection or conflict
__. keep relationships stable

When it softens:
__. I can stay connected without abandoning myself
__. I can set boundaries and still belong

△ What helps:
__. boundary scripts (pre-written responses)
__. pause before responding
__. checking internal needs first
__. tolerating discomfort of others' reactions
__. practicing small "no's"
__. redefining connection as mutual, not self-sacrificing

THE DRIVEN PART

(productivity protector / urgency engine)

"Keep going. Don't stop now."

How it shows up:
__. difficulty resting without guilt
__. constant forward motion or task-switching
__. tying worth to productivity
__. pushing through exhaustion
__. urgency even when things aren't time-sensitive

What it's trying to do:
__. prevent failure or falling behind
__. create safety through achievement
__. outrun shame or "not enough"
__. maintain control through momentum

When it softens:
__. I can pause without losing momentum
__. I can rest and still be worthy
__. I can move at a sustainable pace

△ What helps:
__. externalizing "done" (clear endpoints, not endless striving)
__. body-based pacing (timers, stretch breaks, nervous system check-ins)
__. permissioned rest ("rest is part of the plan")
__. realistic time mapping (reduces urgency distortion)
__. celebrating completion (not just what's next)
__. values check-ins (am I moving toward meaning or just momentum?)

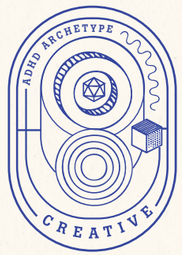
PART TYPES:

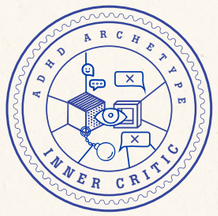
○ **COGNITIVE PARTS**
Overthinker
Inner Critic

⬡ **PROTECTIVE / AVOIDANT PARTS**
Avoider
Alarm

△ **ACTIVATION / PERFORMANCE PARTS**
Planner
Perfectionist
People-Pleaser
Driven

□ **EXPANSIVE / SELF-LED PARTS**
Creative
Adventurer
Visionary
Compassionate Witness





Meeting the Inner System / Field Practice:

Mapping Your Inner System

Intro: You are not one voice. You are a system. Different parts of you hold different roles, different fears, different strategies for protection. In this section, we begin to notice: not "what's wrong with me" but "who is showing up right now?"

Section 01

Who Is Here Right Now?

Think of a recent stressful moment. Check all parts that showed up:

[__] The Inner Critic
[__] The Overthinker
[__] The Avoider
[__] The Planner
[__] The Perfectionist
[__] The Protector
[__] The Visionary
[__] Other: _____

Q: What was happening externally? [_____]

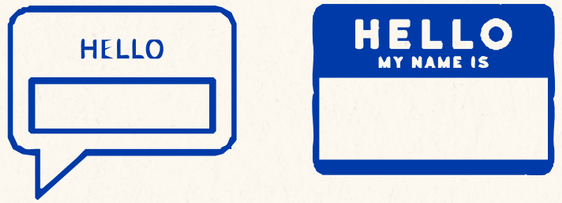
Identify the Parts

Think about a recent moment of stress, worry, or conflict.

Q: What showed up inside you? [_____]

Q: List or name the parts: [_____]

(Examples: Critic, Planner, Avoider, Overthinker, Protector)



Section 02

Choose One Part

Bring your attention to one part that feels strong or familiar.

> Name this part: [_____]

> If you were to visualize it, it might look like:

[__] Sharp / tense
[__] Fast-moving
[__] Heavy
[__] Quiet
[__] Distant
[__] Other: _____

Section 03

Understand Its Role

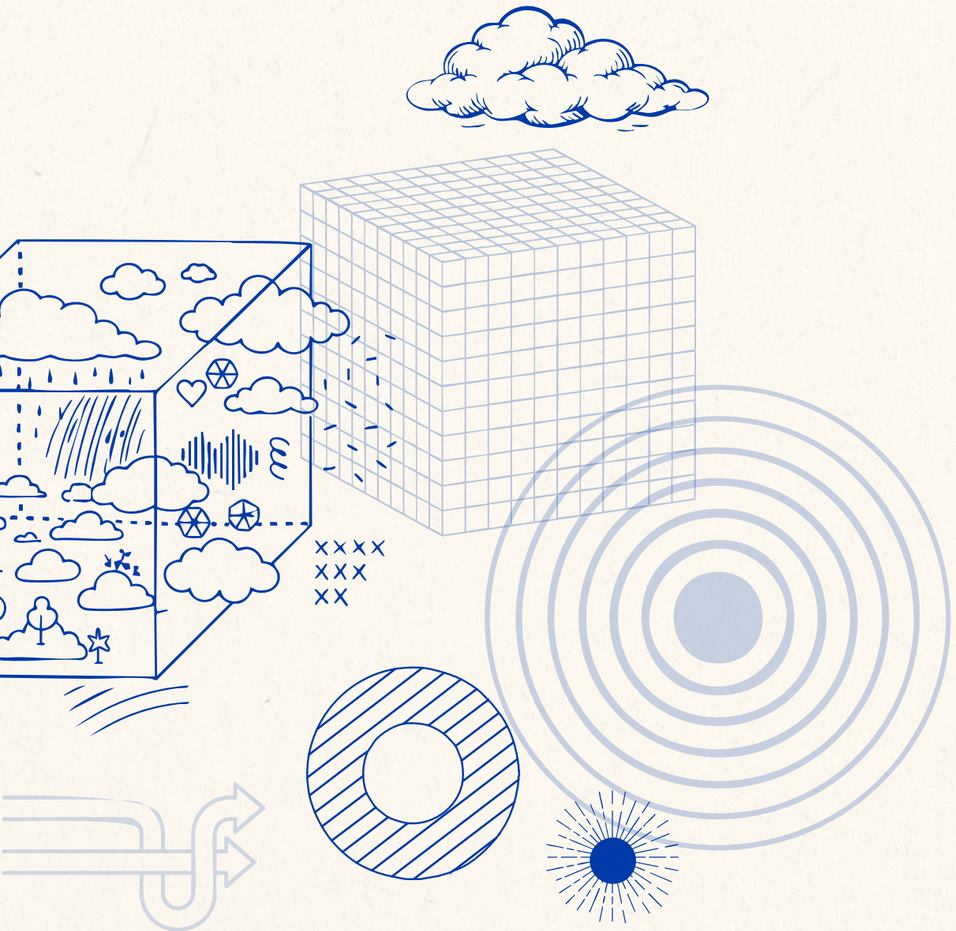
> This part is not random. It has a job.

> This part tends to show up when: [_____]

> This part tries to: [_____]

It tries to:

[__] Prevent failure
[__] Avoid rejection
[__] Reduce overwhelm
[__] Keep control
[__] Protect emotionally
[__] Other: _____



Section 04

Find the Positive Intention

Even difficult parts are often protective. Even if it feels frustrating…
this part is likely trying to help.

At its core, this part is trying to: [_____]

Q: What would happen if this part didn't exist? [_____]

> This part might be trying to:

[__] Prevent failure [__] Avoid rejection
[__] Reduce overwhelm [__] Keep control
[__] Maintain safety [__] Or something else: _____

Section 05

What Does It Need?

Parts don't just act. They also carry unmet needs. Instead of pushing it away…
we ask what would support it.

> This part might need:

[__] : _____ [__] : _____
[__] : _____ [__] : _____

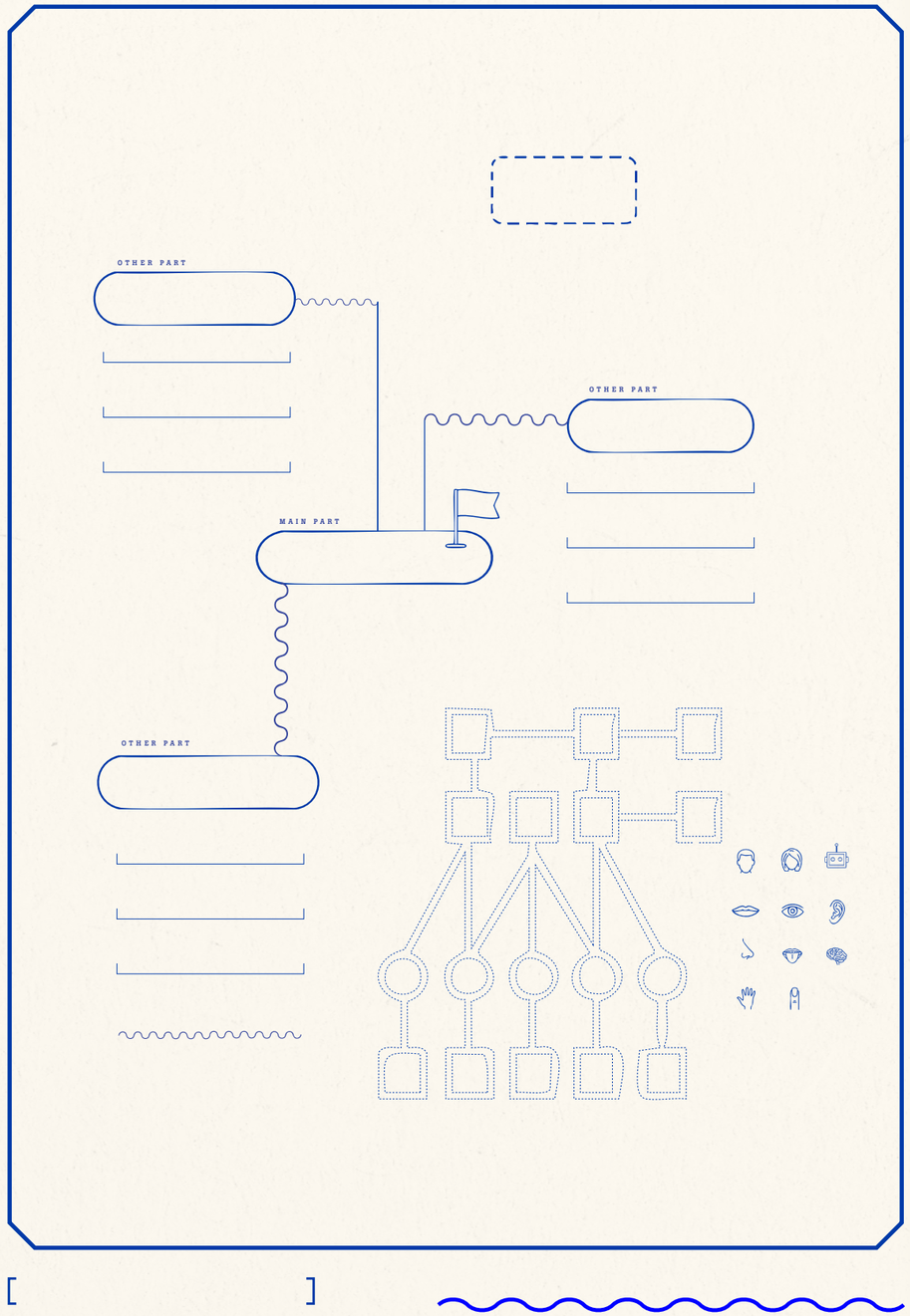
This part might need:

[__] Reassurance [__] Structure
[__] Rest [__] Clarity
[__] Support from others [__] Permission to slow down
[__] Other: _____

Write a response to this part:

_____
_____

Inner Systems Map



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Section 06

Internal Dialogue

> If this part could speak, it might say:

And you might respond: [_____]

Closing Reflection

What happens when you relate to this part with curiosity instead of judgment?

Create a System Map (Visual Exercise)

Draw your inner system:

* Place your main part in the center
* Add 2–3 other parts around it
* Draw lines between them

Label:

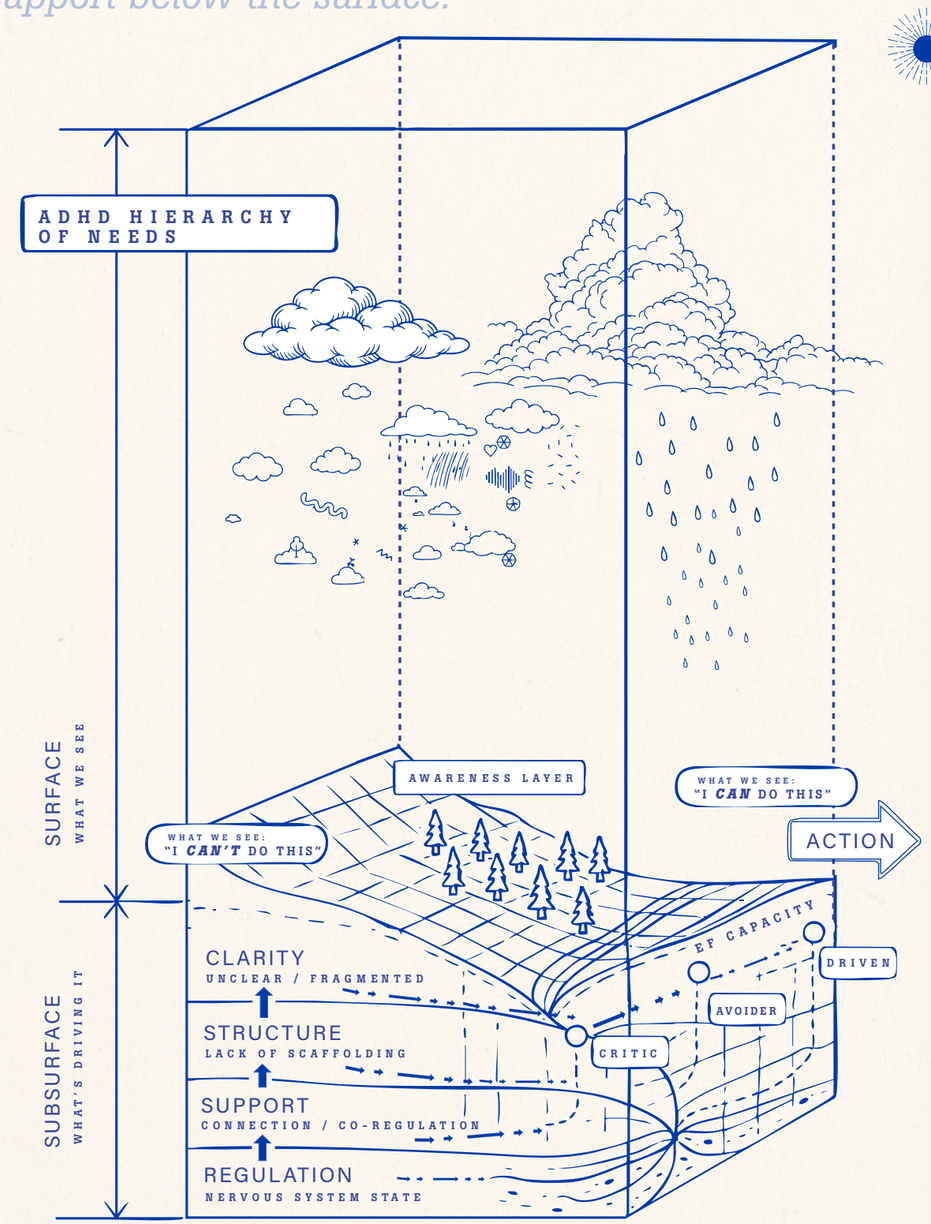
> Label: Who is loudest?
> Label: Who is protective?
> Label: Who gets ignored?

Integration:

Signal -----> System

Q: What did you notice about your system? [_____]
Q: What changed when you approached it with curiosity? [_____]
Q: What worry did you translate? [_____]
Q: What part was involved? [_____]
Q: What structure supports that part now? [_____]

What looks like resistance is often a system asking for support below the surface.



/ FIELD NOTES:

/ The Sequence Beneath the System

/ *Integrating Parts, Regulation, & Executive Function*

Sometimes what we experience as "different parts" are not random or conflicting.They are responding to different layers of the system. Contemporary models of psychotherapy increasingly recognize that internal experiences can be understood as organized, protective sub-systems rather than pathology (Schwartz, 2021). From this perspective, what appears as inner conflict may instead reflect multiple adaptive responses operating at different levels of need.

A System That Responds in Layers

Research across neuroscience and trauma-informed care suggests that higher-order cognitive processes, such as planning, prioritization, and task initiation, depend on more foundational processes being sufficiently supported (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013). When the nervous system is dysregulated, the brain prioritizes safety and threat detection over executive functioning (Porges, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014). This means:

__. Action is harder when the system is overwhelmed
__. Clarity is harder when emotional load is high
__. Structure is harder to access without sufficient regulation

This is not a failure of effort. It reflects how the system prioritizes.

Pārts as Adaptive Responses

From an Internal Family Systems (IFS) perspective, parts that appear "avoidant," "critical," or "overactive" can be understood as protective responses attempting to maintain stability in the system (Schwartz, 2021). For example:
__. An avoidant part may be protecting against overwhelm
__. A critical part may be attempting to create structure or prevent failure
__. A driven part may be pushing toward action before the system is ready

These responses are not inherently dysfunctional. They are adaptive strategies shaped by experience.

ADHD & the Regulation–Action Gap

ADHD research highlights that challenges with task initiation and follow-through are often linked to differences in executive functioning, emotional regulation, and attentional control (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013). Emotional intensity and rapid shifts in attention may increase cognitive load, making it more difficult to organize, prioritize, and act (Shaw et al., 2014; Sonuga-Barke & Castellanos, 2007). As a result, what appears as "procrastination" or "avoidance" may reflect a system that is attempting to manage competing internal demands rather than a lack of motivation.

The Sequence Below the Surface

Across these perspectives, a consistent pattern emerges. Not as a rigid structure, but as a map of how the system organizes support:

__. ***Regulation*** supports access to higher-order thinking
__. ***Support*** and co-regulation reduce emotional load
__. ***Clarity*** enables planning
__. ***Structure*** supports execution
__. ***Action*** ecomes more available once these layers are in place

> This sequence is not rigid, but it is often observable.

Reframing "Stuck"

Instead of asking: "Why can't I do this?" A more accurate question may be: "What layer of my system is asking for support right now?"

Clinical Integration

You may begin to notice:
__. Parts are not the problem, they are signals,
__. Worry is not random, it is predictive,
__. Difficulty with action may reflect unmet needs earlier in the system.

This perspective aligns with integrative approaches that emphasize compassion, regulation, and contextual understanding over deficit-based interpretations of behavior (Siegel, 2012; Neff, 2023). If you look closely, the system has been communicating all along. Not in failure, but in signals.

/ References:

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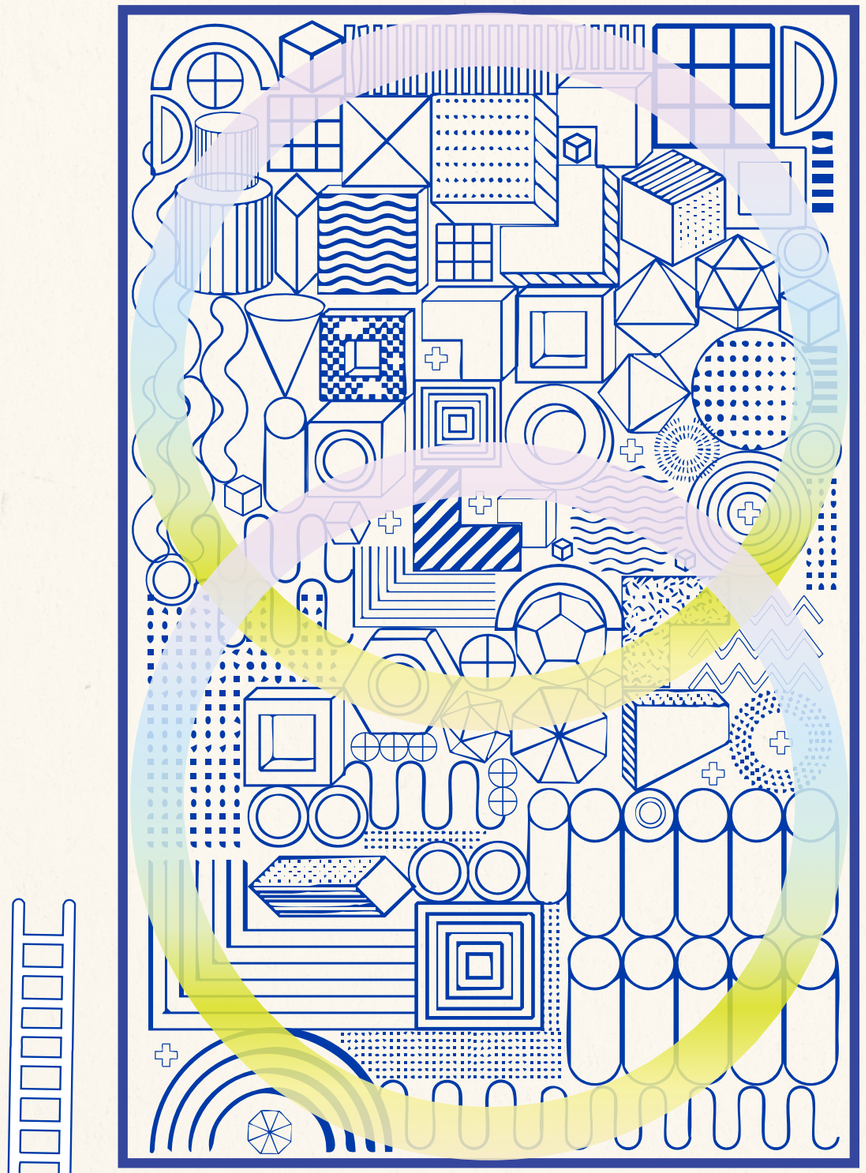

MODULE 05:

The Inner Landscape

Integration: Your Adaptive System

The goal of this work is not perfection, but alignment. Neurodivergent systems often function not through rigid control, but through responsive, adaptive structures that can flex with changing internal and external demands (Neff, 2023). This requires a shift from self-criticism to self-observation.

In this module, we move beyond understanding the adaptive worry system conceptually and begin to map its internal landscape. What may feel like a single experience of anxiety is often composed of multiple interacting responses, patterns organized around protection, prediction, creativity, and care.

These internal responses can be understood as parts within a dynamic system, each carrying specific roles and intentions. Importantly, these processes are not only cognitive but embodied, emerging through shifts in sensation, attention, activation, and emotional tone.

Because many ADHD minds process information visually, relationally, and through movement, this module introduces a visual and experiential approach. Through guided drawing, participants externalize internal experiences, observe relationships between parts, and begin to recognize patterns that may not be accessible through language alone.

This process draws from trauma-informed, neurodivergence-affirming, and expressive approaches, supporting a shift from analysis to relationship, from trying to control the system to learning how to navigate it.

What you map is not a problem to fix. It is a landscape to understand.
And ultimately, a system to work with.

This approach is informed by Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 1995), expressive arts therapy (Malchiodi, 2020), and mindfulness-based and somatic frameworks that emphasize experiential awareness and internal attunement.

References

Neff, M. A. (2023). Self-compassion for neurodivergent minds. HarperCollins.

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Section 01

Bridge

> Up until now, you have been learning how to notice your system. To listen to worry. To begin translating what it is trying to say. This section is different. Here, we begin to see the system. Not by analyzing it. But by mapping it. Not by fixing it. But by relating to it. Your mind is not a single voice. It is a landscape. And today, you will begin to draw it.

Why Draw?

> Why Draw the Inner Landscape? Understanding your mind intellectually is powerful. But sometimes, clarity does not come from more thinking.
It comes from seeing.

Many ADHD minds process through:

__ images
__ patterns
__ movement
__ relationships

Drawing allows you to:

__ See connections between parts
__ Externalize internal experiences
__ Notice patterns you couldn't see before
__ Create space from overwhelming thoughts
__ Access intuition and creativity

> You do not need to be an artist. This is not about making something look right.
This is about making something visible.

Example Symbology

Container = the arched frame (safe system / held space)
Pathway = the river/line (process, movement, integration)
Nodes = numbered anchors (cognitive + somatic checkpoints)
Ecosystem symbols = parts, states, needs, environments
Size = importance/intensity
Shape = type of process
Outline = solid vs dashed
Solid circle = awareness
Double ring = activation
Soft/dashed = reflective step

Plant = growth / emerging part
Flame = activation / alarm system
Cloud + rain = overwhelm / release
Tree = regulation / grounding
Bird = perspective / cognitive flexibility
Spiral = rumination / looping
Heart = attachment / vulnerability
Tent = safety / retreat / restoration
Triangle = threat / nervous system cue

Section 02

The Mind as an Inner Ecosystem

> Instead of one single voice... Most people have many.

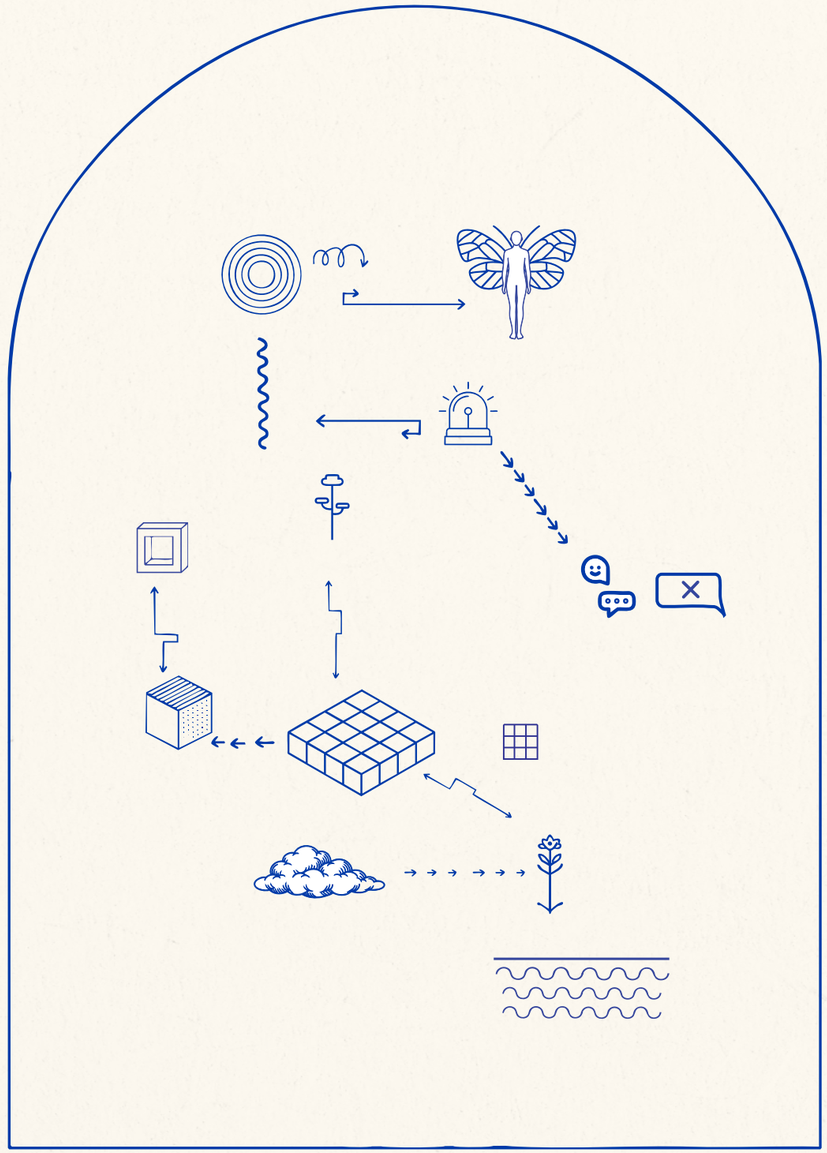
__. Some parts worry.
__. Some parts plan.
__. Some parts criticize.
__. Some parts avoid.
__. Some parts imagine, dream, or expand.

> These parts are not random.
They are responses.

They developed to:

__. protect
__. prepare
__. organize
__. make sense of the world

> Today, you will begin mapping the ecosystem of your mind.



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First Noticing

A Brief Pause Before You Begin

> Take a moment. You can close your eyes if that feels okay. Just notice:

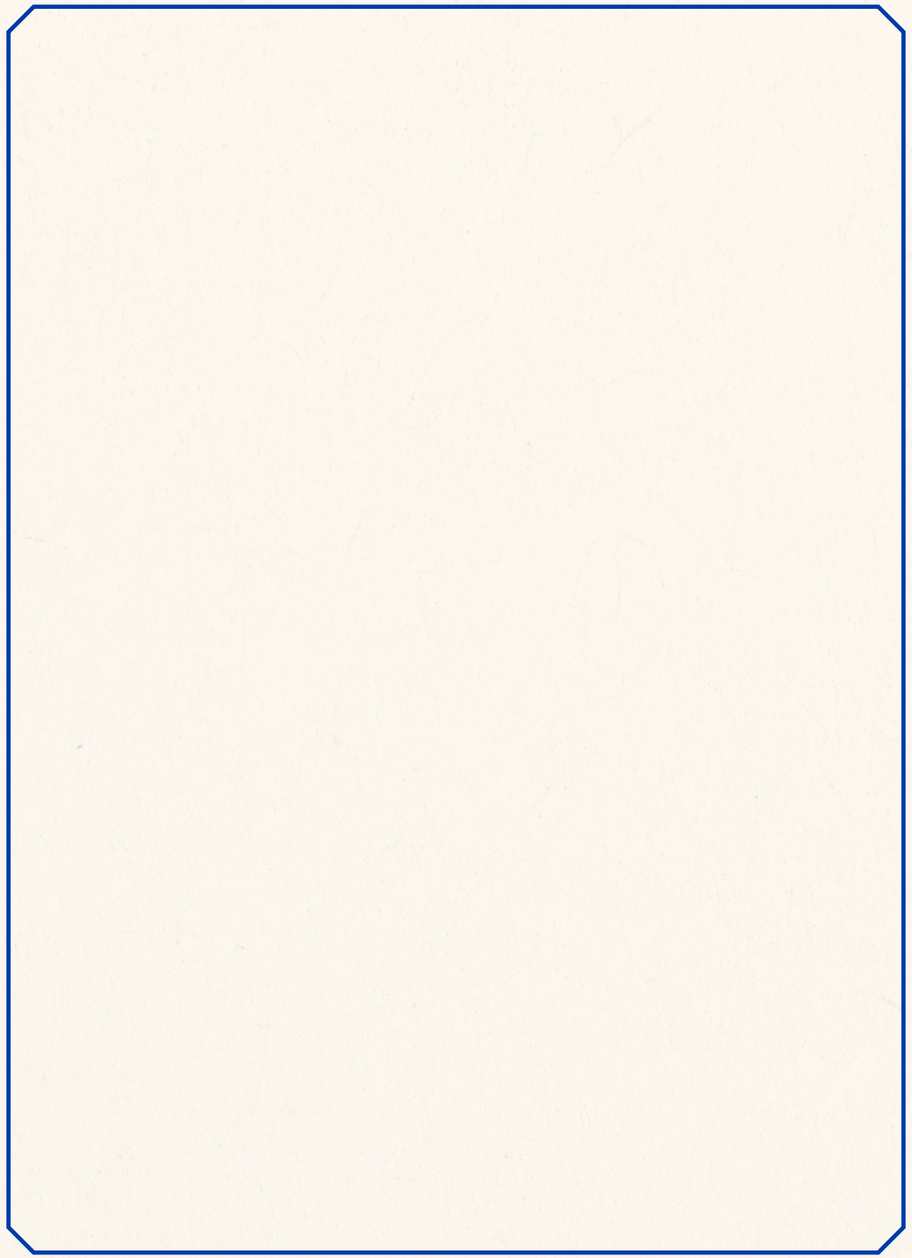
Q: What part of your system feels most present right now?

Is something:
__. loud
__. quiet
__. urgent
__. tired
__. curious

> There is no need to change anything.

> Just notice.

> Then, when you're ready, begin with that.



Section 03

Guided Drawing

Drawing the Inner Landscape

> Follow gently. There is no right way to do this.

1. Draw Yourself at the Center

> A symbol. A shape. A figure.
> This represents you in the system.

2. Notice a Part

> Draw a symbol for a voice, feeling, or pattern that shows up often.

3. Add More Parts

Include any that feel present:

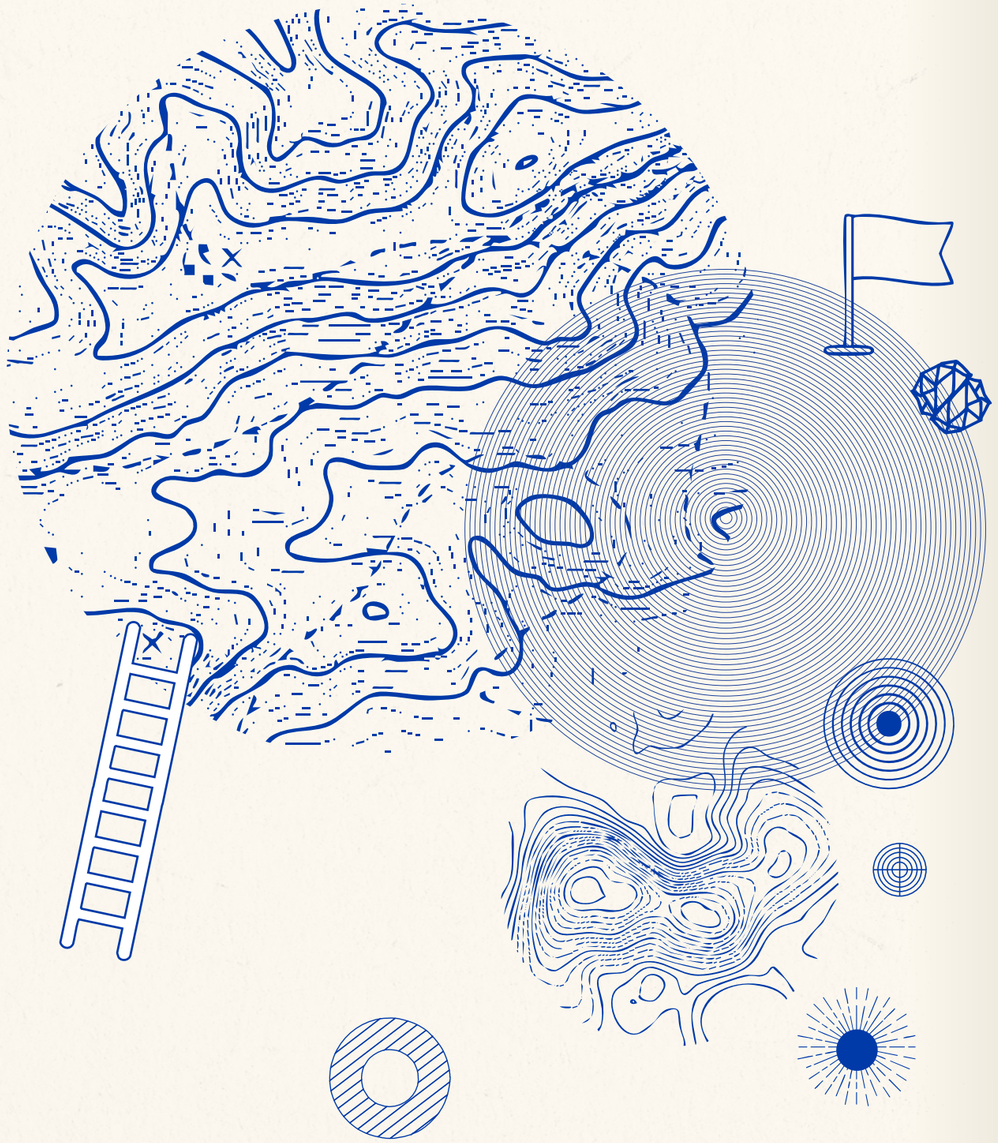
__ worry
__ critic
__ planner
__ avoider
__ dreamer
__ something else

4. Show Relationships

> Use lines, arrows, distance, or placement to show how parts interact.

5. Let It Form Naturally

> You do not need to organize it perfectly.
> You are not creating a diagram.
> You are revealing a landscape.



Section 04

Emotional Geography

Notice the Emotional Geography

> ***As you look at your drawing, you might begin to notice:***

__ Which parts feel large [_____]

__ Which parts feel small [_____]

__ Which parts dominate the space [_____]

__ Which parts stay hidden [_____]

__ Which parts feel close to you [_____]

__ Which parts feel distant [_____]

Your map may show you something important:

Not just what is present, but how it is organized.

Questions to Deepen

Questions to Guide Your Map

As you observe your landscape, you might ask:

__ Where does the Alarm System sit? [_____]

__ Is the Inner Critic loud or far away? [_____]

__ Where does the Visionary live? [_____]

__ Which parts talk to each other? [_____]

__ Which parts interrupt each other? [_____]

__ Which parts feel exhausted? [_____]

> You don’t need to answer everything. Just notice what stands out.

Section 05

The Compassionate Witness

> There is often another presence available within the system.

Not a part that reacts, but a part that observes.

You might notice:

__ curiosity __ calm __ space __ awareness

This is sometimes called:

__ The Observer
__ The Self
__ The Wise Mind
__ The Compassionate Witness

This part does not try to fix. It simply sees.

Add the Witness

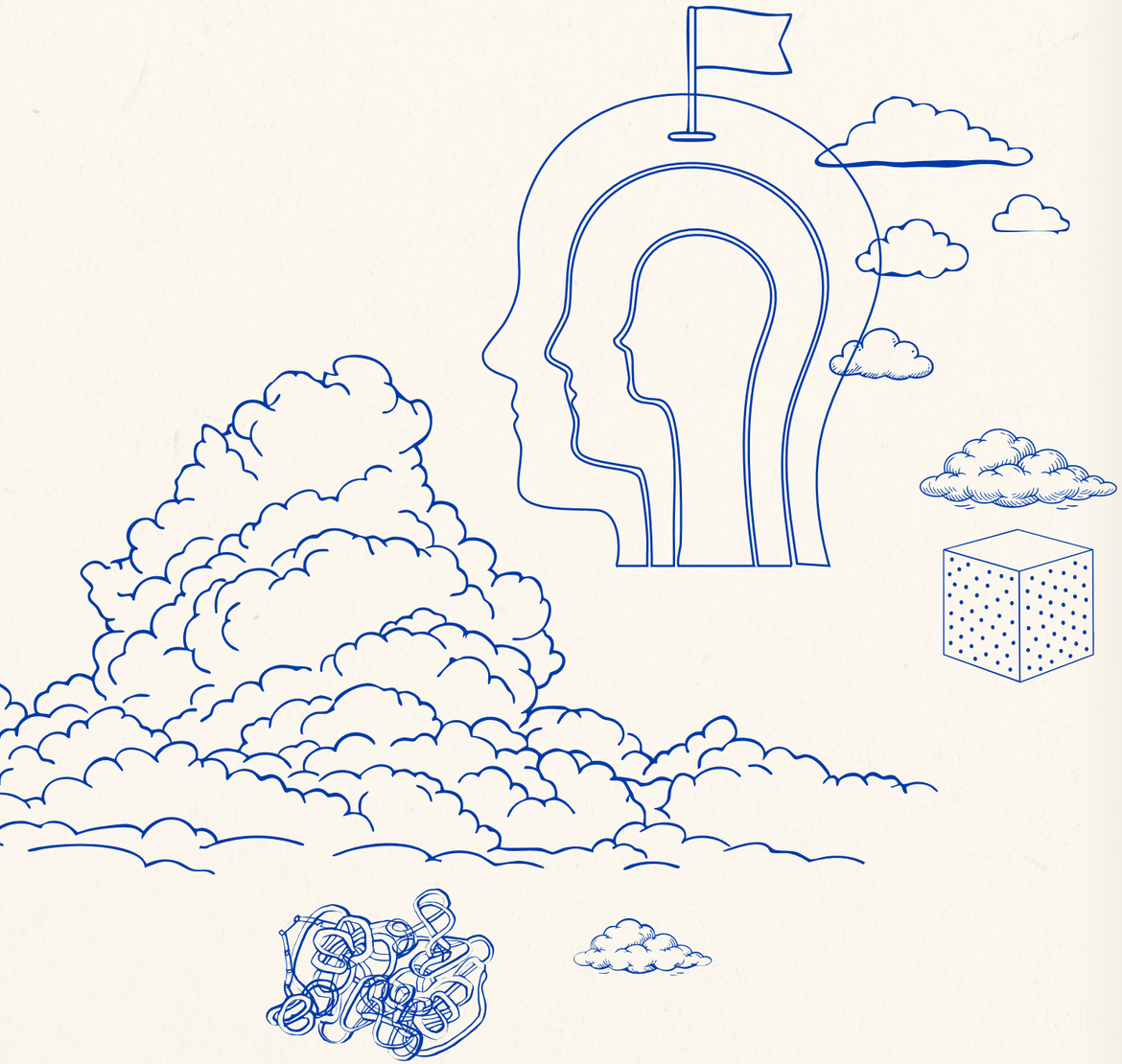
Adding the Compassionate Witness

> If it feels right, Add a symbol for this observing presence.

You might ask:

__ Where does it sit?
__ Is it near the center?
__ Watching from a distance?
__ Just beginning to emerge?

There is no correct placement.
Even noticing it at all is enough.



Section 06

Matching Support to the System

Different Parts Need Different Support

> Not every part of your system needs the same thing.

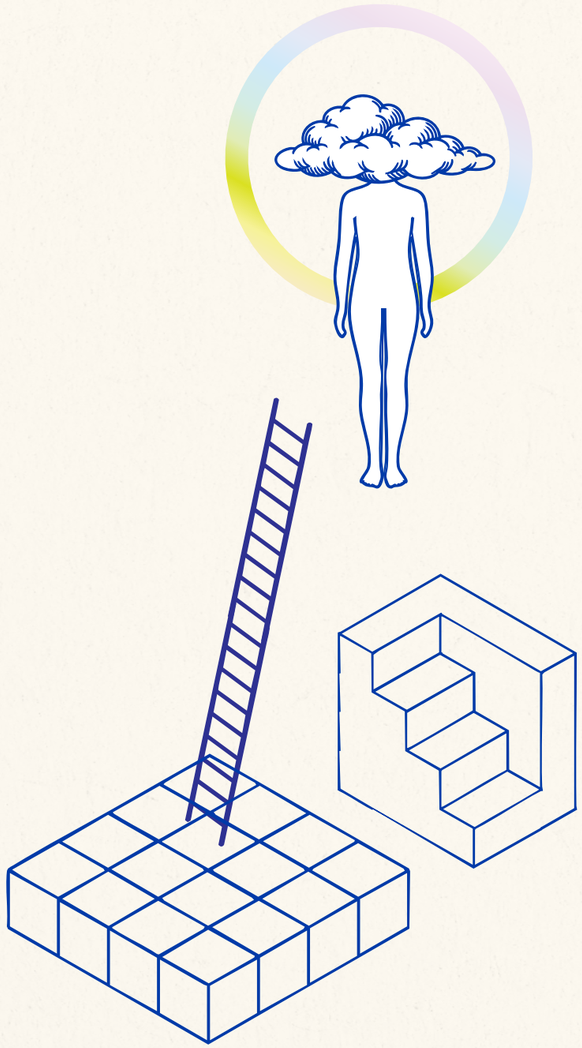
Some parts need:

__ grounding
__ reassurance
__ structure
__ movement
__ rest
__ connection

> You might begin to notice:

Part	*What it might need*
Alarm System	Safety, grounding
Overthinker	Containment, structure
Avoider	Gentle activation, support
Inner Critic	Compassion, reframing
Visionary	Space, expansion

> There is no single solution. There is relationship.



Section 07

Somatic Toolkit

Supporting the System Through the Body

> Your system is not only thoughts. It is also:

__ sensation
__ movement
__ tension
__ rhythm

> Sometimes, the most direct way to support a part is not through thinking, but through the body.

> The following tools are not techniques to fix you.

They are ways to:

__ regulate
__ support
__ respond
__ reconnect

You don’t need to use all of them. Just notice which ones your system responds to.

Section 08

Butterfly Hug

What it is:
Cross your arms over your chest and gently tap alternating sides in a steady rhythm.

Why it helps:
This bilateral rhythm can calm the nervous system and reduce overwhelm.

Best for:
__ Alarm System __ Anxiety spikes __ Emotional flooding

When to use:
When your system feels activated or overloaded.

Grounding Object

What it is:
Hold a small object and bring your attention to its texture, weight, and temperature.

Why it helps:
Anchors attention in the present moment and reduces mental spiraling.

Best for:
__ Overthinking __ Dissociation __ Mental overwhelm

>> See the Somatic Regulation Tool Kit - Next several spreads to try.

Section 09 ////////
Somatic and Mindful Regulation for Neurodivergent & ADHD-Affirming Practice

Somatic and mindfulness-based practices have increasingly been recognized as essential components of trauma-informed and integrative mental health care, particularly for individuals whose nervous systems exhibit heightened sensitivity, variability, or dysregulation. These approaches emphasize bottom-up regulation, working through the body, sensation, and physiological states, rather than relying exclusively on top-down cognitive strategies (van der Kolk, 2014; Porges, 2011). For neurodivergent individuals, including those with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), such approaches are not simply complementary but often foundational.

ADHD is increasingly understood not only as a disorder of attention, but as a condition involving differences in executive functioning, emotional regulation, and motivational systems (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013). Individuals with ADHD frequently experience fluctuations in arousal, difficulty with task initiation, and heightened sensitivity to stress and overwhelm. These patterns are closely linked to nervous system regulation, suggesting that interventions targeting physiological states, such as breath, rhythm, sensory input, and movement, may support improved functioning more effectively than purely cognitive interventions alone.

Somatic practices, including bilateral stimulation, grounding, orienting, and breath regulation, engage neural pathways associated with safety, integration, and emotional processing (Shapiro, 2018; Porges, 2011). These techniques can help shift individuals from states of hyperarousal (e.g., anxiety, panic) or hypoarousal (e.g., shutdown, dissociation) into a more regulated "window of tolerance" (Siegel, 2012). For neurodivergent individuals, whose systems may move more quickly or intensely between these states, accessible and adaptable regulation tools are critical.

Mindfulness-based approaches further support this process by cultivating nonjudgmental awareness of internal experience. However, traditional mindfulness practices may be inaccessible or frustrating for individuals with ADHD if they rely heavily on sustained attention or stillness. As such, this toolkit integrates active, sensory-based, and flexible forms of mindfulness, including rhythmic tapping, orienting, and guided imagery, which allow attention to move while still fostering present-moment awareness.

This resource is grounded in a neurodivergent-affirming and trauma-informed framework, recognizing that many adaptive responses, such as avoidance, overthinking, or emotional reactivity, serve protective functions within the individual's internal system. Drawing from integrative approaches including Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), somatic therapies, and parts-informed frameworks such as Internal Family Systems (IFS), these tools are designed to support individuals in building a more compassionate and collaborative relationship with their internal experience (Schwartz, 2021; Shapiro, 2018).

Importantly, this toolkit also incorporates external scaffolding strategies, such as body doubling, thought containment, and structured task initiation, which align with research on executive functioning and ADHD support. Regulation, in this context, is not conceptualized as an individual responsibility alone, but as something that can be supported through environment, relationship, and structure.

Rather than presenting a prescriptive sequence, this toolkit offers a menu of practices that individuals can explore, adapt, and return to as needed. The goal is not to eliminate distress, but to increase flexibility, awareness, and access to supportive states. In doing so, these practices aim to bridge body and mind, supporting individuals in moving from overwhelm toward greater regulation, agency, and self-connection.

References:

Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.

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SOMATIC REGULATION TOOL KIT

Each tool may support different parts of your system. You might notice which parts respond to which kinds of support.

01. BUTTERFLY TAP

Bilateral Tapping (EMDR-Informed)

DESCRIPTION:
Cross your arms over your chest so your hands rest on your shoulders or upper arms. Gently tap left–right–left–right in a slow, steady rhythm. Let your breath move naturally. You don't have to change what you're feeling, just let the rhythm support your system.

WHY IT HELPS:
The alternating (left–right) rhythm engages both sides of the brain and can help the nervous system settle, organize, and process emotional intensity.

BEST FOR:
__. Big emotions
__. Feeling overwhelmed
__. After something activating
__. When a part feels "loud"

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (activated, overwhelmed)
__ Emotional/younger parts (need soothing)
__ Overwhelmed Part (flooded with feeling)

02. RHYTHMIC TAPPING

(EFT-Inspired, Simplified)

DESCRIPTION:
Using your fingertips, gently tap along a few points on your body, such as your collarbone, upper chest, or side of the hand. You can repeat a simple phrase while tapping: "This is a lot… and I'm here." Keep the rhythm steady and the pressure light.

WHY IT HELPS:
Combines touch, rhythm, and attention, helping the body release tension while creating a sense of internal support.

BEST FOR:
__. Anxiety spikes
__. Racing thoughts
__. Self-soothing during stress
__. When you need something active but contained

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (heightened activation)
__ Overthinker (racing thoughts)
__ Self-soothing part (seeking regulation)

03. GROUNDING TREE

Rooted Grounding

DESCRIPTION:
Imagine roots extending from your feet or body deep into the ground. With each exhale, let your weight drop downward into those roots. You don't have to hold yourself up alone, let the ground support you.

Grounding Tree
"Imagine yourself as a tree-tall, steady, rooted in the earth. Picture your roots going deep into the ground, holding you firmly, giving you strength. Notice your trunk-strong, upright, centered. Your branches reach upward connected to light, air, and space. As you breathe, feel energy moving up from your roots, through your trunk, and out your branches. This steadiness is always within you. Whenever you feel shaken, you can return to your tree and its roots."

WHY IT HELPS:
Shifts energy downward, creating stability and reducing overwhelm or dissociation.

BEST FOR:
__. Feeling scattered or floaty
__. Overwhelm
__. Anxiety in the body
__. Disconnection from self

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Dissociative / drifting parts (disconnected)
__ Alarm System (needs anchoring)
__ Overwhelmed Part (feels scattered)

04. LIGHT BEAM

Light Scan

DESCRIPTION:
Visualize a soft beam of light moving slowly through your body from head to toe. Wherever it lands, gently notice tension and invite softening, no forcing, just awareness.

Light Stream
"Imagine a warm, gentle light above your head. It might be golden, white, or any color that feels right to you.
See it slowly flowing down, washing over your body. As it moves, notice how it brings warmth, safety, or healing. Let it move through your head, shoulders, chest, arms, all the way down to your feet. Wherever the light goes, tension softens. You can imagine this light surrounding you whenever you need calm or comfort."

WHY IT HELPS:
Builds body awareness in a gentle, non-threatening way.

BEST FOR:
__. Tension
__. Emotional buildup
__. Dissociation
__. Difficulty "feeling" your body

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Tension-holding parts (body bracing)
__ Inner Critic (softens intensity)
__ Overwhelmed Part (needs gentle awareness)

05. ORIENTING

Orient to the Present

DESCRIPTION:
Slowly look around your space. Name 3–5 things you can see. Let your eyes land on something neutral or pleasant and stay there for a moment.

WHY IT HELPS:
Signals safety to the nervous system and reduces threat response.

BEST FOR:
__. Anxiety
__. Feeling unsafe
__. Hypervigilance
__. After a triggering moment

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (scanning for threat)
__ Hypervigilant parts
__ Startle / reactive parts

06. GROUNDING OBJECT

Anchor Object

DESCRIPTION:
Hold a small object in your hand, a stone, ring, or textured item. Notice its weight, temperature, and texture. Let your attention settle into sensation.

WHY IT HELPS:
Redirects attention out of looping thoughts and into the present moment.

BEST FOR:
__. Racing thoughts
__. Rumination
__. Panic
__. Mental overwhelm

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Overthinker (looping thoughts)
__ Dissociative parts (disconnected from present)
__ Alarm System (needs anchoring)

07. SLOW BREATH

Extended Exhale Breathing

DESCRIPTION:
Inhale slowly through your nose. Exhale longer than you inhale (for example: in for 4, out for 6). Let the exhale be soft, not forced.

WHY IT HELPS:
Longer exhales activate the body's calming (parasympathetic) response.

BEST FOR:
__. Anxiety
__. Panic
__. Feeling rushed
__. Physical tension

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (physiological activation)
__ Overthinker (can't slow down)
__ Driven Part (pushing urgency)

08. TEMPERATURE SHIFT

Cold Reset

DESCRIPTION:
Hold an ice cube, splash cool water on your face, or place something cold on your wrists. Focus on the sensation as it brings you back into your body.

WHY IT HELPS:
Interrupts intense emotional states and helps reset the nervous system quickly.

BEST FOR:
__. Panic
__.Emotional spikes
__.Overwhelm
__.Feeling out of control

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (intense activation spikes)
__ Panic response
__ Overwhelmed Part (needs rapid reset)

09. PRESS + RELEASE

Tension Release

DESCRIPTION:
Gently tense a muscle group (hands, shoulders, legs), hold for a few seconds, then slowly release. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.

WHY IT HELPS:
Releases stored physical stress and increases body awareness.

BEST FOR:
__. Physical tension
__. Anxiety in the body
__. Restlessness
__. Irritability

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Tension-holding parts (muscle bracing)
__ Inner Critic (stored pressure)
__ Irritated / activated parts

10. 5–4–3–2–1

Sensory Reset

DESCRIPTION:

Name:
5 things you see
4 things you feel
3 things you hear
2 things you smell
1 thing you taste

Move slowly, this is not a race.

WHY IT HELPS:
Anchors attention in the present and reduces mental spiraling.

BEST FOR:
__. Panic
__. Anxiety
__. Dissociation
__. Overthinking

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Overthinker (mental spiraling)
__ Dissociative parts (ungrounded)
__ Alarm System (needs present focus)

11. NAME WHAT'S HERE

Gentle Labeling

DESCRIPTION:
Gently name your experience: "There's anxiety here." "A worried part is showing up." Notice the shift from being the feeling to observing it.

WHY IT HELPS:
Creates space between you and the emotion, reducing intensity.

BEST FOR:
__. Emotional overwhelm
__. Reactivity
__. Shame spirals
__. Confusing feelings

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (urgent, activated)
__ Overthinker (fast-moving thoughts)
__ Inner Critic (reactive evaluation)

12. THOUGHT PARKING

Thought Container

DESCRIPTION:
Write down the thought that keeps looping Place it somewhere (a notebook, notes app, or "parking page") to return to later.

WHY IT HELPS:
Reassures your brain the thought won't be lost, allowing it to let go temporarily.

BEST FOR:
__. Rumination
__. Worry loops
__. Bedtime anxiety
__. Overthinking

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Overthinker (looping, holding multiple threads)
__ Driven Part (pressure to keep everything active)
__ Alarm System (trying to track and prepare)

13. ONE SMALL THING

Tiny Step Forward

DESCRIPTION:
Choose one very small, doable action. Not the whole task, just the next step. Let it be intentionally manageable.

WHY IT HELPS:
Reduces overwhelm and supports gentle re-engagement (especially for ADHD systems).

BEST FOR:
__. Task paralysis
__. Avoidance
__. Executive dysfunction
__. Feeling stuck

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Avoider (difficulty initiating)
__ Exhausted Part (low energy, overwhelmed)
__ Overwhelmed Planner (too many steps at once)

14. BODY DOUBLING

Shared Presence

DESCRIPTION:
Work alongside another person, either in person or virtually. You don't need to talk much. Just being in the same space can help.

WHY IT HELPS:
External presence provides structure and reduces avoidance.

BEST FOR:
__. Task initiation
__. ADHD overwhelm
__. Avoidance
__. Low motivation

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Avoider (resistance to starting)
__ Exhausted Part (needs external support)
__ Driven Part (benefits from structure and presence)

15. SAFE VOICE

Supportive Connection

DESCRIPTION:
Reach out to someone who feels steady and safe. You don't need to fix anything, just being heard is enough.

WHY IT HELPS:
Co-regulation through connection helps the nervous system settle.

BEST FOR:
__. Emotional overwhelm
__. Loneliness
__. Stress
__. Feeling unsupported

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Inner Critic (harsh internal messaging)
__ Alarm System (feels unsafe or overwhelmed)
__ Younger / protective parts (need reassurance)

16. COMPANION PRESENCE

Calm Companion

DESCRIPTION:
Sit with a pet or comforting presence. Notice their breathing, warmth, or steady energy.

WHY IT HELPS:
Nonverbal connection can regulate without effort or explanation.

BEST FOR:
__. Anxiety
__. Loneliness
__. Shutdown
__. Emotional fatigue

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (needs safety and settling)
__ Attachment-sensitive parts (seek connection)
__ Lonely / isolated parts
__ Exhausted Part (needs co-regulation)

17. BELLY BREATHING

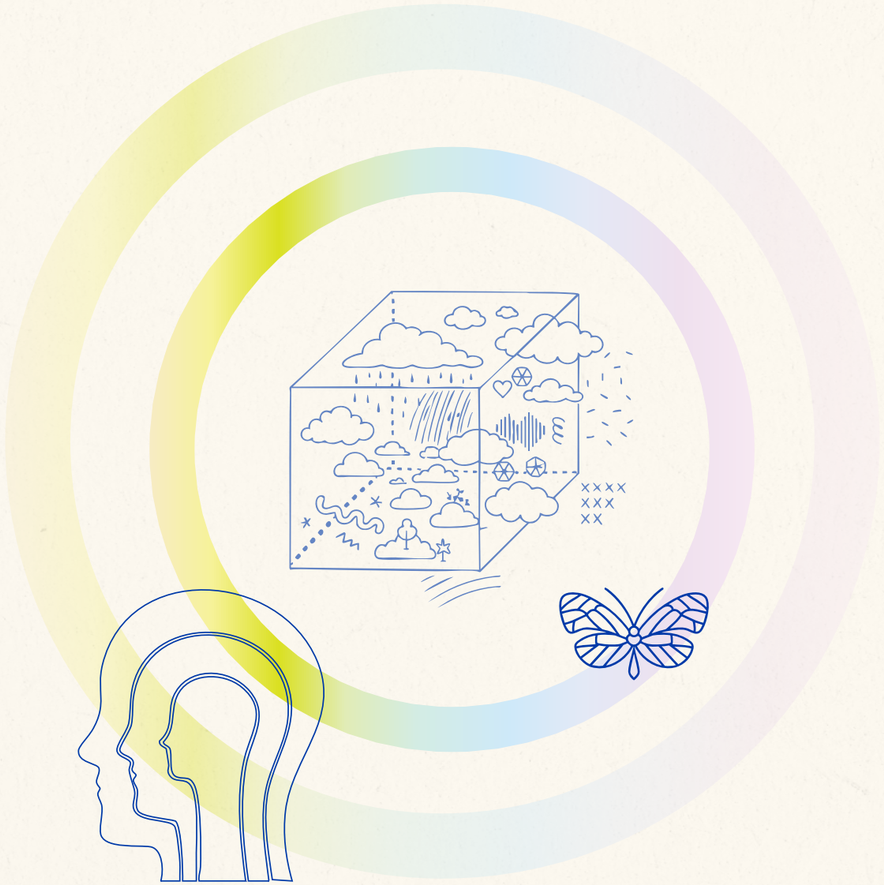
Gentle Regulation

DESCRIPTION:
Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach. Slowly inhale through your nose, allowing your belly to expand. Exhale gently through your mouth, letting your body soften. Let the breath move low and steady, not forced, just supported.

WHY IT HELPS:
Deep, diaphragmatic breathing signals safety to the nervous system, helping shift the body out of stress activation and into a more regulated state.

BEST FOR:
__ Anxiety
__ Racing thoughts
__ Physical tension
__ Emotional overwhelm
__ Difficulty settling

CONNECTED PARTS:
__ Alarm System (physiological activation)
__ Overthinker (mind-body escalation loop)
__ Tension-holding parts (body bracing)



Section 10

Reflection

Looking Back at Your Map

> Take a moment. Look at what you created.

You might ask:

__ ***What part surprised me?*** [_____]

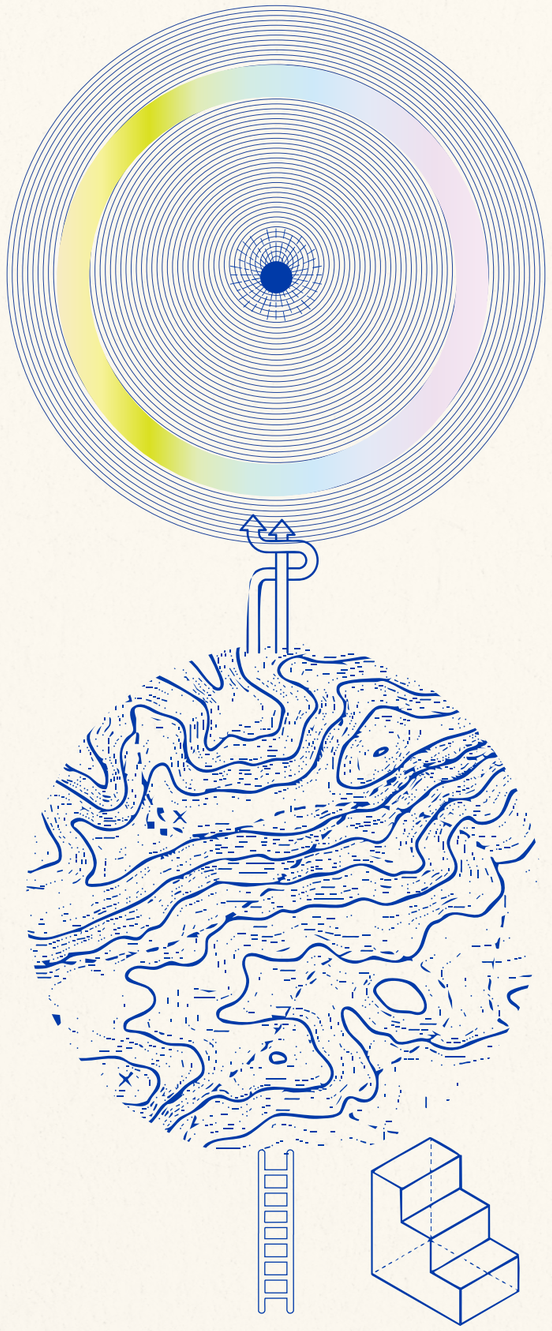
__ ***Which part feels the loudest?*** [_____]

__ ***Which part needs support?*** [_____]

__ ***What does my system seem to be trying to do for me?***

[_____]

> There is nothing to fix here. Only something to understand.



Section 11

Integration

Your mind is not broken.

> It is a system of adaptations
that learned to:

__ protect
__ anticipate
__ create
__ care

> When you can see the landscape clearly,
you gain something new:

Choice.
Not control.
But the ability to move through your system
with more awareness, more intention, and more support.

A Closing Thought

The goal is not to silence your system.

The goal is to understand it well enough
to walk through it with care.

Worry, when listened to,
becomes information.

And over time, information becomes guidance.