

The Executive Dysfunction Survival Kit

6 ways to start, stop, and get through – for brains that are already doing too much

Landing

If you've ever sat in front of an open laptop for an hour, unable to type the first sentence – you already know: it's not laziness. Laziness skips the guilt. Executive dysfunction sits with you in the chair. This toolkit won't fix your brain. Nothing needs fixing. It offers 6 ways to work with a brain that starts hard, stops hard, and forgets the basics when the load is high.

- 6 zero-cost strategies
- 2 scripts – one for yourself, one for asking a friend
- A "when brain won't cooperate ? try this" decision table
- 3 reflection prompts + a "smallest possible version" fill-in sheet
- 3 articles to keep reading

All of it costs \$0. All of it is allowed to work imperfectly.

The Framework: "When Brain Won't Cooperate ? Try"

Your brain isn't broken. It's wired differently – and the "just do it" advice was written for a brain that starts on demand. Ours doesn't. So we work with a different map.

If your brain...

Try this...

Can't start the thing

The 2-Minute Launch (p. 3)

Needs a witness to function

Body Doubling Without a Person (p. 3)

Gets stuck on "gotta do it perfectly"

Permission to Half-Ass It (p. 4)

Forgets water, meds, meals

Visual Anchors Over Willpower (p. 4)

Is too loud, bright, much

Sensory Regulation First (p. 5)

Can't switch tasks (stuck on / stuck off)

The 30-Second Transition (p. 5)

Is spinning with shame

Remember: the smallest action beats the perfect routine you'll never start.

- **The core truth: the smallest action beats the perfect routine you'll never start.**

Strategy 1: The 2-Minute Launch

When the start feels impossible, shrink the start.

- **Pick the smallest possible piece of the task. Not "clean the kitchen" – "put one spoon in the sink."**
- **Set a timer for 2 minutes. No more.**
- **Start badly, on purpose. The wrong version still counts as starting.**
- **When the timer goes off, you can stop. Stopping is allowed. Or you can keep going – but you never have to.**
- **Why it works: your brain isn't refusing the task. It's refusing the size of the task.**

Strategy 2: Body Doubling Without a Person

Your brain doesn't fully distinguish between a real person working next to you and a video of one.

- **Put on a YouTube "study with me" video.**
- **Use a virtual coworking room.**
- **Call a friend and just... both do your own thing on mute.**

The external presence creates just enough scaffolding to get past the wall.

Strategy 3: Permission to Half-Ass It

The top post on r/adhdwomen had 4,684 upvotes for this idea: it's okay to run the dishwasher with less stuff in it. Do the smallest possible version.

- **Wipe one counter.**
- **Answer one email.**
- **Eat toast. Toast counts.**
- **Run the dishwasher half-full. It's still dishes getting clean.**
- **The bar is on the floor on purpose. That's what makes it reachable on the hard days.**

Strategy 4: Visual Anchors Over Willpower

Willpower is finite. Visual cues bypass the decision part of the brain. Three sticky notes you can copy right now:

- **On the fridge: "Fed beats perfect."**
- **On the front door: "Keys, phone, wallet – then go."**
- **On the bathroom mirror: "Rinse counts. Clean-ish is clean enough."**

Your phone's lock screen works too – one card, one reminder, one word.

Strategy 5: Sensory Regulation First

If you're overstimulated, nothing works until you regulate. This isn't a bonus step – it's the prerequisite. A 5-step reboot:

- **Put on noise-canceling headphones (or earplugs, or a hood over your eyes).**
- **Dim the lights.**
- **Get a cold drink. Sip it.**
- **Unclench your jaw. Drop your shoulders.**
- **Zero demands for 90 seconds.**

Then – and only then – try the thing.

Strategy 6: The 30-Second Transition

Task-switching is real work. Budget for it. Between one thing and the next:

- **Ninety seconds of absolutely nothing.**
- **Stand up or shift position. Shake it out.**
- **Water, stretch, or stare out a window.**
- **Then – and only then – the next thing.**

Script A: What to Say to Yourself, Out Loud, When You Can't Start

"I'm not stuck because I'm lazy. I'm stuck because the start is heavy. So I'm not going to start the whole thing.

I'm going to set a timer for two minutes.

I'm going to do the worst possible version of the first step.

When the timer goes off, I can stop – for real, no guilt – or I can keep going.

Either one counts as a win, because both mean I moved."

Script B: What to Say to a Friend When You Need a Body Double

"Hey – no conversation needed. I'm stuck on [thing] and my brain works better when someone's nearby. Could we sit on a call together for 15 minutes while we both do our own thing? Mute is fine. No pressure at all."

Reflection prompts

- What's one task that always felt impossible, until you did a tiny piece of it? What was the tiny piece?
- Where does your brain get "stuck on" – a show, a scroll, a thought loop? What's one object or sound that pulls you out (headphones, a specific song, a pet)?
- If willpower were a battery, what's the one thing that charges yours without costing energy? (A window, a hug, a cold drink...)

Your smallest possible version

- Task I'm avoiding: \\\
- The smallest piece of it: \\\
- Timer set for: 2 minutes
- After the timer: ☐ stop (allowed) ☐ keep going (allowed)

Continue reading on sfwagere.com

- [The Executive Dysfunction Survival Guide](/blog/executive-dysfunction-survival-guide) – the essay that started it
- [Body Doubling: The Trick Your Brain Already Believes](/blog/body-doubling-guide)
- [Apps & Tools That Work With Executive Dysfunction](/blog/apps-tools-executive-dysfunction)

About The Unadulthood Society

We're a shame-free space for caregivers, neurodivergent adults, and anyone who never quite grew up as expected. We create free resources, visual tools, and permission slips to be human. No streaks. No shame. No "you should." If you're in crisis, this toolkit is not the tool. Please reach out to a professional or a crisis line in your country. You deserve real support. – The Unadulthood Society · sfwagere.com