



A PARENT'S GUIDE

Stop Repeating Yourself

Practical strategies for getting your ADHD kid through mornings, homework, chores, and meltdowns, without losing your mind.

MORNINGS

HOMEWORK

CHORES

MELTDOWNS

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You've said it a hundred times. Put your shoes on. Start your homework. Did you hear me? I just said that. Why do I have to keep repeating myself?

If this is your daily reality, you are not failing as a parent. You are parenting a brain that works differently, and most of the strategies that work for neurotypical kids simply don't work for ADHD kids. Not because your child is being difficult. Because the wiring is different.

The approach in this guide is built around one core idea: your job is not to manage your child's every move. Your job is to set up the right conditions and let them operate within them. Independence isn't the goal at the end of the process, it's built into the process from the start.

When you stop trying to control the execution and start controlling the environment, something shifts. The battles get fewer. The repeating stops. And your kid starts to develop the one thing that actually carries them into adulthood: the belief that they can figure it out themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

Mornings

Mornings are hard for ADHD kids because they require a sequence of low-interest tasks with no immediate payoff. The ADHD brain struggles to hold verbal instructions in working memory, which is why telling your kid what to do, repeatedly, doesn't work. The words go in and disappear almost immediately. The fix isn't more reminding. It's building a system they can run themselves.

Use pictures, not words

A morning checklist works, but only if it's visual. Not a written list. Actual photos of your child doing each step: a photo of them brushing their teeth, a photo of them getting dressed, a photo of their backpack being zipped. The ADHD brain has strong nonverbal working memory and weak verbal working memory. A picture of them doing the task activates the right system. A written word doesn't. Take the photos with them, print them out, laminate them, and put them somewhere they'll see them every morning. Let them check each one off themselves.

EXAMPLE: MORNING PHOTO CHECKLIST

 Photo of child waking up	 Photo of child getting dressed	 Photo of child brushing teeth
☐ Wake up	☐ Get dressed	☐ Brush teeth
 Photo of child eating breakfast	 Photo of child packing bag	 Photo of child putting on shoes
☐ Eat breakfast	☐ Pack bag	☐ Shoes on

Replace placeholder icons with actual photos of your child doing each step.

↓ A printable version of this template is available for download at the end of this guide.

Set the parameters, not the schedule

The morning routine needs to be done before they leave the house. That's the parameter. How they move through it: what order, what pace, is up to them. Your role is to build the system once and then step back. The goal is a kid who can get themselves out the door without you narrating every step.

Preparation happens the night before, on their terms

Getting ready the night before reduces how much the brain has to carry in the morning. But you're not packing their bag for them or laying out their clothes. You're establishing that certain things need to be ready before bed, and letting them decide how and when that happens. The standard is set. The execution is theirs.

Incentives over nagging

Attach something they actually care about to completing the morning routine independently. Not a threat. A real reward for following through without prompting. The ADHD brain runs on the anticipation of reward, use that.

CHAPTER TWO

Homework

Homework is one of the biggest daily battles in ADHD households, and most of it is unnecessary. The conflict usually comes from parents trying to control when, how, and in what order their kid does their work. Here's a different approach.

TIP

If your child can complete homework at school, make that the priority. The school environment provides structure, body doubling, and fewer distractions than home. A homework club, staying late with a teacher, or using a free period is not a shortcut. It is a smarter use of the environment.

THE FRAMEWORK: PARENT SETS THE DEADLINE, KID OWNS THE PROCESS**PARENT SETS****The Deadline**

Homework done by 9pm
Every night
Non-negotiable

**KID DECIDES****The Process**

When to start
Where to work
What order to do it in

Set the deadline, not the process

Homework has to be done by a certain time every night. That's the rule. When they do it, where they do it, in what order they do it, that's up to them. Some kids work better right after they get home. Some need time to decompress first. Some do math first because it's harder, some save it for last. Let them figure out what works for their brain. Your job is to hold the deadline, not manage the path to it.

Connect it to a real consequence or incentive

The deadline needs to mean something. If homework is done by the set time, something good follows. If it isn't, something they value doesn't happen. This isn't punishment, it's structure. The ADHD brain needs a real and immediate reason to act. "Because you should" is not a reason. Make the consequence or incentive concrete, predictable, and consistent.

Stay out of the execution

Don't break the assignment into steps for them. Don't set up their workspace. Don't remind them what's due. They have a deadline. They know what needs to get done. Give them the space to figure out how to get there. When you step back, two things happen: they start to develop their own systems, and the homework stops being a power struggle between the two of you.

Remind them of the time, not the task

ADHD brains are time blind, they don't feel time passing the way other people do. An hour can feel like five minutes, which is why deadlines sneak up on them even when they fully intended to follow through. A simple time check, "Hey, it's 7:30", gives them the information they need without telling them what to do with it. You're not nagging. You're narrating the clock. Done calmly and without expectation in your voice, it's one of the least confrontational ways to prompt awareness. The task is still theirs. You're just making sure they have the information they need to manage it.

ADHD brains tend to get highly dysregulated around screens. The higher the screen time before homework, the harder the transition into work will be. Whatever limits you set, know that screens make the pivot to non-preferred tasks significantly harder. Factor that into how you structure the afternoon.

When they don't follow through

If homework isn't done by the agreed time, carry out the consequence. That's it. No lecture. No advice. No "if you had just started earlier." Unsolicited advice to an ADHD brain is completely unheard, it goes in one ear and disappears. They already receive more negative feedback in a day than most people get in a week. They don't need shame on top of a consequence. Be matter of fact: "Homework wasn't done by nine. According to our agreement, you don't have that privilege tomorrow. I know you can figure out how to get it done." Then drop it. The consequence is the message. Your words don't need to be.

CHAPTER THREE

Chores

The same principle applies to chores: set the standard, not the steps. And like mornings, the standard works best when it's visual.

Give them ownership over when it happens

Chores need to be done by a certain point, before dinner, before the weekend ends, whatever works for your family. Within that window, they decide when. Ownership over timing reduces resistance. When a kid feels

like they have some control over their day, they're more likely to follow through.

Keep the chore list consistent

Rotating chores or constantly adding new expectations is hard for ADHD brains that rely on routine and predictability. Assign consistent responsibilities and leave them there. Familiarity lowers the activation energy required to start.

If your chores change day to day: make the consistent daily task asking you for the chore of the day. That way the routine stays the same even when the chore does not.

Acknowledge completion, not quality

The habit of completing the task is what you are building. When you correct every execution detail, you teach them that trying is not worth it. Acknowledge the finish, not the quality of the finish.

Remind them of the time, not the chore

Once again, ADHD brains can't feel time going by. A calm "just so you know, it's 5:15" is all it takes to prompt awareness without turning into a reminder about what they haven't done yet. You're giving them information, not instructions. That distinction matters more than it sounds.

When they don't follow through

If the chore isn't done by the agreed time, carry out the consequence without commentary. No reminding them what they should have done differently. No expressing disappointment. Just: "Chores weren't done by the time we agreed on. According to our agreement, here's what that means. I know you can figure out how to get it done next time." Then move on. Shame doesn't build habits, consistent, predictable consequences do. And your belief in them matters more than any lecture ever will.

Done imperfectly is better than not done at all. Lower the bar, celebrate the completion.

CHAPTER FOUR

Meltdowns

What is said during an ADHD meltdown is not actually what your child thinks. It is a dysregulated nervous system speaking, one that has run out of capacity to cope. The words are the overflow, not the message. Responding to the content of a meltdown as though it reflects your child's real feelings or intentions will always make things worse.

HOW TO RIDE IT OUT



Extreme language / escalation

Your child is dysregulated. The thinking brain is offline.



Do not engage with the content

No explaining, defending, or raising your voice. Just disengage.

**"I don't respond when you talk to me like that"**

Say it calmly, as many times as needed. Mean it every time.

**The door slam, this is a win**

They removed themselves. That IS self-regulation. Let them be.

**They come back, short reconnection**

They're regulated now and can hear you. A short, calm debrief is appropriate here.

Do not engage with dysregulated language

When your child is using extreme language, saying things they don't mean, escalating, saying hurtful things, do not respond to the content of what they're saying. Engaging with it, explaining, defending yourself, raising your voice, none of it helps. It only adds fuel. The dysregulated brain cannot hear reason right now. It can only feel threat or safety.

"I don't respond when you talk to me like that"

This is the phrase that works. Say it calmly, and mean it every time. You can repeat it as many times as needed, the key is that your tone never escalates. Don't explain it. Don't defend yourself. Just disengage. At first, ignoring dysregulated behavior works for a short time, but this phrase takes it further. It gives your child something to push against, and eventually, the frustration of not getting a reaction will move them to their room.

The door slam is a win

It doesn't feel like one. But your child going to their room and slamming the door means they removed themselves from the situation instead of continuing to escalate. That is self-regulation, imperfect, loud, but real. Let them be in their room. Don't follow them in. Give it time.

What usually happens next

After the door slam, after the quiet, most kids come out of their room differently. The storm has passed. They often feel embarrassed about what they said. That moment, when they come out with their tail between their legs, is your opening. They are regulated now and ready to hear you. Start with reconnection: "I love you. You okay?" And then, when the moment is right, a short and calm debrief. Not a lecture, a conversation. They can receive it now in a way they couldn't ten minutes ago.

Look for what came before

Meltdowns rarely come out of nowhere. Hunger, fatigue, a hard day at school, a transition they weren't prepared for, something loaded the gun before the trigger got pulled. When you start tracking what happens before the meltdowns, patterns emerge. Patterns are workable. Character is not.

When it goes further than words

If a meltdown crosses into violence or property damage, that is a different situation entirely. Calling the police and asking them to come speak with your child, not to arrest them, but to talk to them about the seriousness of

what just happened, is an appropriate and effective response. A conversation with a police officer carries a weight that a parent's voice cannot. It is not an overreaction. It is a real-world consequence for behavior that has crossed a real line.

Find a regulating activity for yourself too

Walking away from a meltdown is not abandonment. It is the right call, for both of you. If you stay in the room while dysregulated yourself, the nervous system co-regulation goes in the wrong direction. You escalate each other.

Figure out in advance what a regulating activity looks like for your child and for you. It has to be non-screen based, because screens raise arousal rather than lower it. For your child it might be going outside, doing something physical, drawing, or sitting with an animal. For you it might be a workout, a walk, a few minutes alone with music. The specifics matter less than having the answer ready before the meltdown happens. When you are in it, you will not think clearly enough to figure it out in the moment.

CHAPTER FIVE

Transitions

Transitions aren't just hard for ADHD kids. They are a genuine neurological event. When your child is deep in an activity and you call them away, you are not interrupting something trivial. You are pulling them out of a state their brain worked hard to reach. Understanding what is actually happening in those

moments changes how you respond to them, and how often they turn into fights.

What is actually happening (it's not defiance)

The ADHD brain has a difficult time reaching a state of focus. When it finally gets there, it does not want to leave. Being pulled out of that state does not feel like being interrupted. It feels like a loss. Like being woken up mid-dream and told to immediately start doing homework. The disorientation is real, and the distress is real.

I call this **transition grief**. Your child is not being dramatic. They are not manipulating you. Their brain is genuinely mourning something it worked hard to build. When you see it that way, the meltdown at the TV makes more sense, and the fight becomes something you can work around instead of something you have to win.

Transition grief isn't drama. It's your child's brain experiencing a real loss. The strategy isn't to dismiss it. It's to make the landing softer.

Make time visible before you call it

The ADHD brain does not experience time the way other brains do. "Five more minutes" is an abstraction that means very little unless your child can actually see time moving. A [visual timer](#), one where the remaining time is a shrinking colored arc rather than blinking numbers, makes the countdown concrete and real. When your child can watch time disappearing, the end of the activity is no longer a surprise. It becomes something they can prepare for.

Set the timer together at the start of the activity, not five minutes before you need them to stop. The agreement happens at the beginning, not when you're already trying to end things.

The five-minute warning (and why most parents do it wrong)

Most parents give a five-minute warning and then call their child immediately when time is up. That works fine for a neurotypical kid. For an ADHD kid, the warning and the stop command both land as a crisis. There is no space to process either one.

The five-minute warning should actually do two things: tell your child when the activity ends, and give them a moment to mentally land before the next thing starts. "Five minutes until we leave for soccer. When the timer goes off, take three deep breaths, then get your cleats." That three-breath window is not wasted time. It is a decompression gap that makes the handoff possible.

THE RUNWAY METHOD: A DIFFERENT WAY TO END THINGS

Most transition strategies only handle the first half: warning your child that something is ending. The Runway Method adds the second half: a short, structured gap between the stop and the start. Think of it like a plane needing runway before it can change direction.

- 1 **Set the visual timer together at the start**
"You've got 20 minutes of Minecraft. Let's set the timer now so we both know when it's done."
- 2 **Five-minute warning (not an order, just a heads up)**
"Five minutes left on the timer. Start thinking about a good stopping point."
- 3 **The runway: 2-3 minutes between stop and start**
"Timer's done. Take a few minutes, get a snack, shake it out. Then homework at 4:30."
- 4 **Name the next thing (not a surprise)**

"At 4:30 we're sitting down for homework. You know what's coming."

Screen-to-homework transitions are the hardest

Screen time floods the ADHD brain with dopamine. Homework does not. When you ask your child to close the game and open their backpack, you are asking them to go from one of the highest-dopamine states available to one of the lowest. The distance between those two things is enormous, and the resistance you get reflects that distance.

The runway method is especially important here. Going screen-to-homework with no gap almost always ends in a fight. Screen-to-snack-to-homework with a 5-minute decompression window in the middle gives the brain time to come down before being asked to do something hard. It is not giving in. It is understanding how the brain works and designing around it.

Pre-commit the stop time in writing

The most effective version of this is one your child is part of. Before the activity starts, you and your child write down the stop time together. Not "I'll tell you when to stop." Not "maybe one more episode." The stop time is decided in advance, written on a sticky note or whiteboard, and both of you can see it.

When the timer goes off and you point to what they agreed to, you are not the one ending the fun. The agreement is. That is a fundamentally different dynamic, and it removes a lot of the fight.

Narrate instead of command

Instead of "Turn it off now," try narrating what you see before you ask for anything. "I can see you're really into this and it's hard to stop. The timer says it's time, and I know that's frustrating." That four-second pause before the request gives your child's brain a moment to register that you understand, which lowers the fight response before you've even asked them to do anything.

It sounds small. It works anyway. The ADHD brain is much more likely to comply with a request that does not feel like an attack.

Morning transitions: from preferred to non-preferred

Mornings are a transition problem as much as they are a routine problem. Your child is moving from the preferred state (sleep, warmth, no demands) to the non-preferred state (getting dressed, eating breakfast, being somewhere on time). That is a hard pivot even for adults.

The visual timer and the written schedule both help here. But the single biggest morning transition fix is building in enough time so that you are not rushing. Rushing an ADHD brain does not speed it up. It shuts it down. If mornings are chaotic, add 15 minutes to the start rather than trying to cut steps from the end.

Your child is not refusing to stop because they don't respect you. They are refusing because their brain built something it is not ready to leave. The runway gives them a path out that doesn't feel like a cliff.

CHAPTER SIX

Evenings

Mornings don't start in the morning. They start the night before. What happens in the two hours before your child goes to sleep determines how hard or easy the next morning is going to be. Most parents put all their energy into the morning routine and almost none into the evening one. That's where the leverage actually is.

Set a specific start time for the evening routine

The evening routine needs a hard start time, not a general intention. "We start winding down after dinner" is too vague for an ADHD brain. "The evening routine starts at 7:30" is concrete. Write it down. Put it somewhere visible. The ADHD brain does better with fixed anchors than with flexible guidelines, because flexible guidelines require the brain to constantly re-evaluate when to start, which is its own executive function task.

The start time is non-negotiable. What happens within the routine can have some flexibility. The anchor holds the structure together.

Do tomorrow morning tonight

The single highest-leverage evening habit for ADHD kids is preparing for tomorrow before going to bed. Backpack packed. Clothes laid out. Anything that needs to go to school placed by the door. Lunch made if possible.

This works for a specific reason: morning is the worst possible time to ask an ADHD brain to plan ahead. The brain is transitioning out of sleep, executive function is at its lowest, and the clock is already creating pressure. Doing the planning at night removes those tasks from the

morning entirely. Your kid wakes up and the decisions are already made. They just execute.

Build this into the evening routine as a fixed step, not something you ask about. "Pack your backpack before you brush your teeth" every night, not "did you pack your bag?" in the morning.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS (IN WHATEVER ORDER WORKS FOR YOUR FAMILY)

Screens off: far enough before bed that the brain has time to come down

Tomorrow handled tonight: backpack, clothes, anything needed in the morning

Hygiene: brushing teeth, washing up, whatever your kid needs

Wind-down: something calm and low-demand before lights out

The order and timing are yours to figure out. What matters is that these things happen consistently, not that they happen at the same minute every night.

Screens off earlier than you think

Screens before bed are particularly disruptive for ADHD brains. It is not just about blue light. It is about dopamine. Screens keep the brain in a high-stimulation, high-reward state. When you turn them off and ask the brain to transition into the low-stimulation state required for sleep, you are asking it to make an enormous drop.

The further the screen cutoff from bedtime, the smoother the wind-down. Forty-five minutes minimum. An hour is better. This feels impossible until you try it for a week and notice the difference in how long it takes your child to fall asleep.

Teach your kid to walk themselves through it

The long-term goal of any evening routine is that your child eventually runs it themselves, without you prompting every step. That independence doesn't come from you reminding them less. It comes from building the habit of self-narration: the ability to talk themselves through what comes next.

You can encourage this early. Ask your child, at the start of the routine: "What do we do first?" Let them tell you. Let them check each step off the list themselves. When they get stuck or distracted, instead of telling them what to do, ask: "What does the list say comes next?" You are teaching them to consult the system, not you. That is the whole game.

A kid who can walk themselves through a routine at night becomes a kid who can walk themselves through a morning. It takes longer than just prompting them. It is worth the time.

Handle the resistance before it becomes a fight

Evening resistance is almost always a transition problem in disguise. Your child is being asked to leave something engaging and walk toward something boring. The same runway logic from the transitions chapter applies here: a five-minute warning before screens go off, a short decompression window, then the first step of the routine. No abrupt endings.

If the evening routine turns into a nightly fight, the routine itself is probably starting too late. A rushed evening routine is a failed evening routine. Build in more time than you think you need, and the resistance tends to drop significantly.

Morning chaos is usually an evening problem. Fix the night before and the morning takes care of itself.

None of this works perfectly every time. ADHD is inconsistent by nature, a strategy that works Monday might not work Thursday. That's not failure. That's the reality of parenting a brain that fluctuates.

What you're building isn't a perfect system. You're building a relationship with how your child's brain works, and slowly creating an environment where they can learn to manage themselves. That independence is the whole point. A kid who learns to work within structure, meet their own deadlines, and regulate their own emotions is developing something that will carry them for the rest of their life.

That work takes time. And it's a lot easier with support. If you want to work through any of this with someone who's been on both sides of the table, I'd love to talk.

Want to Work Through This Together?

If you want to work through any of this with someone who knows this stuff from the inside, I'd love to connect.

[Let's Talk →](#)

BONUS

Printable Templates

Download the free printable templates that go with this guide, a morning routine photo checklist and chore reference cards, ready to print, fill in, and laminate.

[Download Your Templates →](#)

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