THE ADHD ADVOCATE

# STUDENT HANDBOOK

# A GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS





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# THE ADHD EFFECT ON STUDENTS

Students with ADHD are often very intelligent, creative, innovative and hard-working individuals but many of them struggle to stay in University and complete their degrees as a result of not getting the support that they need. This is primarily due to a lack of understanding of their unique brain wiring.

Due to ADHD challenges of hyperactivity, impulsivity, distractibility, emotional dysregulation and executive function impairment, despite their best efforts (which are often misconstrued), these students constantly fail to meet expectations, including their own. Not unsurprisingly, these students quickly become frustrated and give up, dropping out of University.

Diagnosis is the first step towards managing these challenges as you have to "name it to tame it". Treatment, usually in the form of medication is the second step. The problem is that "the pills don't give skills". The medication unfortunately is not a magic bullet. It does not create effective strategies for students with ADHD or provide them with a framework in which they will succeed. For this reason, ADHD coaching is necessary for students with ADHD to create and implement structures and supports that will minimise their ADHD challenges and allow them to stay in University, complete their degrees and thrive.

Emotional wellbeing and mindset are crucial to succeeding at university. At The ADHD Advocate, we have found with our students, that to get in the right mindset, they need to understand and accept their ADHD and embrace the strengths of this unique brain wiring. In the right situations, ADHD can be a superpower. After all, ADHD is situationally variable. Unfortunately, the delivery of education and mode of assessment (weighted heavily on the results of exams and dissertations) is not exactly ADHD friendly.



At The ADHD Advocate, we work with many students with ADHD, helping them identify and plot out their steps to success. Making them feel in control and ready for what lies ahead. When it comes to study strategies we "make the invisible - visible, the intangible - tangible and the inaccessible - accessible". Most importantly we make it relevant and appealing to their interest-based nervous systems.



# COMMON ADHD CHALLENGES

Here are the some of the most common ADHD challenges that students with ADHD struggle with on a daily basis that adversely affect performance.

# 8 Lack of Sleep

Students with ADHD come alive at unconventional times. Often in the evening they will get a burst of energy and feel inspired. They also struggle unwinding. This all contributes to a lack of sleep that often has a knock on effect, as lack of sleep exacerbates their ADHD challenges. It is important that students with ADHD get the sleep they need, otherwise they will struggle with less focus, more stress, agitation, impulsivity and more careless mistakes.

# Managing Expectations and Time Blindness

Students with ADHD are often not clear about their own expectations and as a consequence fail to manage others' expectations. They are also given to people pleasing and cannot bear to say no and disappoint anyone. They always feel that they need to prove themselves and will often go the extra mile. Add to that their time blindness and they end up over promising and under delivering.

## 6 Clutter

Students with ADHD struggle to organise themselves and often can't find a clean space to study in their rooms. If they do have a desk, it will likely be covered in papers, post it notes, pens and other miscellaneous pieces of stationery. When deadlines loom, the very last thing these students focus on is clearing this clutter. Unfortunately the clutter around them only serves to clutter their heads. Already anxious and overwhelmed, the out of control study environment can be the straw that breaks the camel's back - particularly if they can't find what they need to get started on revision or writing their dissertations.

#### **5** Lack of Structure

Without a plan, to do list and timetable, students with ADHD are given dangerous free reign to go off tangent, ignore what is required for the day and self-sabotage. They can struggle to focus even when they know what they are meant to be doing. They tend to fall down rabbit holes and pursue what they view as important and/or interesting at the expense of their studies. Its particularly difficult when lectures are few and far between.

#### 4 Inability to Set Clear Boundaries

Students with ADHD are people pleasers. Add social anxiety to that and many students with ADHD struggle to say no to social events, desperately wanting to fit in. This puts extra pressure on their already limited time to study and complete their assignments.

#### 3 Not disclosing their ADHD

ADHD is still sadly stigmatised. Many students with ADHD fear that disclosing their ADHD will only serve to lessen themselves in the eyes of their lecturers and peers, particularly if they are studying Medicine or Law. Students fear that they will be viewed as less reliable, less competent and even picked on or held back. Unfortunately, this fear is not without basis. Disclosing ADHD is the route to reasonable adjustments and funding for support and eventually to defeating the stigma around this unique brain wiring.

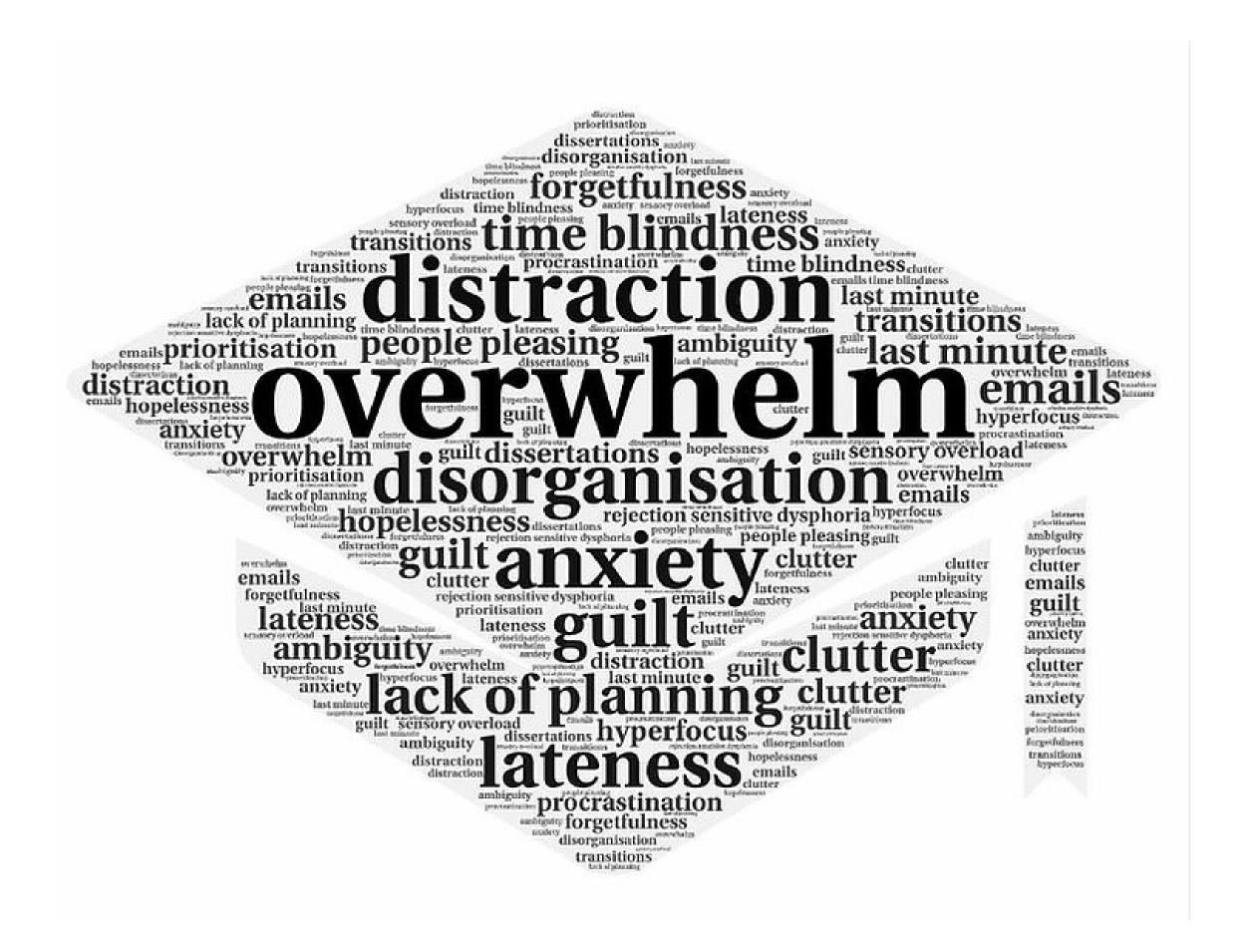


# **2** Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria

Many students with ADHD are so fearful and painfully aware of their potential for being rejected at any possible moment it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Looking for proof that they are 'not worthy' trips them up at every opportunity. Often even the slightest whiff of competition or rejection can cause students with ADHD to hit the self destruct button. Sadly too many students opt out because the pain of rejection is just too great. Other students resort to perfectionism, spending hours and hours on their university work without breaks and sometimes even without food or water, which unfortunately often leads to burnout.

# 1 Procrastination

"Procrastination" - the inability to get started, to do everything but the thing that they are supposed to be doing. Often it is due to ambiguity around the task, too many ways of completing the task and/or difficulty breaking it down and identifying the first step. Perfection also paralyses progress. Mostly, the challenge stems from the students' "interest-based nervous system" which does not align with the importance-based systems that prevail in Education today.





#### Item

# 1:1 ADHD Coaching with The ADHD Advocate



# ADHD challenges addressed improving Academic performance

Helping students with ADHD improve academic performance through:

- understanding their ADHD
- identifying their strengths and how to harness these in these in school universities
- identifying the obstacles getting in the way of their performance
- learning how to effectively plan and prioritise
- creating routines and model weeks
- prioritising health and wellbeing
- boosting confidence

#### **Details**

All Coaches are trained and certified by the ADD Coaching Academy

- 3-month Coaching Programme (weekly 45min sessions)
- 6-month Coaching Programme (fortnightly 60min sessions)

1:1 ADHD Coaching with The ADHD
Advocate

# ADHD Awareness Training with The ADHD Advocate



ADHD awareness is lacking in universities and as a result many students with ADHD are not receiving effective reasonable adjustments to help them access their learning in the same way as their neurotypical peers adversely affecting performance and mental health. Students with ADHD suffer from emotional dysregulation, particularly Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria which directly impacts their academic performance (exacerbating ADHD challenges such as focus and executive function skills).

It is important that lecturers understand ADHD and provide reasonable adjustments including a learning environments that plays to the strengths of students with ADHD and mitigates against the challenges getting in the way.

The ADHD Advocate provides ADHD Awareness Training including strategies for learning with ADHD to Universities

ADHD Awareness Training with The ADHD Advocate



Item

**ADHD** challenges addressed improving Academic **Performance** 

**Details** 

**ADHD Unlocked Community Membership** 



Many students with ADHD do not understand their ADHD, have no strategies struggle to stay motivated and productive without accountability. Students feel very isolated with their ADHD as well, not knowing any other students with ADHD.

or structures to address their challenges and

ADHD Unlocked provides an affordable and accessible solution for students with ADHD through live weekly webinars on ADHD, group "smash it" sessions, member meetups and regular emails keeping the all important lessons in sight and in mind. Students also have access to the extensive resource library where they can access

Members must be 18 and over

- Yearly Subscription -£279
- Monthly Subscription £29.99

**ADHD Unlocked Community Membership** 

ADHD: An A-Z



An insider's perspective on ADHD. A powerful resource for the ADHD community and those affected by it. It is focussed specifically on the UK.

recordings of all previous webinars.

Offers practical solutions to day to day challenges faced by students with ADHD. Written by Leanne Maskell (a client of The ADHD Advocate)

**Dictation Software** 



Writing is the most cognitively demanding task for students with ADHD which is why many procrastinate on emails and writing dissertations. Being able to dictate emails and dissertations helps students get started using one of their dominant processing styles.

**Dragon Dictation** 

**Mind Mapping** Software



Students with ADHD are overwhelmed with ideas and the multiple different ways they can do things which prevents them from getting started and completing their coursework. Mind mapping helps students with ADHD capture, centralise and organise their ideas/information visually and tangibly making coursework more do-able.

**MindView** 



Item

ADHD challenges addressed improving improving Academic Performance

**Details** 

**Password Storage** 



Students with ADHD have weak working memories and often forget log in details causing overwhelm and resistance accessing their coursework and lecture recordings affecting their performance. Sometimes students with ADHD will need to write passwords down on paper compromising security.

<u>Dashlane</u>

Students with ADHD benefit from software that automatically fills all passwords, payments and personal details wherever needed across the web on any device

# Task Management Software



Students with ADHD either don't record their tasks and assignments or do so in different notebooks/platforms so often lose track of what they have to do, affecting their performance.

<u>Monday</u>

Students with ADHD benefit from visual team management software that captures tasks and assignments centrally and creates sub-tasks to make steps clearer and more achievable. It also increases accountability as teachers/mentors can monitor and provide helpful prompts.

Noise Cancelling Headphones



Many students with ADHD have sensory integration issues, including sensitivity to noise which can increase distraction and overwhelm, particularly if they are trying to revise in a public place.

Noise cancelling headphones can reduce the noise and therefore the sensory overload experienced by students with ADHD allowing them to better revise.

Bose Noise Cancelling
Headphones



Item

ADHD challenges addressed improving improving Academic Performance

**Details** 

Read and Write Software



Many students with ADHD find reading books difficult due to the focus and stillness required. Also, a lot of students with ADHD have dyslexia which makes reading even more difficult. Audible allows students with ADHD to listen to books while they are walking, cleaning and exercising which aids in their processing and retention of the information received. Read and Write makes documents, web pages and applications more accessible.

Audible Subscription
Read and Write Inc

**Time Management Aid** 



Students with ADHD struggle with time blindness and can't feel time passing so cannot judge how much time they have to do tasks/assignments and will often be late for their classes and fail to meet deadlines.

The Time Timer enables students with ADHD to see time passing visually.

**Time Timer** 

**Daily Planners** 



Students with ADHD struggle with planning ahead and don't set their agenda for the day so won't have visibility over their schedules. This results in students with ADHD often missing or being late for their classes and not being prepared for meetings/workshops.

<u>High Performance Planner</u> <u>Fox Planner</u>

**Erasable Pens** 



Most students with ADHD are perfectionists and resist writing in their bullet journals or daily plans for fear of having to make changes later. They find that once they are crossing things out and re-writing entries or tasks, the page starts looking too cluttered which makes them reluctant to refer to the page due to overwhelm.

An erasable pen enables students with ADHD to write and refer to their plans more readily.

Pilot Pen Frixion Erasable Rollerball
Pen



#### Item

# ADHD challenges addressed improving Academic Performance

#### **Details**

#### **Monthly Planner**



Students with ADHD struggle with time management and don't feel time passing like their neurotypical peers. As a result, they cannot estimate how much time they have to complete their assignments and prepare for their exams so are often unprepared.

Monthly Planners help to make the month ahead visual helping students with ADHD to get a better idea of what they have on that month, keeping their priorities in sight and in mind and providing enough time to prepare. **The Magnet Shop Wall Planner** 

#### **Yearly Planner**



Students with ADHD struggle with time management and don't feel time passing like their neurotypical peers. In order to better manage their time it helps to see it.

Yearly Planners help to make the year ahead visual helping students with ADHD to get a better idea of when their assignments are due and their exams will be held giving themselves time to prepare themselves.

Year Wall Planner

#### **Gratitude Practice**



Students with ADHD suffer from negativity bias which results in a lot of negative thoughts and rumination. They also don't pause to set their intention for the day or reflect on what went well that day to give themselves opportunities to improve.

The 6 minute diary helps students with ADHD develop a daily gratitude practice, set intentions for the day and reflect. It is achievable as the questions are specific and it only takes 3 minutes in the morning and 3 minutes at the end of the day.

The 6-Minute Diary



#### Item

# ADHD challenges addressed improving Academic Performance

#### **Details**

## **Standing Desk**



Students with ADHD struggle to stay focused, particularly if they have to sit still for any period of time which negatively impacts on productivity.

**Fenge Standing Desk Converter** 

Standing desks/standing desk converters allow students with ADHD to stand up while they are working which increases their alertness and motivation.

#### **Easel/Flipchart**



Students with ADHD benefit from being able to get their thoughts down on paper. They are visual processors and non-linear thinkers so tend to map out their thoughts visually. An Easel or Flipchart is perfect for this and also enables students with ADHD to do their thinking on their feet which enables them to make a start and keeps them focused.

**Flipchart Easel Whiteboard** 

# Whiteboard



Students with ADHD benefit from visual reminders and prompts but are reluctant to put anything on their walls as it can be visually cluttering for them which can lead to lack of focus/overwhelm.

**Magic Whiteboard** 

Magic Whiteboards can be taken down off the wall as easily as they are put up. These are great for mind mapping, recording exam dates, assignments, revision and also for "score keeping" to help motivate students with ADHD to reach their goals.

#### **Note Taking Tablet**



Students with ADHD struggle to centralise their notes and often will write on whatever they can find. If they do use notepads, they often end up losing them.

Note taking tablets help students with ADHD centralise their notes from classes and ensure that important notes are stored in an accessible, searchable, location which reduces anxiety and overwhelm and increases productivity.

# Remarkable 2



#### Item

# ADHD challenges addressed improving Academic Performance

#### **Details**

#### Printer



The less accessible a task is for a student with ADHD the less likely the student will engage with it. This includes documents on the computer. Being able to print out documents that need to be read or amended makes it more likely that the task will get done. Printed documents are more visible, accessible and tangible which appeals to students' multi-sensory approach to processing information.

**HP Envy 5030** 

#### Laminator



Students with ADHD have weak working memories so need visual prompts and reminders (re their key strategies/priorities) up in front of them. Students with ADHD tend to be perfectionists and so by laminating visual prompts they will be protected from wear and tear and more likely to stay up on the wall in sight and in mind.

Blusmart A3 Laminator

# Post It Notes



For really important reminders that need to be in sight and in mind straightaway, post it notes serve as quick and easy (but effective) visual prompts.

Post It Notes

It can also help students with ADHD with transitioning off tasks as they will be more easily able to pick up where they left off when they come back to the task.

#### Alexa/Google Home



Students with ADHD have poor working memory and time blindness. Alarms aren't useful because they tend to be ignored and they don't give students with ADHD any information relating to the alarm so aren't helpful.

Alexa
Google Home

Alexa enables students with ADHD to set reminders in their own words and can help students with ADHD create and stick to routines in the mornings and evenings to increase their productivity.



Item

ADHD challenges addressed improving Academic Performance

**Details** 

**Apple Watch** 



Students with ADHD will often ignore the alarms and reminders that they set themselves on their phones. However, a reminder that vibrates will get their attention and they will be more likely to take notice and follow through on the required action they have set themselves.

**Apple Watch** 

Also, there are useful apps to track steps, sleep and encourage breathing exercises promoting health and wellbeing that students with ADHD don't often prioritise.

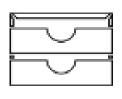
**Fidget Toys** 



Students with ADHD often struggle with hyperactivity and find it difficult to concentrate if they have to sit still without moving. Being able to move in some way helps students with ADHD to stay stimulated which leads to better focus and improved emotional regulation.

Fidget Cube

Filing trays



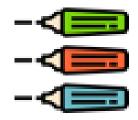
Students with ADHD struggle with filing and will often either lose documents that they need or just don't remember to action them as they are often "out of sight and out of mind".

**5 Tier Stackable Letter Tray** 

Many students with ADHD have very cluttered desks which tend to further clutter their minds. Filing trays are a great solution for keeping those documents that need to be actioned in sight and in mind but in a contained and tidy way.

**BIC Highlighters** 

Highlighters



Students with ADHD find it difficult to read and retain information, particularly when there is a lot of it on a page. This makes it difficult to identify and recall the main points. As students with ADHD are visual processors, the use of colour can help with this.

Item

ADHD challenges addressed improving Academic Performance

**Details** 

Shiatsu Massages



Many students with ADHD are sensory seekers and are restless and unfocused as a result. Massage provides sensory stimulation to students with ADHD which tends to increase their focus and improve their mood helping them to better engage in their learning as they are getting the physical stimulation they need.

Shiatsu Neck Shoulder Massager Foot Massager Machine

**Light Therapy Lamps** 



Many students with ADHD suffer from Seasonal Affectation Disorder. When there is a lack of natural light, it can lead to students with ADHD feeling depressed, listless and fatigued, affecting both performance and mood. Light therapy lamps stimulate natural light to stimulate the body and improve mental alertness.

Sun Lamp, Tecboss

Essential Oils/Oil
Diffuser



Small studies and anecdotal evidence have suggested that some essential oils may benefit people with ADHD (lavender oil for sleep, vetiver oil for increased attention, rosemary for better performance in cognitive tests).

Other essential oils that may be useful include frankincense, ylang-ylang, bergamot, eucalyptus, lemon and cedarwood.

**Essential Oils/Oil Diffuser** 

**Yoga and Meditation** 



Yoga and Meditation tends to help calm restless students with ADHD and increase their focus and clarity which in turn improves their performance and mood.

**Downward Dog App** 

**Affirmations** 



Students with ADHD suffer from negative self-talk due to the brain's negativity bias and negative messages received throughout their lives. Affirmations help students with ADHD rewire their brains, replacing negative thoughts with more positive and empowering thoughts boosting their confidence, mood and motivation. This app can deliver positive affirmations to students' phone and apple watches.

I am App



# THE ADHD ADVOCATE STUDENT COACHING PROGRAMME

The ADHD Advocate Student Coaching Programme has been designed to educate and inspire students with ADHD to understand and embrace their ADHD to remove their barriers to learning at University so they can go on to fulfill their unique, and often great, potential.

## **ADHD Coaching - Students**

During the course of the programme, Students will:

- gain a better understanding of their ADHD brain and how their ADHD manifests itself at University;
- explore the challenges associated with their ADHD, the impact of these traits on their learning and behaviour as well as their relationships with their teachers and peers;
- discover sources of "authentic interest" to keep the individual "fuelled" throughout their degree;
- discover their signature strengths, talents and dominant processing styles and explore how these can be used to help manage their ADHD challenges, study more effectively and complete their degrees;
- uncover their core values and how they can express these values at University;
- revisit and document their success stories to increase self-confidence;
- learn to set, maintain and remember their boundaries and how to communicate these in an effective way;
- learn to set and achieve S.M.A.R.T (ie Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound) goals to improve self-confidence and academic performance;
- create morning and evening routines as well as a "Model Week";
- use planners and other aids to overcome time blindness and promote better time management;
- learn to prioritise;
- break projects and bigger tasks into manageable actionable tasks;
- modify their environment to minimise distractions and maximise performance;
- develop positive and healthy habits;
- create and implement strategies and systems to attend lectures consistently, study effectively and stay in University to complete their degrees;
- develop their network and sense of community at University to promote good mental health and emotional well-being; and
- learn to create and manage their financial budgets.





# USING SESSIONS FOR CHECK INS AND IMPLEMENTATION

## At The ADHD Advocate we tailor our coaching services to our students' unique needs.

This means that we offer flexibility when it comes to the frequency and duration of coaching sessions. Some students like two weeks between sessions, wanting to digest and implement what they have taken away from the session and giving themselves enough time to test, measure and refine. Other students prefer to have more regularity and accountability and require weekly sessions.

Sometimes, its not always helpful for a student to just be coached in a session. As they say, ADHDers know what to do, they just don't do what they know. Coaching helps students get clear about their desired outcomes and the strategies that they can use to reach those outcomes. However, at times, after a session is finished, without their coach present and with the many distractions on campus, students don't execute on the actions that they have set themselves no matter how much they want to and how hard they try. This can be incredibly frustrating for them and only exacerbates their feelings of guilt and shame. Understandably, they can quickly lose hope, including in the coaching process (which we want to avoid at all costs!).

It turns out that many of these students can only complete tasks that they are not authentically interested in, or involve executive function skills that they are lacking, with someone present. Their key ADHD strategy is "the Body Double". For these students, a number of coaching sessions will be broken up into daily check ins or implementation sessions where the student will execute on their actions during the session itself.

**Check Ins** are particularly useful for students during exam periods and when they are writing their dissertations. If students are struggling to wake up early enough, check in sessions in the morning will mean that they will have gotten out of bed early, be dressed and have eaten breakfast by the time of the session. The check in itself allows students the opportunity to verbally process the day's agenda as well as reflect upon what got in the way the day before. They are very effective.

**Implementation sessions** not only help students get started on the work that has been hanging over their head, but it gives them the momentum to complete the work out of session. Often students are so overwhelmed by what they have to do that they feel paralysed to start. Through processing the task ahead with their coach, students gain clarity and confidence to tackle the tasks that they have been procrastinating on. Often the students will not have realised how much they already know or have done. This realisation in itself can make all the difference to their motivation and productivity.





# ADHD UNLOCKED MEMBERSHIP

University students with ADHD often feel quite isolated on campus as they don't tend to know many, or any other, people with ADHD.

This can mean students with ADHD take longer to accept and embrace their ADHD because they tend to doubt the diagnosis, dismissing it as a convenient explanation for what they view as their "character flaws". Hearing other students in ADHD Unlocked share their ADHD experiences in the weekly member meet ups brings students a sense of relief and hope, increasing confidence and productivity.

In addition to support from the community, ADHD Unlocked provides university students with almost daily ADHD education to keep key lessons in sight and in mind. There are also weekly "smash it" procrastination buster sessions every Wednesday during which students can get online with other members and complete their administrative tasks, declutter their desk, make a revision plan or even get started on their dissertations.

# ADHD Unlocked provides:

- live weekly
  - member meet ups facilitated by ADHD Unlocked hosts
  - webinars on an aspect of ADHD (e.g decision making, rejection sensitive dysphoria etc)
  - o procrastination buster "smash it" sessions (to get outstanding admin/tasks done)
- regular topic emails straight to students' inboxes to keep key lessons in sight and in mind
- a members portal for each student where they can access from their mobiles the live sessions, recordings of webinars, topic summaries. topic quizzes to test their knowledge and resources such as daily checklists and visual prompts for key strategies.

ADHD Unlocked Membership can be purchased separate to the coaching and is an affordable option for ADHD support at university. It is also the perfect supplement to 1:1 ADHD Coaching as it not only educates students about their ADHD, but it provides a support network at their fingertips and increases accountability, keeping students focused, motivated and productive in between coaching sessions.

Membership to ADHD Unlocked costs £29.99/month or £279/year.





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