

Autism and ADHD Together (AuDHD): Fact Sheet for Studying at Home

For a person who is both autistic and has ADHD, and studies at home: completing assignments, sitting online assessments, and working without a teacher in the room. Also for the family member or support person helping them.

“AuDHD” is a community term, not a diagnosis. Since 2013, a person has been able to receive both diagnoses (Leitner, 2014). Read this sheet together with the ADHD and Autism fact sheets. This sheet covers what changes when the two meet.

What is going on

Autism and ADHD together are more than two lists added up. Some needs pull in opposite directions inside the same person, and the combination brings greater difficulty with planning, organising and daily functioning than either alone (Leitner, 2014).

The common tug-of-war in study:

Autistic side	ADHD side
Needs routine and predictability	Gets bored by routine and needs novelty
Wants full detail and every reason	Loses focus in long explanations
Wants to finish one thing completely	Jumps between ideas and tasks
Overloaded by noise and clutter	Needs stimulation, movement or background sound to focus
Needs clear structure before starting	Struggles to start even with structure
Deep focus on interests	Hyperfocus which loses track of time

The person often feels pulled both ways at once. A study plan built for only one side fails the other.

Other common experiences:

- Higher risk of burnout, from masking autistic traits while also managing ADHD.
- Diagnosis of the second condition often comes late, so support starts late (Nicholas et al., n.d.).
- Traits of one condition get blamed on the other. Autistic need for sameness is mistaken for ADHD stubbornness, or ADHD inattention is mistaken for autistic disinterest.

Strengths to build on

- Deep interest combined with creative, unusual thinking.
- Energy and drive when a topic connects.
- Detailed knowledge and original ideas together.
- Honest, direct communication.

Setting up to study at home

The rule: **fixed structure, varied content**. The frame stays the same, so the autistic side feels safe. What fills the frame changes, so the ADHD side stays engaged.

- **Same place, same start time, same order of steps** every session.

- **Different topic, example or method** within each session.
- **Sensory balance.** Find the level of sound and movement which works: headphones with chosen music, a fidget tool, a standing option. Test what helps, because the two conditions pull differently on sensory needs.
- **Visual timetable with built-in variety.** For example: “Monday: reading, using audio. Tuesday: reading, using notes.”
- **Breaks scheduled, not earned.** Rest is part of the plan.
- **A “Later” list** beside the work, for ideas and side topics.

Doing an assignment, step by step

1. **Get the exact task in writing**, with the marking guide and a sample if one exists.
2. **Clarify unclear words** with the teacher by email.
3. **Make a visual checklist of small steps.** Each step under 25 minutes.
4. **Use a fixed template** for structure, such as the same essay plan every time.
5. **Choose the starting point.** Start with the part which feels most interesting, inside the fixed template.
6. **Work in timed blocks** with warnings before each switch: a 2-minute warning before a break, and before returning.
7. **Park side ideas.** Every tangent goes on the Later list, not into the assignment.
8. **Use the marking guide as the finish line.** Stops endless research or polishing.
9. **Submit early.**

Doing an assessment or exam at home

- Preview the exam structure in advance, so there are no surprises.
- Practise under the same conditions as the real exam.
- Set the sensory environment to the level which works for this person.
- Read every question twice, for literal meaning and to avoid rushing.
- Set an alarm at the halfway point.
- Plan recovery time afterwards.

When the person is stuck

What you notice	What to try	Why it helps
Bored of the routine, but upset when it changes	Keep the routine. Offer a small choice inside it, such as which topic or which tool today.	Change inside a stable frame meets both needs.
Wants full detail but cannot read long explanations	Layer it: one-line action first, one-line reason second, then an offer of the full detail.	The person takes the layer they need right now.
Jumping between parts of the assignment and distressed by it	Stop. Write everything on the Later list. Return to the checklist and the next single step.	Saves the ideas and restores order.
Needs structure but cannot start	Use the template and start with the most interesting section.	Structure answers the autistic need, interest answers the ADHD need.
Hyperfocused on a side topic for hours	Use timers per section, with a visible warning before each one ends.	Warnings ease the switch, timers catch lost time.
Exhausted. After everything feels too hard	Test if it is possible to work out. Get	Modelling and repeating how conditions

Exhausted, flat, everything feels too hard	Treat it as possible burnout. Cut demands, rest, and return slowly.	Masking and managing two conditions drains energy fast.
Overwhelmed: pacing, repeated questions, freezing	Stop the task, reduce sensory input, give quiet time. See the Autism sheet.	Early action prevents meltdown or shutdown.
Cannot decide between study approaches	Offer two options only. "Step list, or pick your own starting point?"	Two clear options reduce decision load.

Adjustments to ask your course provider for

In Australia, the Disability Standards for Education 2005 apply to schools, TAFE, universities and training providers. Providers must consult with the student and make reasonable adjustments (Department of Education, n.d.). Combine the adjustments from the ADHD and Autism sheets. Most useful together (ADCET, n.d.-a, 2021):

- All course information and changes in writing, with notice.
- Large assignments broken into smaller parts.
- Extra time and rest breaks in exams.
- A separate, quiet exam room with sensory aids allowed.
- A preview of exam format.
- Flexible deadlines agreed in advance.
- One consistent contact person.

How a support person at home helps

- Hold the structure steady while letting the person vary the content.
- Act as a body double during study sessions.
- Give warnings before transitions.
- Help keep the Later list.
- Watch for burnout and lower demands early.
- Ask which side needs support today: "More structure, or more variety?"

Avoid

- Treating the person as only autistic or only ADHD.
- Rigid routines with no room for novelty.
- Constant change with no stable frame.
- Long explanations with no short version.
- Pushing through exhaustion.

Sources

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training. (n.d.-a). *Inclusive teaching: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)*. University of Tasmania. <https://www.adcet.edu.au/inclusive-teaching/specific-disabilities/adhd>

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Nicholas, D., McCrimmon, A., Climie, E., & Savadlou, A. (n.d.). *Considering the co-occurrence of autism and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder*. AIDE Canada. <https://aidecanada.ca/resources/learn/asd-id-core-knowledge/considering-the-co-occurrence-of-autism-and-attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder>

All web sources accessed 12 October 2026.

Note: the “fixed structure, varied content” and layered-reply approaches are practical design choices drawn from combining the ADHD and autism guidance. They are not tested in a published study of AuDHD learners.