



# ADHD MORNING TOOLKIT

GET OUT THE DOOR ON TIME...  
WITHOUT LOSING IT

# Why ADHD Mornings Are So Hard

What's actually going on in their brain

Every morning you ask your child to do something that feels simple. Get up. Get dressed. Eat breakfast. Get out the door. However, every morning it turns into a battle you didn't want to have. Here's what I need you to know: it's not defiance, it's not laziness, and it's not your parenting.

## WHAT WE'RE ASKING OF THEM

- Start a task with no external prompt
- Hold multiple steps in memory at the same time
- Transition between activities without warning
- Track time they cannot see
- Regulate their emotions before 8am

For a neurotypical child, this is hard. For a child with ADHD, every single one of those things is a documented neurological challenge. **We are asking them to run a marathon on a broken leg and wondering why they cannot keep up.**

## ADHD IS AN EXECUTIVE FUNCTION DISORDER

The prefrontal cortex, the brain's CEO, develops more slowly in ADHD brains and works differently. It controls planning, sequencing, memory, time awareness, and emotional regulation. When your child won't get dressed, **their brain is genuinely struggling to start, sequence, and follow through without external support.** That is not a behavior problem. That is neurology.

## THREE THINGS THAT HELP

- 1 The environment does the job their brain cannot do yet.** Visual routines, the launchpad, weekly clothing organizer, the Time Timer. These are not crutches. They are *external scaffolding for a brain that cannot build internal scaffolding yet.* You are not doing it for them. You are building the ramp.
- 2 Your presence regulates their nervous system.** This is called body doubling. *ADHD brains stay on task significantly longer when another person is simply nearby, not hovering, not directing, just present.* If you have ever had to stand in the bathroom while your child brushed their teeth and wondered what was wrong with you, nothing was wrong with you. You were body doubling. It works because your regulated nervous system helps co-regulate theirs.
- 3 Meet their brain where it is.** ADHD brains do not activate on importance or consequences the way neurotypical brains do. They *need a neurological trigger.* Race them to get dressed. Make it a game. Put on a favorite song and see if they can finish before it ends. Novelty, competition, and urgency are on-switches for ADHD brains. Use them on purpose.

# The P.I.N.C.H. Framework

How to activate an ADHD brain instead of escalating

Dr. William Dodson's research shows that ADHD brains do not activate on importance or consequence the way neurotypical brains do. They need at least one of five specific neurological triggers. When your child will not get moving, do not escalate. Activate.

**P**

**PASSION/PLAY:** Make getting dressed a game. Let them pick the song that plays while they get ready. If they love superheroes, they are suiting up for a mission.

**I**

**INTEREST:** Connect the task to something they care about. *'If we get out on time, we can stop, and you can show me that video you wanted me to see.'*

**N**

**NOVELTY:** Switch it up. A silly new routine, music, etc. The ADHD brain wakes up for new and different.

**C**

**COMPETITION/CONNECTION:** Race them. Time them. Do it together. I race my daughter to get dressed almost every morning. It works every time.

**H**

**HURRY/URGENCY:** Create a real deadline with a visual timer. The ticking clock is a legitimate neurological on-switch.

You don't have to do every one of these every day. On those rough mornings choose one and see if it gets your kidoo moving. In our house, these have worked wonders for our mornings.

# Tips for a Smoother Morning

Tried-and-true tips from our house

## 1 LET ALEXA RUN THE MORNING

Set up timed Alexa announcements that run automatically every school day. You stop being the timekeeper. You stop being the reminder. Alexa does it. Kids will argue with you. They will not argue with Alexa.

Here's an example of our morning Alexa alarms:

- 8:00am "Time to get dressed."
- 8:20am "First warning, time to leave. If you are ready now, you can walk."
- 8:30am "Time to go to school."

## 2 USE A VISUAL TIMER, NOT A VERBAL COUNTDOWN

Five more minutes' means nothing to an ADHD brain. Time is invisible to them, not metaphorically, neurologically. The Time Timer or any visual timer makes time visible. The red disk shrinks in real time, so your child can see exactly how much time is left without asking you. Put it somewhere they can see it from wherever they are getting ready. (See our favorite tools)

## 3 BODY DOUBLE THE HARDEST STEPS

If your child consistently gets stuck at the same point every morning, usually getting dressed or getting teeth brushed, try simply being in the room with them. One thing that works in our house is if I'm doing the same thing. For example, when my daughter is brushing her teeth, so am I, in the same bathroom.

## 4 USE P.I.N.C.H. BEFORE YOU ESCALATE

Before you raise your voice, activate their brain instead. Race them to get dressed. Make breakfast a challenge. Put on a song and see if they can finish before it ends. Novelty, competition, and urgency are neurological on-switches for ADHD brains. Use them on purpose.

## 5 SAME ORDER, EVERY DAY TIME, SAME DAY.

ADHD brains thrive on predictability. The routine does not have to be elaborate. It just has to be identical. Same steps, same order, same time. When the sequence is automatic, your child uses less energy fighting the routine and has more left for doing it.

# Our Favorite Tools

These tools make our mornings much easier

## DAILY CLOTHES ORGANIZER

This takes a mental load off of me as the mom. I do laundry on the weekends, so I'll load it for the week while I'm doing laundry. My daughter's not super picky about what she wears, so this works. You could also do it with your child on Saturday or Sunday. Every outfit, shirt, pants, and socks, goes into the right day's compartment.

One thing that has been really helpful in our house is hanging this in MY closet. My bedroom is on the main floor, so this makes it so my daughter never has to go back upstairs after waking up for the day. There are a lot of options on Amazon.

[You can get this exact time here.](#)



## THE TIME TIMER WITH WHITEBOARD

We have multiple of these countdown timers in our house. However, this one with the whiteboard is my favorite for mornings. I'll write down the steps my daughter needs to do and set the timer for how long she has to finish the tasks. I'll put little boxes by the tasks, like in the picture. My daughter loves checking them off as she completes them. You could get a cheaper timer and buy a small whiteboard and use it in the same way. [You can get this exact timer here.](#)



# Set Up Your Morning Chart

## **How to set up your Morning Routine chart:**

1. Print this page on cardstock if possible – regular paper works too
2. Cut along each dotted vertical line to separate the tabs
3. Fold each tab in half along the center horizontal line, picture on the outside
4. Add a small velcro dot or magnet to the circle on the front and the circle on the back so the tab stays closed
5. Hang the chart at your child's eye level in a central location they'll see it consistently throughout the morning.




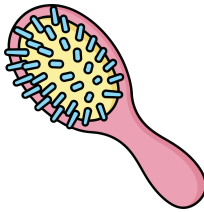

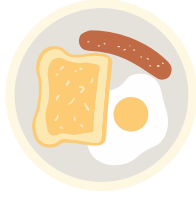
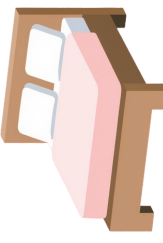
## **How to use it each morning:**

Each tab starts open so your child can see the picture and the label. When they complete a step, they fold the tab closed and press the velcro or magnet together. A closed tab means done. At a glance, you can both see exactly how many steps are left – no nagging required.

At the end of the morning, open all the tabs to reset for tomorrow.



# Morning Routine

<input type="checkbox"/>		Shoes On <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		Pack Bag <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		Get Dressed <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		Brush Hair <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		Brush Teeth <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		Eat Breakfast <input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>		Make Bed <input type="checkbox"/>

# Let's Stay Connected

If this toolkit helped your family this morning, there is so much more where that came from.

Every week on the Raising ADHD podcast, Dr. Brian Bradford and I break down what is actually happening in your child's brain — and what to do about it. No fluff. No judgment. Just real talk from a mom, an educator, and a board-certified child psychiatrist who live this alongside you.

**[The Raising ADHD Podcast](#)** New episodes every week Search "Raising ADHD" on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen.

**[Follow along on Instagram](#)** @raisingadhd\_org Behind the scenes, quick strategies, real moments, and a community of parents who get it. Send me a DM and say hi. I LOVE hearing from you!

You are not doing this wrong. You are just doing it without the right tools. We are here to help you find them.

You've got this!

*Apryl*