

2026

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The Adaptive Worry System

A Field Guide to the ADHD Inner Landscape

- DAY 01 **March 25**
Welcome / Module 01 & 02
Introduction to the Adaptive Worry System. Module 01 explores worry as a messenger—not a malfunction. Module 02 begins mapping the signal, helping you see how your system organizes, scans, and responds.
- DAY 02 **April 1**
Module 03 & 04
Module 03 introduces Anxiety Alchemy—learning how to work with the signal instead of against it. Module 04 explores inner archetypes, helping you meet and understand the parts within your system.
- DAY 03 **April 8**
Module 05
Module 05 brings the system together—exploring the unified inner landscape of ADHD through creative, integrative practices.





Welcome

This is not a workbook to fix you. This is a place to listen. Your mind has been working very hard to protect you, to anticipate, to prepare, to make sure nothing important is lost. Sometimes that protection shows up as worry. Not as a flaw. Not as failure. But as a signal. This workbook is an invitation to slow down just enough to hear what that signal is trying to say.

> **You don't need to complete every page.**

> **You don't need to get anything "right."**

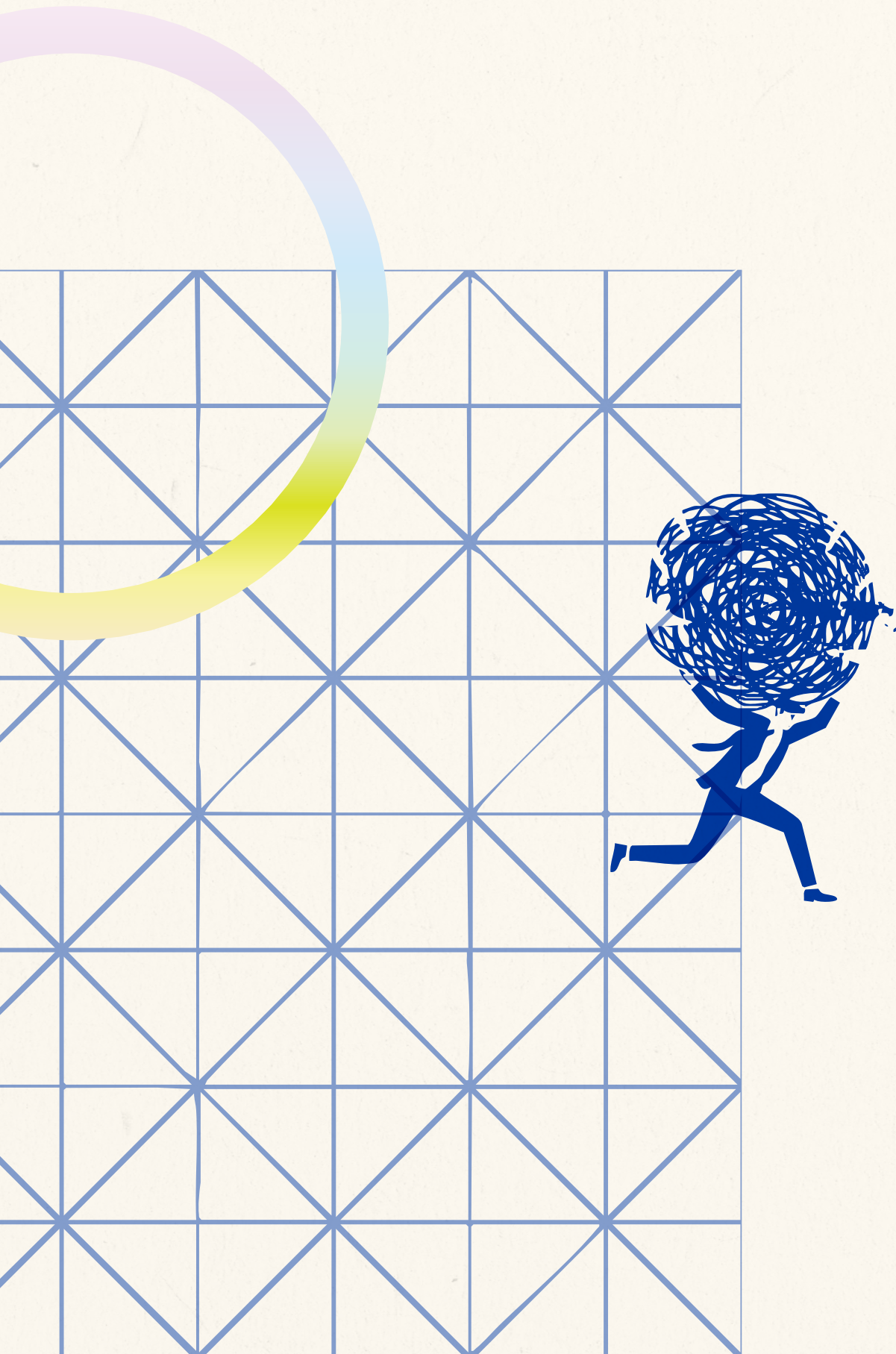
You are allowed to:

write draw collage
 skip return later explore
 change your mind

> You are the expert on your own system.

How to Use This Workbook

Move gently. If something feels overwhelming, pause. If something feels meaningful, stay there longer. There is no correct path through this. This is not about control. This is about relationship.



MODULE 01:

Worry as a Messenger

Worry as a Signal, Not a Problem

Sometimes what we call “worry” is not excess, it is information arriving quickly, before we have a place to put it. For many individuals with ADHD, the nervous system is highly responsive to uncertainty, change, and perceived risk, often generating rapid predictive thoughts in an effort to prepare (Barkley, 2015; Dodson, 2022). This can feel overwhelming, but it reflects a system that is actively trying to protect, organize, and anticipate. Research on executive functioning suggests that difficulties with task initiation and prioritization are often preceded, not caused, by

emotional and cognitive overload (Brown, 2013). When worry is not understood, it can interrupt action. When it is mapped and translated, it can become a guide.

This section invites you to begin noticing worry not as something to eliminate, but as something to interpret.

For many individuals with ADHD, worry is not a flaw in the system, it is a fast-moving form of prediction. The brain is attempting to anticipate, prepare, and protect, often before conscious processing can organize the signal (Barkley, 2015; Dodson, 2022).

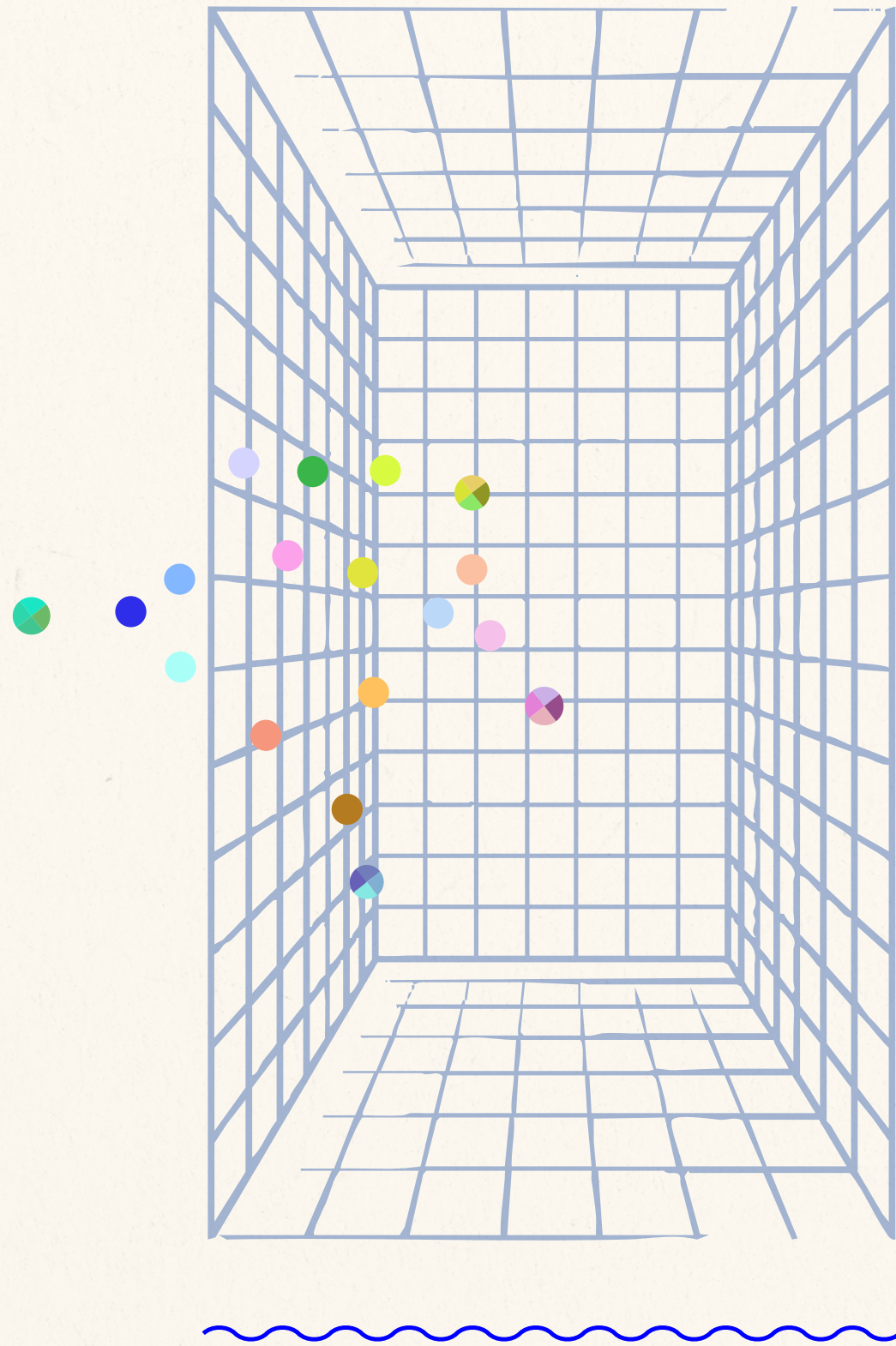
When this signal is not understood, it can feel overwhelming.

When it is interpreted, it becomes useful.

This section invites a shift from reacting to worry > to listening for what it is trying to say.

References

- Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.
- Brown, T. E. (2013). Smart but stuck: Emotions in teens and adults with ADHD. Jossey-Bass.
- Dodson, W. (2022). Emotional regulation and rejection sensitivity in ADHD. ADDitude Magazine.



What is Worry for You?

> Before definitions... before strategies... Just notice.

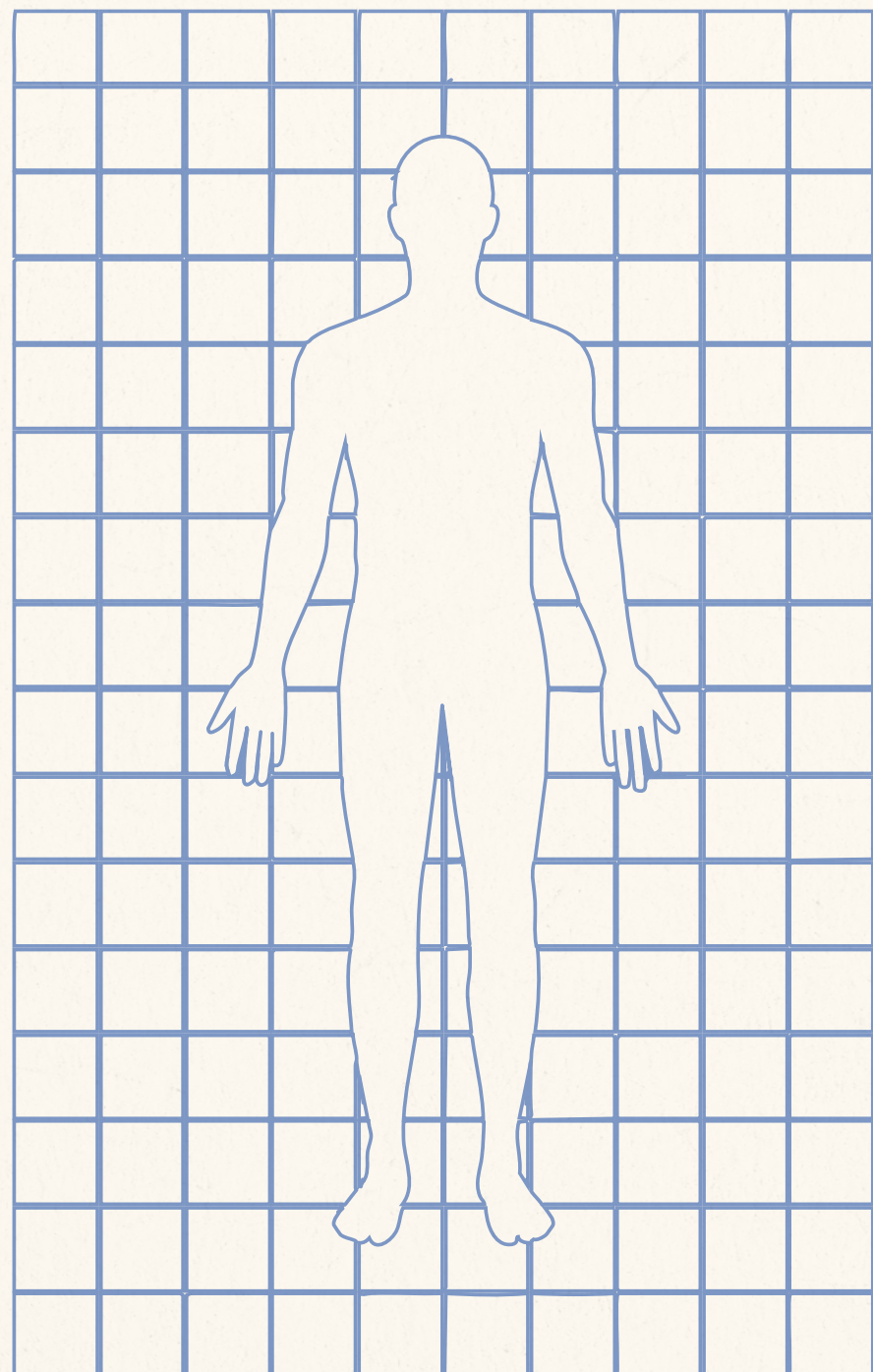
When worry shows up, what is it like?

__Q1: Is it loud or quiet?

__Q2: Fast or slow?

__Q3: Clear or tangled?

Write, draw, collage, or map what comes:



[_____]



/ Your Worry Voice

> Worry often speaks in a voice. Sometimes it sounds urgent. Sometimes critical. Sometimes protective. **Complete the sentence:**

"My worry usually sounds like _____..."

/ What tone does it use?

Q: What does it seem most afraid of?

[_____]

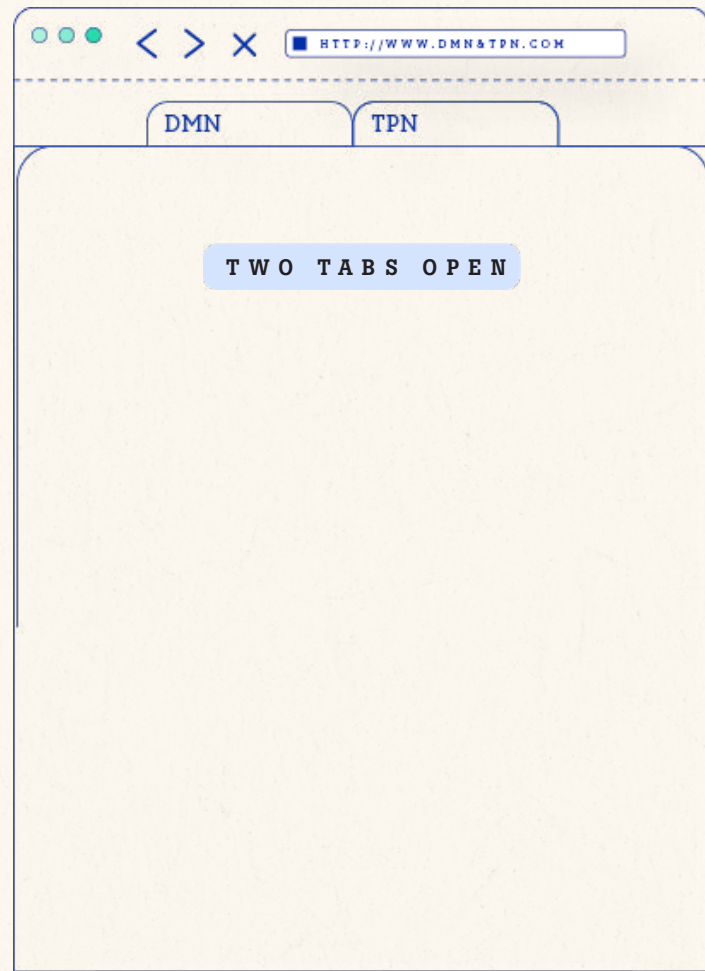
/ Where It Lives

> Worry is not just thoughts, it lives in the body. Take a moment.

Q: Where do you feel it?

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> chest | <input type="checkbox"/> legs | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stomach | <input type="checkbox"/> feet | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> throat | <input type="checkbox"/> toes | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> shoulders | <input type="checkbox"/> arms | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> face | <input type="checkbox"/> fingers | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> somewhere else | _____ | |

You can: / label / shade / circle / draw /



[]



/ Two Tabs Open

Many ADHD minds experience something like having two tabs open at once:

- ___ one focused on the task
- ___ one moving inward—thinking, imagining, remembering

Right now... What's open in your "other tab"?

[]

The Drift

Sometimes the mind moves without asking.

- ___ into the past
- ___ into the future
- ___ into imagined scenarios
- ___ into self-evaluation

This is not failure. This is a pattern.

What direction does your mind tend to drift?

[]



[_____]

[_____]

[_____]

The Superpower Zone

> The same system that generates worry also supports:

- creativity
- intuition
- deep thinking
- emotional insight
- imagination

__Q1. Where does your mind help you?

__Q2. Where does it expand?

__Q3. What are your superpowers?

Brain Dump



Brain Dump

Q01: Make a list of worries that surface for you:

" _____, _____, _____, _____..."

Q02: What is Worry for you?

"My worry usually sounds like... _____"

Q03: Where does worry show up in your body?

"Worry shows up in my... _____ [body/area]"

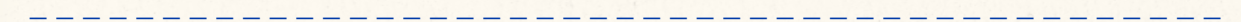
> Let everything out.

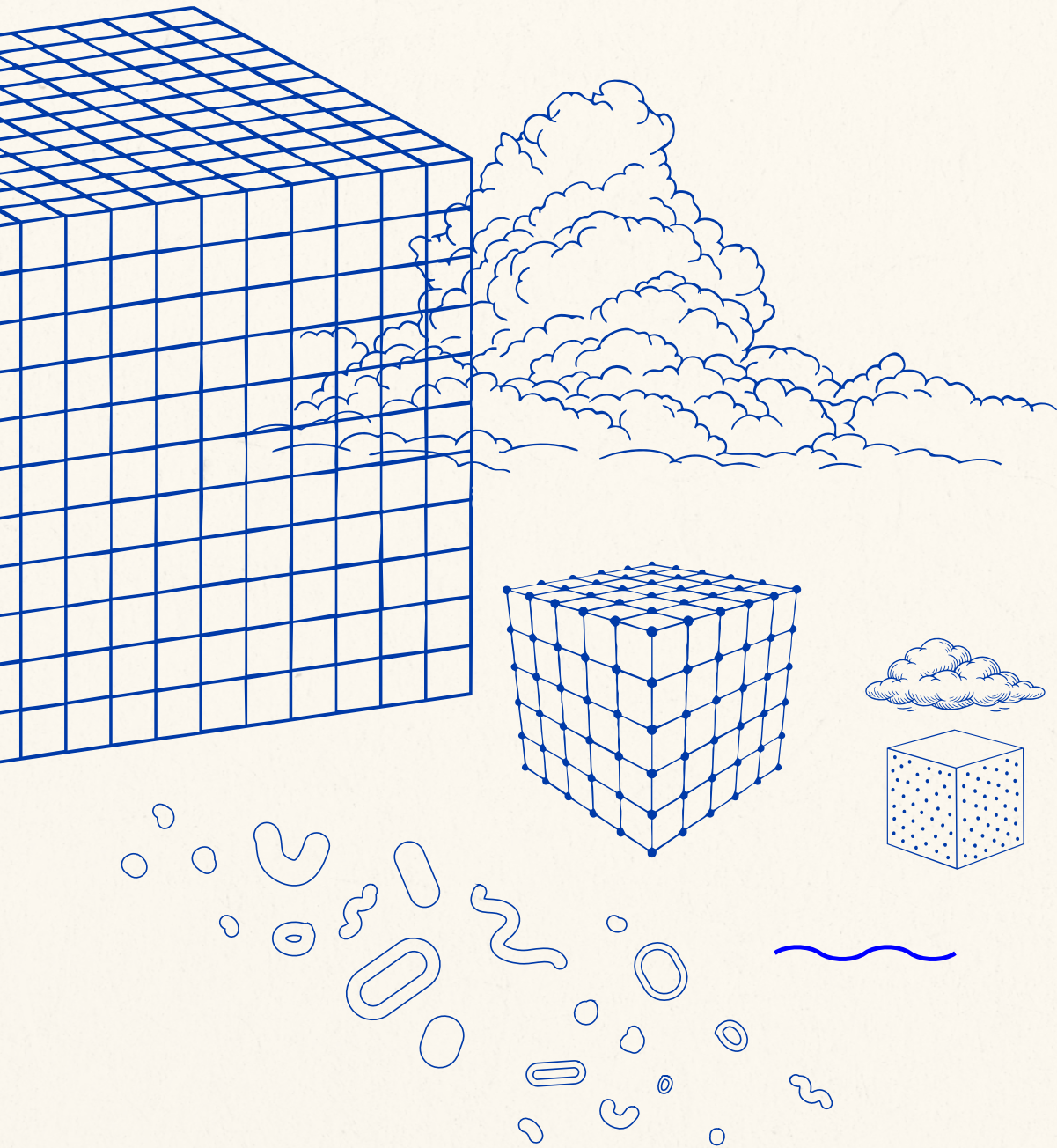
No organizing.

No filtering.

No making it make sense.

>>> Just release what's in your mind.





A Gentle Pause

> Look back at what you wrote.

> Without judgment, just notice:

[] What surprised you?

[_____]

[] What felt familiar?

[_____]

[] What feels most important right now?

[_____]



/FIELD NOTES:

The Science Beneath the Signal

/ Understanding the Sensitivity of the System

Some ADHD nervous systems are highly responsive, especially to emotion, change, and perceived disconnection.

/ You might notice:

- ___ feelings that arrive quickly and intensely
- ___ a strong reaction to criticism or misunderstanding
- ___ a sense of urgency to repair, fix, or prevent loss

This is sometimes described as rejection sensitivity (Dodson, n.d.). Not as a weakness, but as a system that is deeply attuned to connection.

/ Why Worry Feels So Loud

For many people, worry is a background noise. For others, it becomes a full system response:

- ___ scanning for what might go wrong
- ___ anticipating outcomes
- ___ trying to prepare in advance

This is not overreacting. This is a brain that is trying to protect you, quickly (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013).

/ A Different Way to Understand This

Some researchers describe ADHD as involving differences in emotional regulation and intensity (Shaw et al., 2014; Surman et al., 2013).

Emotional responses may move quickly, feel amplified, or take longer to settle, not because something is wrong, but because the system is highly responsive.

But beyond labels, what matters is this: Your system is not broken. It is responsive, fast, and deeply invested in keeping you safe.

/ FURTHER READING RESOURCE LIST

/ Foundational ADHD Texts

ADHD 2.0

Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (2021). ADHD 2.0.

Driven to Distraction

Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (1994). Driven to Distraction.

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Handbook for Diagnosis and Treatment.

Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: A Handbook for Diagnosis and Treatment.

/ Neurodivergence & Identity

Self-Compassion for Neurodivergent Minds

Neff, M. (2023). Self-Compassion for Neurodivergent Minds

Unmasking Autism

Price, D. (2022). Unmasking Autism Emotional Regulation & ADHD

Dr. William Dodson + ADDitude Magazine

Dodson, W. (various articles; ADDitude Magazine)

Emotion dysregulation in ADHD

Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). Emotion dysregulation in ADHD

/ Online and Accessible Resources

ADDitude Magazine

(www.additudemag.com)

Divergent Insights

(Dr. Megan Neff)

CHADD

(Children and Adults with ADHD)

/ References:

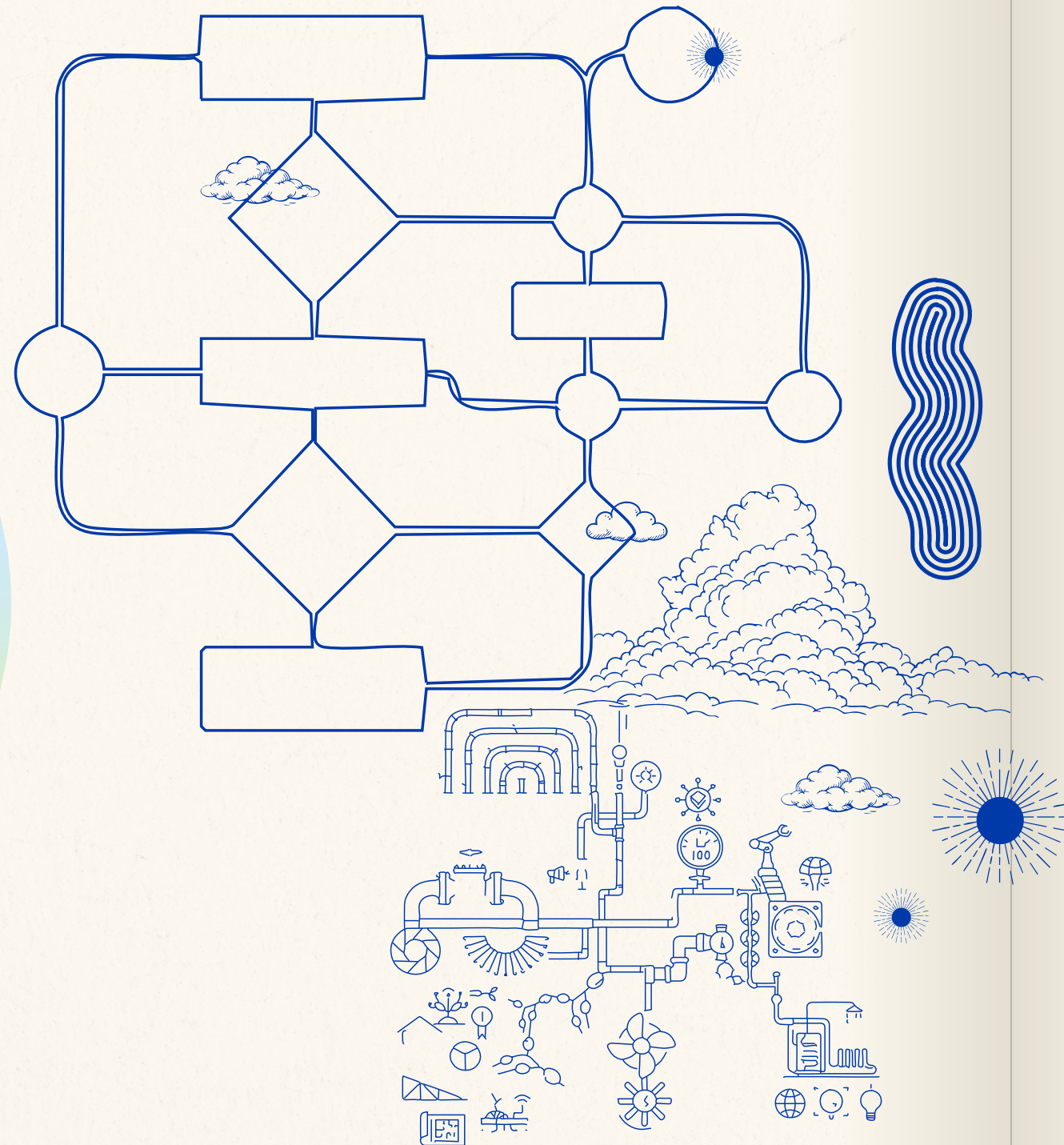
Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.

Brown, T. E. (2013). A new understanding of ADHD in children and adults: Executive function impairments. Routledge.

Dodson, W. (n.d.). Rejection sensitive dysphoria and ADHD. ADDitude Magazine.

Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). Emotion dysregulation in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. American Journal of Psychiatry, 171(3), 276–293. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.2013.13070966>

Surman, C. B. H., Biederman, J., Spencer, T., & Miller, C. A. (2013). Understanding deficient emotional self-regulation in adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A controlled study. Journal of Attention Disorders, 17(7), 557–567. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087054712437295>



MODULE 02:

Mapping the Signals

Mapping the Inner Landscape

Before change can occur, there must be visibility. Many individuals with ADHD describe a sense of internal chaos, not because there is no structure, but because the structure has not yet been externalized. Cognitive neuroscience research suggests that the brain is constantly shifting between internally directed thought (default mode network) and externally focused engagement (task-positive network) (Raichle, 2015). For ADHD individuals, these shifts can be more rapid, more intense, or less regulated (Sonuga-Barke & Castellanos, 2007). What appears as distraction is often a dynamic internal landscape competing for attention.

Mapping is not about control, it is about orientation. When internal experiences are named, drawn, or located, they become more workable.

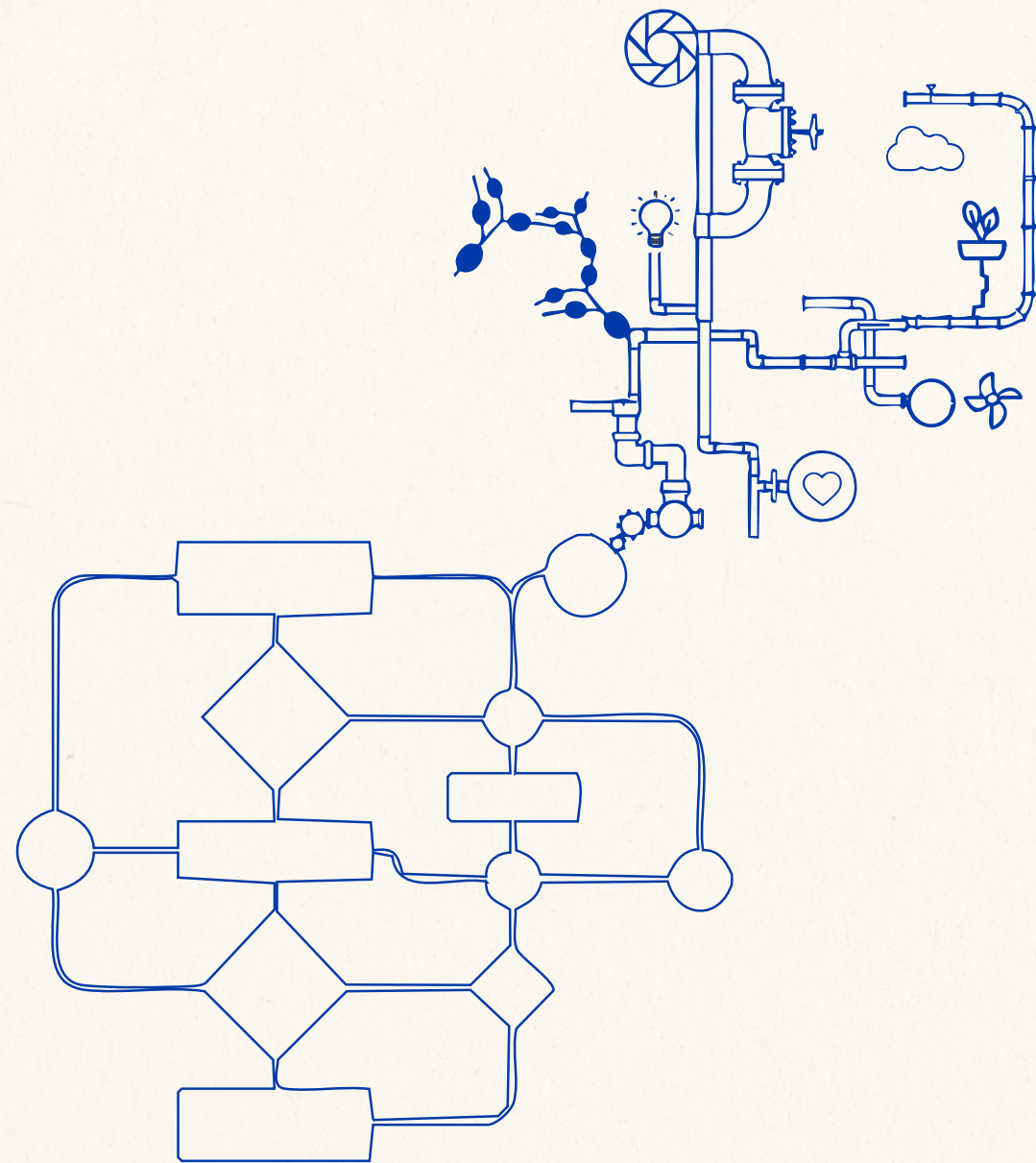
Attention is not a single state, it is a shifting system. The brain moves between internally directed thought and externally focused engagement, often rapidly and outside of conscious control (Raichle, 2015).

In ADHD, these shifts can feel unpredictable or difficult to regulate, leading to experiences of distraction or mental overload (Sonuga-Barke & Castellanos, 2007).

Mapping the inner landscape is not about control. It is about orientation, seeing what is already happening.

References

- Raichle, M. E. (2015). The brain's default mode network. *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 38, 433–447.
- Sonuga-Barke, E. J. S., & Castellanos, F. X. (2007). Spontaneous attentional fluctuations in impaired states and pathological conditions: A neurobiological hypothesis. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 31(7), 977–986.
- Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (2021). *ADHD 2.0: New science and essential strategies for thriving with distraction—from childhood through adulthood*. Ballantine Books.



Understanding the System

> What we often call "struggle" is often a difference in how the brain:

- . holds information
- . organizes tasks
- . shifts attention
- . regulates energy

> This is not about laziness. This is about how your system works.

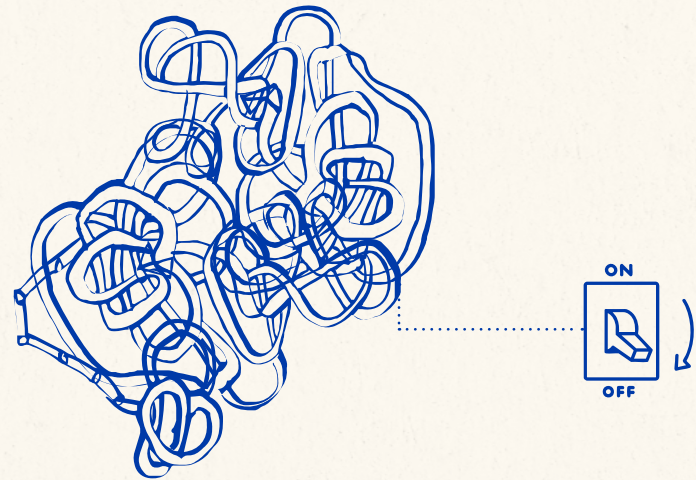
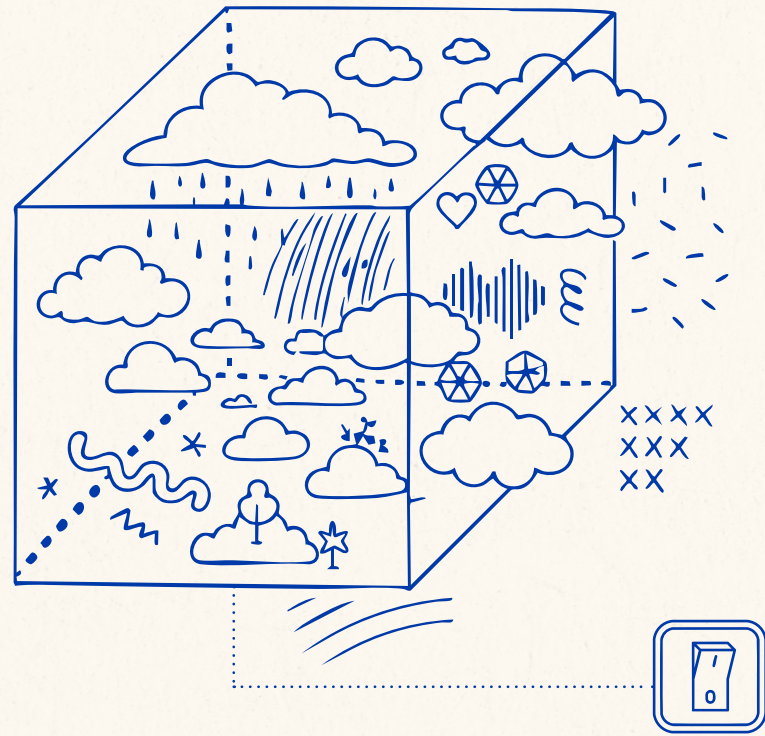
Where Do You Feel It Most?

Q: Which of these feels most challenging right now?

[You can circle, mark, or reflect]

- [] Working Memory (holding information in mind)
- [] Planning & Organization
- [] Prioritization
- [] Cognitive Flexibility

Q: What do you notice as you choose?



Q: When things feel hard, what story do you tell yourself?

Q: What might change if this was not a "personal failure," but a brain-based pattern?



The Worry Map Structure

> Now we begin translating worry. Choose one worry from earlier. Just one.

__Q: 1. What I fear

__Q: 2. What this worry is trying to do for me

[What is it protecting? Preventing? Preparing for?]

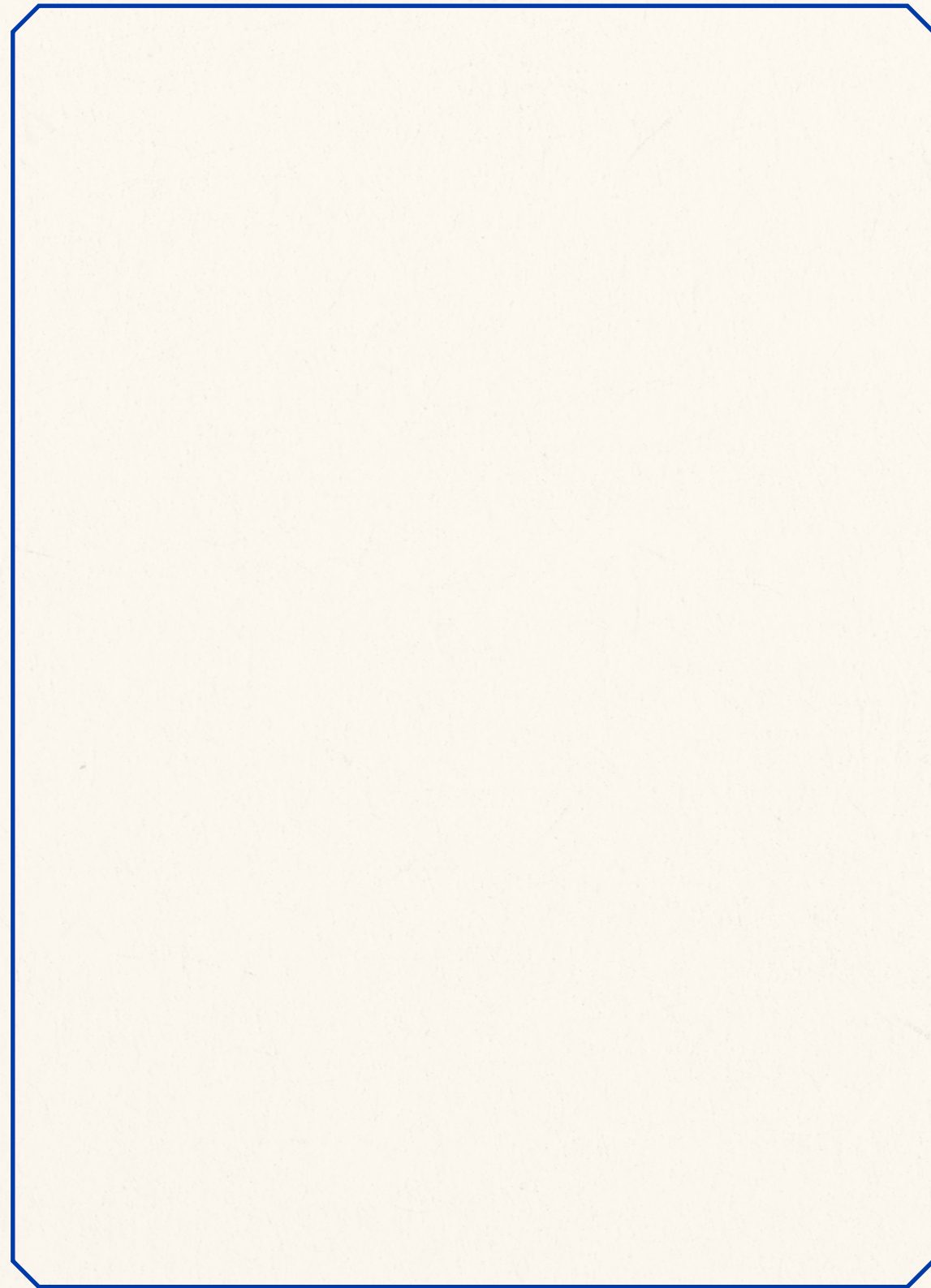
__Q: 3. What this tells me I might need

- clarity
- structure
- reassurance
- support
- rest
- something else
- _____

__Q: 4. What I can try gently

Not perfectly. Not completely. Just one small step.

Your Worry Map



[

]

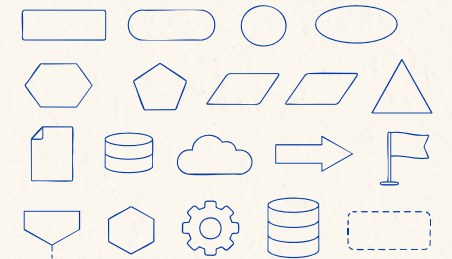


Your Worry Map

> You can also represent this visually.

> Use in your map:

- [_] arrows
- [_] shapes
- [_] zones
- [_] symbols



> Let this be intuitive.

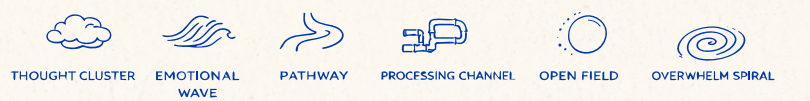
SIGNALS

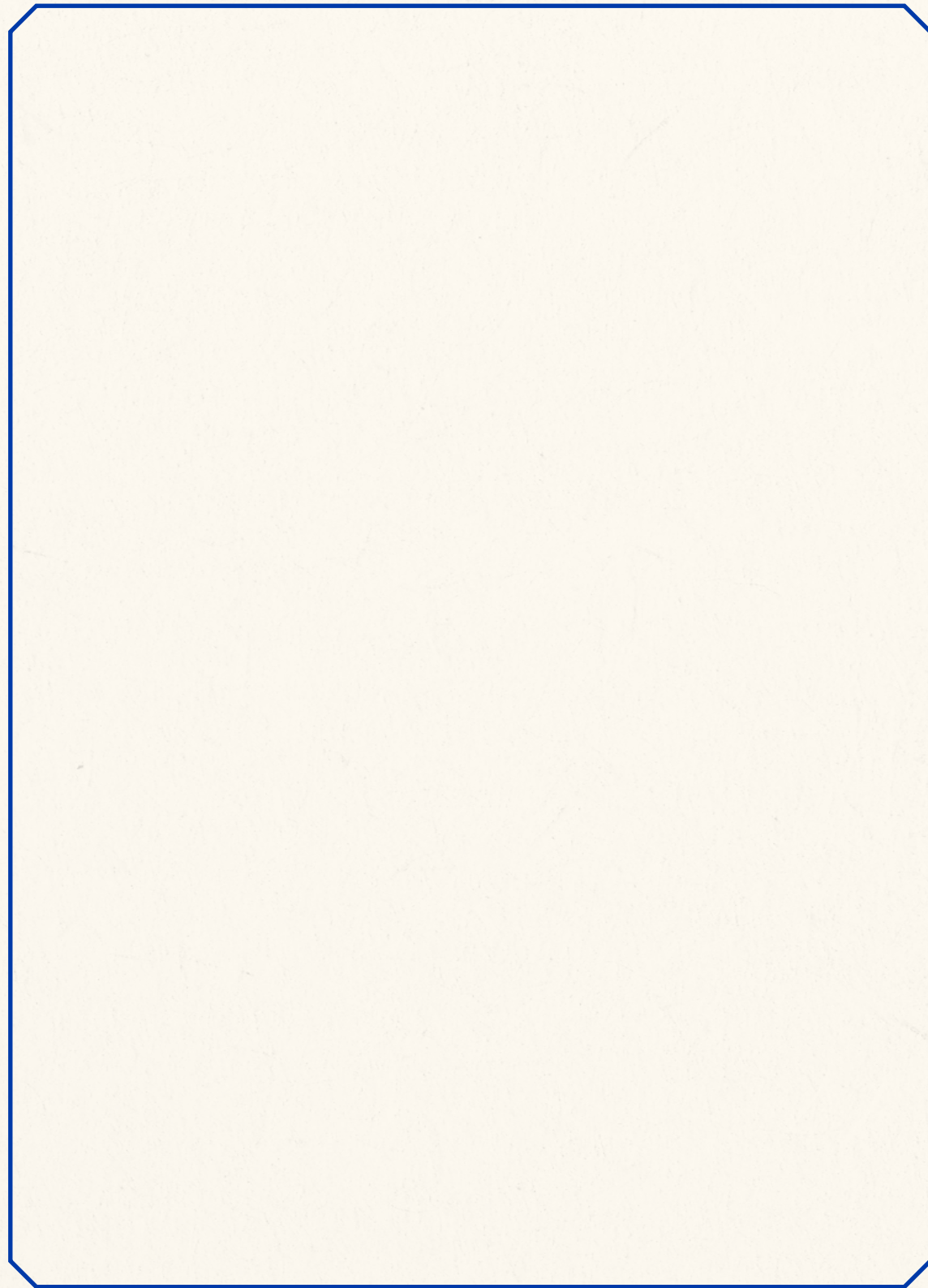


STRUCTURES



PARTS



Executive Function Map

[

]



/ Executive Function Map

> Let's imagine your brain visually. Not as a list of problems, but as a landscape.

> **Draw or map your system using four regions:**

[] Region 01. **Memory Harbor**
Holding information in mind



[] Region 02. **Planning Mountain**
Organizing, starting, sequencing



[] Region 03. **Priority Compass**
Deciding what matters most



[] Region 04. **Flexibility Bridge**
Shifting, adapting, recovering



> **Now, begin to map:**

- [] Where do traffic jams happen?
[*Where does it feel stuck, slow, or overloaded?*]
- [] Where do things flow more easily?
[*Where does your system work with you?*]
- [] What helps you navigate?
[*Tools, supports, environments, people*]

> You can draw this. You can label it. You can make it abstract or literal. This is not about accuracy. This is about noticing patterns.



Containment Ritual

- > You do not have to carry everything in your mind.
- > Take a moment to close this process.

You might:

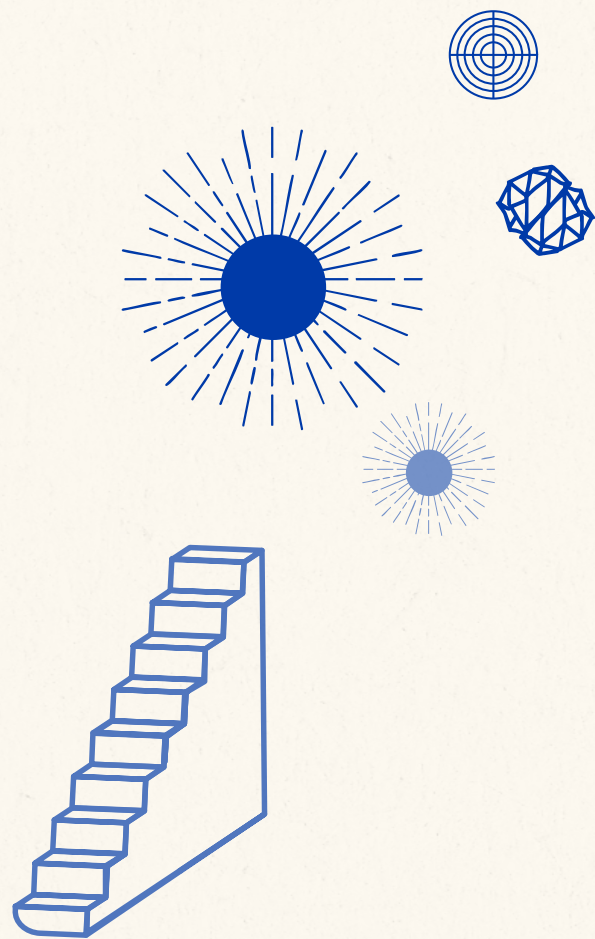
- [] fold this page
- [] draw a container
- [] give this worry a title
- [] imagine placing it somewhere safe

- > This is already held.
-

Integration

What Did You Notice? As you moved through this process:

- [] **Q: What shifted?** [_____]
 - [] **Q: What became clearer?** [_____]
 - [] **Q: What felt different?** [_____]
-



A Gentle Next Step

- > You are learning how to listen,
to a system that has been trying
to care for you all along.
- > Not a plan. Not a demand.
- > Just a possibility.
- > "One small thing I might try _____..."

Closing Reflection

Your worry is not the enemy. It is a signal. A system. A form of care that may have become overwhelming. But underneath it, there is intelligence. there is protection. there is something trying to help. You are not broken. You are learning how to listen.



MODULE 03:

Anxiety Alchemy

:Translating the Signal

From Worry to Structure

Worry often contains an unspoken question:

What needs to happen so this turns out okay?

When left unprocessed, this question loops. When translated, it becomes action.

Executive functioning research suggests that individuals with ADHD benefit from externalized structure, systems that reduce the burden on working memory and decision-making (Barkley,

2015). This means that insight alone is not enough; it must be paired with tangible supports. In this section, worry is not reduced, it is converted. From signal to need to structure to action.

References

- Barkley, R. A. (2015). Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder: A handbook for diagnosis and treatment (4th ed.). Guilford Press.
- Hallowell, E. M., & Ratey, J. J. (1994). Driven to distraction: Recognizing and coping with attention deficit disorder from childhood through adulthood. Simon & Schuster.
- Dodson, W. (2022). Emotional regulation and ADHD. ADDitude Magazine.

7. Self-Trust / Expansion

- "what opens up now?"
 I can trust myself to do this again

6. Integration

- meaning making
 updating system

5. Action

- initiation
 follow-through

4. Structure steps

- external supports
 time scaffolding

3. Clarity

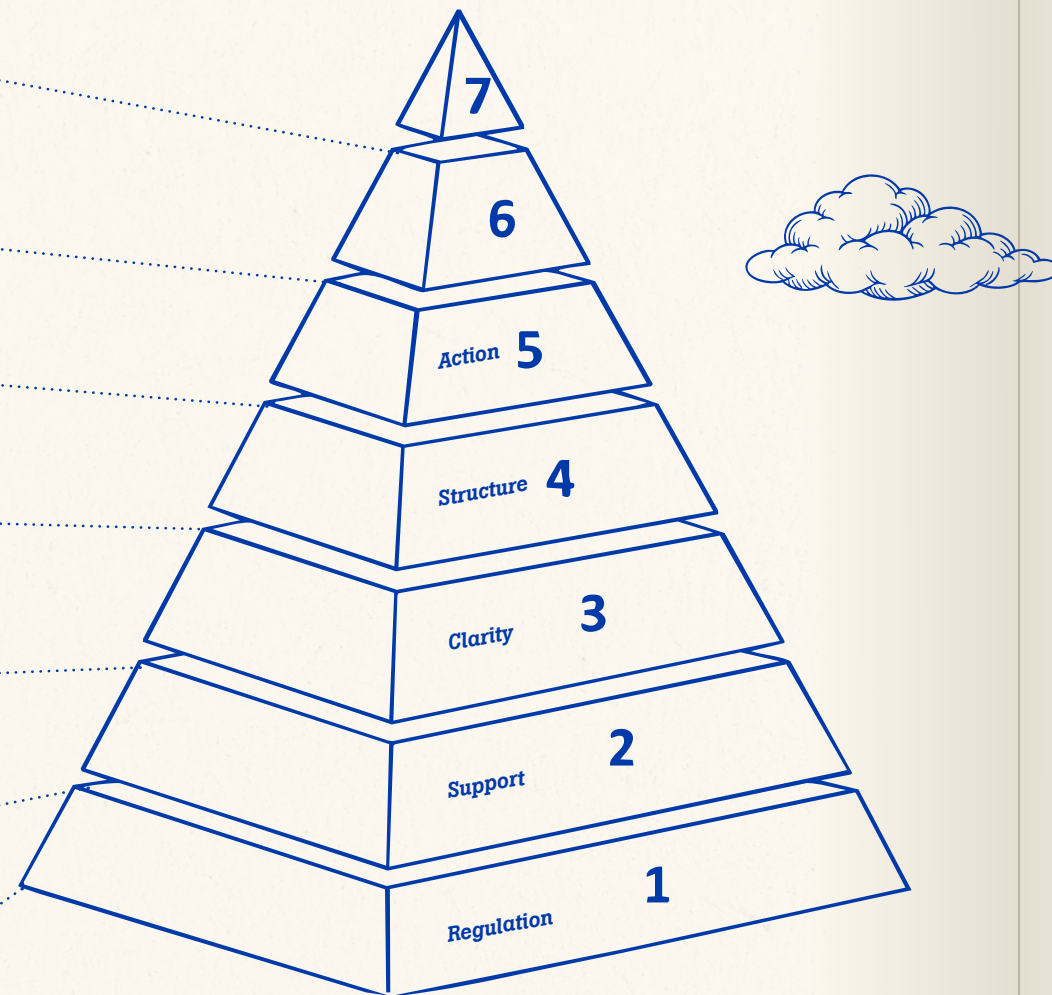
- what is the task?
 where do I start?

2. Emotional + Relational Support

- reassurance
 shame reduction
 co-regulation

1. Safety + Regulation

- nervous system state
 overwhelm / shutdown
 sensory load

**Bridge from Module 02 to Module 03**

So far, you've done something really important. You've started to notice your worry...and map how your system moves. But there's still a question that tends to show up here: 'If I can see it... why does it still feel so hard to shift?' What we're going to introduce now is a way of understanding that. Not as a lack of effort...but as a question of sequence."

The ADHD Hierarchy of Needs**What Your System Might Be Asking For**

Sometimes what feels like 'I can't do this' isn't about motivation. It's about something earlier in the system asking for support first. Before focus... before planning... before follow-through...the nervous system asks:

"Am I regulated?"

"Do I have enough support?"

"Is this clear enough to begin?"

This is not a failure of effort. It is a sequence. When you mapped your worry earlier, you may have noticed it was pointing toward something, rest, clarity, support. This hierarchy helps you locate where that need lives.

Q: When you feel stuck, where might your system be asking for support first?

- Regulation Support
 Clarity Structure
 Action

*** If action feels hard, return to the layer below. ***



Anxiety Alchemy is not about pushing yourself into action. It's about listening to what the signal is asking for...and responding at the right layer."

Section 01

Notice the Signal

> Pause and write:

Q: What is one worry that has been repeating in your system?

[_____]

Real-Time Awareness

Track the Signal

> Pause. Drop into the present moment. Right now, what is your system doing?

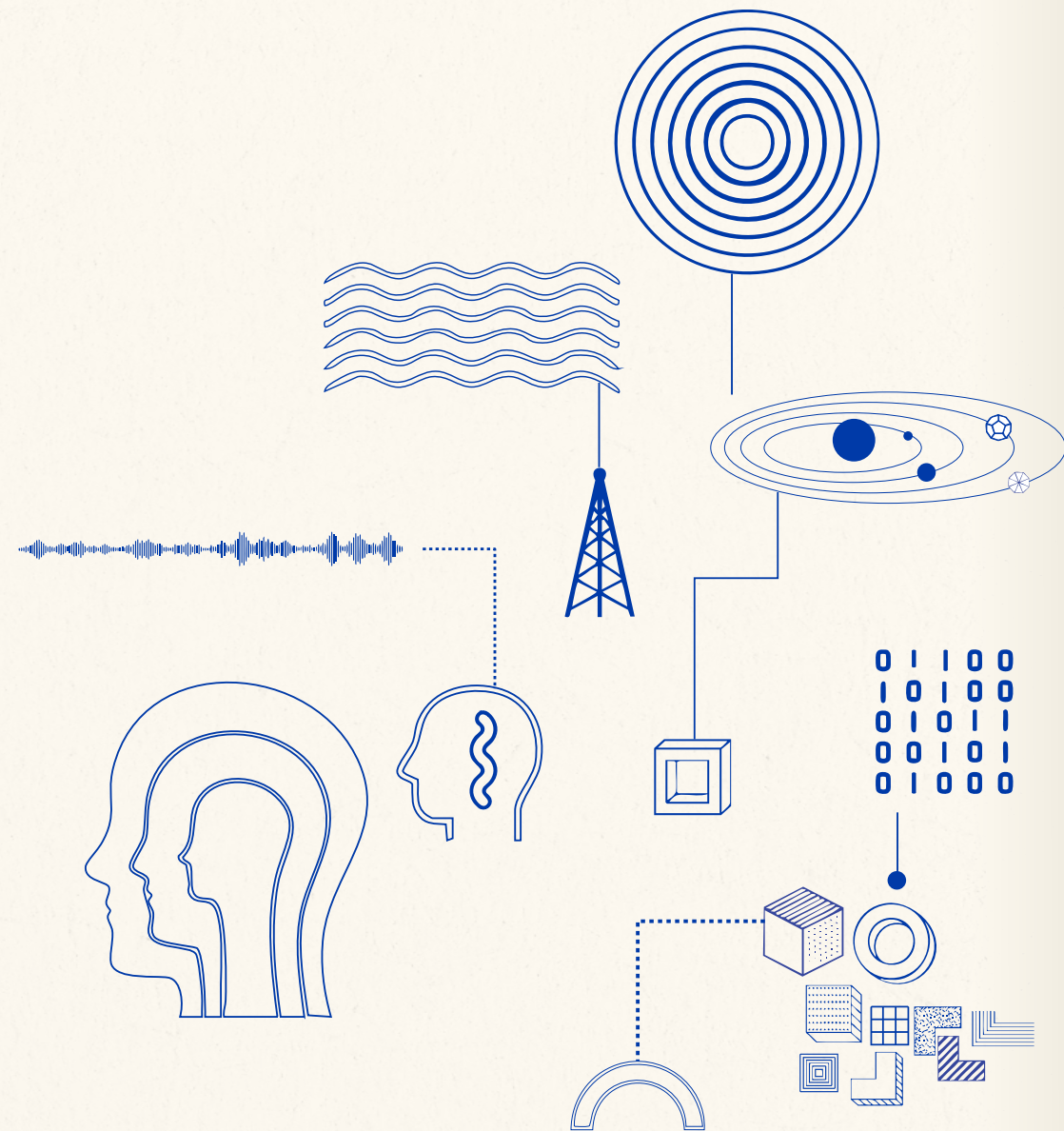
- Scanning Overthinking
- Avoiding Urgency / pressure
- Freeze / stuck
- Other: _____

Q: What is the current worry signal?

(write exactly how it shows up in your mind)

Q: Where do you feel this in your body?

- Chest Stomach
 - Shoulders Head
 - Hands Other: _____
-



Section 02

Decode the Signal

Instead of asking "How do I stop this?" We ask:

Q: "What is this trying to do for me?" [_____]

> **This worry might be trying to:**

- [] Prepare me
- [] Prevent something
- [] Help me remember
- [] Protect me from judgment
- [] Avoid failure
- [] Keep control
- [] Other: _____

> **If this worry had a message, it might say:**

Identify the Protective Intention

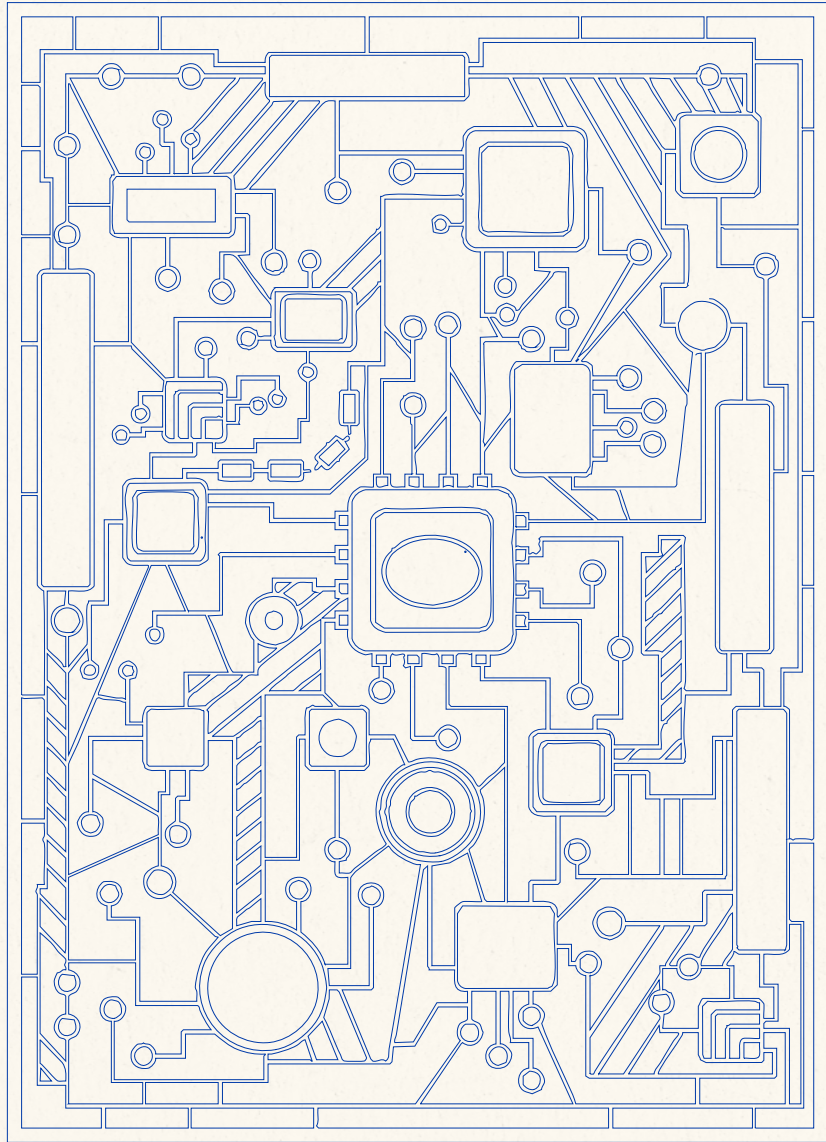
> Every worry carries a direction. It may not feel clear at first, but underneath the noise, there is often a question:

Q: "What is this trying to prevent?" [_____]

Q: "What is this trying to prepare for?" [_____]

> This worry might be trying to protect me from:

It might be trying to help me prepare for: [_____]



Section 03

Translate into Information

> Now we gently shift from emotion information instead of: "I'm overwhelmed", we ask:

Q: "What specifically needs attention?"

[_____]

> **List what this worry is pointing to:**

01. _____

02. _____

03. _____

> Let's slow the signal down. Break the worry into pieces:

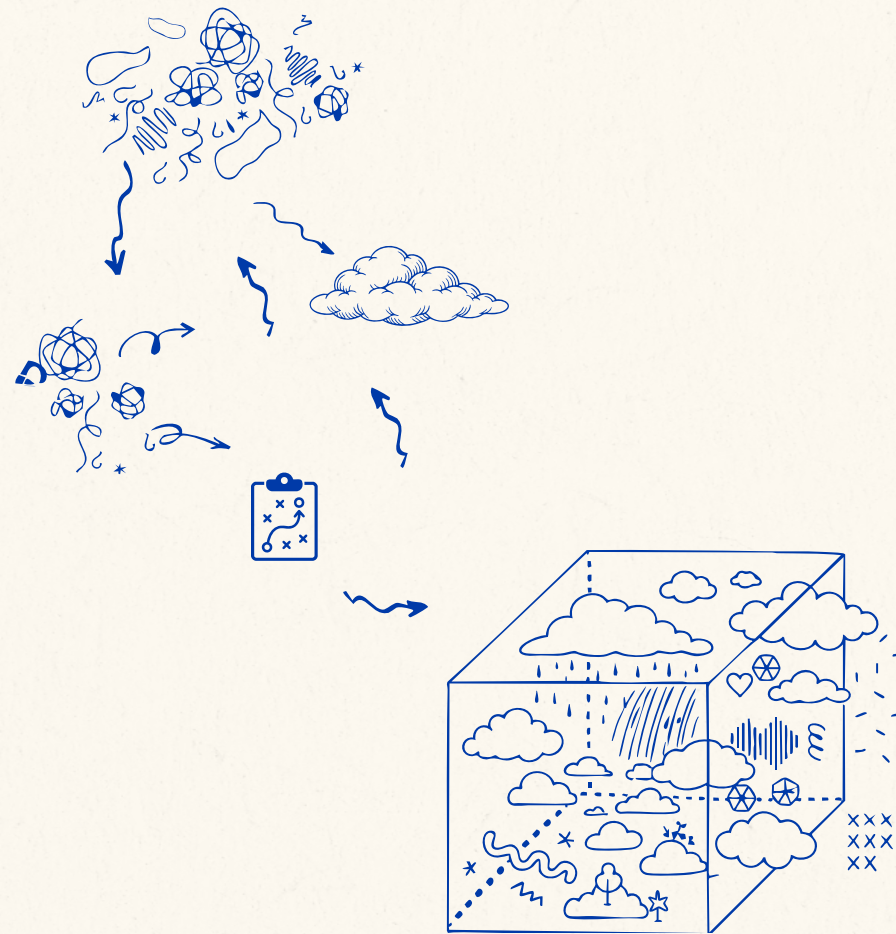
Q: What specifically needs attention?

01. _____

02. _____

03. _____

Circle what is actually within your control: (You can circle from the list above)



Section 05.

/ Tool: The Anxiety Translator

> A way to work with the signal instead of getting pulled into it. Worry often sounds absolute. Translation creates space.

Q01. What my anxiety says: [_____]

Q02. What it might actually mean:
 What is this trying to protect, prepare, or care about? [_____]

Q03. What I might try:
 One small step. Not perfect. Just possible. [_____]

Q4. What this part might need:
 [___] structure [___] reassurance
 [___] clarity [___] support
 [___] rest [___] something else: _____

Closing Reflection

Reflection: What Shifted?

[___] Before _____
 [___] After _____

What helped the most?
 [___] Naming the worry [___] Understanding the intention
 [___] Creating structure [___] Taking action
 [___] Other: _____

Q: What changed when you moved from worry structure?



Section 05***Your 2-Minute Start Ritual***

Choose a small action that signals your brain: "It's time to begin."

Examples:

- lighting a candle setting a 5-minute timer
 - stretching or breathing writing the first messy sentence
 - opening the document write or draw ritual.
-

Take One Small Action

Not everything needs to be solved. We are looking for movement, not perfection.

/ Choose one small action (under 5 minutes):

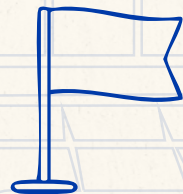
- Send one message Write one line
- Open the task Set a timer
- Gather materials

> Your action: _____

/ After doing it, check:

- I started
- I reduced overwhelm
- I still feel stuck (that's okay)

> One small next step: [_____]



MODULE 04:

Inner Archetypes

The Emotional System (RSD, Overwhelm, Freeze)

Emotional intensity in ADHD is often misunderstood as reactivity, when in reality it reflects differences in emotional regulation and processing speed (Shaw et al., 2014; Dodson, 2022).

Experiences such as rejection sensitivity, overwhelm, or shutdown are not character flaws—they are nervous system responses to perceived threat or disconnection.

From a trauma-informed perspective, these responses are adaptive. They are attempts to maintain safety, belonging, or control.

Understanding these patterns does not eliminate them.

But it changes the relationship to them.

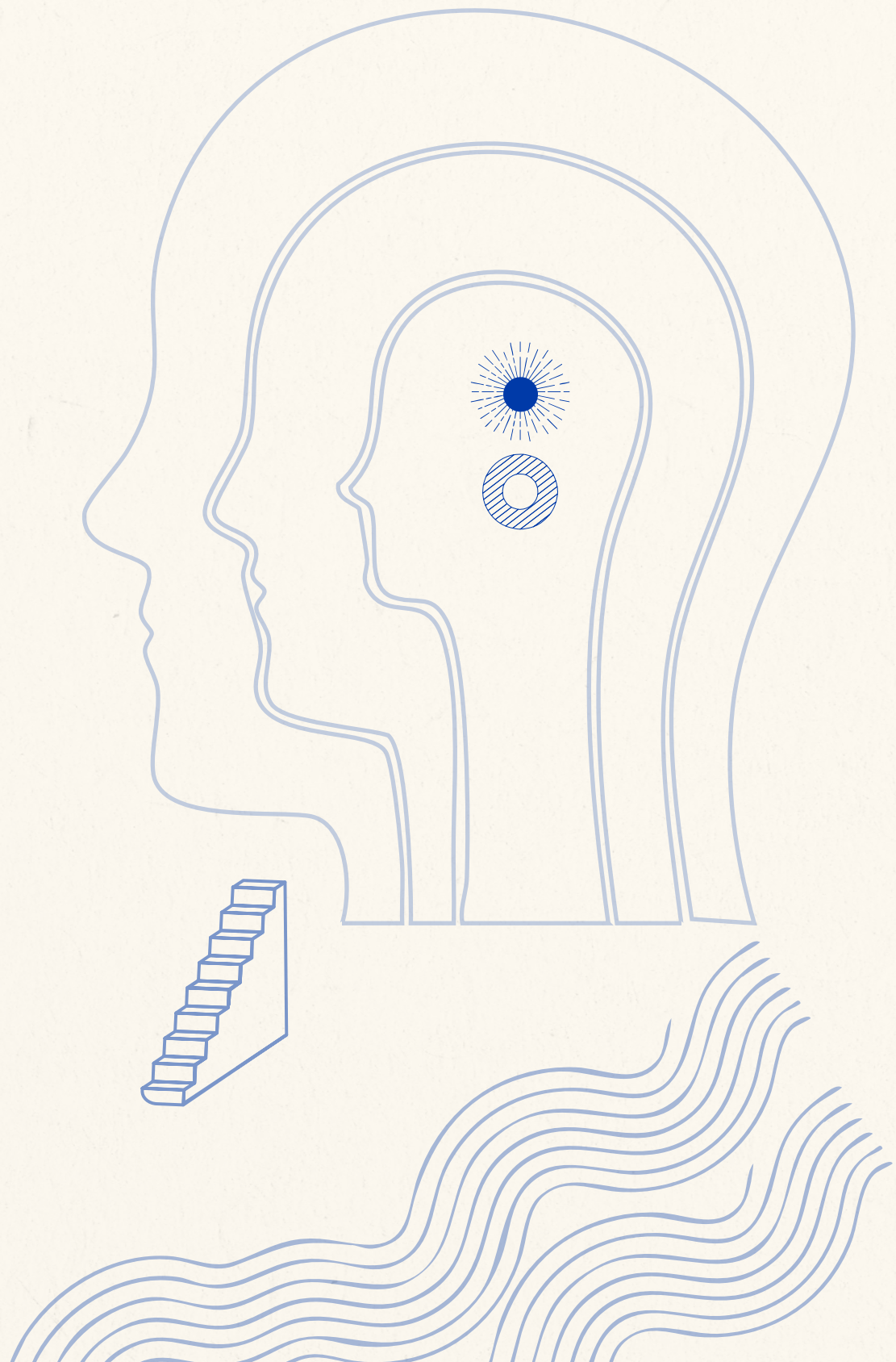
References

Shaw, P., Stringaris, A., Nigg, J., & Leibenluft, E. (2014). Emotion dysregulation in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 171(3), 276–293.

Dodson, W. (2022). Rejection sensitive dysphoria in ADHD. *ADDitude Magazine*.

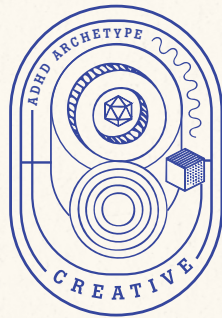
van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

Schwartz, R. C. (2021). *No bad parts: Healing trauma and restoring wholeness with the Internal Family Systems model*. Sounds True.



THE ADAPTIVE WORRY SYSTEM

Inner Archetypes



THE CREATIVE

“What if we tried it this way...”

How it shows up:

- ___ generating ideas, visuals, or connections
- ___ thinking in images, metaphors, or patterns
- ___ wanting to make, design, build, or express
- ___ nonlinear thinking (jumping between concepts)

What it's trying to do:

- ___ bring ideas into form
- ___ create meaning and expression
- ___ explore possibilities beyond structure

When it softens:

- ___ I can create without needing it to be perfect
- ___ I can follow ideas without losing myself in them

What helps:

- ___ open-ended time without pressure
- ___ play-based exploration
- ___ capturing ideas quickly (notes/sketches)
- ___ reducing evaluation during creation
- ___ alternating structure + freedom
- ___ protecting creative energy from over-scheduling



THE ADVENTURER

“Let's go. Let's try it.”

How it shows up:

- ___ desire for novelty or change
- ___ restlessness with routine
- ___ impulsive action or quick decisions
- ___ bursts of energy toward something new

What it's trying to do:

- ___ move you toward growth and experience
- ___ prevent stagnation
- ___ help you engage with life

When it softens:

- ___ I can move with intention, not just urgency
- ___ I can explore without abandoning stability

What helps:

- ___ planned novelty (intentional change vs chaos)
- ___ safe risk-taking
- ___ movement and stimulation
- ___ variety within structure
- ___ channeling impulse into exploration, not escape
- ___ clear return points (anchors)



THE COMPASSIONATE WITNESS

(your "Driven / Futuristic" energy)

“I can sit with this.”

How it shows up:

- ___ curiosity instead of judgment
- ___ ability to pause
- ___ noticing without reacting
- ___ internal steadiness

What it's trying to do:

- ___ create safety inside your system
- ___ hold all parts without rejecting them
- ___ support integration and choice

When it leads:

- ___ everything else becomes easier to work with
- ___ your system feels less like a battle, more like a conversation

What helps:

- ___ intentional access (pause + notice)
- ___ mindfulness practices
- ___ IFS-style unblending
- ___ slowing down internal reactions
- ___ creating space before responding
- ___ self-to-part dialogue



THE VISIONARY

(your "Driven / Futuristic" energy)

“There's so much I could do...”

How it shows up:

- ___ big ideas
- ___ excitement about possibilities
- ___ starting many things at once
- ___ difficulty narrowing focus

What it's trying to do:

- ___ expand your life
- ___ create meaning and direction
- ___ move toward possibility

When it softens:

- ___ I can choose one direction at a time
- ___ I can bring ideas into form

What helps:

- ___ grounding ideas into next steps
- ___ externalizing ideas (maps, diagrams)
- ___ choosing one direction at a time
- ___ collaboration to refine ideas
- ___ balancing ideation with execution
- ___ capturing ideas without needing to act on all of them



THE AVOIDER

“I'll start... just not right now.”

How it shows up:

- ___ procrastination
- ___ shutdown or freeze
- ___ difficulty initiating tasks
- ___ waiting for the "right moment"

What it's trying to do:

- ___ protect you from overwhelm
- ___ reduce pressure
- ___ avoid failure or discomfort

When it softens:

- ___ I can take one small step
- ___ I can begin without needing to finish

What helps:

- ___ body doubling (shared space reduces activation barrier)
- ___ co-regulation (being near someone steady)
- ___ tiny entry points ("open the doc," not "finish the task")
- ___ reducing overwhelm visually (break tasks into visible steps)
- ___ gentle accountability (supportive, not pressure-based)
- ___ nervous system settling first (before task initiation)



THE OVERTHINKER

“If I can just think it through one more time...”

How it shows up:

- ___ looping thoughts
- ___ analyzing past conversations
- ___ difficulty making decisions
- ___ trying to find the "right" answer

What it's trying to do:

- ___ create certainty
- ___ prevent mistakes
- ___ solve the problem before it happens

When it softens:

- ___ I can choose without perfect clarity
- ___ I can move forward with "enough" information

What helps:

- ___ externalizing thoughts (write it out, don't hold it all mentally)
- ___ decision containers (limit options or time)
- ___ "good enough" thresholds
- ___ talking it through with someone
- ___ structured problem-solving (step-by-step instead of looping)
- ___ interrupting loops with action (small movement forward)



THE INNER CRITIC

“You should be doing better.”

How it shows up:

- ___ harsh self-talk
- ___ comparison to others
- ___ shame after mistakes
- ___ feeling "not enough"

What it's trying to do:

- ___ push you toward improvement
- ___ prevent rejection
- ___ keep you aligned with expectations

When it softens:

- ___ I can speak to myself with respect
- ___ I can grow without shame

What helps:

- ___ compassionate reframe ("what is this part afraid would happen?")
- ___ externalizing the voice (naming it as a part)
- ___ counter-statements grounded in truth
- ___ shame reduction through sharing
- ___ self-talk modeling (how would I speak to a client?)
- ___ tracking effort, not just outcomes



THE ALARM SYSTEM

“Something's wrong. Fix it. Now.”

How it shows up:

- ___ urgency in the body
- ___ scanning for what could go wrong
- ___ difficulty settling or relaxing
- ___ strong reactions to perceived shifts or disconnection

What it's trying to do:

- ___ protect you from harm
- ___ prepare you for what might happen
- ___ keep you alert and ready

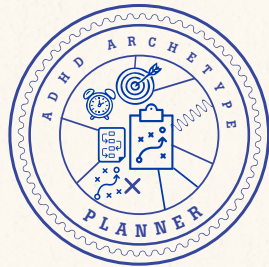
When it softens:

- ___ I can pause without losing awareness
- ___ I can respond instead of react

What helps:

- ___ somatic grounding (butterfly hug, cold water, pressure)
- ___ orienting to present safety
- ___ predictability structures (knowing what's coming next)
- ___ slowing the body before solving the problem
- ___ reducing sensory overload
- ___ co-regulation when possible

[THE ADAPTIVE WORRY SYSTEM
Inner Archetypes]



THE PLANNER

(executive function
scaffold part)

**"Let's figure out
how to do this."**

How it shows up:

- ___ organizing steps
- ___ creating lists or systems
- ___ structuring time or tasks
- ___ trying to create order

What it's trying to do:

- ___ support follow-through
- ___ reduce overwhelm
- ___ translate ideas into action

When it softens:

- ___ I can keep structure simple
- ___ I can support myself without rigidity

△ What helps:

- ___ simple, visible systems (not overly complex)
- ___ prioritization limits (top 1-3 tasks only)
- ___ flexible structure (not rigid perfection)
- ___ external tools (lists, calendars, visual maps)
- ___ starting before fully ready
- ___ review + adjust (not abandon)



THE PERFECTIONIST

"It has to be right."

How it shows up:

- ___ over-editing or over-preparing
- ___ fear of making mistakes
- ___ difficulty finishing or submitting work
- ___ high internal pressure

What it's trying to do:

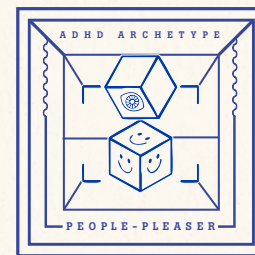
- ___ protect you from criticism
- ___ maintain a sense of control
- ___ ensure you are seen as capable

When it softens:

- ___ I can complete instead of perfect
- ___ I can allow things to be "good enough"

△ What helps:

- ___ "done > perfect" anchors
- ___ time limits for tasks
- ___ drafting mindset (first version allowed to be messy)
- ___ exposure to imperfection (intentionally leaving small things imperfect)
- ___ redefining success criteria
- ___ self-compassion practices



THE PEOPLE-PLEASER

"Don't let anyone be upset."

How it shows up:

- ___ prioritizing others' needs over your own
- ___ difficulty saying no
- ___ anxiety around conflict
- ___ over-explaining or over-accommodating

What it's trying to do:

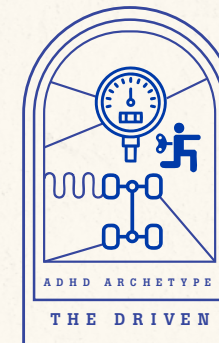
- ___ maintain connection
- ___ avoid rejection or conflict
- ___ keep relationships stable

When it softens:

- ___ I can stay connected without abandoning myself
- ___ I can set boundaries and still belong

△ What helps:

- ___ boundary scripts (pre-written responses)
- ___ pause before responding
- ___ checking internal needs first
- ___ tolerating discomfort of others' reactions
- ___ practicing small "no's"
- ___ redefining connection as mutual, not self-sacrificing



THE DRIVEN PART

(productivity protector / urgency engine)

"Keep going. Don't stop now."

How it shows up:

- ___ difficulty resting without guilt
- ___ constant forward motion or task-switching
- ___ tying worth to productivity
- ___ pushing through exhaustion
- ___ urgency even when things aren't time-sensitive

What it's trying to do:

- ___ prevent failure or falling behind
- ___ create safety through achievement
- ___ outrun shame or "not enough"
- ___ maintain control through momentum

When it softens:

- ___ I can pause without losing momentum
- ___ I can rest and still be worthy
- ___ I can move at a sustainable pace

△ What helps:

- ___ externalizing "done" (clear endpoints, not endless striving)
- ___ body-based pacing (timers, stretch breaks, nervous system check-ins)
- ___ permissioned rest ("rest is part of the plan")
- ___ realistic time mapping (reduces urgency distortion)
- ___ celebrating completion (not just what's next)
- ___ values check-ins (am I moving toward meaning or just momentum?)

PART TYPES:

○ COGNITIVE PARTS

Overthinker
Inner Critic

◻ PROTECTIVE / AVOIDANT PARTS

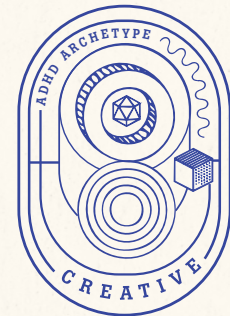
Avoider
Alarm

△ ACTIVATION / PERFORMANCE PARTS

Planner
Perfectionist
People-Pleaser
Driven

□ EXPANSIVE / SELF-LED PARTS

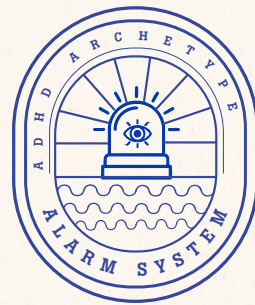
Creative
Adventurer
Visionary
Compassionate Witness



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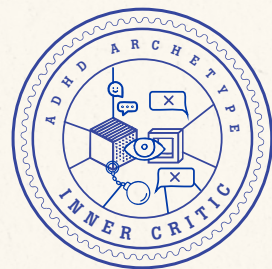
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Meeting the Inner System / Field Practice:

Mapping Your Inner System

Intro: You are not one voice. You are a system. Different parts of you hold different roles, different fears, different strategies for protection. In this section, we begin to notice: not "what's wrong with me" but "who is showing up right now?"

Section 01

Who Is Here Right Now?

Think of a recent stressful moment. Check all parts that showed up:

- The Inner Critic
- The Overthinker
- The Avoider
- The Planner
- The Perfectionist
- The Protector
- The Visionary
- Other: _____

Q: What was happening externally? [_____]

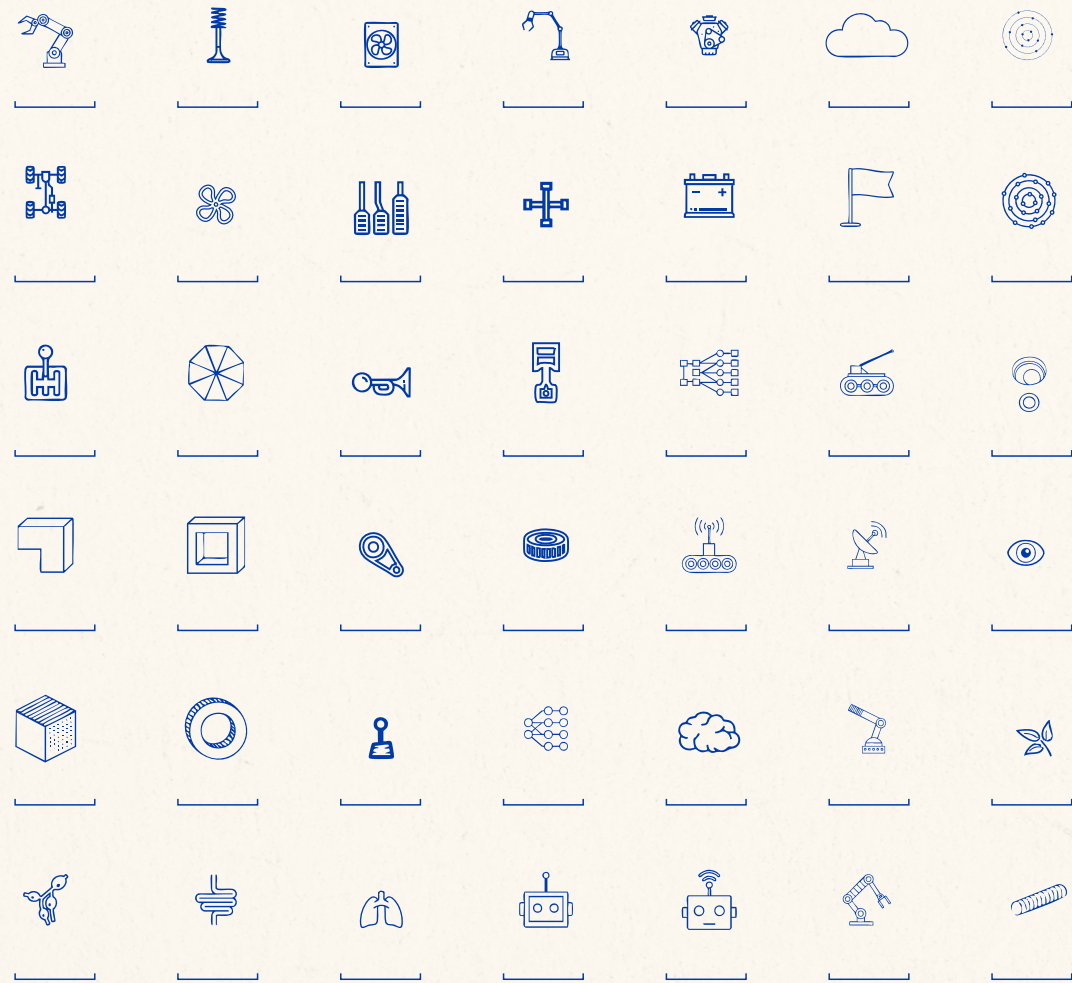
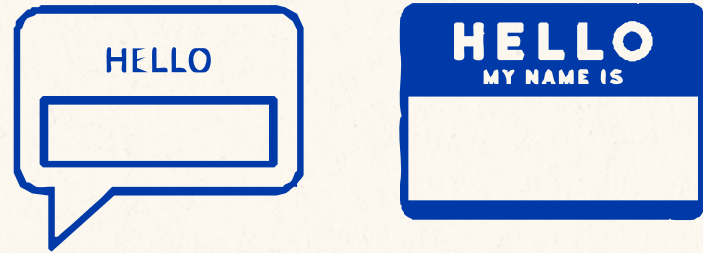
Identify the Parts

Think about a recent moment of stress, worry, or conflict.

Q: What showed up inside you? [_____]

Q: List or name the parts: [_____]

(Examples: Critic, Planner, Avoider, Overthinker, Protector)



Section 02

Choose One Part

Bring your attention to one part that feels strong or familiar.

> Name this part: [_____]

> If you were to visualize it, it might look like:

- [] Sharp / tense [] Fast-moving
- [] Heavy [] Quiet
- [] Distant [] Other: _____

Section 03

Understand Its Role

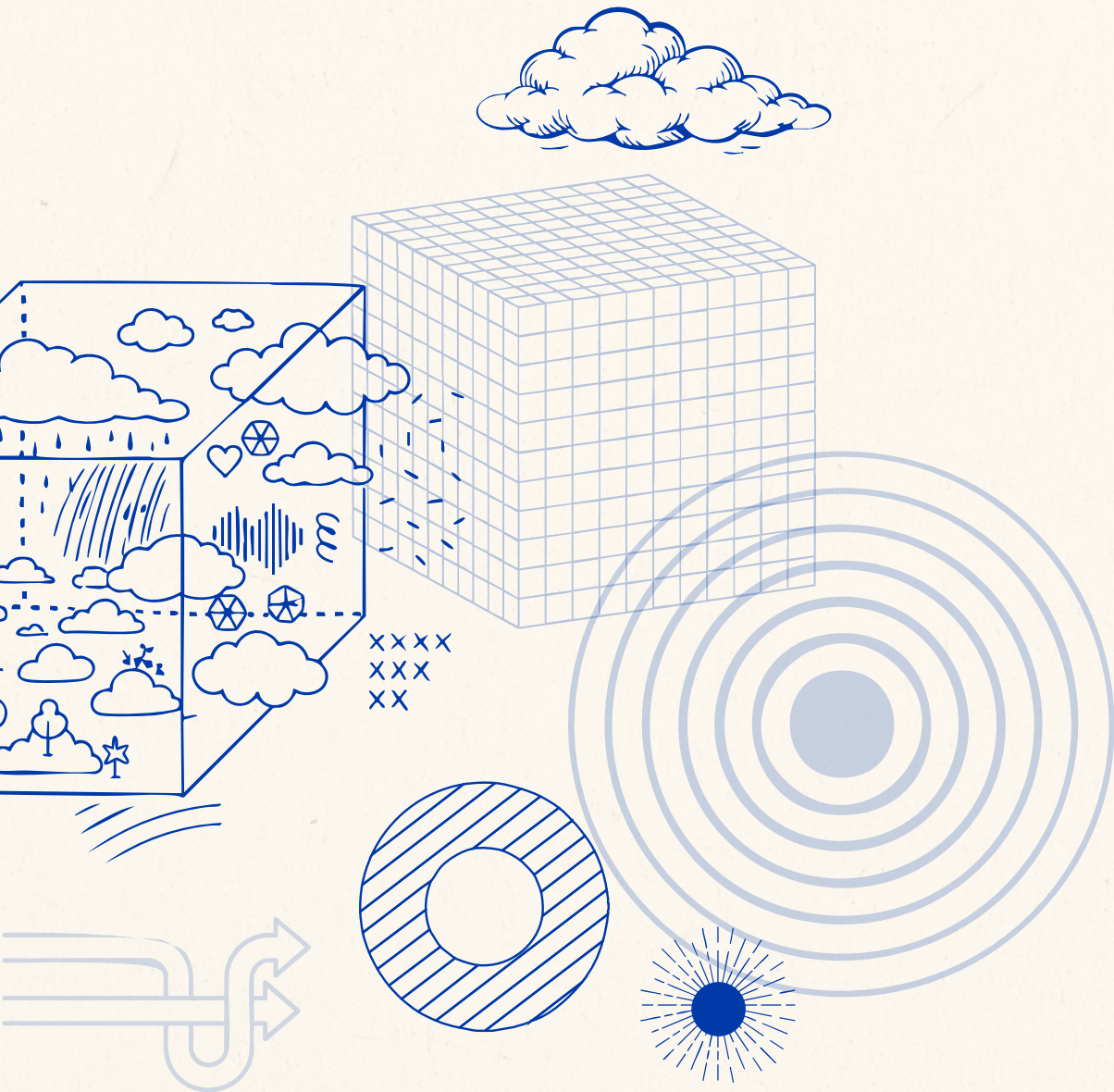
> This part is not random. It has a job.

> This part tends to show up when: [_____]

> This part tries to: [_____]

It tries to:

- [] Prevent failure
- [] Avoid rejection
- [] Reduce overwhelm
- [] Keep control
- [] Protect emotionally
- [] Other: _____



Section 04

Find the Positive Intention

Even difficult parts are often protective. Even if it feels frustrating... this part is likely trying to help.

At its core, this part is trying to: [_____]

Q: What would happen if this part didn't exist? [_____]

> This part might be trying to:

- Prevent failure Avoid rejection
- Reduce overwhelm Keep control
- Maintain safety Or something else: _____

Section 05

What Does It Need?

Parts don't just act. They also carry unmet needs. Instead of pushing it away... we ask what would support it.

> This part might need:

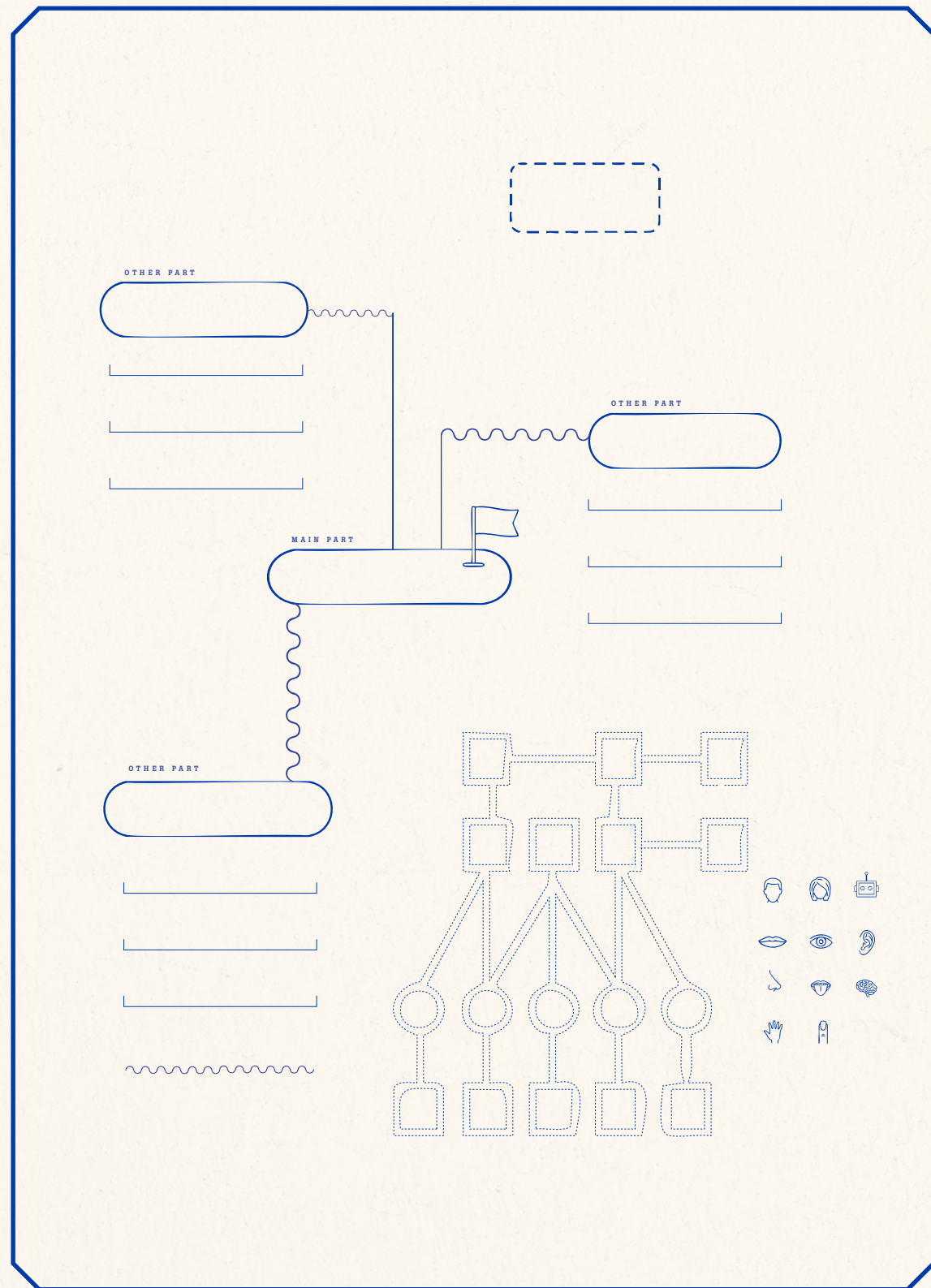
- : _____ : _____
- : _____ : _____

This part might need:

- Reassurance Structure
- Rest Clarity
- Support from others Permission to slow down
- Other: _____

Write a response to this part:

Inner Systems Map



Section 06

Internal Dialogue

> If this part could speak, it might say:

And you might respond: [_____]

Closing Reflection

What happens when you relate to this part with curiosity instead of judgment?

Create a System Map (Visual Exercise)

Draw your inner system:

- * Place your main part in the center
- * Add 2-3 other parts around it
- * Draw lines between them

Label:

- > Label: Who is loudest?
- > Label: Who is protective?
- > Label: Who gets ignored?

Integration:

Signal -----> System

Q: What did you notice about your system? [_____]

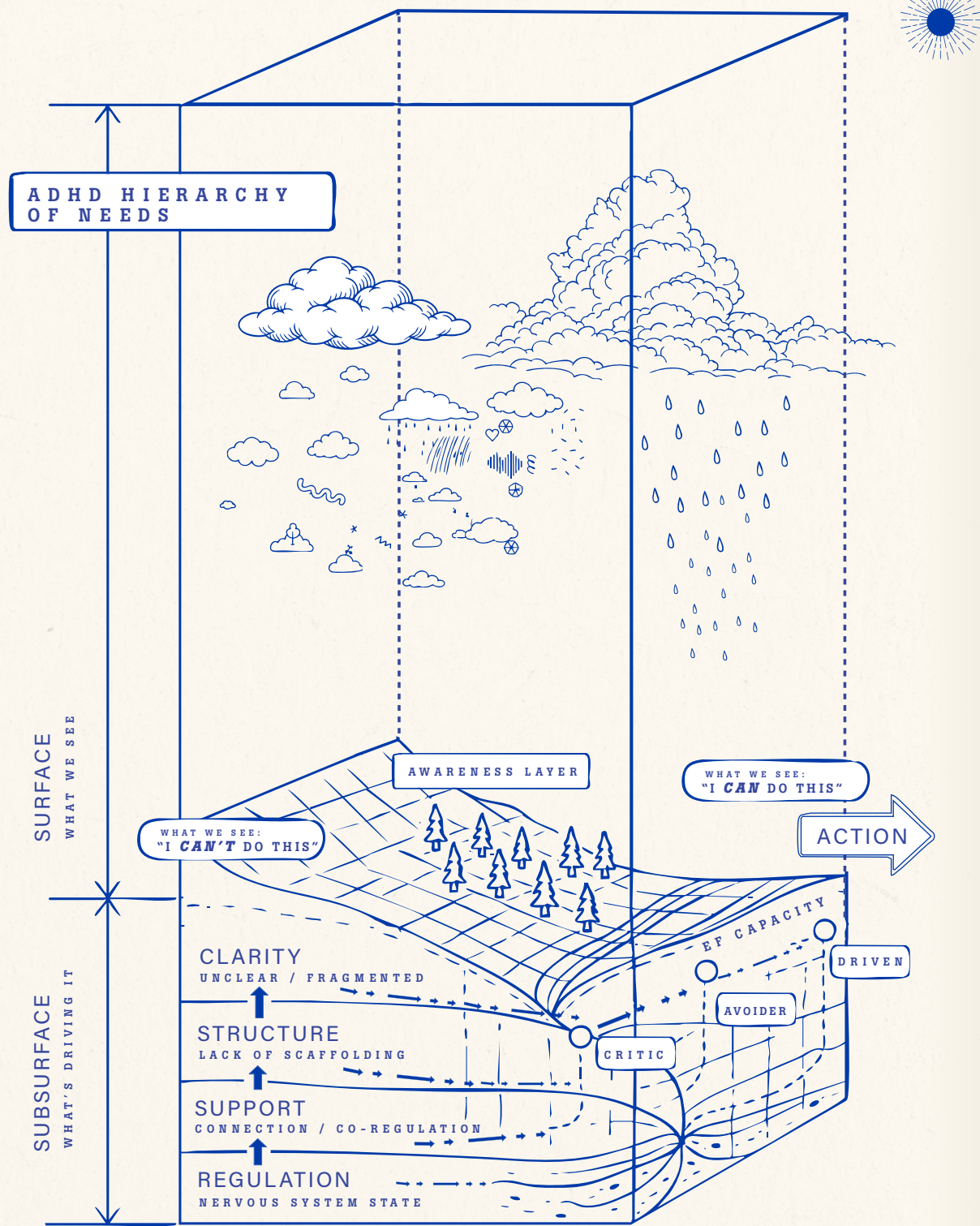
Q: What changed when you approached it with curiosity? [_____]

Q: What worry did you translate? [_____]

Q: What part was involved? [_____]

Q: What structure supports that part now? [_____]

What looks like resistance is often a system asking for support below the surface.



/ FIELD NOTES:

/ The Sequence
Beneath the System

/ Integrating Parts, Regulation,
& Executive Function

Sometimes what we experience as “different parts” are not random or conflicting. They are responding to different layers of the system. Contemporary models of psychotherapy increasingly recognize that internal experiences can be understood as organized, protective sub-systems rather than pathology (Schwartz, 2021). From this perspective, what appears as inner conflict may instead reflect multiple adaptive responses operating at different levels of need.

A System That Responds in Layers

Research across neuroscience and trauma-informed care suggests that higher-order cognitive processes, such as planning, prioritization, and task initiation, depend on more foundational processes being sufficiently supported (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013).

When the nervous system is dysregulated, the brain prioritizes safety and threat detection over executive functioning (Porges, 2011; van der Kolk, 2014). This means:

- ___ Action is harder when the system is overwhelmed
- ___ Clarity is harder when emotional load is high
- ___ Structure is harder to access without sufficient regulation

This is not a failure of effort. It reflects how the system prioritizes.

Parts as Adaptive Responses

From an Internal Family Systems (IFS) perspective, parts that appear “avoidant,” “critical,” or “overactive” can be understood as protective responses attempting to maintain stability in the system (Schwartz, 2021). For example:

- ___ An avoidant part may be protecting against overwhelm
- ___ A critical part may be attempting to create structure or prevent failure
- ___ A driven part may be pushing toward action before the system is ready

These responses are not inherently dysfunctional. They are adaptive strategies shaped by experience.

ADHD & the Regulation–Action Gap

ADHD research highlights that challenges with task initiation and follow-through are often linked to differences in executive functioning, emotional regulation, and attentional control (Barkley, 2015; Brown, 2013). Emotional intensity and rapid shifts in attention may increase cognitive load, making it more difficult to organize, prioritize, and act (Shaw et al., 2014; Sonuga-Barke & Castellanos, 2007). As a result, what appears as “procrastination” or “avoidance” may reflect a system that is attempting to manage competing internal demands rather than a lack of motivation.

The Sequence Below the Surface

Across these perspectives, a consistent pattern emerges. Not as a rigid structure, but as a map of how the system organizes support:

- ___ **Regulation** supports access to higher-order thinking
 - ___ **Support** and co-regulation reduce emotional load
 - ___ **Clarity** enables planning
 - ___ **Structure** supports execution
 - ___ **Action** becomes more available once these layers are in place
- > This sequence is not rigid, but it is often observable.

Reframing “Stuck”

Instead of asking: “Why can’t I do this?” A more accurate question may be: “What layer of my system is asking for support right now?”

Clinical Integration

You may begin to notice:

- ___ Parts are not the problem, they are signals,
- ___ Worry is not random, it is predictive,
- ___ Difficulty with action may reflect unmet needs earlier in the system.

This perspective aligns with integrative approaches that emphasize compassion, regulation, and contextual understanding over deficit-based interpretations of behavior (Siegel, 2012; Neff, 2023).

If you look closely, the system has been communicating all along. Not in failure, but in signals.

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