

Welcoming Adults *with* ADHD *into Parish Life*

A practical guide for
priests and parish teams

www.adhdcatholic.com

Every
person.
Every
journey.
Every
gift.

INTRODUCTION

This printable guide helps priests and parish teams welcome adults with ADHD with practical, pastoral care. By the end, you'll have clear ways to communicate, plan, pray, and offer ministry so that parish life is more accessible and less stressful for someone whose brain works differently.

Estimated time to use: 10–15 minutes to read; revisit as needed when planning ministries and meetings.

Difficulty: Beginner (no specialist knowledge required).

WHO THIS HANDOUT IS FOR

Priests, deacons, parish secretaries, welcome teams, catechists, ministry leaders, and anyone coordinating groups, liturgies, formation, or pastoral appointments.

WHAT “WELCOMING AN ADULT WITH ADHD” MEANS

Welcoming an adult with ADHD means recognising that someone can deeply love God and genuinely want to participate in parish life while still struggling with attention, organisation, time, memory, impulsivity, or sensory overload.

These struggles are not a sign of weak faith. They often reflect how the brain manages focus, planning, emotional regulation, and stimulation—especially in busy, unpredictable, or socially demanding environments.

Pastoral aim

Reduce unnecessary barriers so the person can pray, belong, and serve—without having to mask, apologise constantly, or feel “less reverent” because their attention or body is restless.

PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES (USE THESE ACROSS PARISH LIFE)

- **Do not mistake distraction for a lack of faith.** Someone may be prayerful and devoted even if their attention wanders or they struggle to follow long announcements or homilies without drifting.
- **Be comfortable with movement and fidgeting.** Quiet movement, standing at the back, stepping out briefly, or using a small fidget can help focus rather than disrupt reverence.
- **Keep important information clear and written down.** Put key details (time, place, contact, what to bring, next action) in writing—short and easy to scan.
- **Send reminders before meetings, appointments, and events.** A brief reminder 24 hours before (and again on the day if helpful) can prevent missed commitments and reduce shame.
- **Be aware of time blindness and use clear expectations.** Say when something starts and ends, how long it will take, and what “on time” means (e.g., “arrive by 6:50 for a 7:00 start”).
- **Break tasks into manageable steps.** Offer one next action at a time, with a simple checklist if possible.
- **Allow different ways of praying.** Some pray best with silence; others with guided prayer, scripture prompts, a rosary in hand, walking, journaling, or brief repeated prayers. Provide options without judgement.
- **Make Confession ADHD-friendly.** Offer the option of written notes, using an examination of conscience, or bringing a short list to stay on track. Be patient if the person struggles to organise their thoughts under pressure.
- **Do not confuse executive dysfunction with laziness.** Difficulty starting, sequencing, or completing tasks is often a genuine barrier—not a lack of goodwill.
- **Be sensitive to shame.** Many adults with ADHD carry years of criticism, embarrassment, or feeling like they “should be able to manage.” Gentle tone matters as much as practical adjustments.
- **Remember rejection sensitivity.** A small correction can feel overwhelming; aim for clarity without harshness, and reassure the person they’re still welcome and valued.
- **Give permission to ask for clarification.** Explicitly invite questions and repeats: “If anything’s unclear, please ask—happy to go over it again.”
- **Look for strengths.** Many adults with ADHD bring creativity, enthusiasm, humour, spontaneity, compassion, energy, and different thinking that can enrich parish life.
- **Ask rather than assume what would help.** Needs differ widely. A simple,

respectful question prevents missteps and builds trust.

- **Do not expect neurotypical behaviour as proof of reverence.** Stillness, eye contact, and “looking attentive” are not reliable measures of devotion; focus on the person’s intention and participation.
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APPLYING THE PRINCIPLES IN EVERYDAY PARISH SETTINGS

Communication & announcements

- **Use one clear message.** Put the main point in the first line (what, when, where, who to contact).
- **Prefer written follow-up.** After Mass, meetings, or phone calls, send a short text/email summary with next steps.
- **Reduce “memory-only” expectations.** If something matters, write it down and repeat it in the same wording across channels.

Meetings, groups, and formation

- **Start and finish on time.** Predictability lowers stress and supports attendance.
- **Share an agenda.** Even a simple 3-point list helps attention and reduces overwhelm.
- **Offer roles that fit strengths.** For example: brainstorming, welcoming, creativity, youth engagement, practical compassion, problem-solving, or short tasks with immediate feedback.

Liturgy and the physical environment

- **Allow discreet movement.** Make it normal for someone to stand at the back, step out, or choose an aisle seat without being singled out.
- **Notice sensory overload.** Crowding, noise, strong smells, long lines, or unpredictable changes can overwhelm. Where possible, offer quieter options and clear directions.
- **Offer clear guidance for “what happens next.”** Simple cues reduce anxiety: “After Communion we’ll have 2 minutes of silence, then the prayer after Communion.”

Prayer, spiritual direction, and pastoral care

- **Normalise varied prayer styles.** Suggest practical options (short daily prayers, scripture prompts, audio prayer, walking prayer, journaling) and ask what actually works for them.
- **Set realistic spiritual goals.** Focus on consistency and compassion rather than perfection; shame can quickly derail prayer habits.

Confession (practical ways to reduce stress)

- **Invite structure.** Offer an examination of conscience, or suggest the penitent bring written notes to help them stay focused.
- **Be patient with organisation and time.** If someone rambles or forgets key points, gently help them name one thing at a time and reassure them they are not “doing it wrong.”
- **Reduce shame.** Keep correction clear but kind; reaffirm God’s mercy and the person’s desire to grow.

TROUBLESHOOTING (COMMON SITUATIONS)

- **Problem:** They miss meetings or arrive late.
Solution: Assume time blindness first: send reminders, clarify start/end times, and offer a “arrive by” time. Keep tone warm and practical, not punitive.
 - **Problem:** They look distracted at Mass or during talks.
Solution: Do not treat this as a faith issue. Offer permission for discreet movement, provide written summaries, and avoid public correction.
 - **Problem:** They agree to help but don’t follow through.
Solution: Consider executive dysfunction: break the task into steps, write down the first next action, and check in with a simple reminder. Match responsibilities to strengths and capacity.
 - **Problem:** They react strongly to feedback or seem to withdraw.
Solution: Remember rejection sensitivity: affirm belonging, give feedback privately, and use specific, non-shaming language with a clear path forward.
 - **Problem:** They feel embarrassed asking “basic” questions.
Solution: Give explicit permission to ask for clarification and repeat key details without impatience. Put important information in writing.
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"You don't have to hide your ADHD here. Let's find ways of helping you pray, participate and use your gifts in the life of the Church."

NEXT STEPS FOR PARISH TEAMS

- ☐ Choose one person (priest, pastoral associate, or ministry lead) who can be a consistent point of contact.
- ☐ Create a simple habit: send written reminders for meetings, appointments, and ministry commitments.
- ☐ Review one ministry area (liturgy, formation, volunteering, welcome) and identify 1–2 changes that reduce overwhelm and shame.
- ☐ Keep key information in one place (a short email template, a handout, or a standard message format).
- ☐ Ask directly (and privately) what would help—and be ready to adjust without making it a big issue.

CONCLUSION

Church should not become another place where an adult with ADHD feels they are failing. With clarity, patience, and practical supports, the parish can help them feel they belong—and trust that God can meet them in the way their mind actually works.

What is ADHD Catholic?

ADHD Catholic is a dedicated online hub designed to support Catholics with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Our mission is to provide meaningful resources that empower individuals to embrace their faith while navigating the unique challenges associated with ADHD. Through engaging content such as blogs, videos, podcasts, and prayer resources, we aim to create a modern and accessible platform that resonates with the Catholic ADHD community.

More resources available on www.ADHDCatholic.com