

PASTORAL GUIDE • PERSONAL USE

A Catholic Examination of Conscience

for Catholics with ADHD

Begin here. This is not a scorecard. It is a way to notice where you freely turned from love, where ADHD made faithful action harder, and where Christ is inviting you to receive mercy and begin again.

Original pastoral adaptation inspired by the broad structure of Bulldog Catholic's A Detailed Catholic Examination of Conscience (Second Edition). This guide uses original wording and is not affiliated with Bulldog Catholic.

For personal preparation, parish accompaniment, and conversation with a priest or qualified clinician. It is not a diagnostic tool, medical advice, or a substitute for individualized pastoral counsel.

How to Use This Guide

You do not need to finish every page. Choose a time period—since your last Confession is usually best—ask the Holy Spirit for light, and move slowly. Mark only what truly needs attention. If you become overwhelmed, stop after three honest items and prepare to confess those clearly.

A five-minute path

- ☐ Set a timer for five minutes and silence avoidable notifications.
- ☐ Pray the short prayer below.
- ☐ Read ‘Symptoms, sin, and responsibility.’
- ☐ Scan the headings; pause where your conscience becomes alert.
- ☐ Write a private three-to-five-line confession note; then stop reviewing.

Permission to pause. Fatigue, shame, hyperfocus, and scrupulosity can turn examination into rumination. A sincere, limited examination is better than an exhausting search for perfect certainty.

Prayer before examination

Come, Holy Spirit. Give me light without fear, honesty without self-hatred, and sorrow that leads to hope. Help me remember what I need to bring to Jesus. Show me the choices by which I failed to love God or my neighbor. Help me distinguish weakness from refusal, symptoms from sin, and regret from true repentance. Mary, Mother of Mercy, pray for me. Amen.

A simple memory frame

- God: prayer, worship, trust, reverence.
- People: charity, family, promises, repair.
- Body: safety, anger, sexuality, substances, rest.
- Responsibilities: work, money, property, truth, commitments.
- Patterns: what I knowingly keep choosing, excusing, or refusing to address.

Symptoms, Sin, and Responsibility

ADHD can affect attention, inhibition, working memory, time awareness, emotional regulation, task initiation, and follow-through. A symptom or unwanted feeling is not automatically a sin. Catholic moral reflection asks not only what happened, but what you understood, intended, consented to, and could reasonably have done in the circumstances.

Catholic principle. Responsibility can be reduced—or sometimes removed—by inadvertence, habit, fear, psychological factors, and other limits. At the same time, foreseeable harm can become morally relevant when we freely refuse reasonable care, support, or repair. See Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) 1735–1737.

Use these four questions

- ☐ What happened? Name the act or omission without insulting yourself.
- ☐ What did I know at the time? Was the moral issue clear to me?
- ☐ What did I freely choose? Distinguish an impulse, distraction, or forgotten task from a deliberate yes.

- ☐ What could I reasonably do now? Apologize, restore, use support, change an environment, or seek counsel.

Examples for discernment

Situation	Pastoral discernment
I lost track during prayer.	Likely a symptom, not a rejection of God. Gently return; consider a shorter or more embodied prayer.
I forgot an appointment despite a sincere plan and reminders.	The forgetting itself may not be sinful. Ask whether repair is needed and whether a realistic support can reduce repeated harm.
I knew my words would wound someone and chose to send them while angry.	The impulsive intensity may affect freedom, but the chosen harmful act and refusal to repair deserve honest examination.
I kept delaying a duty because starting felt painfully difficult.	Task paralysis is not laziness by definition. Examine the degree of freedom, the importance of the duty, supports available, and whether you knowingly abandoned responsibility.
I used ADHD as a reason never to apologize or accept help.	A diagnosis explains real limits; it does not license contempt, dishonesty, or refusal of reasonable repair.

Mortal and venial sin—without panic

For a sin to be mortal, grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent must all be present (CCC 1857–1859). Conditions that affect knowledge or freedom may lessen culpability (CCC 1860). Do not diagnose your own soul through fear. Confess remembered grave sins honestly, including kind and number as best you can, and ask the priest when you are uncertain. Venial sins may also be confessed and can reveal patterns where grace is inviting growth.

For scrupulosity or OCD. Follow the guidance of one trusted confessor when possible. Do not repeatedly re-confess a sin already honestly confessed and absolved unless your confessor directs you. If this guide fuels compulsive checking, put it down and seek pastoral and clinical support.

Examination by the Ten Commandments

Read the blue ADHD note first if a section is likely to trigger shame. Check only items that reflect a real concern. These prompts are aids, not declarations that every listed act is always grave or fully culpable.

1. You shall have no other gods before me

Trust, worship, and what governs my choices

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: novelty-seeking, hyperfocus, and inconsistent routines can disrupt prayer. Examine chosen priorities and resistance to grace, not the mere wandering of attention.

- ☐ Have I deliberately neglected God, prayer, or the life of faith—not merely become distracted or forgotten?
- ☐ Have I treated achievement, stimulation, approval, productivity, a relationship, money, politics, or online life as more important than fidelity to God?
- ☐ Have I knowingly rejected a teaching of faith without honestly seeking understanding?
- ☐ Have I despaired of God’s mercy, or presumed upon mercy while planning to continue serious sin?
- ☐ Have I used superstition, divination, occult practices, or spiritual practices incompatible with Christian faith?
- ☐ Have I hidden behind busyness or novelty to avoid silence, truth, or conversion?
- ☐ Have I refused reasonable help because admitting need wounded my pride?
- ☐ Have I judged my worth only by performance, forgetting that I am God’s beloved creature?

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

Reverence in speech and promise

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: blurting a word is not identical to calculated contempt. Examine intention, awareness, the pattern, and whether you made a sincere effort to repair and build a better pause.

- ☐ Have I used God’s name, Jesus’ name, or sacred things with contempt or as a weapon?
- ☐ Have I made a promise or vow to God rashly, dishonestly, or without intending to keep it?
- ☐ Have I spoken about the Church, her worship, or another person’s faith with deliberate mockery?
- ☐ Have I used religious language to manipulate, shame, threaten, or present my preferences as God’s command?
- ☐ Have I blamed God for consequences of my own freely chosen actions?
- ☐ Have I shared sacred content carelessly for attention, outrage, or amusement?

3. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day

Mass, prayer, and holy rest

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: time blindness and transitions can make punctuality hard. Ask whether you intended to attend and used reasonable supports—not whether you executed the morning perfectly.

- ☐ Have I deliberately missed Sunday Mass or a holy day of obligation without a serious reason?
- ☐ Have I arrived very late or left early through a free and avoidable choice?
- ☐ Have I received Holy Communion while conscious of unconfessed mortal sin?
- ☐ Have I treated the Eucharist or a sacred place carelessly or irreverently?

- ☐ Have I let avoidable work, shopping, entertainment, or scheduling erase worship and restorative rest?
- ☐ Have I neglected the spiritual needs of children or others entrusted to my care?
- ☐ Have I refused every realistic support—calendar, alarm, prepared clothes, ride, earlier Mass—while repeatedly missing an important obligation?
- ☐ Have I judged another person's Mass attendance without knowing illness, disability, caregiving, or other serious constraints?

4. Honor your father and your mother

Family, authority, and duties of care

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: conflict may follow missed details or emotional flooding. Examine how you respond afterward: truth, repair, humility, and willingness to use supports.

- ☐ Have I treated parents, guardians, children, spouse, teachers, leaders, or coworkers with contempt?
- ☐ Have I disobeyed a just request or law through a deliberate choice rather than forgetfulness or confusion?
- ☐ Have I neglected a serious duty of care toward a child, dependent, aging parent, or vulnerable person?
- ☐ Have I used authority harshly, inconsistently, or for my own comfort?
- ☐ Have I failed to set reasonable boundaries where compliance would enable abuse or serious harm?
- ☐ Have I refused to apologize after an outburst, interruption, or broken commitment?
- ☐ Have I expected others to carry invisible planning work without discussion or gratitude?
- ☐ Have I made promises impulsively, knowing I could not responsibly keep them?

5. You shall not kill

Life, safety, anger, and dignity

ADHD lens. Safety note: if you may harm yourself or someone else, pause this examination and contact emergency services or a crisis service now. A safety crisis needs immediate help, not moral self-analysis.

- ☐ Have I intentionally harmed, threatened, abused, or endangered another person?
- ☐ Have I participated in abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, or another direct attack on innocent human life?
- ☐ Have I driven recklessly, especially while impaired, enraged, exhausted, or distracted?
- ☐ Have I deliberately encouraged self-harm, violence, bullying, hatred, or dehumanization?
- ☐ Have I nursed hatred, sought revenge, or delighted in another's suffering?
- ☐ Have I harmed someone through cruel speech, harassment, exclusion, or repeated intimidation?
- ☐ Have I misused alcohol, medication, or drugs in ways that seriously endangered myself or others?
- ☐ Have I neglected necessary care for my health or another's through a substantially free and serious refusal?
- ☐ Have I refused forgiveness in the sense of clinging to revenge—while remembering that forgiveness does not require tolerating abuse or abandoning prudent boundaries?
- ☐ Have I ignored a credible threat to someone's immediate safety when I could reasonably seek help?

6 & 9. You shall not commit adultery; you shall not covet your neighbor's spouse

Chastity, fidelity, and the dignity of persons

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: an intrusive thought, sudden attraction, or bodily response is not itself a

chosen sin. Examine deliberate consent, actions, secrecy, harm, and the safeguards you are willing to use. Bring complex questions to a trusted priest.

- ☐ Have I freely chosen sexual activity outside marriage or been unfaithful to my spouse?
- ☐ Have I deliberately used pornography, sexualized media, or another person for arousal?
- ☐ Have I treated someone as an object rather than a person with dignity and freedom?
- ☐ Have I entertained lustful thoughts by deliberate consent, rather than simply experiencing an unwanted thought or bodily response?
- ☐ Have I crossed another person's boundaries, pressured them, ignored consent, harassed them, or exploited vulnerability or power?
- ☐ Have I been dishonest with my spouse about conduct that seriously affects our marriage?
- ☐ Have I deliberately placed myself in a near occasion of sin while refusing practical boundaries?
- ☐ Have I violated chastity through sexting, sexual messages, images, or secret online relationships?
- ☐ Have I failed to seek appropriate help for a compulsive pattern that repeatedly harms others or my commitments?

7 & 10. You shall not steal; you shall not covet your neighbor's goods

Property, work, money, and simplicity

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: losing an item is not theft. Impulsive spending may involve reduced inhibition, but serious, foreseeable harm calls for honest repair and external safeguards such as limits, waiting periods, or shared oversight.

- ☐ Have I taken, kept, damaged, or used another's property without permission?
- ☐ Have I cheated, pirated, falsified expenses, evaded a just debt, or been dishonest in business or taxes?
- ☐ Have I knowingly failed to give honest work for my pay—or denied another fair pay or conditions?
- ☐ Have I made impulsive purchases or gambled in ways that seriously harmed people who depend on me?
- ☐ Have I envied another's possessions, status, talents, home, family, or opportunities?
- ☐ Have I wasted shared resources or refused restitution when I caused loss?
- ☐ Have I ignored the poor or the needs of the Church despite a real ability to help?
- ☐ Have I borrowed items or money without a realistic plan to return or repay them?
- ☐ Have I used subscriptions, trials, returns, or digital services dishonestly?
- ☐ Have I concealed financial behavior from a spouse or accountable person when they had a right to know?

8. You shall not bear false witness

Truth, reputation, and communication

ADHD lens. ADHD lens: inaccurate recall, losing the thread, or speaking imprecisely is not automatically lying. A lie involves choosing to deceive. When memory is uncertain, say so plainly.

- ☐ Have I lied or intentionally created a false impression?
- ☐ Have I gossiped, revealed another's faults without proportionate reason, or spread an unverified claim?

- ☐ Have I damaged someone's reputation through falsehood, insinuation, selective facts, or online sharing?
- ☐ Have I made rash judgments and treated guesses as certainty?
- ☐ Have I betrayed a confidence without a just reason?
- ☐ Have I plagiarized, cheated, fabricated work, or taken credit that was not mine?
- ☐ Have I exaggerated an excuse to avoid responsibility for a forgotten task or late arrival?
- ☐ Have I promised something merely to end an uncomfortable conversation, without intending to follow through?
- ☐ Have I hidden a serious sin in Confession or intentionally deceived the priest?
- ☐ Have I refused to correct a harmful falsehood when I reasonably could?

Key Areas of Christian Life

The life of prayer and grace

- ☐ Have I made any realistic space for prayer, Scripture, gratitude, or silence?
- ☐ When routines failed, did I begin again—or surrender to shame and avoidance?
- ☐ Have I asked for sacramental and pastoral help when I needed it?
- ☐ Have I received God's gifts with gratitude, or compared my spiritual life constantly with others?

The Precepts of the Church

- ☐ Have I participated in Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, unless excused by a serious reason?
- ☐ Have I confessed grave sins at least annually and received Holy Communion during the Easter season?
- ☐ Have I observed the Church's appointed days of fasting and abstinence according to my age, health, and local discipline?
- ☐ Have I supported the Church's material needs according to my ability?

Relationships and community

- ☐ Have I listened, or repeatedly dominated, interrupted, dismissed, or made conversations about myself without trying to change?
- ☐ Have I kept others waiting or broken commitments without prompt communication and repair?
- ☐ Have I resented accommodations I need—or refused reasonable accommodations to others?
- ☐ Have I isolated in shame rather than tell a safe person that I needed help?
- ☐ Have I served the lonely, poor, sick, excluded, or burdened when I reasonably could?

Work, study, and vocation

- ☐ Have I acted dishonestly about work I did not complete?
- ☐ Have I neglected an important responsibility after recognizing the risk and refusing reasonable support?
- ☐ Have I overcommitted for approval or excitement, then avoided honest renegotiation?
- ☐ Have I used hyperfocus in a way that repeatedly deprived family, prayer, sleep, or essential duties of due attention?
- ☐ Have I failed to respect the limits and dignity of coworkers, employees, students, or those I serve?

Digital life and attention

- ☐ Have I deliberately consumed or shared content that was cruel, sexually exploitative, dishonest, or spiritually harmful?
- ☐ Have I used my phone to avoid a person who had a reasonable claim on my attention?
- ☐ Have I joined outrage, mockery, pile-ons, or dehumanizing speech?
- ☐ Have I knowingly let screens displace essential sleep, worship, care, or safety?
- ☐ Have I refused practical limits after seeing repeated serious harm?

Care of body and mind

- ☐ Have I treated medication or professional care as shameful in myself or others?
- ☐ Have I taken prescription medicine other than as directed, shared it, or sought it dishonestly?
- ☐ Have I ignored sleep, food, movement, or treatment in a way that seriously and foreseeably harmed my duties?
- ☐ Have I used substances, food, spending, sex, gaming, or media mainly to escape, while refusing needed help?

- ☐ Have I accepted that prudent self-care can support love of God and neighbor?

Justice, mercy, and stewardship

- ☐ Have I shown prejudice or denied another person's dignity?
- ☐ Have I ignored unjust treatment when I had a prudent way to help?
- ☐ Have I cared for creation and shared goods responsibly?
- ☐ Have I practiced a corporal or spiritual work of mercy?
- ☐ Have I prayed for those I dislike and sought peace without denying truth or safety?

Reflection Without Rumination

Choose one or two questions. Write phrases, not essays.

- ☐ Where did I most clearly choose against love?
-

- ☐ Who was affected, and what repair is possible?
-

- ☐ What pattern keeps returning?
-

- ☐ What support would make the good choice easier next time?
-

- ☐ Where did God give me grace that I want to thank him for?
-

- ☐ What is one small amendment of life—not ten—that I can make with grace?
-

Stop rule. When you can name your sins honestly and have one realistic next step, preparation is complete. You do not need to manufacture a feeling, remember every detail, or become certain about every doubtful matter.

Preparing Your Confession

Make a short private note

Use keywords only. For remembered grave sins, note the kind and number—or the best honest estimate you can give. You may say ‘about,’ ‘several times,’ or ‘a recurring pattern’ when exact recall is impossible. Destroy the note afterward if that protects your privacy.

Possible opening. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been [time] since my last Confession. I have ADHD and may use a brief note so I do not lose my place.

My brief note

1. _____

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

A simple amendment of life

With God's grace, I will: _____

Support I will use: _____

Repair I need to make: _____

Before entering

- ☐ Bring the note and an Act of Contrition.
- ☐ Choose face-to-face or behind the screen according to what helps you confess honestly.
- ☐ Tell the priest at the start if you are anxious, have forgotten the order, need extra time to answer, or need questions one at a time.
- ☐ If waiting is difficult, use a quiet fidget, slow breathing, or a short repeated prayer.
- ☐ Do not rehearse endlessly. Honesty matters more than polished delivery.

The Rite of Reconciliation: A Penitent's Guide

1. Welcome and Sign of the Cross

The priest welcomes you. Make the Sign of the Cross. You may begin with the familiar formula above.

2. Confession of sins

Name your sins plainly. Avoid a long backstory unless context is needed to understand responsibility. If you lose your place, look at your note or say, 'I need a moment.'

3. Counsel and penance

The priest may ask questions, offer counsel, and assign a penance. If you did not understand, ask him to repeat or simplify it. You may write it down after leaving.

4. Contrition

Express sorrow and a purpose of amendment, often by praying an Act of Contrition.

5. Absolution

Listen as the priest prays the prayer of absolution. Make the Sign of the Cross and answer 'Amen.'

6. Dismissal

The priest sends you forth in peace. Respond as directed, often 'Thanks be to God.' Complete your penance as soon as reasonably possible.

If you forget something. A sin genuinely forgotten after a sincere examination is not the same as a sin deliberately concealed. Mention a remembered grave sin in your next Confession. If uncertainty is feeding scrupulosity, follow your confessor's direction rather than restarting the examination.

Act of Contrition

My God, I am sorry for my sins with all my heart. In choosing to do wrong and failing to do good, I have sinned against you whom I should love above all things. I firmly intend, with your help, to do penance, to sin no more, and to avoid whatever leads me to sin. Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us. In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

A shorter form when memory is difficult:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. I am sorry for my sins. With your grace, I intend to turn from sin, do my penance, repair the harm I have caused, and follow you more faithfully. Amen.

A priest may invite another sincere expression of contrition. You do not need to memorize a particular formula unless your parish or priest asks you to do so.

After Confession: Make Mercy Easier to Live

- ☐ Do the penance promptly; set an alarm before leaving if needed.
- ☐ Thank God briefly instead of replaying whether you ‘did it right.’
- ☐ Make any safe and appropriate restitution or apology.
- ☐ Choose one environmental support: calendar block, visual cue, blocker, pill organizer, spending limit, accountability check, prepared Mass bag, or earlier departure alarm.
- ☐ If a pattern is compulsive, traumatic, dangerous, or beyond self-management, seek qualified clinical care as well as pastoral care.
- ☐ Notice grace: Confession is reconciliation, not merely error reporting.

One-week reset card

Grace to remember

One next step

Cue or support

Person to contact

Prayers for the Days After

Prayer for a new beginning

Jesus, thank you for meeting me in truth and mercy. Keep me from shame that hides and pride that refuses help. Give me patience to begin again, courage to repair what I can, and humility to use the supports I need. Let my weakness become a place where your grace is welcomed. Amen.

Prayer when I fail again

Lord, I have fallen, but I will not run from you. Show me what was chosen, what was limited, and what needs repair. Guard me from excuses and from self-contempt. Give me the next faithful step. Jesus, I trust in you. Amen.

Prayer for another person

Merciful Father, bless the person I have harmed or struggle to love. Protect their dignity and heal what I cannot heal. Teach me to act justly, ask forgiveness humbly, respect wise boundaries, and desire their true good. Amen.

Pastoral and Doctrinal Notes

Purpose and limits

This guide supports personal reflection. It cannot determine subjective culpability, diagnose ADHD, treat scrupulosity, or replace a priest's judgment in pastoral questions or a clinician's care.

Freedom and responsibility

CCC 1735–1737 explains that inadvertence, habit, psychological factors, and other conditions may affect responsibility, while foreseeable effects and negligence may still matter.

Mortal sin

CCC 1857–1860 teaches that grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent must coincide. Judgment about persons is entrusted to God's justice and mercy.

Confession

CCC 1455–1458 and 1491–1494 describe contrition, confession, absolution, satisfaction, the confession of remembered grave sins, and the value of confessing venial sins.

Precepts of the Church

CCC 2041–2043 describes the minimum obligations that nourish prayer, sacramental life, moral effort, and growth in love.

Local practice

Holy days, fasting disciplines, sacramental formulas, and pastoral customs can vary by place and circumstance. Follow the lawful guidance of your parish, diocese, and confessor.

Selected sources

- Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1422–1498; 1730–1742; 1846–1876; 2041–2043.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Penance resources and How to Go to Confession.
- Bulldog Catholic, A Detailed Catholic Examination of Conscience, Second Edition (consulted for high-level sequence and scope only).

Scripture references for prayer and reflection: Psalm 51; Luke 15:11–32; John 20:19–23; 2 Corinthians 5:17–20; 1 John 1:8–9.

Quick-Print Confession Card

Start. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It has been _____ since my last Confession. I have ADHD and may use this note.

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

For these and all my sins, I am sorry.

Penance: _____

One next step: _____

Remember. Be honest, be brief, ask for help if confused, receive mercy, and do the penance soon.