

Explaining What I Need

A self-advocacy collection for autistic, ADHD and disabled teenagers and adults — and the people supporting them.

15 packs · 60 pages · print at home

Written by someone with SEN, not about us.

[your shop name here]

What's Inside

Every pack works on its own. Start with whichever one matches the thing that's hardest right now — you don't have to work through it in order.

1. School and College	page 3
About Me sheet, adjustments checklist, meeting prep, scripts	
2. Work	page 7
How I work best, reasonable adjustments, manager conversations, scripts	
3. Health Appointments	page 11
Appointment prep, communication needs, notes, scripts	
4. Routine and Organisation	page 15
Daily plan, weekly grid, task breakdown, brain dump, energy	
5. Sensory and Regulation	page 20
Sensory profile, warning signs, toolkit, recovery	
6. Pocket Cards	page 24
Sixteen cut-out cards to carry	
7. Phone Calls, Forms, Admin	page 26
Call prep, call log, getting through a form, phone scripts	
8. My Support Records	page 30
Support team, appointment log, what's been agreed, the short version of me	
9. When Support Isn't Happening	page 34
The facts, the timeline, writing it up, escalating, scripts	
10. For Parents	page 39
Reading the signs, after school, questions for school, looking after yourself	
11. Job Hunting and Interviews	page 43
What I'm looking for, applications, interview prep, disclosure	
12. Burnout and Recovery	page 47
Early signs, where it's going, cutting back, getting back	
13. Money and Everyday Admin	page 51
Where money goes, key dates, the avoided pile, eating on a bad day	
14. People and Boundaries	page 55
What I need from people, saying no, is this good for me, masking	
15. Somewhere New	page 59
Before I go, going to look first, the first day, telling new people	

These sheets are tools for organising your own thinking and explaining your own needs. They are not medical, legal or educational advice. For SEND issues in England, SENDIASS gives free independent advice; Citizens Advice covers a wider range.

About Me

A one-page summary to give to a teacher, tutor, TA or SENCO. Fill it in once, photocopy it, hand it to anyone new.

My name, and what I'd like to be called

Things I'm good at

Things I find hard

What helps me

What doesn't help, or makes things worse

How you'll know I'm struggling

If I'm overwhelmed, the best thing you can do is

Adjustments That Would Help Me

Tick anything that applies. Take this to a review meeting so you're not trying to think of things on the spot.

In lessons

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Instructions given one at a time | ☐ Warning before a change of activity |
| ☐ Instructions written down as well as spoken | ☐ Permission to use headphones or ear defenders |
| ☐ Extra time to answer a question | ☐ Permission to fidget or stand |
| ☐ Not being asked to read aloud | ☐ A quiet place to work when needed |
| ☐ A seat near the front / near the door | ☐ Being allowed to type instead of handwrite |
| ☐ A printed copy of the slides | ☐ Checking I've understood, privately |

Around school / college

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ A card that lets me leave the room | ☐ A named person I can go to |
| ☐ Somewhere quiet at break and lunch | ☐ Advance notice of cover teachers |
| ☐ Leaving lessons a few minutes early | ☐ Support with unstructured time |

Anything else I need

If I could only have one of these, it would be

Getting Ready for a Meeting

For an annual review, parents' evening, EHCP meeting, or any conversation with staff about support.

Meeting with

Who, when, and what it's about.

The three things I most want to say

If the meeting goes badly or gets rushed, these are the ones that must be said.

What's been going well

What isn't working

What I'm asking for

NOTES DURING THE MEETING

Agreed next steps — and who is doing them

Things You Can Say

Ready-made sentences for when the words won't come. Say them, read them off the page, or send them as a message.

Asking for what you need

Can I have that written down as well, please? I lose spoken instructions.

I'm not being difficult — I process this more slowly. Can you give me a minute?

Could you tell me one step at a time rather than all of it at once?

I need to step out for five minutes. I'll come straight back.

When something isn't working

The arrangement we agreed isn't working for me. Can we look at it again?

I want to try, but the way it's set up at the moment makes it impossible for me.

That was agreed in my support plan. Can we make sure it's happening?

When you're overwhelmed

I can't talk about this right now. Can we come back to it later today?

I'm not upset with you. I've hit my limit and I need quiet.

How I Work Best

A one-pager for a manager or a new team. You choose how much to share — you don't have to name a diagnosis to ask for what helps.

What I'm good at, and what I bring to the team

How I like to receive instructions and information

Conditions I work best in

Things that make work harder for me

How to give me feedback so I can actually use it

Signs I'm struggling, and what helps

The best way to contact me

Adjustments I'm Requesting

Reasonable adjustments are a legal duty for employers in the UK under the Equality Act 2010. Tick what applies, then send it in writing.

How I work

- ☐ Written follow-up after verbal briefings
- ☐ Agenda circulated before meetings
- ☐ Notice before changes to my work
- ☐ Tasks given one at a time, prioritised
- ☐ Deadlines confirmed in writing
- ☐ Regular short check-ins
- ☐ Fewer unplanned interruptions
- ☐ Instructions broken into steps

Where and when I work

- ☐ Flexible start and finish times
- ☐ Some days working from home
- ☐ A quieter desk or workspace
- ☐ Permission to use noise-cancelling headphones
- ☐ Regular short breaks
- ☐ A quiet space to decompress
- ☐ Adjusted lighting at my desk
- ☐ Not being moved desks without notice

Other adjustments I need

Date requested / who I sent it to

Keep a copy. If an adjustment is agreed and then stops happening, having the date in writing matters.

Before I Talk to My Manager

For a disclosure conversation, a request for adjustments, or raising something that isn't working.

What I want out of this conversation

One clear outcome. Not everything at once.

What I'm going to say first

The problem, in practical terms

Describe the effect on the work, not the diagnosis. It's harder to argue with.

What I'm asking for, and why it will help

If they say no, my next step is

WHAT WAS AGREED, AND WHEN

Things You Can Say

For meetings, messages and the moments you get put on the spot.

Opening the conversation

I'd like to talk about a few things that would help me work more effectively. Do you have twenty minutes?

I'm disabled and there are some adjustments that would make a real difference. I've written them down.

I don't need to go into the medical side. I'd rather focus on what actually helps.

Asking for what you need day to day

Could you send that to me in a message as well? I'll lose it otherwise.

I need to check I've understood — can I read that back to you?

I can do that, but not today. Which of these would you like me to drop?

I'd rather give you a proper answer tomorrow than a rushed one now.

Holding your ground

That adjustment was agreed in writing. I'd like us to go back to it.

I understand it's difficult. Can we look at what would work instead?

Before My Appointment

Appointments are short and easy to lose control of. Fill this in beforehand and take it in with you.

Appointment with / date / time

The main thing I need to talk about

One sentence. This is the thing that must get said.

What's been happening, and for how long

How it's affecting my daily life

My questions

What I'm hoping to leave with

How to Communicate With Me

Hand this over at the start. It saves explaining yourself when you're already stressed.

My name, and what I'd like to be called

Things that help me in appointments

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Speak slowly and clearly | ☐ Tell me before you touch me |
| ☐ One question at a time | ☐ Warn me about noises or bright lights |
| ☐ Give me time to answer | ☐ Let me bring someone with me |
| ☐ Write down key information | ☐ Keep the door open / lights lower |
| ☐ Check I've understood | ☐ Send follow-up in writing, not by phone |

Things I find difficult

Communication I struggle with

For example: phone calls, open questions, being asked to rate things, long waits, eye contact.

If I go quiet or can't answer, it means

Who to contact if I can't communicate

During and After

Write things down in the room, or immediately outside it. Detail disappears fast afterwards.

WHAT I WAS TOLD

Words or terms I need to look up later

What happens next, and who is doing it

When I should hear something, and who to chase

Questions I forgot to ask

How I feel about how it went

Things You Can Say

Appointments move quickly. These are for when you need to slow one down.

At the start

I've written down what I need to cover, because I lose track when I'm anxious. Can I read it to you?

I find appointments hard. Could you speak a bit more slowly and check I'm following?

Before we start — I'd like to cover one main thing today.

When it's going too fast

Sorry, can we go back a step? I've lost the thread.

Could you write that down for me? I won't remember it accurately.

Can I say that back to you, to check I've understood?

I need a moment to think before I answer.

When you're not being heard

I don't feel we've covered the thing I came about. Can we come back to it?

I'd like this written in my notes, please.

What should I do if it gets worse before my next appointment?

My Day

Build the routine once, when you're calm. Then you don't have to work it out again on a hard day.

Morning

Middle of the day

Evening

The non-negotiables — the things that must happen even on a bad day

My Week at a Glance

One page, whole week. Fixed things in first, then everything else around them.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Things that must happen this week, whatever else does not

Big Task, Small Steps

For anything that feels too big to start. Break it down until the first step is small enough to be boring.

The task

Why it feels hard

Naming it helps. Too vague? Too many steps? A phone call involved? Don't know where to start?

The very first step — small enough to do in five minutes

Then

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

What I need before I can start

Information, a form, someone's permission, a quiet hour.

When I'll do the first step

Brain Dump, Then Pick Three

When everything is swirling: get it all out of your head first, then choose. Deciding and remembering at the same time is what makes it overwhelming.

Everything that's in my head right now

No order. No judging. Just get it down.

The three I'm actually doing today

Not today — and that's a decision, not a failure

Energy and Overwhelm

Track it for a couple of weeks and patterns show up that you can't see day to day.

Date

Energy today

Circle one.



Empty



Low



Okay



Good



Full

What filled me up today

What drained me

Warning signs I noticed

The early ones. Not the point where it's already too late.

What actually helped

One thing I'd change about tomorrow

My Sensory Profile

What's too much, what's not enough, and what actually helps. Fill it in over a few days rather than all at once.

Sound

TOO MUCH / TOO LITTLE

WHAT HELPS

Light and visual

TOO MUCH / TOO LITTLE

WHAT HELPS

Touch, clothing and texture

TOO MUCH / TOO LITTLE

WHAT HELPS

Smell and taste

TOO MUCH / TOO LITTLE

WHAT HELPS

Movement, balance and body

TOO MUCH / TOO LITTLE

WHAT HELPS

Temperature and pain

TOO MUCH / TOO LITTLE

WHAT HELPS

My Warning Signs

Overwhelm has stages. Knowing the early ones is what gives you time to do something about it.

Stage 1 — I'm fine, but something has started

Subtle. Easy to miss or talk yourself out of.

Stage 2 — I notice I'm struggling

Stage 3 — Other people can tell

Stage 4 — Past the point of choosing

The earliest sign I can realistically catch

This is the one to learn. Write it somewhere you'll see it.

What usually builds up before it happens

My Regulation Toolkit

Work this out on a calm day. In the moment, you won't be able to think of anything.

Things that reliably help me settle

Things that help within one minute

For when you're somewhere you can't leave.

Things that help when I've got longer

Things that seem like they should help but don't

What I need other people to do

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Stop talking to me | ☐ Take me somewhere quieter |
| ☐ Stay nearby but quiet | ☐ Don't ask me questions |
| ☐ Leave me completely alone | ☐ Don't touch me |
| ☐ Turn the lights down | ☐ Just tell me what happens next |

Afterwards

Recovery is a real stage, not weakness. Planning it in advance stops the guilt afterwards.

What I need in the first hour

What I need for the rest of the day

Things I should cancel or postpone without feeling bad about it

What I want to say to whoever was there

What I've learned about what set it off

Recovery often takes longer than the event itself. That is normal and it isn't a setback.

I NEED A MOMENT

I'm not being rude. I need a short break
and I'll come back.

PLEASE WRITE IT DOWN

I lose spoken information. Please write
down anything important.

I CAN'T SPEAK RIGHT NOW

I can still hear and understand you.
Please keep talking to me normally.

PLEASE SPEAK SLOWLY

One question at a time, and please give
me time to answer.

I NEED SOMEWHERE QUIET

I'm becoming overwhelmed. Please help me
find a quieter space.

PLEASE DON'T TOUCH ME

Not without asking first. It isn't
personal.

I'M PROCESSING

I've heard you. I need a few seconds
before I can answer.

PLEASE BE PATIENT

I have a disability that affects
communication. Thank you.

IF I'M OVERWHELMED

Please do this:

WHAT HELPS ME

PLEASE CONTACT

If I can't communicate, please contact:

NAME AND NUMBER

MY EXIT CARD

I'm using my agreed arrangement to leave the room.

AGREED WITH

I'M AUTISTIC

This affects how I communicate. It doesn't affect my understanding.

I HAVE ADHD

I may interrupt or lose the thread. I'm listening.

APPOINTMENT CARD

I find appointments hard. Please check I've understood.

MY NAME

MY OWN CARD

WRITE YOUR OWN

MY OWN CARD

WRITE YOUR OWN

Before I Make This Call

Phone calls are one of the most common things that get avoided until they become a crisis. Fill this in first and the call gets much shorter.

Who I'm calling, and the number

Any reference or account number I'll be asked for

The one sentence that explains why I'm calling

Write it out in full. You can read it straight off the page.

What I need from them

Questions I must ask before I hang up

If I get stuck, I will say

Best time to call / when I'll do it

During and After the Call

Write while you're on the phone. You will not remember it accurately ten minutes later.

Date, time, and who I spoke to

WHAT THEY SAID

Reference number they gave me

What they agreed to do, and by when

What I have to do next

If nothing happens by this date, I'll chase it

Always ask for the name of the person you spoke to and a reference number. It makes chasing far easier.

Getting Through a Form

Long forms aren't one task, they're forty. Treat them like it.

Which form, and the deadline

What I need to gather before I start

Documents, dates, names, letters, evidence.

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Sections — tick them off as you go

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Questions I'm stuck on

Who can help me with this, and how to reach them

Date sent, and how I sent it

Things You Can Say on the Phone

Read them straight off the page. Nobody can tell.

Starting the call

Hello — I need some help with something and I've written it down, so bear with me.

I have a disability that affects communication. Could you speak slowly and I may need extra time.

Before we start, could I take your name please?

When you need it to slow down

Sorry, could you repeat that? I'm writing it down.

Can I read that back to you to check I've got it right?

I need a moment to think. Please don't go.

Could you send that to me in writing as well?

Before you hang up

Can I have a reference number for this call?

What happens next, and when should I expect to hear?

If I haven't heard by then, who do I contact?

My Support Team

Everyone involved in your support, in one place. Useful when you're asked and can't think.

NAME AND ROLE	CONTACT DETAILS AND HOW OFTEN WE'RE IN TOUCH
NAME AND ROLE	CONTACT DETAILS AND HOW OFTEN WE'RE IN TOUCH
NAME AND ROLE	CONTACT DETAILS AND HOW OFTEN WE'RE IN TOUCH
NAME AND ROLE	CONTACT DETAILS AND HOW OFTEN WE'RE IN TOUCH
NAME AND ROLE	CONTACT DETAILS AND HOW OFTEN WE'RE IN TOUCH
NAME AND ROLE	CONTACT DETAILS AND HOW OFTEN WE'RE IN TOUCH

Appointment Log

A running record. Patterns and gaps become visible, and it's evidence if you ever need it.

DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT
DATE AND WHO WITH 	WHAT WAS AGREED / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

What's Been Agreed

Support and adjustments that were promised — and whether they're actually happening. Keep this one up to date.

Adjustment or support agreed

Who agreed it, when, and where it's written down

Is it actually happening?

- ☐ Yes, consistently
- ☐ It stopped
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ It never started

If it isn't happening — what I've done about it so far

Who I'll raise it with next, and by when

Date I raised it / what they said

The Short Version of Me

For when someone new needs the basics quickly. Keep a photo of this on your phone.

Name, date of birth, and what I'd like to be called

My diagnoses or the things I'm being assessed for

Things I take regularly

Allergies and things to avoid

The most important thing for someone new to know about me

Emergency contact

What's Actually Gone Wrong

Before you complain about anything, get the facts straight and separate them from how it feels. Both matter — but they do different jobs.

What was agreed, and where it's written down

A support plan, an EHCP, an email, minutes of a meeting.

What is actually happening instead

The effect this is having

Be specific and concrete. Missed lessons, lost work, health, refusal to attend.

Evidence I already have

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Emails | ☐ Meeting notes or minutes |
| ☐ Letters | ☐ Reports from professionals |
| ☐ The plan itself | ☐ My own diary or log |

Evidence I still need, and who has it

The Timeline

A dated record is the single most useful thing you can have. Fill in one line each time something happens, while it's fresh.

Record the date, who was involved, what happened, and what was said. Keep copies of everything. If something important was said out loud, email the person afterwards to confirm your understanding in writing — that turns a conversation into a record.

Writing It Up

A complaint that gets acted on is short, dated, factual, and asks for one specific thing. Draft it here first.

Who I'm writing to, and their role

Opening line — what this is about

One sentence. No history yet.

What was agreed, and when

What has happened instead — with dates

The effect it has had

What I want to happen now

Be specific. 'Better communication' is not actionable. 'Confirmation by Friday that X will restart from Monday' is.

The date I want a response by

If It Doesn't Get Fixed

Most systems have stages. Going through them in order is slower, but it's what makes the later stages work.

Stage 1 — the person directly involved

Stage 2 — their manager, or the head of department

Stage 3 — the formal complaints process

Stage 4 — external

Ombudsman, tribunal, regulator, or a professional body, depending on the situation.

Deadlines I need to be aware of

Who is supporting me with this

Free, independent advice exists and is worth using before you escalate. In England, SENDIASS covers education-related SEND issues, and Citizens Advice covers a wider range. Time limits for formal appeals can be short and vary by process, so check the current deadline early.

Things You Can Say

For the meetings and calls that happen along the way.

Making it a record

Could you confirm that in writing, please?

I'll email you a summary of what we've agreed, so we've both got the same version.

Can I ask that this is minuted?

When you're being managed rather than helped

I appreciate that, but it doesn't answer what I asked. Can we come back to it?

I understand there are pressures. I'm asking what will happen about the part that was agreed.

Who is the right person to take this to if it can't be resolved here?

What's the timescale, and what happens if that passes?

Staying steady

I'm not going to drop this, but I'm happy to work with you on it.

I need to stop here and come back to it when I've had time to think.

Reading the Signs

Behaviour is usually communication. This page is for working out what might sit underneath it — written from the inside, by someone who couldn't explain it at the time either.

What I'm seeing

When it happens — and what came immediately before

Look at the hour before, not the moment itself. The trigger is often earlier than it looks.

Things that are often underneath it

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Sensory overload building up | ☐ Not understanding what's expected |
| ☐ Too many instructions at once | ☐ Dreading something later |
| ☐ An unexpected change | ☐ Needing the loo but not saying |
| ☐ Hunger, thirst, tiredness, pain | ☐ A demand that felt impossible |
| ☐ Exhaustion from masking all day | ☐ Something that happened hours ago |

What I think is really going on

After School Is Different

A child who is calm at school and falls apart at home is not being difficult at home. They held it together all day and home is where it's finally safe to stop.

What the first hour home usually looks like

What helps in that first hour

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ No questions about the day | ☐ Being left alone |
| ☐ Food straight away | ☐ Being nearby without talking |
| ☐ Quiet and low light | ☐ Same routine every day |
| ☐ Screen time without guilt | ☐ No plans straight after school |

What makes it worse

When is the best time to actually talk to them

Often not face to face. In the car, on a walk, at bedtime, or side by side doing something else.

What I'll try this week

Questions Worth Asking the School

Take these to your next meeting. They're the ones that get useful answers rather than reassurance.

About the day itself

Worth asking: What does an unstructured time like break actually look like for them? Who do they go to when they're struggling, and do they know that? What happens when there's a cover teacher?

☐

☐

☐

About the support that's meant to be in place

Worth asking: Which adjustments are actually happening every day, not just written down? Who is responsible for each one? How would you know if one had quietly stopped?

☐

☐

☐

What I want to have agreed before I leave this meeting

Date, who was there, and what was agreed

Looking After Yourself

This part gets left out of every SEN resource, and it's the one that determines whether you can keep going.

What this is currently costing me

Time, work, sleep, money, other relationships, my own health.

What I've stopped doing that I want back

Who is actually helping me, and who only says they will

The one thing I'm going to ask someone else to take on

What I'd tell another parent in my position

You don't have to fight everything at once. Picking one thing and seeing it through usually achieves more than pushing on six fronts until you burn out.

What I'm Actually Looking For

Working this out first saves applying for jobs you couldn't hold down. The environment matters as much as the role.

The work itself — what I'm good at and want more of

Conditions I need to work well

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Quiet or low-noise environment | ☐ One task at a time |
| ☐ Predictable hours | ☐ Low-pressure phone use |
| ☐ Working from home some days | ☐ Short or flexible commute |
| ☐ Clear written instructions | ☐ A manager who checks in regularly |

Absolute dealbreakers

The things that would make the job impossible, however good the rest looks.

Things I can tolerate if the rest is right

Before I Apply

One sheet per job. Fills in the gap between reading an advert and having any idea what to write.

Job title, employer, and closing date

What they say they actually need

Pull out three or four things from the advert in plain words.

Where I match that — with a real example each time

Where I don't match, and what I'll say about it

What I need to check before applying

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Hours and pattern | ☐ What the environment is like |
| ☐ Location and commute | ☐ Whether the salary is stated |
| ☐ Whether it's really hybrid | ☐ Who I'd report to |

Interview Preparation

Write your answers out in full beforehand. You won't read them in the room, but having written them means they're there when you need them.

Tell me about yourself — my answer, written out

Why this job — my answer

A time I solved a problem — my example

A weakness, answered honestly but well

Questions I'm going to ask them

☐

☐

☐

Good ones to consider: What does a normal day look like? How does the team communicate day to day? What would you want me to have achieved after three months?

Whether and How to Tell Them

There's no single right answer. This is for thinking it through in advance rather than deciding under pressure in the room.

What I'd gain by telling them

What I'm worried about

What I actually need — and whether it needs a label attached

You can request an adjustment without naming a diagnosis. Sometimes that's easier.

My decision, and when I'll do it

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ On the application | ☐ After an offer |
| ☐ Before the interview | ☐ Once I've started |
| ☐ At the interview | ☐ Not at all for now |

How I'll word it

There are a couple of adjustments that help me work at my best — I'd rather mention them now.

I'm disabled. It affects how I take in information, not what I can do. Written instructions solve most of it.

Could you tell me a bit about the working environment? Noise levels and interruptions matter to me.

Am I Heading For It

Burnout builds slowly and is much easier to catch early. This is for noticing, not for diagnosing anything.

What I've noticed lately

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Everything takes longer than it used to | ☐ I'm sleeping badly or far too much |
| ☐ Skills I had have got harder | ☐ I've stopped doing things I enjoy |
| ☐ I'm avoiding things I used to manage | ☐ I feel flat rather than upset |
| ☐ I'm more sensitive to noise and light | ☐ Small decisions feel impossible |
| ☐ I can't face messages or the phone | ☐ I'm getting ill more often |

How long this has been building

What was happening when it started

What I'm still managing to do

Worth writing down. It's easy to lose sight of.

If this has been going on a long time, or you're struggling to function day to day, it's worth talking to your GP. Burnout and depression can look very similar from the inside and the difference matters for what helps.

Where It's Going

You can't fix the drain without knowing where it is. Be honest — this page is only for you.

What takes the most out of me

What I'm doing that I've never actually agreed to

What I'm doing to meet someone else's expectations

How much of my day is spent masking

What gives something back

Cutting Back

Recovery isn't rest on top of the same load. Something has to come off. Decide what, deliberately, rather than waiting until it collapses.

Stopping — completely, for now

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Pausing — coming back to it later

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Keeping — because it holds everything else up

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Who I need to tell, and what I'll say

Getting Back

Recovery is usually slower and less linear than you want it to be. Plan for that rather than being disappointed by it.

What a genuinely restful day looks like for me

Not what it's supposed to look like. What actually restores you.

The smallest sign that things are improving

What I'll do when I have a bad day mid-recovery

You will have them. It isn't going backwards.

What I need other people to do

What I'm going to do differently when I'm back

Where My Money Goes

Not a budget you have to stick to. Just a picture, so you know what you're dealing with.

Money coming in — and when

Things that go out automatically, and on what date

What's left after that

Where the rest tends to go

The thing I most want to change about this

Dates I Can't Miss

Set a phone reminder for each one, two days early. Then you never have to hold it in your head.

Rent or mortgage, bills, insurance renewals, subscriptions, appointments, benefit reviews, car tax and MOT, prescriptions.

The Things I'm Avoiding

Everyone has a pile. Writing it down is worse for about ten minutes and better thereafter.

What's in the pile

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Which one is quietly getting more expensive or more urgent

Why I'm avoiding it

A phone call? Not knowing what to say? Not having a document? Shame about how long it's been?

The smallest possible first step

Who could sit with me while I do it

Being in the same room as someone else while you do a hard task is a legitimate strategy, not a failure to manage alone.

Feeding Myself on a Bad Day

Plan the low-effort version in advance, so that on the day there's no decision to make.

Meals I can make with almost no energy

What I keep in for those days

Buy these when you're well. They're not a failure, they're infrastructure.

What stops me eating when things are bad

What has actually helped before

My shopping list, so I don't have to think in the shop

What I Need From People

Most friendship advice assumes everyone wants the same things. Work out what you actually want, then you can ask for it.

How I like to keep in touch

- ☐ Text or message, no rush to reply
- ☐ Voice notes
- ☐ Doing something side by side
- ☐ Long gaps are fine
- ☐ Regular, predictable contact
- ☐ Small groups, not big ones
- ☐ Talking about shared interests
- ☐ Phone calls are hard for me

What I find hard about friendships

What I bring to a friendship

What I'd like to be able to explain to people

Saying No

Saying no in the moment is much harder than saying it from a page you wrote earlier.

Things I say yes to and then regret

What usually makes me agree

Being put on the spot? Not wanting to disappoint? Not being sure it's allowed to say no?

Sentences I can use

I can't do that, but thanks for asking.

I need to check before I answer. I'll message you tonight.

That's not going to work for me this time.

I'd like to, but I don't have it in me this week.

No — but ask me again another time.

A no doesn't need a reason attached. Adding one invites negotiation.

Is This Good For Me

Worth checking now and then, particularly if you've been told you're 'too sensitive' about how someone treats you.

How I feel before I see them, and afterwards

Things I've noticed

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ I can be myself around them | ☐ I feel drained or worse |
| ☐ I mask the whole time | ☐ They make room for what I need |
| ☐ They accept a no | ☐ They make me feel difficult |
| ☐ They keep pushing after a no | ☐ I trust them with something real |
| ☐ I feel calmer afterwards | ☐ I'm careful what I say |

What I'd tell a friend who described this relationship to me

What I want to do about it

Masking

Masking is a skill and it's kept a lot of us safe. It also has a running cost, and it's worth knowing what yours is.

Where I mask most

What I'm doing when I mask

Forcing eye contact, copying expressions, suppressing movement, rehearsing sentences, hiding confusion.

What it costs me afterwards

Where I don't have to mask

If the answer is nowhere, that's important information.

One place I'd like to drop it a little

Before I Go

New places are hard mostly because of unknowns. Every question you answer in advance is one less thing to handle on the day.

Where I'm going, and when

What I need to find out first

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Exactly how I get there | ☐ Whether there's somewhere quiet |
| ☐ How long it takes | ☐ Who I'm meeting and their name |
| ☐ Where the entrance is | ☐ What happens when I arrive |
| ☐ Where the toilets are | ☐ How long I'll be there |
| ☐ What I'm supposed to wear | ☐ Whether there's food |

Who I can ask these questions

What I'm most worried about

Going to Look First

Visiting in advance, even standing outside for five minutes, removes a surprising amount of the difficulty.

Date and time I went

How I got there, and what the journey was like

What the place is actually like

Noise, lighting, smell, crowds, layout, exits.

Where I could go if I needed a minute

What I know now that I didn't before

The First Day

Decide it in advance, while you're calm, and follow it on the day without renegotiating.

What time I'm leaving, and what I'm taking

What I'll do in the first ten minutes

What I'll say if someone asks me something I can't answer

My plan if it gets too much

What I've deliberately left free afterwards

How it actually went

Telling New People About Me

The short version, for a new tutor, manager, keyworker or support worker. You choose how much of it to hand over.

What I want them to know first

How to give me information

What I'll find hard at the start

What will help me settle in

How I'd like them to check in with me

What I'd rather they didn't do
