A Guide For You

I.N. THERAPY BERKSHIRE
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, ASSESSMENT & SUPPORT

UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF BETTER

A practical psychological guide to understanding your patterns, needs and strengths

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There are lots of reasons why we might become curious about understanding ourselves a little better.

Perhaps certain parts of everyday life take more energy than they used to. You might be feeling more easily overwhelmed, noticing patterns that keep showing up, wondering about ADHD or autism, making sense of a diagnosis, navigating a period of change, or simply wanting to understand yourself better.

This guide isn't about finding something that needs to be fixed or changed.

It offers four psychological ideas that might help put language around experiences you already know well, or help you look at something familiar from a slightly different perspective.

Take what feels useful and leave the rest.

1 Your Capacity Can Change

Have you ever managed something relatively easily one day and found the very same thing much harder on another? Our capacity isn't fixed.

How much we have available can be affected by:

•Sleep • Stress • Physical health
• Hormones • Sensory demands
• Relationships • Work
• Caring responsibilities
• Decisions • Uncertainty
• How much we're already managing



Having the **ability** to do something doesn't mean having equal access to that ability in every moment.

You might enjoy socialising but find it takes much more energy after a demanding week.

You might usually manage a change of plan but find it much harder when you're already stretched.

Or a relatively small task might feel enormous when your brain is already holding twenty other things.

None of this takes away from what you are capable of.

It simply recognises that our capacity is affected by context.

WHEN YOUR SYSTEM IS MANAGING A LOT

Sometimes our brain and body give us signs that we're carrying a lot.
You might feel restless, tense, irritable, emotional, anxious or more sensitive to things around you.

At other times, you might feel exhausted, withdrawn, disconnected or find it difficult to get started.
What helps will be different for everyone.

It might be:
•Movement • Rest • Music • Time alone • Connection
• Being outdoors • Familiar routines • Interests
• Less sensory input • Fewer demands

Some people need movement while others need stillness. Some want connection while others need space. What helps you may also change depending on the day.

There isn't one right way to regulate.



2 Knowing Isn't Always the Same as Doing

Sometimes we can know exactly what needs to happen and still find it surprisingly difficult to get started, organise ourselves or follow something through.

An email stays unanswered.
An appointment slips your mind.
A small job remains on the list much longer than expected.
Or you become completely absorbed in one thing and find it difficult to shift your attention somewhere else.

One part of this can be **executive functioning.**

These are some of the skills our brains use to manage everyday life:
Starting • Planning • Organising • Prioritising • Remembering • Managing time • Shifting attention • Juggling demands • Adapting to change



Executive functioning differences are commonly associated with ADHD and can also be relevant for autistic people.

These skills can also be affected by stress, anxiety, sleep, hormones, burnout, physical health and simply having a lot to manage.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING ISN'T A MEASURE OF INTELLIGENCE, EFFORT OR HOW MUCH SOMETHING MATTERS TO YOU.

You may already use lots of things that support you:

- lists and reminders
- calendars and alarms
- routines
- deadlines
- working alongside someone else
- keeping important things where you can see them
- creating structure around tasks

These aren't shortcuts or things you should eventually manage without.
They are ways of creating conditions that work for your brain.

Your environment matters too

How we function isn't only about what is happening within us. You might thrive with clear expectations but find ambiguity tiring. You may concentrate brilliantly somewhere quiet but struggle with constant interruptions.

You might enjoy spending time with people one-to-one while finding larger groups take considerably more energy. Different environments place different demands on us.

Noticing where things feel easier can tell you something useful about the conditions that support you.

Finding What Works Is Often a Process

Not everything you try will work, and something that helps in one situation might not help in another.

That isn't failure.
It is information.

If a new routine, strategy, system or adjustment doesn't work as you hoped, it can tell you something useful about what you need.

Perhaps there were too many steps. The timing wasn't right. It required more energy than it saved. The environment made it difficult. Or it simply wasn't a good fit for you.

You can notice what happened, adapt something and try again.

Try ⇝ Notice ⇝ Learn ⇝ Adapt

Finding what works for you doesn't have to mean getting it right first time.

Sometimes the things that don't work give us some of the most useful information about what might.

3 Some Ways of Coping Take a Lot of Energy

We all develop patterns in how we navigate everyday life.

You might recognise things such as:

- managing for long periods and then needing significant recovery
- replaying conversations afterwards
- finding uncertainty uncomfortable
- relying on urgency to get started
- noticing other people's needs more easily than your own
- holding yourself to high standards
- needing to withdraw when things become too much

There can be many influences on these patterns, including personality, neurotype, relationships, experiences, responsibilities and the environments we live within.

Often, it is a mixture.

We don't need to analyse every response or find an explanation for everything we do.
Sometimes simply recognising: **"This is something I experience"** can help us understand ourselves with a little more compassion.

The energy involved in adapting

We all adapt ourselves to some extent depending on where we are and who we are with. For some people, particularly neurodivergent people, this can require significant energy. This might involve rehearsing conversations, consciously thinking about eye contact, monitoring how you're coming across, copying social behaviours, holding back natural movements, hiding confusion or pushing through sensory discomfort.

This is sometimes described as masking.

Some people immediately recognise themselves in this description. Others don't relate to the term at all.

It can be useful to notice that some places, situations and relationships allow you to feel more comfortable being yourself than others.

How much energy something requires matters, even when you appear to be managing it well.

4 See the Whole of Yourself

Understanding yourself isn't only about understanding the things that take effort or can feel challenging.

It also includes your humour, interests, relationships, knowledge, creativity, values, curiosity, passions and your individual way of experiencing and seeing the world.

You might be:
Curious • Creative • Compassionate • Analytical • Funny • Determined • Thoughtful • Observant • Loyal • Resourceful • Passionate • Honest • Imaginative • Independent

Or their strengths might look completely different.

Perhaps you notice details other people miss, become deeply knowledgeable about things that interest you, see unusual connections, bring warmth or humour to relationships, or care deeply about particular people, ideas or causes.

The things that bring you pleasure, comfort, fascination or joy have value because they matter to you.

Strengths don't cancel out the things you find difficult.

And finding some things difficult doesn't take away from your strengths.

Both are part of you.



What You Already Know About Yourself

If it feels useful, you might simply notice:

I seem to have more capacity when...

Things that tend to help when I'm overwhelmed or running low on energy are...

Something about myself that I value is...

You Don't Have to Have All the Answers

You might be wondering why something takes so much energy, why your capacity varies, whether you could be autistic or have ADHD, or why some situations seem much easier than others.
Or you may not be asking any of those questions.

You don't need to have everything figured out.

There can be many influences on how we think, feel and function, including the way our brain works, our experiences, relationships, physical health, responsibilities, environment and what is happening in our lives right now.

Psychologists sometimes use the word formulation for bringing these different pieces together.
A formulation isn't a diagnosis, and it isn't about finding a problem within you.

It is simply a way of developing a fuller understanding of your experiences within the context of your life.

You may already have spent years finding ways to navigate life, understanding yourself and working out what helps.
Sometimes psychology simply gives us additional language for things we already know and experience.

Sometimes recognising:
“That makes sense for me”
is enough.

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IF YOU'D LIKE

SOME SUPPORT EXPLORING THIS FURTHER

I'm Dr Emma Rigby, a Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist specialising in autism, ADHD and psychological wellbeing.

I offer **six-session psychology support for adults** who would value some individual space to better understand their experiences, patterns, strengths and needs.
You don't need a diagnosis or to be seeking one.
I also provide **autism and ADHD assessments for adults** where greater clarity around your individual profile may be helpful.



My approach is compassionate, individualised and neuroaffirming, with a focus on understanding you within the context of your life.

Find out more at I.N. Therapy Berkshire
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