

Flourish Worksheet: The Self-Punishment Trap

Fact Sheet WorkSheet

What Is the Self-Punishment Trap?

Self-punishment is the habit of withdrawing care from yourself when you are already struggling. Instead of responding to difficulty with support, you respond with restriction. For ADHD women, this creates a cycle where the brain that most needs stability and regulation receives the least.

How It Commonly Appears in ADHD Women

1

Executive Function Spiral

- Struggling with focus at work → skipping meals or water to "make up for it"
- Forgetting to respond to messages → deleting apps and cutting off social contact
- Having trouble with paperwork → working late into the night without breaks

2

Emotional Overwhelm

- Having a strong emotional reaction → denying yourself activities that bring joy
- Crying in public → convincing yourself you are "too sensitive" and don't deserve compassion
- Feeling jealous → avoiding relationships that usually support you

3

Daily Functioning Failures

- Dishes piling up → deciding you don't deserve to eat properly
- Arriving late to a child's event → refusing to rest afterward
- Overspending → forcing yourself to sleep uncomfortably

4

Masking Breakdown

- Struggling to keep up appearances → labeling yourself as lazy and removing comforts
- Asking for accommodations → weeks of doubting yourself and withholding care

Impact on the ADHD Brain

When care is withdrawn, the ADHD nervous system shifts into survival mode.

What the brain needs:

- consistent fuel
- breaks
- rest
- comfort
- emotional safety

What self-punishment provides:

- stress hormones
- fatigue
- shame
- reduced executive function



This makes it harder to regulate, focus, and recover from mistakes.



The Flourish Approach



♥ Self-Compassion

Notice when the reflex to punish begins.

Remind yourself: "Being harsh with myself does not improve my functioning."



🧠 Self-Awareness

Track patterns:

- When does the shift into punishment happen?
- What do you usually take away from yourself?
- How does your body feel when you are in punishment mode compared to care mode?



⚖️ Self-Accommodation

Instead of demanding that you manage without support, acknowledge your brain's needs.

Plan for recovery time, build in backup systems, and allow extra room for tasks that are consistently difficult.



🗣️ Self-Advocacy

Challenge the voice that says care must be earned. Practice saying:

- To yourself: "I need more care when I'm struggling, not less."
- To others: "I'm working on keeping my self-care steady, even during hard times."



🌱 Self-Care

Care is not a reward. It is a baseline requirement for an ADHD brain.

Food, rest, hydration, comfort, and connection remain necessary whether you are performing well or not.

Building a New Response System

When struggle begins:

1

Pause Before Punishing:

"What am I about to deny myself?"

2

Reject Punishment Logic:

"Struggling does not cancel out my right to care."

3

Assess Needs:

"What would help me reset right now?"

4

Advocate:

"I need to maintain care, not withdraw it."

5

Provide Care:

Choose something supportive and follow through.

Why This Matters

Old belief: "If I punish myself, I'll improve."

Reality: Punishment lowers executive function and increases emotional distress.

Old belief: "I have to earn care through good behavior."

Reality: Consistent care is necessary for any functioning at all.

Old belief: "I have to earn care through good behavior."

Reality: Consistent care is necessary for any functioning at all.





Reflection + Practice

Identify Your Pattern:

One common way I punish myself when I'm struggling is:

- ☐ Skipping meals
- ☐ Working without breaks
- ☐ Isolating myself
- ☐ Negative self-talk
- ☐ Denying rest
- ☐ Other: _____

Interrupt It:

A phrase I can use to stop that reflex is:

- ☐ "I need care most when I'm struggling"
- ☐ "Punishment doesn't help me function better"
- ☐ "My ADHD brain requires consistent support"
- ☐ "I deserve compassion when I'm having a hard time"
- ☐ Other: _____

Choose Care Instead:

When I notice punishment starting, one small act of care I will practice is:

- ☐ Drinking water
- ☐ Taking a 5-minute break
- ☐ Speaking kindly to myself
- ☐ Reaching out to a supportive person
- ☐ Eating a nourishing snack
- ☐ Other: _____

Experiment This Week:

I will give myself the same level of care on hard days and good days. I will notice how this affects:

My functioning: _____

My mood: _____

My ability to recover from mistakes:



Flourish Intention

This week, one way I will maintain care for my ADHD brain is:

- ☐ Consistent meal times
- ☐ Regular breaks during work
- ☐ Daily movement
- ☐ Adequate sleep
- ☐ Hydration throughout the day
- ☐ Positive self-talk practice
- ☐ Connection with supportive people
- ☐ Other: _____

I commit to maintaining this care regardless of how I perform or feel.