

SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR VULNERABLE CLIENTS

NEURODIVERGENCE IN FOCUS

INTRODUCTION

Montrose Health Group is a CQC regulated private healthcare service specialising in the treatment of addiction, mental health and neurodiversity for individuals aged 7+.

We provide a discreet, one client at a time service, treating UK-based and international clients. Delivered in a compassionate and supportive environment, our unique approach offers each client a tailored experience designed to meet their specific needs and desired outcomes. Our goal is to consistently deliver gold-standard care that enhances wellbeing and promotes longevity.

This guide has been developed to support lawyers in managing the challenges that can arise when working with clients who may be vulnerable or neurodiverse. It offers practical strategies and considerations to help legal professionals navigate complex situations with greater sensitivity, awareness, and effectiveness. By providing clear guidance, the resource aims to promote more inclusive practices, strengthen client relationships, and ensure that all individuals are able to engage meaningfully in the legal process.

ADHD is defined as a neurodevelopmental syndrome with diverse presentations, a deeply studied neurobiological background, and three subtypes: Inattentive (20%–30% of cases), hyperactive-impulsive (15%) and combined (50%–75%) (NICE, 2024). In 2023, ADHD was the second most frequently viewed health condition on the NHS website (Gregory, 2024). In the UK, it is estimated that 3–4% of adults have ADHD, with a male-to-female ratio of about 3:1 (NICE, 2024).

Introduction to ADHD

(Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)

Dr Martha Harrison - Clinical Psychologist

Traits of ADHD?

There are three main presentations: inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive, or combined.

People with inattentive-type ADHD might struggle to hold focus, but they can also experience intense periods of hyperfocus; becoming absorbed in something for hours at a time.

The hyperactive-impulsive type might present with high energy, restlessness, fidgeting, constant movement, and a fast-flowing stream of words (the “can talk underwater” kind of vibe).

It's true, ADHD can bring challenges, especially in environments that aren't built for brains like this. But alongside the difficulties, ADHDers are people who are vibrant, deeply creative, intuitive, entrepreneurial, and wired for innovation.

How can ADHD be supported?

The goal of treatment is to bring balance to the brain—supporting the nervous system, improving focus, and calming the internal noise.

Medication is often the first-line treatment, with both stimulant and non-stimulant options available. These medications work (broadly) by increasing levels of dopamine and norepinephrine, which in turn improves executive functioning and reduces hyperactivity. Around 70–80% of people see a noticeable benefit from medication—but as always, it's important to talk with their doctor about potential side effects and whether it's the right fit for them.

Lifestyle approaches are also a huge part of the picture. Exercise, good sleep hygiene, and a balanced diet aren't just “nice to have”, they're essential for supporting a neurodivergent brain. High-protein meals (especially in the morning) can stabilise blood sugar and support neurotransmitter production. Amino acids (from protein) are literally the building blocks of dopamine.

There's also growing evidence for cold water therapy. Studies suggest that cold exposure can increase dopamine by around 250% and norepinephrine by up to 530%—with effects that can last for hours. Ice baths aren't for everyone, and need to be introduced gently, but for many, they offer a powerful way to naturally boost focus and mood. Think of it as part of your holistic toolkit, a way of working with your neurotype rather than against it.

We can also provide coaching and therapy to support and manage ADHD symptoms. Our expert coaches will tailor the programme to support your individual needs.

Understanding Neurodivergence & ADHD

Camila Gutiérrez - Meditation and Mindfulness Coach

Neurodiversity, neurodivergent, neurotypical? Nowadays there is a wide variety of concept that relate to the experience of having a 'different' mind. Language creates reality; therefore, it is vital to have clarity of concepts so we can communicate effectively and relate to the neurodiversity paradigm and ADHD experience in a better manner. Dr. Walker's definitions (Walker, 2021) give us a clear picture of concepts:

- **Neurodiversity:** "... is the diversity of human minds, the infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species." (Walker, 2021). The concept is a biological fact, used to describe a group of people composed of different neurotypes. Neurodivergent people + neurotypical people = neurodiverse group.

- **Neurodivergent:** "... means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal'." (Walker, 2021). It is the term commonly used to refer to the ADHD or autistic experience. Yet, neurodivergence is an umbrella term which encompasses not only autism or ADHD, but also dyslexia, dyspraxia, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), synaesthesia, and many more.

- **Neurotypical:** "... means having a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of 'normal'." (Walker, 2021), i.e., the most repeated neurocognitive pattern in society or the one defined as 'normal'. It is important to highlight that neurotypical does not mean non-ADHD or non-autistic.

Under these definitions, all people with ADHD are neurodivergent (not neurodiverse), but not all neurodivergent individuals are an ADHDer.

It is important to recognise that ADHD has historically been defined by the medical field, specifically by psychiatry, meaning that has been chronically pathologized. It has been treated as a 'condition', 'abnormal' and seen through a deficit lens. Nevertheless, the neurodiversity movement advocates for inclusion and normalisation of neurodivergent individuals, treating neurodivergence as another way of being, understanding, and processing life, focusing more on strengths rather than deficits.

Common Challenges ADHD Clients May Experience

Camila Gutiérrez - Meditation and Mindfulness Coach

The ways in which ADHD presents are as varied as the individuals who live with it. Each person will have distinctive features in terms of challenges and strengths. Even so, there are shared experiences that many with ADHD can recognise.

Impulsivity: it may appear in the form of interrupting conversations, impatience, and reckless behaviours such as dangerous driving, compulsive spending, gambling and overworking.

Inattentiveness: it can be less evident to others, experienced as constant zoning out while listening, reading, or doing tasks, getting lost in thoughts and daydreaming. It also involves forgetfulness, missing small details, misplacing or losing objects, and careless mistakes.

Hyperactivity: it is often experienced as restlessness, moving in one's seat, fidgeting, or an uneasy feeling when still for a period. Moreover, mental hyperactivity can be present with racing and disorganised thoughts.

Executive functioning: struggles with planning, prioritising and organising; feeling overwhelmed and frozen when choosing between multiple options; inability to initiate a task, or to create and maintain routines, and procrastination.

Emotional dysregulation: people may be seen as irritable or quick-tempered, impatient, easily frustrated, and have difficulty recovering from emotional states.

Perhaps even more important than the challenges, are the strengths. ADHD individuals tend to be creative, innovative, spontaneous, and display problem-solving abilities and out-of-the-box thinking (Oxford CBT, 2024), characteristics quite helpful when working and facing difficulties. The hyperfocus state is also common, meaning an extreme fixation on one activity or theme, particularly with new and motivating experiences/jobs/hobbies, making ADHDers fast learners and well-versed in topics they are passionate about.

Understanding How ADHD Affects Legal Engagement

Montrose Health Group - ADHD Team

Legal settings are often structured, high-pressure environments filled with jargon, strict timelines, and long documents. These conditions can unintentionally disadvantage clients with ADHD. Below are key areas affected:

Attention and Focus

Clients may:

- Zone out during long explanations or interviews
- Struggle to follow multi-part instructions
- Skip over key sections of legal documents
- Appear distracted or disengaged (even if they are trying to focus)

This is not disinterest—it is often a neurological difficulty in maintaining attention, particularly during tasks that lack immediate rewards or emotional engagement.

Memory and Recall

ADHD impacts both working memory (holding information in mind briefly) and prospective memory (remembering to do something in the future). Clients may:

- Forget appointments or deadlines
- Fail to follow through on agreed tasks
- Misplace important documents
- Ask the same question multiple times

Executive Functioning

Executive functions are the brain's management tools—used for planning, initiating, sequencing, and completing tasks. ADHD clients may:

- Avoid or procrastinate complex paperwork
- Miss deadlines despite good intentions
- Struggle to organize their case materials or tell their story coherently

This often appears as disorganisation or irresponsibility, but is actually the result of real cognitive barriers.

Time Perception ("Time Blindness")

Many individuals with ADHD have difficulty estimating time, prioritizing long-term outcomes, or anticipating how long something will take. They may:

- Seem indifferent to time limits or urgent instructions
- Arrive late or submit documents past deadlines
- Have difficulty engaging with future-focused legal arguments (e.g. consequences of a plea or settlement)

Impulsivity and Decision-Making

Clients with ADHD may:

- Agree to terms without reading or fully understanding
- Withdraw instructions or change course unexpectedly
- Respond emotionally rather than rationally under pressure

Impulsivity can be particularly dangerous in legal contexts where long-term consequences hinge on a single, rushed decision.

Emotional Regulation

ADHD clients may display:

- Frustration, shutdown, or anger in stressful moments
- Difficulty tolerating ambiguity or conflict
- Outbursts that appear disproportionate to the situation

This can lead to unfair perceptions of being "difficult," "uncooperative," or "untrustworthy," when in fact the behaviour reflects emotional dysregulation—not intent.

Communication Best Practices

Kiran Tabasum - Physician Assistant: ADHD

In legal practice, these traits can create challenges in communication and engagement. Lawyers who understand these dynamics and adapt their approach can build trust, reduce misunderstandings, ensure clients remain organised and informed throughout the legal process.

When working with clients who have ADHD, clear and accessible communication is essential. Use straightforward, jargon-free language, break complex concepts into manageable steps, and provide written summaries with outlined next actions.

Encourage clients to repeat key points to ensure understanding. Structured case management supports organisation and accountability. Set clear expectations for responsibilities, deadlines, and communication, and provide timely reminders for appointments or deadlines. Digital tools such as calendars, task lists, or client portals can enhance organisation and clarity.

Meetings should be focused and time-limited, with schedules shared in advance. For longer sessions, include brief breaks to help maintain attention. Decision-making is best supported with visual aids like charts or checklists, and clients should have time to process information thoughtfully.

Document and information management should prioritise clarity. Organise materials into clearly labelled sections, highlight urgent items, and emphasise deadlines to prevent overwhelm.

Patience, empathy, and professionalism are crucial. View mistakes in organisation and time management as symptoms of ADHD rather than intentional behaviour. Approach setbacks with problem-solving strategies, adapt systems to client strengths, and maintain a supportive tone to reinforce trust and engagement.

Relationship Management

Kiran Tabasum - Physician Assistant: ADHD

For clients with ADHD, relationship management requires added patience, consistency, and awareness. Their needs may vary day to day, and their behaviour can sometimes be misunderstood as evasive, careless, or oppositional when it is, in fact, a neurological response to stress or overwhelm.

Building and maintaining strong relationships with clients who have ADHD requires purposeful communication, empathy, and structure. Clear expectations at the onset regarding responsibilities, deadlines, and preferred communication methods help establish trust and prevent misunderstandings. Regular check-ins, reminders, and written summaries reinforce these expectations and help clients stay organised and stay on track.

Active listening and patience are critical components of relationship management. Clients may experience frustration, anxiety, or become overwhelmed when confronted with legal complexities or tight deadlines. Lawyers should respond with understanding, validating concerns while offering practical solutions. Encouraging clients to ask questions, share feedback, and clarify points fosters collaboration and ensures they feel heard and supported.

Flexibility in approach further enhances relationship management. Breaking tasks into manageable steps, using visual aids, and adapting communication style to client needs can reduce confusion and increase engagement. Recognising and leveraging a client's strengths—such as creativity, problem-solving skills, or energy—can also enhance confidence and participation in the legal process.

Ultimately, effective relationship management combines professional structure with empathy. By creating a supportive, organised, and communicative environment, lawyers can foster trust, maintain engagement, and guide clients through legal matters with clarity and confidence.

Structuring Meetings

Montrose Health Group - ADHD Team

For clients with ADHD, traditional legal meetings can feel overwhelming, disorganised, or difficult to follow. Small adjustments in how meetings are structured can make communication clearer, reduce stress, and build trust.

Key Principles

- Clarity over length: Shorter, focused sessions are often more effective than long, detail-heavy meetings.
- Predictability: A clear agenda helps clients prepare mentally and reduces anxiety about “what’s coming next.”
- Flexibility: Allow space for questions, digressions, or repetition without judgment.

Practical Strategies

Set Expectations in Advance

- Send a written agenda beforehand that outlines the topics to cover.
- Highlight the most time-sensitive issues at the top of the list.
- Let clients know the estimated length of the meeting.

Use Structure During the Meeting

- Begin with a brief recap of where things stand.
- Work through the agenda in small, manageable chunks.
- Periodically check in: “Does this make sense so far?” or “Should we pause here before moving on?”

Support Attention and Memory

- Encourage note-taking (or provide written notes afterward).
- Use visuals—timelines, flowcharts, or checklists—when explaining processes.
- Summarise decisions and next steps verbally and in writing.

Adapt Timing and Environment

- Offer shorter sessions with breaks instead of one long block.
- Be mindful of sensory factors (e.g., minimise distractions in the meeting room or during video calls).

Follow-Up and Reinforcement

- Send a concise written summary after the meeting, focusing on action items and deadlines.
- Where appropriate, break tasks into smaller steps and confirm who is responsible for what.

Example in Practice

Instead of scheduling a two-hour case review, you might:

Break it into two 45-minute sessions on different days.

Share an agenda like: “1) Review documents received, 2) Decide on filing deadline, 3) Confirm client’s tasks.”

After the meeting, email a one-page summary with bullet points of next steps.

By building meetings this way, you’re not lowering expectations—you’re ensuring your client has the tools to engage fully, make informed decisions, and feel respected in the process.

Being Trauma-Informed

Dr Mike Heaver - Clinical Psychologist

One of the most important aspects of being trauma-informed is recognising that each person's experience is unique. For example, just like someone with ADHD may face challenges that differ greatly from others with the same diagnosis, the same can be said for those who have had traumatic experiences. This can mean therefore that a "one-size-fits-all" approach is not necessarily the most effective way to work with someone, even if at the same time there can be overlapping themes of experience for those people with these conditions.

It is also essential to hold in mind how trauma can intersect with and exacerbate ADHD symptoms (or other conditions of neurodiversity) and vice versa. Thus, a person-centred approach is crucial when working with this client group. For any professional or legal representative working with those clients it can be important to remain curious, ask thoughtful questions, and allow space to explore whether their trauma and/or ADHD has created any specific and idiosyncratic difficulties during legal proceedings.

Trauma-informed practice is an approach to health and care interventions which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development (Gov.UK, 2022)

6 Key Principles

Safety

It is essential to ensure that individuals with trauma feel both psychologically and physically safe. This involves communicating clearly, putting appropriate arrangements in place to ensure safety, and being mindful that certain environments could be triggering. In the legal system clients may feel particularly exposed, and for those who have also experienced trauma this may lead to increased feelings of shame and guilt, and other emotions such as depression and anxiety. This can manifest at times by making people appear more guarded, avoidant, disassociated, or reluctant to share information. While this might be misinterpreted as non-compliance or dis-interest, it is often a reflection of their experiences of trauma and stress, and what is needed is compassion, greater sensitivity, and support.

Trustworthiness

The importance of building a positive and trusted relationship with the client who has ADHD and/or trauma is essential. This will hopefully enable them to feel secure, contained and supported. This can be aided as far as possible by being consistently candid and transparent with them, checking in with them to ensure they understand what is being communicated, and avoiding the urge to either dismiss or overpromise. If this clarity and candour is lacking, this can create too much space for possible misunderstanding and (mis)interpretation for the client, thus increasing their stress levels and anxiety. Clear communication is critical. Above all, listening to the client and demonstrating reliability helps foster a sense of safety and trust.

Being Trauma-Informed

Dr Mike Heaver - Clinical Psychologist

Choice

It is important to recognise that clients have likely experienced a lack of control and/or autonomy in their lives - particularly in relation to their traumatic experiences. This experience can then be re-experienced and even exacerbated for people when they are involved within legal proceedings. This again, at times can inhibit the development of a constructive working relationship. This sense of limited agency can stem from a protective need to stay and feel safe, and can present as guardedness, avoidance, or an apparent reluctance to engage. By providing clients with options and choices where possible and appropriate, explaining procedural steps clearly, and respecting their autonomy in decision-making, legal professionals can help mitigate some of these feelings of disempowerment. Facilitating the conditions to help your clients to feel heard and strengthen their capacity to have 'some' (choice even if this is limited), not only strengthens trust but also contributes to fairer and more effective participation in the legal process.

Cultural

Trauma can be experienced differently not only for individuals, but also for communities. For some clients with ADHD, this can include having had repeated negative experiences in educational and work settings, and difficulties within interpersonal relationships. Other cultural and identity-related factors, such as religion, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, class, or community background, may also shape how trauma and/or ADHD is experienced and indeed expressed by the individual. Thus, it is vital to hold an impartial and curious position that remains mindful of these wide-ranging cultural considerations, whilst avoiding assumptions. Instead, it is prudent to approach each client with openness and sensitivity to their unique context.

Empowerment

Focus on validating clients' experiences in a meaningful way, move beyond general statements or platitudes to truly acknowledge and hear their perspective. Empowerment involves actively listening, encouraging clients to participate in decision-making, and providing them with practical tools. An example is discussing the pros and cons of different options to help them make informed choices. Since individuals who have experienced trauma and/or have ADHD may struggle at times to process and retain information, it is important to check understanding and revisit key points where necessary.

Collaboration

Create genuine opportunities for mutual involvement and shared decision-making. This means seeking out and valuing the client's voice in a way that is not tokenistic but heard, respected, and acted upon meaningfully. Collaboration requires meeting clients where they are, allowing space for them to share their experiences - without expecting them to take on the role of "patient" or requiring therapeutic disclosure. It also includes making reasonable adjustments and recognising limitations, as well as holding in mind strengths and skills. To help build collaboration practice with open mindedness, compassion, kindness, and thoughtfulness. Processing speed, working memory, and executive functioning can be significantly impacted for clients with ADHD and/or those who may carry traumatic memories, thus it may be helpful to break down information into digestible and manageable parts, ensuring that communication is clear and supportive rather than overwhelming. Again, checking in with client regarding their ability to not only understand information, but also retain information is vital. It can be helpful to vary the mode of communication as some people may respond better to written material, whilst other may be able to process verbal information easier, for many a combination of the two may be the best option.

OUR ADHD ASSESSMENT JOURNEY

Our ADHD and Mental Health Outpatient Clinic is specifically designed for adults and adolescents aged 13+ seeking fast, responsive access to a private ADHD clinic in both London and Sheffield. Our clinics offer a safe, confidential space for ADHD assessments, mental health evaluations, and ongoing outpatient treatment.

As a CQC-regulated provider, we are committed to delivering gold-standard care through our highly qualified team of psychiatrists, psychologists, specialist nurses, and therapeutic practitioners.

Telephone Triage

A friendly screening to understand your needs, history, and immediate concerns.

ADHD Assessment (In-Person or Online)

A combination of clinical interview, self-report scales and cognitive testing ensures accuracy and clarity

Comprehensive Feedback Session

You'll receive a full feedback report unpacking strengths, diagnostic clarity, and potential comorbidities

Tailored Treatment Plan

Including evidence-based medication options, therapeutic support, coaching, family guidance, and lifestyle recommendations.

Ongoing Support

Continuum of care, supporting you post assessment.

Expert-led, CQC-regulated care

Our multidisciplinary team delivers compassionate, one-to-one support in our Sheffield clinic and via in person or online appointments.

Robust diagnostic framework

We utilise gold-standard diagnostic tools and neuropsychological screening to ensure a well-rounded understanding of your profile.

Personalised outcomes

Beyond diagnosis, our pathway includes outpatient monitoring, medication initiation in line with NICE guidelines, and a tailored transition plan to shared-care with your NHS GP when appropriate.

Referring a client with ADHD to additional professional services can be a critical step in ensuring they receive the holistic support they need—especially when their condition impacts their ability to engage effectively in the legal process.

Referrals are not about passing responsibility, they are about strengthening client support and ensuring informed, voluntary, and effective participation in legal matters.

OUR ADHD THERAPEUTIC SERVICES

ADHD Coaching

Camila Guitierz, ADHD and Mindfulness Coach – Montrose Health Group

To help you understand your ADHD, harness your strengths and work with your challenges, by building sustainable strategies in areas like time management, focus, emotional regulation, executive functions and self-esteem. We take a deep dive into your ADHD profile, life history, challenges, and goals. By co-creating your coaching roadmap, we can accurately focus on personal goals and arising challenges and enable you to select a focus area each week. We also incorporate different strategies, such as mindfulness and CBT techniques, as well as Use of tools: visual planners, time estimation exercises, body-doubling, strategies, nervous system regulation techniques to help you understand your own ADHD.

Psychotherapy

Steve Styan, Psychotherapist – Montrose Health Group

Create a shared understanding through a formulation road map and understand the difficulties clients have faced in the past, the present and perhaps the future. This brings together a clearer understanding of the client's physical, emotional and cognitive challenges. Which can often be seen through trauma. We can help heal his trauma through emotional processing, validation and cognitive restructuring, building coping skills, establishing trust, healing the nervous system and creating a new narrative.

Art Psychotherapy

Katya Somers, Art Psychotherapist – Montrose Health Group

Pure Art Psychotherapy uses a psychodynamic approach to exploring difficult thoughts and feelings when sometimes words can be too hard, possibly due to traumatic experiences or underlying neurodiversity or both.

It's a gentler yet effective non-direct treatment and you don't need to be good at art to engage in this treatment just willing to use the materials and be ready, willing and able to engage in treatment. Using art materials can also reveal unconscious material which within a safe therapeutic relationship the client might choose to explore. Or not. They are firmly in the driving seat.

I also like to use different trauma treatments and some low level cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) but especially Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) alongside this. These treatments are direct, and I find the combination of non-direct and direct can fast track duration in treatment and offers a more integrative approach.

Clinical Psychology

Dr Mike Heaver, Clinical Psychology

I provide formulation led integrated ADHD/Neurodiversity psychological coaching and support. My work is underpinned by the neurodiversity affirmative model and includes psychological coaching for people at the pre and post diagnostic stages of their ADHD journey, and also for those people who either decide not to be formally assessed; or those who do not meet the clinical criteria for a full diagnosis. I can provide neurodiversity workplace consultation and training to individuals and organisations to ensure compassion and inclusivity for people with ADHD/Neurodiversity and to understand how both context and environment can both positively or negatively impact upon them.

Psychology and Psychiatrist Intervention and Assessment

If the assessing clinician determines that further investigation is needed to explore potential underlying conditions—such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other mental health concerns—we can provide additional assessments to gain a clearer understanding.

Medication

Once assessed, the client may wish to seek a medication pathway to manage and stabilise their symptoms. We offer a robust medication optimisation pathway, enabling clients to access medication in a safe, yet timely manner, following NICE guidelines in line with us as a gold-standard practice.

If medication is initiated, it will be monitored and stabilised by the prescribing clinician for a period of up to 6 months prior to a potential referral back to client GP. Medication can be prescribed within 4 weeks following official diagnosis.

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