



PINCH

ADHD Motivational System

A Guide to Understanding ADHD Motivation

What is the PINCH System?

The PINCH system helps explain why people with ADHD struggle with motivation for some tasks but excel at others. Dr. William Dodson originally identified these core motivators with the acronym ICNU, but it has since been popularized as PINCH, a more memorable acronym.

The key insight: ADHD brains have an "interest-based nervous system" rather than an "importance-based nervous system." This means you're motivated by what's personally engaging rather than what others say is important.

The Five PINCH Motivators

- P – Passion & Play
- I – Interest
- N – Novelty
- C – Competition/Challenge
- H – Hurry (Urgency)

P - Passion & Play

Engaging in activities that are enjoyable and intrinsically motivating.

What this looks like:

- Tasks feel fun or personally meaningful

This handout is for educational purposes. For personalized strategies, consult with an ADHD specialist or executive function coach.



- You can add humor, games, or creativity
- You genuinely care about the outcome

How to use it:

- Turn boring tasks into games ("How fast can I sort these papers?")
- Pair unpleasant tasks with something you enjoy (music, favorite snacks)
- Find personal meaning in required tasks

I - Interest

Focusing on tasks that are inherently fascinating and captivating.

What this looks like:

- You naturally want to learn more about the topic
- You find yourself getting absorbed in the details
- The subject connects to your existing interests

How to use it:

- Look for connections between boring tasks and your interests
- Research the "why" behind assignments to spark curiosity
- Ask questions that make the task more interesting to you

N - Novelty

Seeking out new, shiny, and exciting experiences to maintain engagement.

*This handout is for educational purposes. For personalized strategies,
consult with an ADHD specialist or executive function coach.*



What this looks like:

- New experiences feel energizing
- You get excited about trying different approaches
- Routine tasks become harder over time

How to use it:

- Change your environment (different room, coffee shop, outdoors)
- Try new methods or tools for familiar tasks
- Rotate between 60-100 different techniques so old ones feel new again

C - Competition/Challenge

Adding an element of competition, working cooperatively, or turning tasks into challenges to make them more engaging.

What this looks like:

- You perform better when there's something to "win"
- Working with others energizes you
- You rise to meet difficult goals

How to use it:

- Set personal challenges ("Can I finish this in 20 minutes?")
- Work alongside others (body doubling)

*This handout is for educational purposes. For personalized strategies,
consult with an ADHD specialist or executive function coach.*



- Create friendly competition with friends or family
- Gamify tasks with point systems or rewards

H - Hurry (Urgency)

Completing tasks under time pressure to create a sense of urgency.

What this looks like:

- You work best under deadline pressure
- Last-minute energy helps you focus
- Without deadlines, tasks feel endless

How to use it:

- Create artificial deadlines before real ones
- Use timers to create time pressure
- Break large projects into smaller urgent chunks
- Schedule accountability check-ins

Why Traditional Motivation Doesn't Work

Unfortunately, most societal systems, including schools and workplaces, operate on an importance-based model. This often leads to tension and burnout for ADHDers, as the misalignment between our natural motivators and societal expectations creates significant stress.

Importance-based thinking says: "You should do this because it's required/responsible/good for you."

*This handout is for educational purposes. For personalized strategies,
consult with an ADHD specialist or executive function coach.*



Interest-based thinking says: "I can do this when it connects to my PINCH motivators."

The Key Question

Dr. Dodson asks his ADHD clients: "If you could get engaged and stay engaged, has there ever been anything you couldn't do?" The majority respond with: "If I can get engaged, I can do anything."

The challenge isn't ability—it's engagement. Once you understand your PINCH motivators, you can work WITH your brain instead of against it.

Quick PINCH Assessment

For each current challenge in your life, ask:

- Passion/Play: How can I make this more enjoyable?
- Interest: What aspects of this could be fascinating?
- Novelty: How can I approach this differently?
- Competition/Challenge: Can I turn this into a game or work with others?
- Hurry: What deadline or time pressure would help me focus?

Remember

- ✓ Not every motivator works for every person or every task
- ✓ Your motivators may change based on mood, energy, or circumstances
- ✓ It's okay to need different strategies than other people
- ✓ Working with your brain's natural patterns is more effective than fighting them

This handout is for educational purposes. For personalized strategies, consult with an ADHD specialist or executive function coach.