The Ally One-Pager

Which means someone you care about has been diagnosed with ADHD, probably recently, and probably as an adult.

They handed you this instead of explaining it themselves. That isn't avoidance. Explaining a diagnosis while you're still absorbing it is genuinely hard, and most people do it badly the first few times. This page does the boring half so the two of you can have the real conversation.

It takes about ninety seconds to read.

What the diagnosis actually is

It isn't a verdict, and it isn't new. ADHD is a developmental condition — the criteria require that the difficulties were present in childhood, long before the job or the relationship or the internet. So nothing about them changed on the day they were diagnosed. What changed is that it finally has an accurate name.

It also isn't a mild thing that everyone has. Plenty of people lose their keys. What gets diagnosed is a pattern that has been *costing* them — in work, money, relationships, and a hundred small things nobody sees — for long enough and severely enough to cross a clinical threshold.

If it helps: it's one of the most heritable conditions in psychiatry, around 70%. It runs in families roughly the way height does.

What it is not

It is not an excuse, and they know that. A diagnosis explains a pattern. It doesn't discharge anyone from what they owe you. If something needs repairing between you, it still needs repairing.

It is not a personality replacement. Their humour, their taste, what they care about, the way they are with you — none of that was on the assessment form.

It is not your fault, and it probably isn't anyone's. The reasons adults get missed are structural: criteria built around children, people who compensated well enough that nobody looked, and anxiety or low mood that got treated first because it was the visible thing.

What is probably going on for them right now

Three things, in roughly this order, and all of them are normal.

Reading everything. A rush of intense interest is one of the most consistently reported reactions to an adult diagnosis. It passes.

Doubting it. Usually a few weeks in, usually right after a good day. They may tell you they think they made it up. This is close to universal and it isn't a sign the diagnosis was wrong.

Grief. This one surprises people. Alongside the relief there is often real mourning for the years spent without an explanation — jobs, friendships, a version of themselves that might have existed. It arrives late and comes back in waves. It is not self-pity and it is not a request that you fix it.

What actually helps

- **Believe them the first time.** They have likely spent decades being told they weren't trying.
- **Ask what changed for them, and then listen without solving.** Most of what they need in the first months is to be taken seriously, not managed.
- **Be specific about what you need, in writing.** Not because they're incapable — because verbal instructions and competing deadlines are precisely where this bites. A message they can re-read is worth more than a reminder.
- **Let them be excited about it for a while.** The intensity settles.
- **Ask before helping.** Unrequested help lands as a comment on their competence, even when it isn't meant that way.

What doesn't help

- *"Everyone's a bit ADHD these days."* It's true that most people recognise some of the traits; that's exactly why the diagnosis measures cost and duration rather than traits.
- *"But you've always done so well."* Doing well is often what hid it. The achievement was real and it was expensive.
- *"We didn't have all these labels in our day."* True, and that is the entire problem.
- **Reading it back to them as a weapon.** *That's just your ADHD* is a devastating sentence in an argument, and it will end conversations you wanted to have. The reverse is equally true: neither of you should use it to close down a fair complaint.

The useful question

If you only take one line from this page, take this one, and ask it when things are calm:

> ***"What's one thing that would actually be easier if I did it differently?"***

Then do that thing. It will be smaller and more boring than you expect.