



# Things You Can Do For Your Depressed ADHD / Autistic Friend While She Looks For Work

- a zine by Ash McAllen

This is a guide for my friends to help them help me, an adhd autistic woman with chronic depression while I'm in the particularly shit position of looking for work because job hunting in this capitalist hellscape is a kind of demoralizing torture that pairs exceptionally well with depression to just destroy a person's mental health and will to live. While I was writing it I realised that there are a bunch of others out there who might find this shit useful so I've adjusted it to be a little more general so that it might be helpful to you, but the entire document comes with a huge grain of salt labelled "this applies to me and my friends, it might apply to you and yours, but, like, talk to them and check, hey?"

With all that out of the way, here are some tips:

## Rule Zero:

**A gift is a gift not a loan, you must communicate that your support is a gift.**

Depressed people often are often struggling with low self value so when offered support they often turn it away because they don't think they are deserving and worry that the support will be "called in" as a debt in future and that they will not be able to return the favour and the unpaid debt will impact the relationship. You must communicate that the support you provide comes with zero strings or expectations attached. Depressed people's brain worms can be bad enough that they might not believe you, so you might not convince them, but convincing them is not your responsibility, communicating is. If you can't provide support without expecting the effort to be returned in future or without this communication, your "support" might do more harm than good.

# Executive Function And Basic Maintenance

Your Depressed ADHD / Autistic Friend -is- disabled. She might not seem it when times are good but you've probably seen behind the curtain and the curtain often falls down during hard times. Here is a broken down list of things you can do to help. These lists can be overwhelming both for the person offering but also for the person being helped because of the issues discussed in Rule Zero, so often it is very helpful to just pick one and help with that and then pick another if you still have energy to help more either at the time or on another day. Don't over commit, a little help occasionally that leaves you with energy and positive vibes to give a little help again later is better than overdoing it once and disappearing.

- **Body Doubling** - just having a friendly presence around can provide extra energy and executive function to help your friend do the things she needs to do.
- **Cleaning And Tidying**
  - Pick a single room or zone in a room like a specific surface or corner
  - Pick a single type of issue to address
    - Picking up all the trash
    - Putting away all the things that have ended up on the floor
    - Gather up all the laundry
  - Taking out bins
  - Laundry
    - Putting a load of laundry through the washer and dryer / hanging it to dry
    - Helping put clean dry laundry away
    - Changing bed linen
    - Running a load of linens or towels
- **Help with Job Hunting** - Job hunting sucks and is incredibly exhausting. Help on some tasks can lighten the load.
  - Help search through job listings for appropriate positions
  - Provide feedback on CVs and Cover Letters
  - Help research companies that your friend is applying for positions with



- **Food And Nutrition** - Making sure your friend eats is important, making sure they eat good nutritious food is even better. Depression and food sensitivities can make eating difficult and eating well even harder, as a result we often fall back on ultra-processed foods. Those foods work for depression and food sensitivity because they're easy, they're more shelf stable so unlikely to go bad in the fridge, they're easy to sensorily process, and carbs and sugar can provide a quick mood improvement even if it results in a crash after. Unfortunately they obviously aren't great for health and wellbeing so helping your friends find ways to eat good nutritious food is a huge help. Just remember to keep dietary requirements and food sensitivities in mind, it's not much help to provide food that your friend can't eat, and mentally processing new, complex, or aversive food sensations can sometimes cost mental energy, potentially further exhausting your friend, so check in, provide options and encouragement without judgement. Here are some good options:

- **Get food together** - take friend out to eat somewhere or order in together
- **Cook for them** - invite them over to your home for a meal or go to their place and cook there
- **Meal prep** - make sure not to prep too much of a thing or it can become overwhelming and then get lost in the freezer, if you want to provide more than 2 or 3 servings of food, make sure it's different things to prevent the combination of repetition and the energy required to open the freezer and defrost the food from creating a barrier to eating it.
- **Grocery shopping** - they probably have pretty specific grocery needs and there's a risk of feeling judged and shutting down here. The best bet is to communicate safety and non-judgement and then build a grocery shopping list that includes options and fallbacks, here's an example:
  - 2-3 of [4 bananas, 1 pre-cut cantaloupe, 1 pre-cut pineapple, 1 package grapes] - *an example of different options to choose from in case any one of the things isn't available*
  - 6 Dr Pepper Zero, else 6 Trocadero Zero, else 6 non-caffeinated sugar free soda - *an example of fallbacks in case the first option isn't available*
  - Naan bread (We make Tuesday): [self-raising flour + greek yoghurt + garlic butter] - *an example of ingredients for a recipe you intend to make with or for them. Otherwise there's a good chance they never have the energy to make it themselves and the ingredients go to waste*

# COMPANY AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES



While looking for work you're not at a job getting social interactions. Depression also feeds into social isolation with a feedback loop, making it harder to find the energy to socialise, creating more isolation, which makes the depression worse. Some people are introverts and don't need -as much- social interaction, but they definitely still need a certain amount to stay sane, and it is perfectly possible to be an autistic extrovert in which case more social interaction is needed but it just needs to be in more controlled circumstances. Here are some ways you can contribute to meeting the social needs of your Depressed ADHD/Autistic Friend:

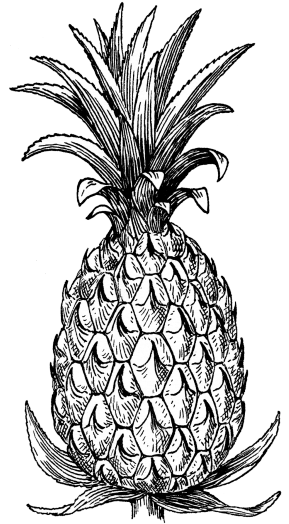
- **Get coffee, brunch, lunch, dinner together.** - also offers the opportunity to make sure they're eating! Maybe even eating well!
- **Coworking and Parallel Play** - Sharing space while doing your own things still counts as social time and can actually be one of the lower stress ways of getting extended social time for neurodivergence. You can just chill in the same space together while you each do work tasks, job hunt, work on creative or hobby projects, watch a thing, scroll your phone, play your own games, etc.
- **Shared Media** - This is another great low-demand way to get time together.
  - Watch a show or movie together
  - Play a game together
  - Start a micro book club and read the same things
  - Chill out listening to music together

- **Gym Together** - The gym can be an addiction for some people while depressed but otherwise there's a good chance your Depressed ADHD/Autistic Friend is struggling to get enough exercise. If you can use doing it as a shared activity together as a way to get them there without overwhelming them, that's a huge bonus. Just getting to the gym counts as victory, every activity you do there after that is bonus points. Movement and exercise are clinically proven one of the best ways to combat depression so we gun for it where we can.
- **Go for a stupid walk for your stupid mental health together** - Also a great way to encourage movement and less overwhelming and less commitment. Being outside is also another great thing for combatting depression. A great tip for getting this one to work is to have a reward built in, walk to a cafe and get a treat once you're there, maybe that will give the energy to walk back!
- **Adventure activities** - Museums, arcades, bouldering, go-karting, archery, book shops and libraries, markets, carnivals, etc. Go out and do something outside of the everyday. Life is still happening so invite your friend out into it.
- **Sex and kink** - If that's a thing you already do together, it's a great way to connect if they're feeling down for it, which admittedly is usually less when the mental health is less great.
- **Partying** - Celebrations, house parties, bars, clubs. Subject to whether your friend drinks, likes to dance, or is ok talking to people in a party environment, but this is another great way to encourage your friend to keep being part of the world rather than retreating from it.
- **Go Shopping** - Retail therapy is often fun but it can be overwhelming. It can help if you know the person well enough to be suggesting things you find for them as you go so they don't have to process everything in the store.
- **Shared Projects** - Working on something together is an amazing way to motivate your friend. DIY, Crafts, Art; making something together helps you feel connected AND accomplished and it's almost always fun along the way. Importantly, try to remove any opportunity for perfectionism you can because that will create stress and reduce satisfaction. Do something low stakes, super easy, open ended, or intentionally rough like "let's paint some really terrible paintings" to really let things take their own course.

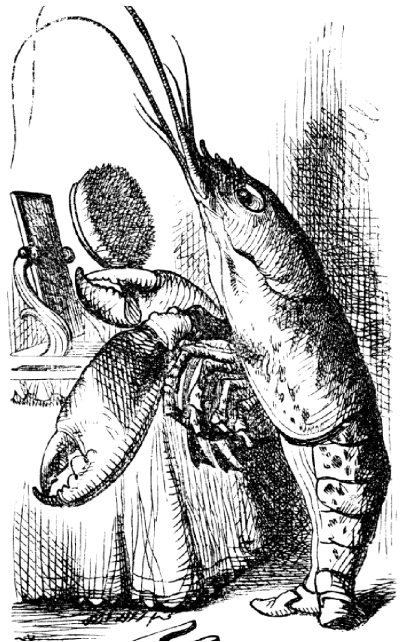
# Nice Things

Depression and job hunting both wear you the fuck down. Little mood boosters go a long way. Sprinkle these around as much as you like.

- **Little Treats** - Helping your friend have access to nutritious food is helpful but so is helping them just enjoy having a nice time. A coffee and a pastry, biscuits with tea, ice cream, snacks while you watch a show together. The important part is to give the treat its space, mark it as a nice special thing in the day, even if the day requires more than one. The danger is if the treat stops feeling special and just becomes baseline or binging.
- **Improving the Comfort of Spaces** - Helping fill their space and experience with comfort and pleasantness can help soothe and reduce overwhelm and create a safe space to launch out into the world from.
  - Soft blankets and pillows
  - Candles / Incense / Essential oils
  - Rugs / Curtains / Drapes
  - Art / Decoration / Ornamentation
  - Lamps and Lighting - ceiling lights are almost always a mistake. Less overhead light and cool light, more warm light and lamps.
  - Music - help make it easy to make the sonic experience of the space more pleasant
  - Plants - comes with the risk of them dying so check first and get things that are resilient AF or help water when you visit



- **Pampering** - If you feel comfortable providing any of these for your friend it can be lovely. A lot of these can be very personal or intimate so obviously check in with them, but looking good and feeling good can be huge boosts to mental health.
  - Bleaching / Dying / Cutting / Styling Hair
  - Nails
  - Face masks / skin treatment
  - Massage
  - Nice soaps / lotion / perfumes / essential oils
  - Acting as Stylist - this one is great for helping someone getting ready to go out to parties or social gathering. Making suggestions, picking outfits, doing someone's makeup or hair for them to help them feel good about how they look without having to spend lots of energy thinking about it. This can massively reduce the barrier to actually leaving the house.
  
- **Reflection** - Depression fucks with your self perception real bad, communicating your perception of your friend helps with that.
  - Take a nice picture of them
  - Write a little poem
  - Draw a portrait
  - Make art in response to art or creative works of theirs
  - Send them a message about a thing you love about them
  - Send them things from your day that remind you of them



# Emergency Procedures

In the event of me having a Bad Time, there are a set of things my friends can do in a present moment to help me regulate and get back to a better headspace. This is a list that works for me, probably best to check it against your own friend and see what works for them or needs changing.

- **Remove rough stimuli**
  - Less harsh light
  - Chill audio space, music, or quiet
  - Remove anything itchy/scratchy/rough, might involve changing clothes or pyjamas
- **Put a blanket on her** - plus pillows / couch / bed if possible
- **Tasty treats**
  - Tea or decaf Coffee with (oat)milk and lots of sugar
  - Pastries / sweets / Ice cream / etc
  - Takeaway
- **Touch** - I am generally a person who is always a little touch starved, and some folks don't like touch so check in, get permission, and then hugs and cuddles
- **Comfort Media** - This is obviously different for everyone, something easy to process and hold attention on without needing to spend effort thinking too much about, some of mine are:
  - British panel and game shows, eg QI, Taskmaster, etc
  - Any of my favourite ttrpg actual play shows, eg Dimension 20
  - Ghibli films, obviously
  - Period dramas, eg Pride & Prejudice, Agatha Christie, Hornblower
  - Minecraft, Valheim, Kenshi,
- **Talk Through It** - Ask what they're feeling, what triggered that, what does it make them think, what needs to change, what do they want to do? Allow for space for the feelings, acknowledge the thoughts, provide gentle resistance to false narratives. Engage higher order thought: "what would you say to a friend who said that?" Remind them that they're safe, loved, acknowledge that the current moment sucks and also that they are going to be ok even if it hurts.