Body Doubling

Working alongside another person — in the room or on a call — so that starting stops being something you have to do alone.

You do not need someone to help. You need someone to be there.

WHAT THIS IS ABOUT

Body doubling is one of the most-reported and least-explained ADHD strategies: a task that has been impossible for days becomes possible the moment another person is quietly present. They do not supervise, coach or check. They simply exist nearby, doing their own thing, and the task starts.

It works for a specific reason. The presence of another person supplies structure the ADHD brain finds hard to generate on its own — a start time, a reason to stay seated, a mild social expectation — without any of the pressure that comes from being watched or judged. This sheet explains why, and what a body double is and is not.

WHY IT CAN BE HARD — WHAT IS ACTUALLY GOING ON

- **Starting alone has no external cue.** The ADHD brain relies more than most on outside signals to begin. A room with another working person in it is a signal; an empty room is not.
- **Staying seated is a second task.** Once started, remaining with a boring task draws on the same limited regulation as starting it. A quiet presence nearby lowers the cost of staying, minute by minute.
- **Accountability usually arrives as pressure.** Most attempts to get help — reminders, check-ins, someone asking “did you do it?” — trigger shame and resistance. A body double asks nothing. That is why it works where nagging fails.
- **It is not a character weakness to need it.** Many neurotypical people work in offices for exactly this reason and never name it. Body doubling is the same mechanism, used deliberately.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN

you are dependent or cannot work independently. It means you have found a condition under which your brain starts more easily — the same way some people need quiet and others need noise.

FOR A PARTNER OR FAMILY MEMBER

You are not there to check on them. Bring your own work, sit nearby, and let the task be theirs. If they stall, do not comment; your presence is the whole job.

Continued on the next page.

Where to go from here

This sheet is the introduction. The workbook that goes with it walks you through setting the skill up yourself.

1
BEFORE

Before you start: notice one thing for a week.

Each time you start something without meaning to — a chore, a form, a message — notice whether anyone else was in the room or on a call. Do not arrange anything yet. Just notice how often the answer is yes.

2
SET IT UP

Set it up: work through the workbook.

Pick one task you have been avoiding and one or two people who might be a body double. The workbook helps you choose the task, the person, the setting and how to ask — without it becoming supervision — and set up your first experiment.

Body Doubling is a four-step sequence. Each step exists because of one of the difficulties on the previous page, and the order matters. The workbook takes you through them in that order.

3
AFTER

After: a review date, and the rest of the library.

Choose a review date before you start and look at what happened then — a plan that did not hold is information, not a verdict. This is one of thirty-three skills across five focus areas; the Skill Finder points to the others. If several fit, start with one.

READY TO START?

Open the workbook for **Strategy 01** in your library and set a review date.

WANT SUPPORT?

This works on your own. For support, a therapist or ADHD coach can work through it with you.

TWO THINGS PEOPLE GET WRONG

"It's just procrastination with an audience."

Actually — Nothing is performed. Most people report the other person barely notices they are working.

"If I need someone there, I haven't really learned to do it."

Actually — Learning the conditions under which you start is the skill. The condition is the tool.

CHECK WITH A PROFESSIONAL FIRST IF

being near other people while you work makes it worse rather than better, or the only people available are ones whose presence carries pressure or judgement. Those change which skill comes first — and none of them mean this is not for you.

EVIDENCE **C — Descriptive / practice-based** PRIMARY TARGET **Task initiation under social presence**

Basis. Widely reported in the adult ADHD community; consistent with social facilitation and external-structure accounts (Barkley). Formal trials are limited. Educational self-help information — not a diagnosis, treatment plan, or substitute for professional care. © 2026 STG Health Services Inc. Personal, non-commercial client use permitted. SaskADHD.com