



THE BUSY BRAIN CHECK-IN

A neurodivergent reflection tool for checking in on your nervous system and getting curious about what you need.

Written by Kathleen Helm

(with fantastic support from neurodivergent virtual assistant Ellie of [What The Ell Ltd](#))

Website: thinkkinetic.co.uk

Email: kathleen@thinkkinetic.co.uk

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS TO ME

Hi, I'm Kathleen (They/Them).

I'm an ICF Certified ADHD Coach, neurodiversity trainer, speaker, and founder of Think Kinetic.

My work is shaped by my lived experience as a late-diagnosed Autistic ADHDer, chronic pain survivor, LGBTQ+, and working-class person. These experiences inform how I coach, train, and advocate.

I specialise in supporting late-diagnosed and neurodivergent-questioning individuals who may feel stuck, burnt out, overwhelmed, or unsure how to move forward. Many people spend years trying to meet expectations that were never designed with them in mind, often leaving them disconnected from themselves and uncertain about what actually works for them.

My approach isn't about fixing people or encouraging them to try harder. Instead, it's about understanding patterns, reducing barriers, and finding sustainable ways of living and working that feel realistic and aligned.

Alongside my coaching work, I am a UK Parliament ADHD Champion, ADHD UK Lead Ambassador, and regularly contribute to conversations around neurodiversity, accessibility, and inclusion online, in person and local and national media.

I hope this workbook helps you better understand yourself, your capacity and what support you need to thrive.

CONNECT WITH ME:



[kinetickathleen](https://www.instagram.com/kinetickathleen)



[linkedin.com/in/kathleen-helm/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kathleen-helm/)



Book a discovery call:

tidycal.com/thinkkinetic/30-minute-discovery-call



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Receiving difficult news, facing uncertainty, or dealing with a stressful situation can leave us feeling overwhelmed, stuck, or unsure what to do next.

This guide is not about "thinking positively" or pretending everything is okay. Instead, it offers a few simple coaching tools and reflection exercises to help you slow down, understand what you're experiencing, and make thoughtful choices about what comes next.

You can work through the guide in one sitting or return to different sections as and when you need them. There is no right or wrong way to complete it.

What you'll explore:

- ✓ How stress or overwhelm may be affecting your capacity
- ✓ What may be adding to your load across your body, mind, environment, and wider context
 - ✓ What you may need more of: control, clarity, or connection
 - ✓ What support, adjustment, or next step might be useful now
 - ✓ What you might want to explore further, alone or with support

This workbook is for education and self-reflection. It is not therapy, crisis support, medical advice, or a substitute for professional help.

As you work through the activities, be honest with yourself and take your time. You don't need to have all the answers. The goal is simply to create a little more clarity, capacity, and choice in the midst of uncertainty.

Take what is useful, leave what isn't, and stop if an exercise feels unhelpful.

REGULATE BEFORE YOU NAVIGATE

When we're stressed, overwhelmed, or dealing with difficult news, our nervous system can move into survival mode.

In these moments, "executive functions" such as problem-solving, decision-making, and planning often become much harder.

Before moving forward, it can help to pause and reconnect with your body, your breath, and the present moment.

The following breathing exercise is a popular tool to help you slow down, create a sense of safety, and gently return to a more grounded state.

You don't need to feel calm, positive, or "fixed" before continuing.

The aim is simply to create a little more space between what has happened and how you respond to it.

Try the guided breathing exercise



[Click here](#) or

Scan the QR code to access Kathleen's guided breathing practice.



What do you notice after completing the exercise?

What feels different, if anything?

What is your next small step from here?

DISCOMFORT DIAGNOSTICS

When we're struggling, it's easy to assume that we're the problem.

Many of us have spent years being told we're too sensitive, too emotional, too disorganised, too much, or simply not trying hard enough. As a result, we often default to self-criticism when things feel difficult.

The Discomfort Diagnostic offers an alternative approach.

This model is a prompt to help you consider what ELSE might be going on that is taking up your capacity, in order that you can practice self-kindness, let go of shame and make adjustments.

Our mood, energy levels, decision-making, concentration, and ability to cope are influenced by far more than motivation or mindset alone. Physical needs, environmental factors, emotional experiences, and wider life circumstances all place demands on our capacity.

This tool encourages you to pause and explore four key areas that may be affecting your wellbeing:



Body

Your body is constantly communicating with you, but these signals can be missed or overlooked when you're overwhelmed or used to pushing your sensory needs aside.

Consider whether pain, fatigue, hunger, thirst, illness, hormones, medication, or other physical factors may be influencing how you feel.

Mind

Our thoughts and emotions can take up a surprising amount of energy. Taking time to notice what you are thinking, get specific on what you are feeling, and separate what is true from what feels true can help you understand what needs attention, reassurance or reassessment.

Wider Context

At times we can overlook the toll that the wider context we exist in can take on our wellbeing. Financial pressures, relationship difficulties, caring responsibilities, workplace demands, discrimination, social expectations, political events, or wider systemic barriers can all affect our capacity. What's been adding to your load recently?

Environment

The spaces we spend time in can have a significant impact on our wellbeing. Think about factors such as noise levels, lighting, temperature, weather, smells, air quality, privacy, sensory demands, or whether you've had enough time alone or outdoors. Sometimes a simple switch in location can make all the difference.

YOUR DISCOMFORT DIAGNOSTIC

Take a few moments to check in with yourself. There are no right or wrong answers.
Not much of a writer? How about recording yourself talking through your answers!

Step 1: How is the discomfort showing up?

Is it a feeling, sensation, thought, urge, capacity change, behaviour, or just something feeling off?

Step 2: Explore the Four Areas

As you look at each area, jot down anything that might be affecting your capacity right now.

Body

What physical factors could be influencing how you're feeling?

Mind

What thoughts, emotions, worries, memories, or unfinished tasks are taking up space?

Environment

What sensory or environmental factors may be contributing?

Wider Context

What external pressures or circumstances might be affecting you?

Step 3: Spot the Patterns

Looking back at your answers:

- ☐ I noticed factors I hadn't considered before
- ☐ I can see why I'm finding this difficult
 - ☐ My capacity is being affected by multiple things at once
- ☐ I've been blaming myself for things that aren't entirely within my control
- ☐ I need more support than I realised

Step 4: One Small Adjustment

What's one small thing you could do to support yourself today?

- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Eat or drink something
 - ☐ Ask for help
 - ☐ Reduce a demand
- ☐ Spend time outdoors
 - ☐ Move my body
 - ☐ Take a break
 - ☐ Something else:

THE THREE CORNERSTONES

The Three Cornerstones highlight three core needs that can help you feel more supported during times of stress, uncertainty or change. When you feel discomfort or overwhelm, one or more of these cornerstones is often missing, weakened or harder to access. Exploring them can help you understand what you need to feel steadier and move forward.

Think of the cornerstones as load-bearing foundations. Each one supports the others. When Control, Clarity and Connection are in place, it can become easier to make decisions, process information and navigate challenges.

When you are overwhelmed, you might spring into action, shut down, or feel unable to act at all. These are often signs your nervous system does not feel safe.

Many of the examples below are questions I use during in coaching. You can also use them yourself when you feel stuck, overwhelmed or unsure what to do next.

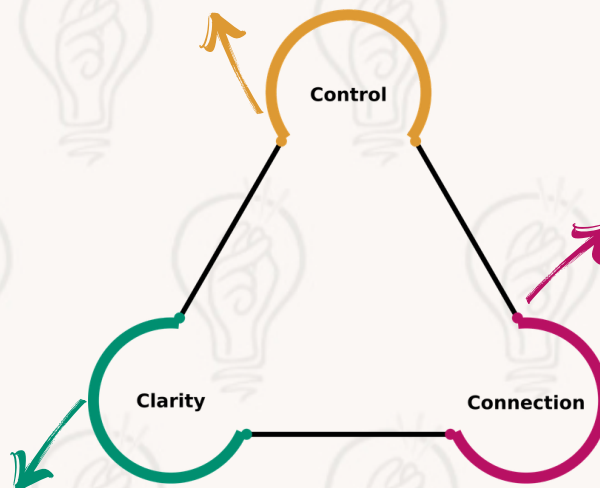
Control

Control is about having enough agency over the things that affect your capacity, safety and participation

When we're stressed, it's easy to focus on everything we can't change. Looking for areas where we still have choice can help us feel more grounded and able to take action.

Ask yourself:

- What choices do I have that I may not have considered?
- What could be changed, reduced, delayed, or removed?
- What is outside my control, and what could be brought under my control?



Clarity

Clarity is about understanding what is happening, what is expected, what matters, and what happens next.

Uncertainty can increase stress and leads to our pattern seeking brains seeking safety by filling in the gaps with assumptions. Sometimes what we need most is clearer information.

Ask yourself:

- What information do I need right now?
- What am I having to guess or assume?
- What is the next decision that needs to be made?

Connection

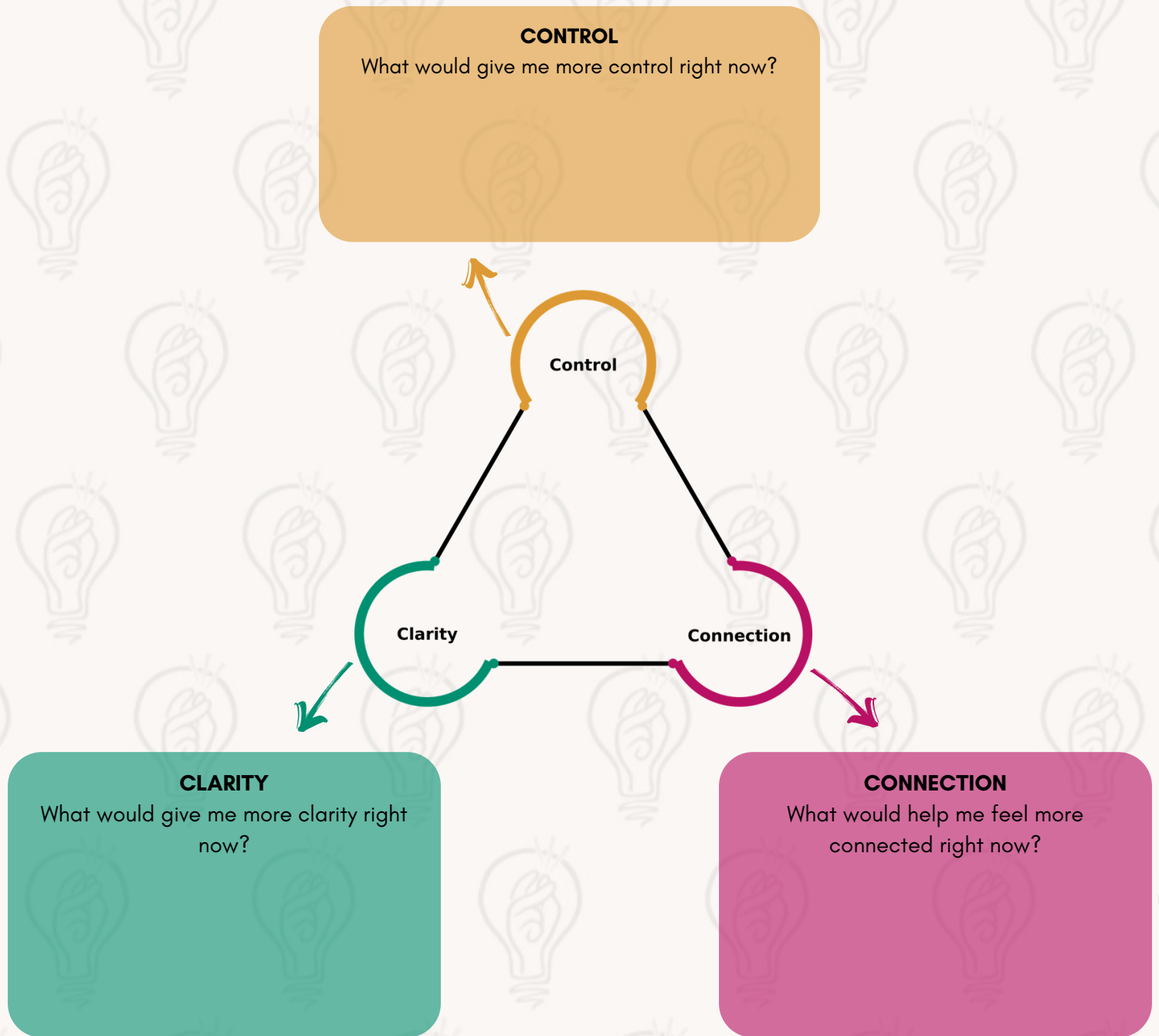
Connection is about feeling linked to people, purpose, or your support systems

When things feel difficult, we often withdraw or try to manage alone. Connection reminds us that support and belonging matter.

Ask yourself:

- Who or what could help me feel less alone?
- Do you understand what purpose your current activity serves?
- Who do I want to be in this situation, and what would help me show up as that person?

THE THREE CORNERSTONES



Looking at your answers, what actions might you need to take in order to feel calmer?

FINAL REFLECTION

Before you close this workbook...

What stands out most from what you've explored?

What have you learned about yourself or your current situation?

What is one thing you would like to remember the next time you face a difficult situation?

What is one small action, adjustment, or act of self-compassion you can take from here?

Check-In

Compared to when you started this workbook, I feel:

- ☐ More grounded
- ☐ More informed
- ☐ More in control
- ☐ More connected
- ☐ More compassionate towards myself
- ☐ Clearer about my next step
- ☐ Not much has changed, and that's okay too

What feels like something I could work through alone, and what might be easier with support?

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP?

If this workbook has given you a few lightbulb moments, raised new questions, or helped you see things differently, you don't have to figure everything out on your own.

In coaching, we can use tools like these to explore what is affecting your capacity, what support you need, and how to build ways of living and working that feel realistic, sustainable, and aligned.

You might find coaching useful if you are:

- late-diagnosed or neurodivergent-questioning
- feeling stuck, overwhelmed, burnt out, or unsure what to do next
- trying to stop pushing through and start working with your needs
- navigating work, self-employment, identity, capacity, or change
- looking for practical support that does not treat you like a problem to be fixed

If you'd like to explore working together, you're welcome to [book a discovery call](#) or get in touch directly.



Website: thinkkinetic.co.uk



Email: kathleen@thinkkinetic.co.uk

I hope to hear from you soon!

Kathleen



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