Scaffold

Independent UX Research Project

Semi-structured Research Interview Guide

Scaffold explores how support systems might reduce cognitive friction while preserving user agency, emotional safety, and informed consent.

Project Focus

Scaffold is an exploratory UX research and systems-design project investigating how support systems might reduce cognitive friction for users experiencing executive dysfunction, overwhelm, task paralysis, or fluctuating cognitive capacity.

The project explores how AI-supported interaction systems might assist users without relying on coercive productivity frameworks, surveillance, or behavioral pressure.

Research Objectives

The interviews aimed to better understand:

- how users experience task initiation difficulty
- what overwhelm feels like internally

- which support systems help or harm
- how users experience reminders and productivity tools
- how shame and emotional regulation affect follow-through
- where existing systems increase friction
- what forms of assistance preserve autonomy and facilitate emotional regulation

Participant Criteria

Participants included adults who self-identified with experiences involving:

- ADHD
- autism
- executive dysfunction
- burnout
- chronic overwhelm
- depression
- fluctuating functional capacity
- difficulty with task initiation or sequencing

Selection was based on lived experience rather than diagnosis alone.

Methodology

RESEARCH TYPE

Semi-structured qualitative interviews

INTERVIEW DURATION

60–90 minutes.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The interviews prioritized:

- lived experience
- emotional nuance
- contextual detail
- behavioral patterns
- environmental triggers
- support preferences
- internal cognitive experience

The semi-structured format allowed participants to guide discussion toward experiences most relevant to them.

Ethical Research Constraints

The research intentionally incorporated constraints that were trauma-aware and autonomy focused:

- Participation was voluntary.
- Participants could redirect or stop discussion at any point.
- The research avoided framing executive dysfunction as laziness or noncompliance.
- Emotional distress was not escalated for insight extraction.
- Psychological safety and user agency were prioritized throughout.

Interview Questions

CONTEXT + DAILY EXPERIENCE

- What kinds of tasks tend to feel hardest to begin?
- What happens internally when you know you need to do something but cannot start?
- How does overwhelm show up mentally or physically?
- What conditions make task initiation easier or harder?

EXISTING SYSTEMS + TOOLS

- What productivity systems or tools have you tried?
- What helped temporarily?
- What made things worse?
- How do reminders usually feel?
- What causes you to disengage from support systems?

EMOTIONAL DYNAMICS

- What emotions emerge when tasks accumulate?
- How do shame or self-judgement affect your ability to act?
- What kinds of support feel encouraging versus pressuring?
- What kinds of language increase stress?

SUPPORT + AUTONOMY

- What would ideal support look like?
- What makes a system feel psychologically safe?
- What makes support feel invasive or controlling?
- How important is the ability to pause or disengage?

Key Research Observations

Several patterns emerged repeatedly across participants:

AMBIGUITY INCREASES TASK PARALYSIS

Tasks without a clear starting point became disproportionately difficult.

SHAME COMPOUNDS EXECUTIVE DYSFUNCTION

Pressure-oriented systems often intensified shutdown rather than improving follow-through.

CAPACITY FLUCTUATES DYNAMICALLY

Stress, sensory input, emotional load, and accumulated demands strongly impacted functionality.

SMALL, ACTIONABLE ENTRY POINTS MATTER

Participants consistently responded better to systems that reduced decision burden.

AUTONOMY IS CRITICAL

Support systems became aversive when users felt managed, monitored, or externally controlled.