Explaining ADHD

In Pictures

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INNERFOCUS THERAPY
COUNSELLING & PSYCHOTHERAPY

The ADHD Brain...

> **...is a turbo charged mind – like a Ferrari engine, but with the brakes of a bicycle.**

- Dr Hallowell

Yes, there are 3 Types of ADHD!

Predominantly Inattentive Type (ADHD-I)

Main features: difficulty focusing, distractible, forgetful, disorganised, difficulty following instructions.
Often less disruptive, so it can be overlooked (sometimes called the "quiet" type).

Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type (ADHD-HI)

Main features: restlessness, fidgeting, excessive talking, interrupting, difficulty staying still, impulsive decisions.

Combined Type (ADHD-C)

A mix of inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive symptoms.

ADHD Neuroanatomy

Dopamine

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter. It's primary role is to transmit messages of reward and pleasure. So it is key in motivation, as well as being involved in focus and planning.

What's Different in ADHD?

It is hypothesised that there is a disruption in dopamine pathways for people with ADHD. Either there are more dopamine transporters, meaning excess dopamine isn't removed from the brain. Or there are lower levels of dopamine. Or there are fewer dopamine receptors, meaning the brain cannot use all the dopamine produced. This explains why people with ADHD are more at risk for engaging in risky behaviours to get a 'dopamine hit' and also are not as interested and motivated by low dopamine producing activities.

ADHD Neuroanatomy

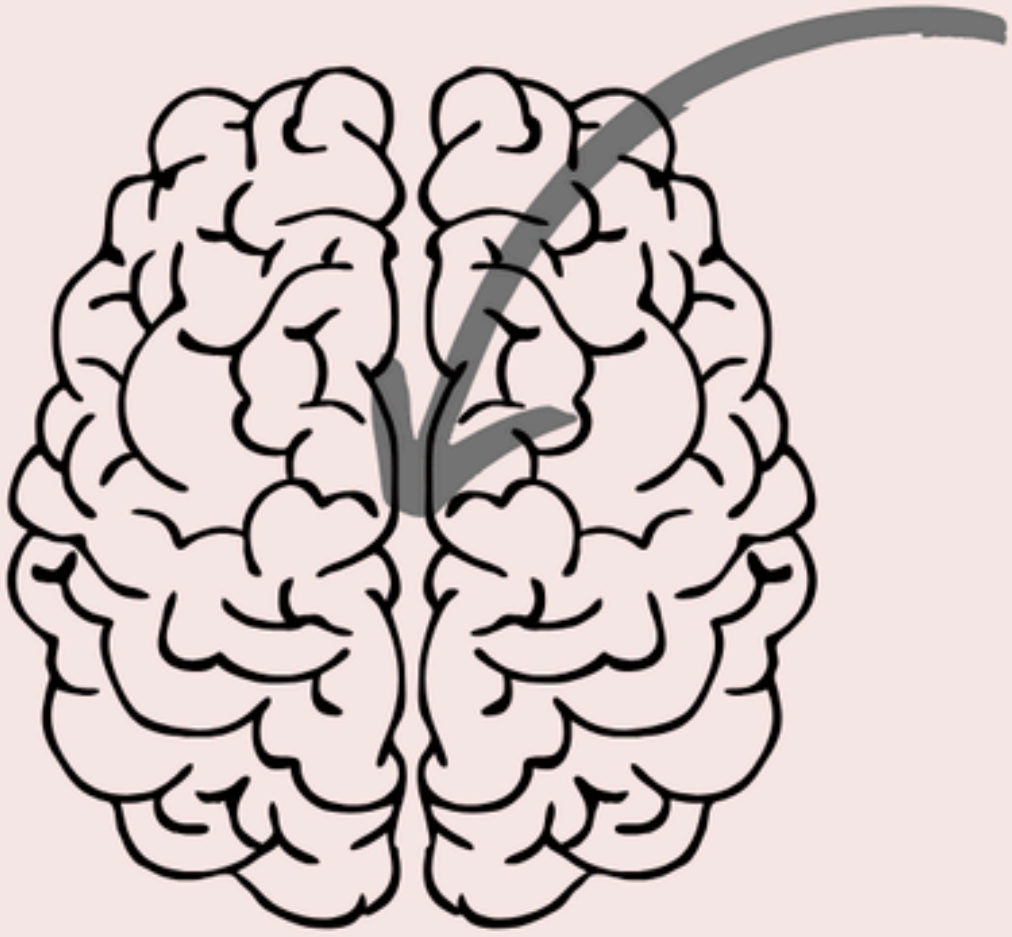
The Prefrontal Cortex

The Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) is responsible for the ability to focus, plan and remember things for more than a few seconds. It is in the PFC that we problem-solve, make decisions, control impulses, utilise logic and feel motivated.

What's Different in ADHD?

The PFC is thinner in ADHD brains compared to neurotypical brains. This causes problems with executive functioning, such as working memory and the ability to plan and stay organised.

ADHD Neuroanatomy



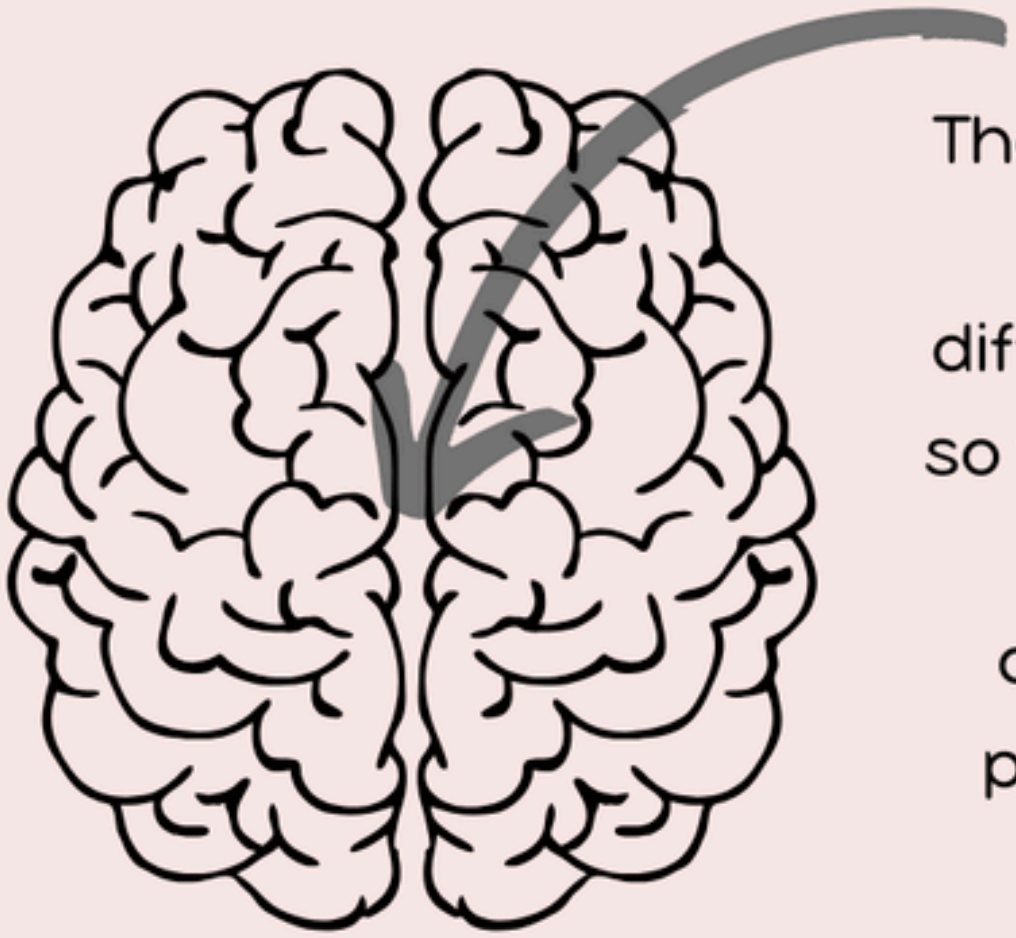
The Limbic System

The Limbic System (LS) manages core survival behaviours, as well as emotional regulation, learning and memory.

What's Different in ADHD?

There is diminished white matter integrity in people with ADHD, which leads to symptoms of emotional dysregulation, decision-making and motivation.

ADHD Neuroanatomy



The Basal Ganglia

The Basal Ganglia (BG) forms connections between different regions of the brain so they can all work together. It is also involved with decision-making, reward processing and emotional regulation

What's Different in ADHD?

There is less grey matter in the BG than in neurotypical people, which increases inattention and hyperactivity. However, over time, the grey matter tends to fill with age, so symptoms in adulthood can be less pronounced.

ADHD Neuroanatomy

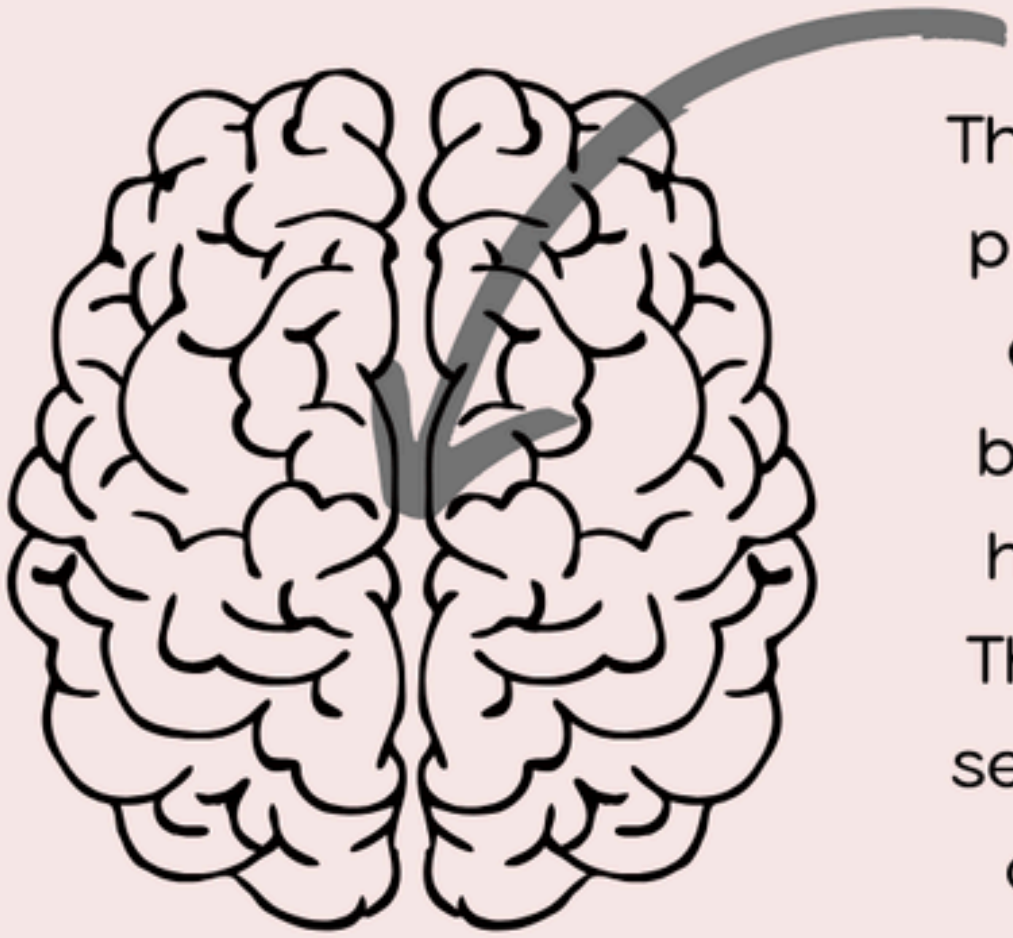
Noradrenaline

Noradrenaline is a neurotransmitter and a hormone. It helps transmit nerve signals across the body. It is also is part of the body's 'fight or flight system', and affects the sleep-wake cycle, mood and memory.

What's Different in ADHD?

People with ADHD can have variants in the Noradrenaline transporter gene, Because noradrenaline is particularly important for maintaining attention and focus, in people with ADHD this can lead to difficulty with attention, concentration and impulsivity.

ADHD Neuroanatomy



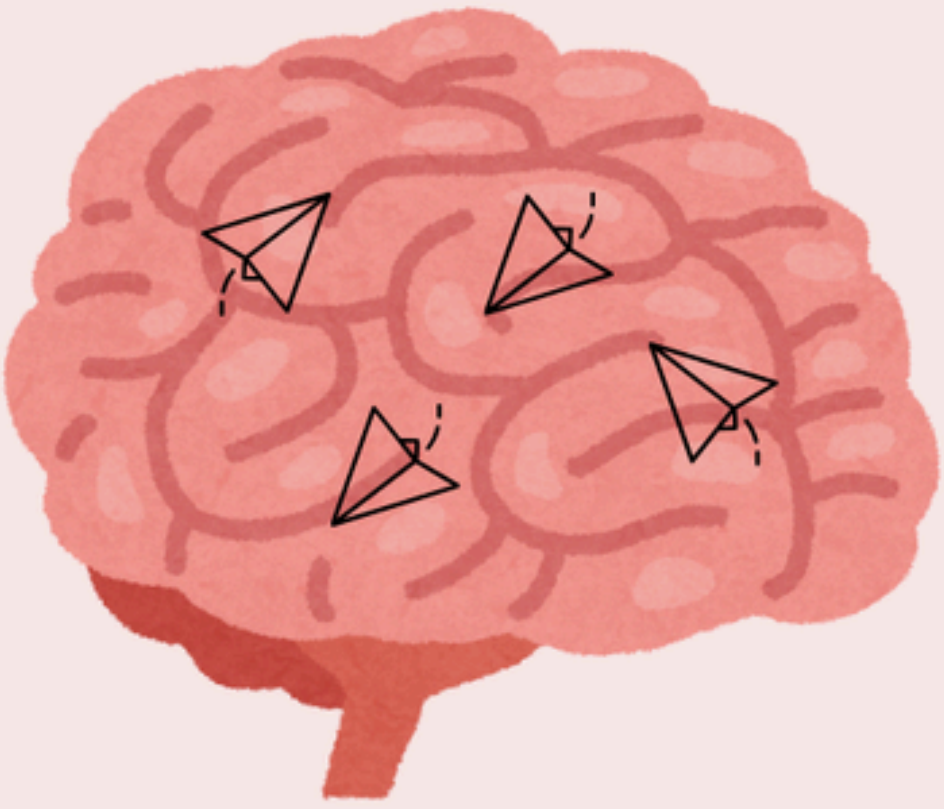
The Corpus Callosum

The Corpus Callosum (CC) is primarily thought of as the communication network between the right and left hemispheres of the brain. This allows for coordinated sensory input, motor output and cognitive processes.

What's Different in ADHD?

There are structural differences in the white matter of the CC. This could affect attention, impulse control and motor coordination.

ADHD Neuroanatomy



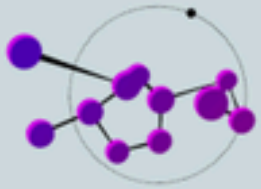
The Default Mode Network

The Default Mode Network (DMN) is a network, located in several brain regions, including the medial prefrontal cortex, posterior cingulate cortex, angular gyrus, and precuneus. Which is most active when the brain is at rest. This supports daydreaming and self-reflection.

What's Different in ADHD?

the DMN may be less effectively suppressed during task-related activity, leading to potential disruptions in attention and cognitive control. So it's much more difficult to stop daydreaming then focusing on a task.

ADHD and Dopamine



Dopamine is our reward chemical! When it is released in the brain it plays a role in feeling pleasure and feeling motivated. Our brain's reward system craves stimulation, especially when activities offer immediate dopamine / gratification.

People with ADHD may either have low dopamine levels or their brains may process dopamine too quickly.

This means that people with ADHD often find it hard to shift attention from an activity which they are engaged in (as it is releasing dopamine) to certain activities which they are not feeling motivated by.

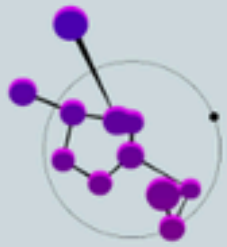
When an activity signals to the brain to release dopamine, this will increase concentration and make it easier for the person to stay focused. This is why people with ADHD can also hyper focus.

It can also lead to some people with ADHD to seek dopamine in ways that end up backfiring on them, such as getting a dopamine release from over-eating (especially sugary foods and carbs).

It can also lead to procrastination and avoidance of tasks which neurotypical people may find easier to complete.

ADHD, Dopamine & Food

Food activates the dopamine reward centre in all brains. However, for people with ADHD who may be deficient in dopamine and can be impulsive, it can lead to an agonising challenge of daily self-regulation.



ADHD brains also exhibit decreased glucose metabolism compared to non-ADHD brains, this results in less energy available to the attention centre in the prefrontal cortex.

As a result, ADHD brains send out distress messages demanding more glucose, thus initiating a suddenly crave for sugary foods and carbohydrates, which can be quickly converted into glucose. Chocolate may be particularly craved not only because of the glucose, but the caffeine as well.

This glucose increases dopamine and serotonin, so brains experience pleasure and greater calm. This can lead to people with ADHD self-medicating with food.

The Evolutionary Strengths of Neurodiversity

ADHD:
The Vigilant Explorer

People with ADHD have a low level of dopamine, which causes hyper-focus and restlessness.

People with ADHD are able to be spontaneous innovative thinkers due to their hyper-focus and novelty-seeking.

Celebrate your energy and creativity.

Why the ADHDer is Not the Problem, the Environment Is!

ADHDers can THRIVE, attuning to their neurodiversity as strengths, no role can be ruled out. ADHDers can find novel solutions to problems and respond calmly to chaos. However, when they are expected to perform in an environment which doesn't suit their brains, then their behaviours can betray them, leading to criticism, labelling and rejection. This becomes internalised and ADHDers often become fearful in future scenarios. Thus they mask, which negatively affects self-esteem and can impact their mental health.

CELEBRATE MINDS

of all kinds

The Beauty of ADHD

Let's See Some Ways ADHD Brains are Wonderful

Creativity, imaginative, and original – may come up with new ideas.

Bagfuls of energy, especially when motivated.

Enthusiasm.

Laser focused when interested in something.

Can turn impulsivity into spontaneity.

Can be open to trying new things.

Adaptability.

Can have a unique perspective on life.

Being "different" can make people with ADHD compassionate and accepting.

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Neurodiversity and the Increased Likelihood of Being Bullied

We are programmed with an innate mechanism to judge people based on first impressions. And these impressions take only a fraction of a second.

There is a concept known as 'social signalling' – in which people unconsciously send out messages in the form of micro-expressions (e.g. nodding, speed of speech, subtle body movements, etc.) and these are unconsciously picked up by others leading to judgements and unrealised modified responses.

Whether we 'know it' or not we can recognise when someone is different. And children are particularly good at picking up on differences.

A neurotypical person might meet a neurodivergent person and they will notice micro differences (e.g. too little / too much eye contact, inappropriately smiling, interrupting etc.). And that's it. The opinion is formed. And some people can't get past that opinion and brush them off. Or even deliberately bully them.

But it is vitally important to remember that only 'hurt people, hurt people!' You are never to blame for being bullied. What I have described is an innate human process. But there are others in our social world who see an opportunity to take advantage of others due to their own insecurities.

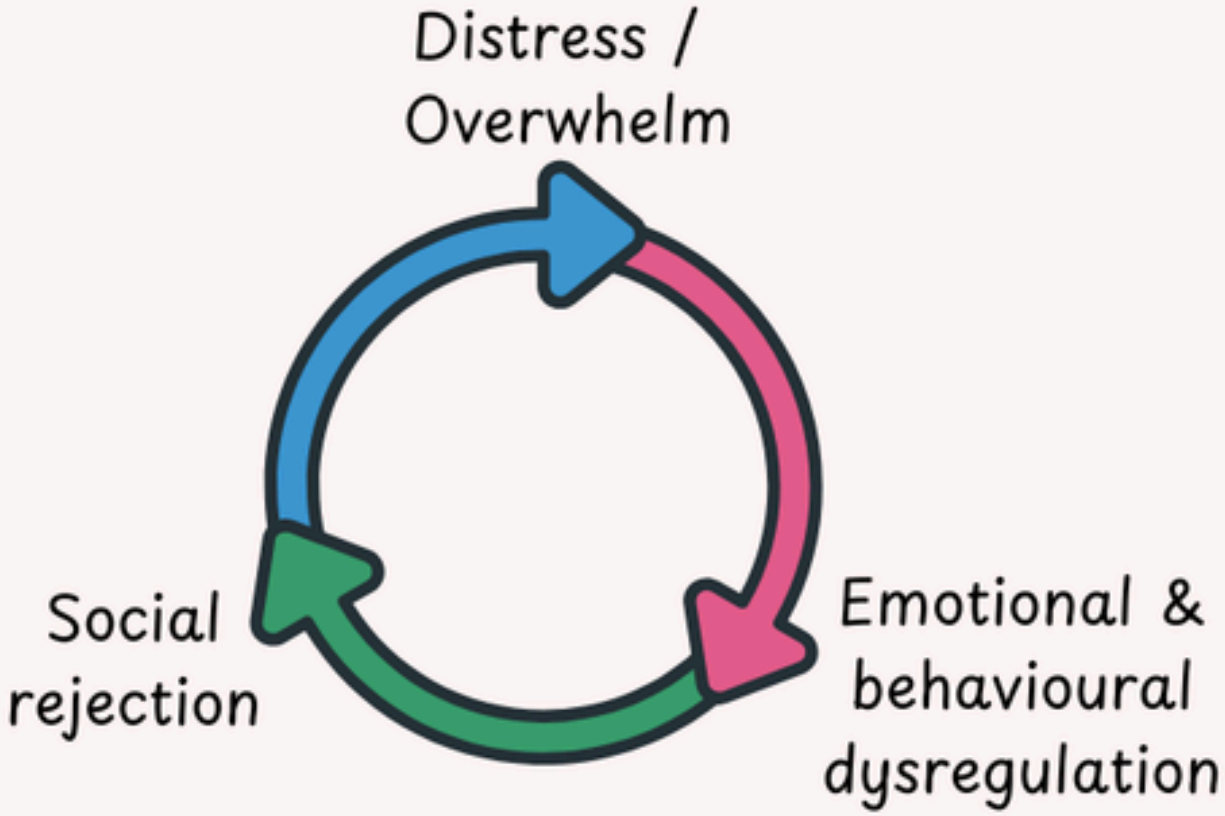
ADHD and Rejection Sensitivity

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD) and ADHD are linked. One reason for this is that ADHD brains find it more difficult to regulate emotions and behaviours which can be triggered by rejection.

People with ADHD feel intense emotional pain when they experience or perceive rejection, criticism, or they 'fail'.

RSD can be triggered by *small* social cues that imply disapproval, or by a sense of falling short of expectations.

And because people with ADHD can find it more difficult to read social cues, follow social rules and patterns, as well as regulate social behaviours, then they are more likely to receive negative feedback (verbally or non-verbally), which then becomes a vicious cycle.



Neurodiversity and Homophily

The combination of different communication styles, different body language and social cues allows neurodiverse people to gravitate towards each other, often unknowingly. This is because we understand each other better, as well as have an increased unconscious empathy towards one another.

This phenomenon, known as homophily, suggests a preference for social bonds with those who share similar traits, behaviours, or cognitive styles.

Neurodivergent people may find comfort and understanding in shared experiences and communication styles, leading to stronger connections.

Being with others who understand neurodivergent experiences can be validating and reduce feelings of isolation or being "different".

We self-select - and when we unconsciously and consciously choose people who "get us", and who "we get", then we have a greater sense of belonging.

Find your people!

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Neurodiversity and ‘Fitting In’

The human need to belong is crucial for everyone, this provides a sense of self-identification as well as being part of a community. The search for a community can be a challenge for people with neurodiversity, with a sense of ‘not being the same’ as others.

It’s like feeling out of place among horses, when you're unaware of your true zebra nature.

This can lead to confusion and a sense of inadequacy.

We need to all find ‘our people’!

Did you know that children with ADHD hear an estimated 20,000 more critical or corrective messages before age 12 compared to their neurotypical peers?
(Dodson, 2016)

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD) is one of the most misunderstood experiences for people with ADHD — especially children.

Imagine growing up with that constant feedback. It's no wonder many kids (and later, adults) develop intense emotional responses to perceived rejection or criticism. 💔

RSD isn't "being too sensitive."

It's a nervous system overloaded by years of correction, misunderstanding, and feeling "too much" in a world not built for them.

Let's do better! Let's increase understanding and compassion 💛

ADHD and Social Challenges

Small talk can be difficult to engage in; ADHDers tend to be better with conversations based around topics or objects, especially areas of interest or hyper-focus, which allows for associative leaps and creative thinking.

Staying on topic, or taking turns can make it hard to maintain conversations.

Interrupting or blurting out thoughts, can disrupt conversations and sometimes cause offence.

It can be harder to switch topics with the rest of the group, if it is something you are interested in, or you need to finish your sentence / story.

Irritability and difficulty managing frustration can create conflict and strain relationships.

Missing social cues, due to inattention, such as noticing when the other person is bored can cause social tension.

Difficulty picking up on subtle social cues, can lead to misunderstandings and mismatched responses.

Difficulty with planning, organising, and following through with social activities can make it hard to maintain friendships.

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Myth

People with ADHD are ‘stupid’ or ‘lazy’ and need to try harder

Fact

The truth is, this myth comes from misunderstanding what ADHD actually is. It’s not about effort or motivation; it’s a developmental difference in how the brain manages focus, planning, and self-regulation. Telling someone with ADHD to “try harder” is like telling someone with bad eyesight to “see better.” Would you really call Michael Phelps or Richard Branson either ‘stupid’ or ‘lazy’, because they both have ADHD!

ADHD and Positive Emotions

People with ADHD can often experience very intense positive emotions, such as extreme joy or excitement. In the same way as more negative emotions, this can overwhelm the person due to their difficulty regulating emotions. Therefore they feel them very strongly and as a result, might display a more extreme reaction to positive events compared to others, sometimes even appearing over-the-top, hyperactive or overly enthusiastic. Which can in turn lead to impulsive behaviours or 'over-reactions'.

However, on the positive side, the ability to deeply experience positive feelings can allow for heightened enthusiasm, passion, greater exuberance towards achievements, be fun to be around or being able to deeply connect to interests and others.

ADHD and Risk Taking

Individuals with ADHD are more prone to taking risks, and in some cases this can shorten someone's life expectancy due to the dangerous nature of these risks.

This may be due to a tendency to become distracted (internally or externally), impulsivity, impaired decision-making in Executive Functioning, having a heightened sensitivity to immediate rewards, or a tendency to overestimate abilities and underestimate risk. Therefore those with ADHD may be more willing to engage in high risk behaviours.

People with ADHD may be more likely to cause a motor vehicle incident, self-medicate, experience accidents leading to injuries or get into dangerous situations.

ADHD and Addictions

Impaired Executive Functioning in the Pre-Frontal Cortex, as well as lowered levels of Dopamine, puts people with ADHD at increased risk of developing addictions, including self-medicating or behavioural addictions.

Neurodivergent people don’t need to change — our environments do.

Stop trying to “fix” neurology that was never broken. Build schools, workplaces, and communities that accommodate different sensory needs, communication styles, and ways of thinking.

When we change the environment, everyone has the chance to thrive.

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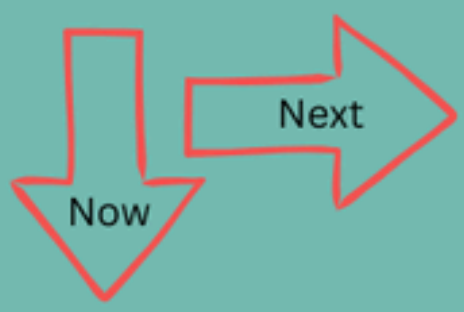
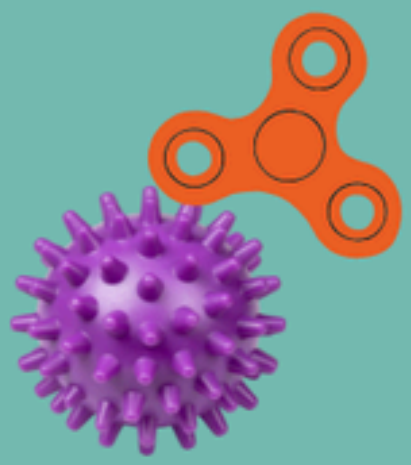
In daily life, **neurodivergent people** shouldn't have to change who they are just to get through the day — we **should be changing the environment around us**.

Instead of forcing ourselves to push through sensory overload, exhaustion, or systems that don't work for our brains, let's build routines, spaces, and supports that do. Noise-cancelling headphones, flexible schedules, clear communication, sensory-friendly homes, task tools — these aren't "crutches," they're empowerment.



We thrive not by reshaping our neurology, but by reshaping our surroundings to meet our needs.



And that's valid, powerful and necessary.

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ADHD & Self Care

Routines and Habit Stacking
Try and establish fun routines with rewards to ensure you meet your daily needs.

Be Yourself
Enjoy being yourself, see your positives, indulge in your hyperfocuses and remove your 'mask'.

Exercise / Movement
Exercise or movement helps release energy and provide dopamine & endorphins.

Self Compassion
ADHDers receive disproportionate amounts of criticism - re-balance this with self compassion.

Practice Gratitude
Practicing gratitude helps our brain tune into the positives.

Most tasks require three mental shifts:

start → continue → finish

For many people with ADHD, the hardest part is often the transition between these states.

ADHD often affects the brain's motivation and reward system.

The brain may not respond strongly to importance.

It responds more to:

interest, novelty,
urgency, and immediate reward.

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For ADHD brains, starting is often hard because tasks that feel boring, vague, or too big don't create enough activation.

"I want to do it, but I can't make myself begin."

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What helps with starting:

- make the task tiny and concrete
- use external triggers (timers, exact start times)
- add urgency or accountability
- pair the task with stimulation

What helps with sustaining:

- short work sprints
- visible reminders of the goal
- reducing friction (clear space, fewer tabs)
- body doubling

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What helps with finishing:

- define what "done" means upfront
- break the last stage into steps
- use earlier deadlines
- reward completion immediately

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ADHD support works best when you rely less on willpower and more on structure.

Externalise steps.

Shrink the task.

Add stimulation.

Create safe urgency.

Build routines.

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ADHD & Reducing Procrastination

Just Do It

We often get distracted or caught up in our busy minds when we need to get something done, so whenever possible, do the thing you need to do straight away.

Create Urgency

ADHD minds often react better to a sense of urgency - so create an earlier deadline or see how quickly you can do something.

Put Your Phone Away

It's easy to end up doom scrolling for hours - phones and apps are designed to be addictive - so pop it away for a few hours when you have things to do.

Get Stimulated

Tasks are often not dopamine fuelled enough - so create some motivation, add some excitement. What could make the task more fun? Can you get some movement going first - dance, fidget spinner, exercise? Use music at the same time?

Use Binaural Beats

Binaural beats promotes focus, by playing slightly different frequencies in each ear via stereo headphones.

ADHD & Completing Tasks

Start Small

To begin, choose a task that only has one step then it's done and that it is relatively easy - e.g. pick up dirty clothes and put them into the laundry basket; take your dirty cup to the sink; make your bed.

Home Routine Calendar

Build a housework list that you can follow each week - use something visual and use a lot of colour to remind you what to do each day.

Use Music

Before you start and whilst you're doing 'mundane' tasks, put some music on, something uplifting which will get you moving.

Use Rewards

Rewards give us dopamine - a neurotransmitter which gives us a feeling of pleasure - so think about how you can reward yourself when a task is complete - tasks can also be broken down to mini-tasks to get more regular rewards and keep us motivated.

Body Doubling

Have someone close by when you're completing a boring or demanding task - this creates a subtle external pressure to stay focused.

ADHD & Managing Impulsivity

The 24 Hour Rule

If you are making a decision to buy something or sign-up for something, give yourself a 24-hour cooling off period. After which, review whether you still "need" it.

Speak Out Loud First

Before doing something impulsive, say it first, this helps it go through our Frontal Lobes, helping with decision-making, thus rational actions.

Ask 'Where will this Live?'

Before you purchase something, ask yourself, 'where will this live?' It can help give clarity to whether you really need the item.

Note It

Before speaking in meetings or discussions, note it down on paper first. This gives pause to possible interruptions or whether this may be brought up by the person already speaking first. It also stops the feeling that you'll forget it if you don't say in now.

Practice Pausing

Practice active listening when you're engaging in a conversation, then take a three second pause before you speak. After some practice, this will help with impulsive interrupting.

ADHD & Mood

Self Compassion
A more self compassionate approach towards ourselves is the best way to feel better in mood.

Find Your People
Find people who get you, don't judge you, can empathise, or are also neurodivergent so there is a shared understanding.

Journalling
Journalling can help you to process your feelings and thoughts so they stop looping in your mind.

Emotional Regulation
What stategies help you feel calm - music, movement, breath work, exercise, dance, fidgeting.

Lean into your Hyperfocus
Your hyperfocuses give you your dopamine supply - go with it!

Managing Adult ADHD Symptoms in this Neurotypical World...

Pomodoro Technique

Set a timer for 20 minutes and start your task. When the alarm goes off, take a 5 minute break. Then start the cycle again. Give yourself a tick for every completed cycle.

Carry a Small Pocket Notebook with You

Write down important things in your booklet as soon as you think of them, so they're not forgotten. Keep this on you and in your dominant pocket so easy to reach.

Break Down Tasks

Split tasks into smaller chunks and create mini-deadlines along the way - smaller tasks reduce overwhelm and so are easier to approach, help increase confidence.

Use a Wall Calendar

Use a chalk board or dry wipe board to list your tasks and appointments. Use bright colours. Cross things off each day.

Use your Smart Phone

Use your reminder alerts, notepad app and calendar to help you remember important tasks or habits, as well as appointments.

Sleeping & ADHD

People with ADHD often have sleep problems, especially at night. This isn't a coincidence; ADHD and sleep are tightly connected. Falling asleep can often be really hard and so is waking up. In addition, sleep tends to go a bit nocturnal.

The ADHD brain doesn't "power down" easily.

ADHD brains tend to be:

- More alert at night
- Full of racing thoughts
- Sensitive to stimulation (sounds, light, phone scrolling)

So when it's time to sleep, the brain keeps saying "Wait, one more thought..."

Delayed sleep phase is very common.

Many people with ADHD have a shifted body clock:

- Not sleepy until very late (1–3 a.m.)
- Struggle to wake up in the morning
- Feel most focused at night

This is called Delayed Sleep Phase Syndrome, and it's biological, not laziness.

Hyperfocus can steal the night.

ADHD hyperfocus can kick in at night:

- "Just one more video"
- "I'll finish this quickly" (spoiler: 2 hours later)

Time blindness + hyperfocus = accidentally staying up way too late.

Emotional regulation affects sleep.

ADHD often comes with:

- Anxiety
- Emotional intensity
- Rumination at night

When the world goes quiet, thoughts get loud.

Sleeping Better with ADHD

Same wake-up time > same bedtime

This is one of the most important strategies so our body clock knows what to expect. If your sleep cycle is quite nocturnal and you're trying to re-set it, then shift this gradually backwards. Keep it the same even on weekends.

White Noise or Distraction

Some background noise, such as white noise, classical music or your TV can help to reduce sensory stimulation. It can also help to quieten the mind with some distraction.

Sleep Routine

A wind down buffer of 30-60 minutes can help teach our brains that it's time for sleep. This might include sensory calming (e.g. dim lights, blanket), gentle focus (e.g. puzzles) & body based calming (stretching).

Quieten the Mind

The mind often turns on when it's quiet, try doing a brain dump at least 60 minutes before bedtime - quieten your space and dump every thought on purpose.

Sunlight

Exposure to sunlight, or a SAD lamp, in the morning will help to set your body clock.

Songs for Growing ADHD Brains

Ludwig van Beethoven:
'Emperor Concerto for Piano, No. 5'
The patterns, details, and mathematical structure of pieces like Beethoven's build all portions of a child's brain simultaneously.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:
'Symphony No. 40 in G Minor'
Strengthens auditory and motor functions, which can be helpful for children with learning issues or auditory problems.

Johann Sebastian Bach:
'Brandenburg Concertos'
Changes the electromagnetic frequencies of the brain to 7.5 cycles per second, which is referred to as the "Alpha Mode", helping focus, concentrate, and learn better.

Songs for Growing ADHD Brains

George Frideric Handel:
'Water Music'

Great for getting brains into Alpha Mode. It takes about 20 minutes for the brain to change to this mode, so start this hour-long collection should be started before concentration is required.

Johannes Brahms:
'Concerto for Violin, D Major'

Lively music but still Alpha mode! This music allows children to focus their energy effectively and generate new ideas, without getting distracted by a fidgety body.

Johann Pachelbel:
'Canon in D'

This meditative music can help soothe overactive minds after a long day.

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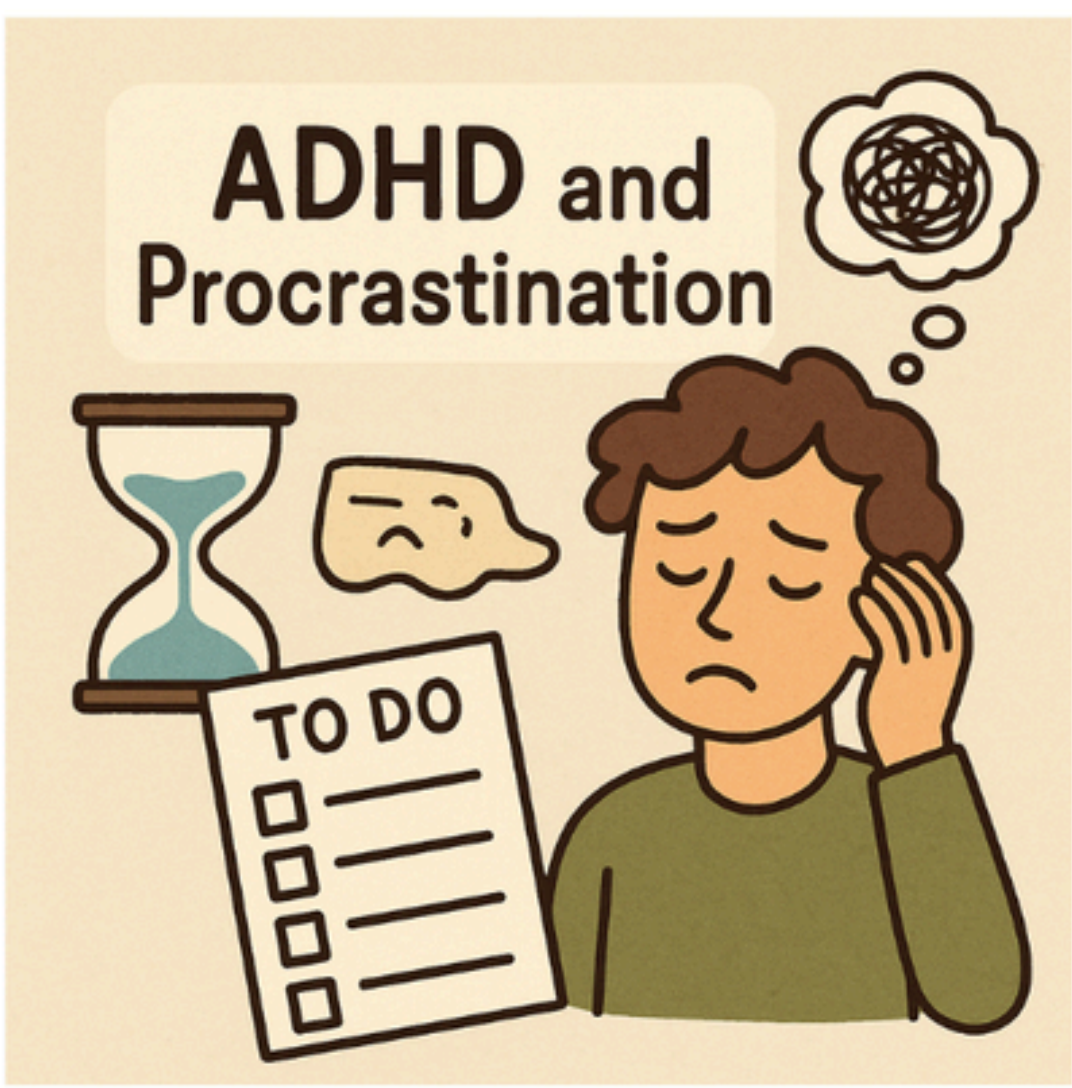
ADHD & Procrastination

ADHD & procrastination: it's not about being lazy or unmotivated.

It's a tug-of-war between wanting to start and feeling stuck, knowing what needs to be done yet being unable to bridge that gap.

The clock keeps ticking, guilt keeps growing & the task feels even heavier.

Brain chemistry and structure leads to difficulties with executive functions, emotional regulation, and motivation. These challenges, make it hard to initiate, organise, and complete tasks, leading to procrastination as a coping mechanism or avoidance strategy.



If this is you: pause, breathe, and remember – your worth isn't measured by your productivity.

ADHD & Procrastination

What can help?

Body Doubling

You have someone close by when you're completing a boring or demanding task. If no-one is there, try using AI to help you.

Reward System – Now & Next

What can you give yourself after you finish that you can look forward to? What gives you a Dopamine Release? What's your hyper-focus? What's a treat?

Binaural Beats

By listening to two slightly different frequencies in each ear, your brain may sync to a calming rhythm, boosting concentration and easing stress.

Choose 1 easy task to get started

Choose an easy one-step task to get yourself moving – this needs to be easily achievable and quick.

Break tasks into micro-steps

Break the tasks down into small well-defined steps.

Pomodoro technique

25 minutes focused work + 5 minutes break.

Use visual task lists

Whiteboards, images, sticky notes or apps. Keep them visible.

ADHD and Binaural Beats

Struggling with focus? ADHD can make it tough to tune out the noise – but binaural beats might help!

By listening to two slightly different frequencies in each ear, your brain may sync to a calming rhythm, boosting concentration and easing stress.

Give it a try next time you need to get things done!

Make a playlist of find one already made on a digital music platform – iTunes, Spotify, YouTube...

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Body Doubling and ADHD

Body Doubling is a technique for people with ADHD to help with procrastination and enhance productivity and focus.

You have someone close by when you're completing a boring or demanding task - they don't need to do anything, just be present and informed that you are doing an activity and to be with you until it's done.

Having someone nearby creates a subtle external pressure to stay focused, reduce distractions and stay on task, as well as boost dopamine levels, which are lower in individuals with ADHD.

Neurodiversity and Masking

What is masking?

A conscious or sub-conscious strategy to hide your natural behaviours, whilst taking on behaviours which are "socially acceptable" in order to "fit in". For example, people pleasing, mirroring social behaviour, suppression of stimming, rehearsing social scripts, hiding interests and passions, not sharing opinions, caretaking, or copying other's behaviours.

Why do we mask?

Neurodiverse people often feel "different", which is interpreted as "not good enough", receive more criticism and can be more often bullied. This leads to Rejection Sensitivity and overwhelming distress, with less ability to emotionally regulate this distress, so behavioural strategies are used to reduce distress, criticism, judgement and rejection. It's a survival strategy to manage this social world and our innate need for connection and attachment.

The Consequences of Masking

The Short Term Advantages of Masking

- Social Acceptance - fewer judgements and criticism, able to 'blend in', reduce bullying and thus feeling safer
- Increased Opportunities - hiding the differences / condition can mean we are not disadvantaged in educational or occupational settings due to stigma / discrimination

The Long-Term Impacts of Masking

- Low Self Esteem - due to hiding away our true selves, we can never be accepted for who we are, so we continue to not feel "likeable / loveable / worthy / good enough", this leads to poor mental health and often withdrawal from connection and relationships
- Burnout - the strain of suppressing and masking causes exhaustion, leading to burnout, and can impact physical health

Examples of Masking

My true self	Judgement	My Mask
Being forgetful	'You're disorganised'	Extreme organisation
Hyper-focused	'You're obsessed'	Hide interests
Speak too much / too little	"You ramble / You're too quiet"	Rehearse conversations
High energy	'You're too much'	Suppress energy
Emotional dysregulation	'You're too sensitive'	Bottle up emotions
Unable to focus	'You're stupid / lazy'	Procrastination
Social difficulties	'You're weird'	People pleasing / avoidance
Creative doodling	'You're a daydreamer'	Suppress creativity
Overwhelmed	'You're naughty'	Conforming

Un-Masking

Firstly, let's clarify that everyone learns to conform and adapt to society and in certain situations this can be a very useful skill. However, this is a problem when it is used universally in all situations especially intra-personally or in close healthy relationships.

How to Un-Mask

Unmasking can be a challenging process, so it's crucial to prioritise doing this with people who are supportive and safe.

Do it at your pace and comfort level.

Seek support from other Neurodiverse individuals.

Take it one step at a time; choose a behaviour to start with that feels important to you, but not too scary - this could be a behaviour you have used to over-compensate to 'cover' a trait which was deemed 'unacceptable' which you would like to stop, or a behaviour you have always suppressed but would like to 'own again'.

Set experiments to change your behaviour and evaluate the outcomes, building on this little by little, until you are more your authentic self.

If someone is critical of you - evaluate what happened and whether this is a person who it is safe to un-mask around.

Research shows that **50–70% of Autistic people also have ADHD**, and **20–50% of ADHDers are also Autistic**.

Neurodiversity isn't about fitting people neatly into one box or another — our brains are far more complex.

Instead of asking "Which label fits?"
Let's start asking
"What does your *unique* brain look like?"

Every individual's presentation is valid. Every experience matters.

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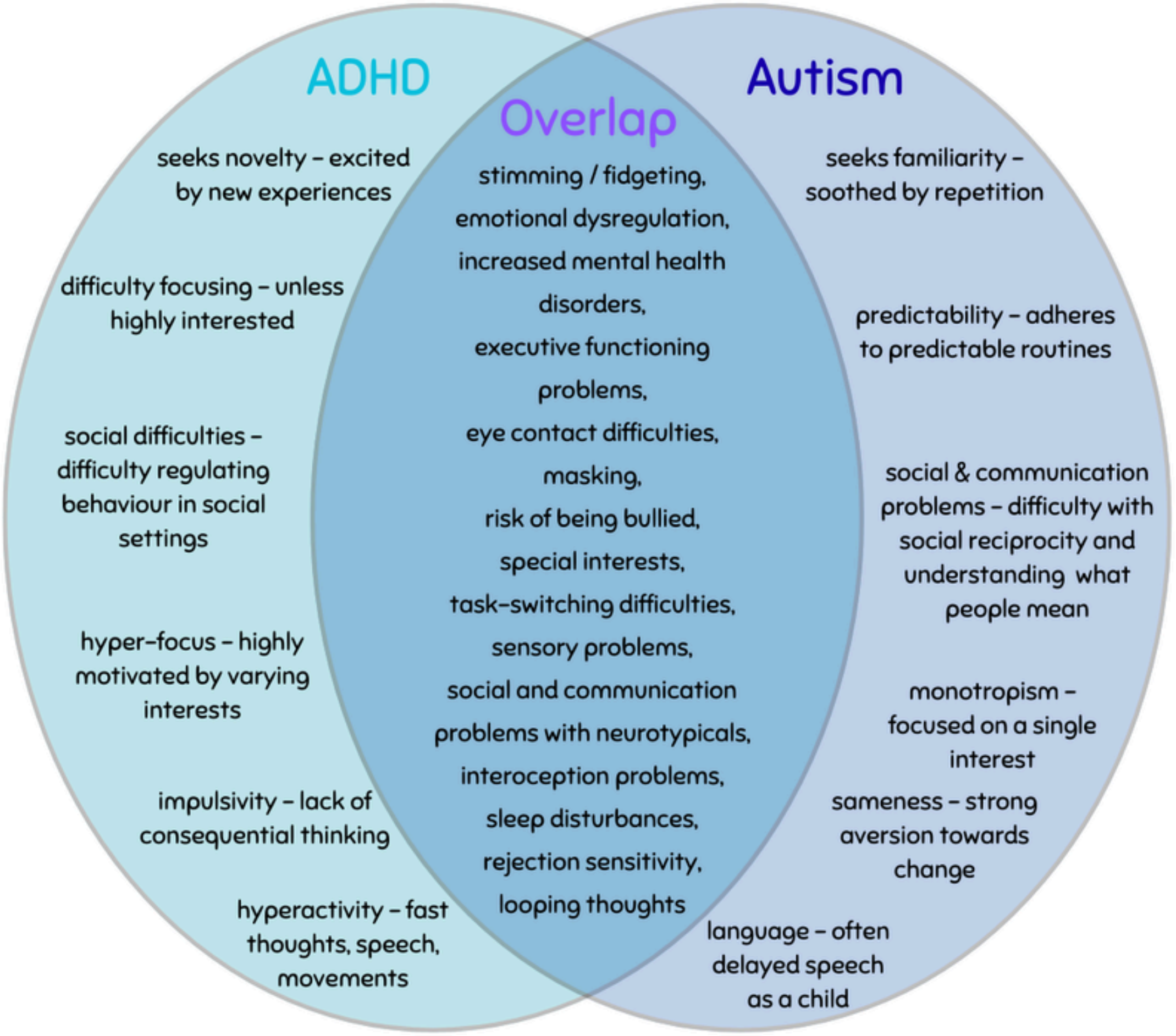
Is it ADHD or Autism?



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NEURODIVERGENT PEOPLE HAVE ROUGHLY 2-3X HIGHER RATES OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION COMPARED TO NEUROTYPICAL PEOPLE

Those with ADHD are 30-40% likely to suffer with anxiety and 25-35% likely to suffer with depression

Those with Autism are 30-50% likely to suffer with anxiety and 40-50% likely to suffer with depression

Neurotypical People are 20-25% likely to suffer with anxiety and 15-20% likely to suffer with depression

The world isn't built for neurodivergent brains! Neurodivergent brains process stimuli, emotions, and social cues differently. constant masking, sensory overload, social criticism / rejection, and lack of support create a chronic state of threat and stress. With understanding, acceptance, and accommodations, emotional wellness can dramatically improve.

Neurodivergence and Anxiety

Differences in brain structure - less connection between Pre-Frontal Cortex ('thinking brain') with the Limbic System ('emotional brain'), which means emotions may be harder to regulate, including anxiety.

Masking - not feeling like you fit it, or not meeting society exceptions, can lead to anxiety and therefore masking as a coping strategy.

A need for predictability and a greater intolerance of uncertainty - which can lead to anxiety during change or uncertain times.

Sensory overload - heightened sensitivity to external stimuli can be anxiety-inducing.

Social challenges - difficulty interpreting social cues, social norms, and initiating conversations can lead to social anxiety.

Misjudgement - being judged by others who don't understand their experiences; "different", "naughty", "odd", "difficult", leading to social anxiety.

Looping - getting caught on thoughts and ruminating, worrying or obsessing on them can lead to anxiety.

ADHD, Dopamine and OCD

Dopamine is a hormone associated with the brain's reward system and produces feelings of pleasure.

ADHD brains have lower-than-average levels of dopamine. As a result, people with ADHD are more easily distracted from low-level dopamine activities. Whereas dopamine-increasing behaviours are even more gratifying, contributing to hyper focus and hyperactivity.

How does this relate to OCD?

The body releases dopamine in response to stress / anxiety / fear. Short-term, 'controllable' stressors, such as intrusive thoughts, cause stress and thus a release of dopamine. The brain craves this dopamine and this creates a vicious cycle, increasing the frequency of intrusions and long-term anxiety.

And because ADHD brains have difficulty regulating emotions, they also remain in these more distressed states for longer.

So you've found out that your kid has ADHD, and you've worked out that probably your husband too!

Then perimenopause hits!

Suddenly the mask slips, the executive function disappears, and you're managing everything and nothing all at once.

This is when you finally understand that it's ADHD and has been all along — not laziness, not burnout, not "just you."

You've been holding it all together for so long. It's OK to let the mask drop. You're not alone in this!

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Disclaimer – I have been a therapist for many years and thus cannot reference where I have learned all theories and aspects that I have covered in this book, however, I have listed key texts and sites which have shaped my thinking.

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