Emotions

Emotions are incredibly complex and crucial for survival. Yet, in Western society, our understanding of them is often limited and inaccurate.

It is shaped by outdated views from ancient Greek and Roman times, where emotions were seen as irrational and disruptive.

These perspectives have perpetuated the misconception of emotions as weaknesses.

Emotions facilitate communication through tone and expressions and influence hormone production, like oxytocin, which eases tension and fosters bonds between a mother and child, underscoring their role in compassion and empathy.

Despite this, scientists have only recently begun to appreciate their significance. Modern research now underscores that emotions are essential for decision-making, survival, and understanding our environment, challenging ancient beliefs and highlighting their crucial role in our well-being and social interactions.







Emotions



Emotions influence our thoughts, how we process information, and our behavior. They are caused by our assessment of the environment, its features, and our past experiences.

Emotions help maintain the body's balance, make decisions, and stay safe. They also aid us in understanding the world and making predictions.

Are Emotions and Feelings the Same?

Feelings are the components of emotions that live in our body, although you will often hear the words used interchangeably.

Emotions and Core Beliefs



New definition: Core beliefs

Core beliefs are a person's most central ideas about themselves, others, and the world. People are not born with core beliefs—they are learned.

Core beliefs usually develop in childhood or during stressful or traumatic adult periods. **You can change your core beliefs.**

Core beliefs influence emotions. Emotions help us make predictions and guide us through life.

Each person's emotions are influenced by their core beliefs, past experiences, and how their brain processes information in the present.

How might a core belief like

- "I am not as smart as everyone else."
- or
- "I am defective."

affect your emotions and predictions?

What do you think some of your core beliefs that influence your emotions might be?



Emotions and Core Beliefs

New definition: Core beliefs

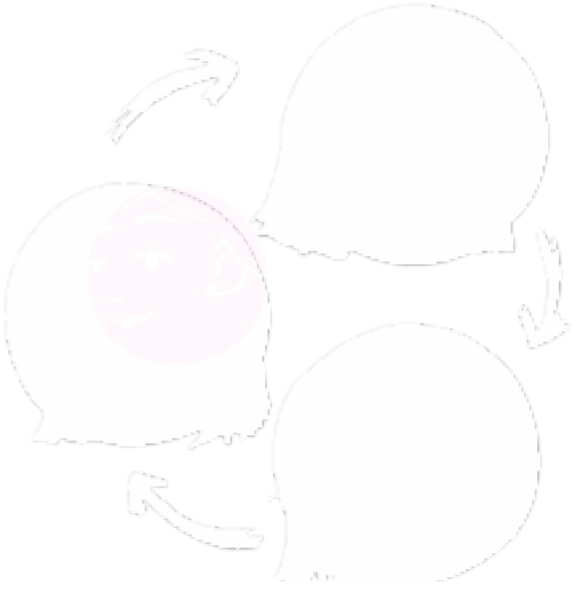


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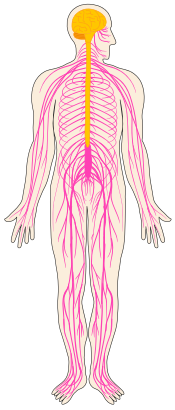
What do you think some of your core beliefs that influence your emotions might be?



How Emotions are Created

What else creates and influences emotions?

- Personal history
- Sensory systems
- The present moment
- Feelings in our body/stress response
- Cognitive Processes
- Social and Cultural Contexts
- Biological Factors
- Health and Physical Well-being
- Past Traumas









How Emotions are Created

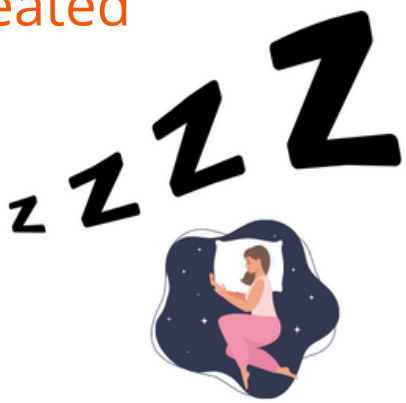
- Cognitive Processes: Thoughts and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping emotions. How we interpret events, the meaning we attach to interactions, and our belief systems influence your emotions.

- Society and Culture: A person's environment, including cultural norms and societal expectations, affects how emotions are expressed and processed. Social interactions and relationships also strongly impact emotions.

- Biological Factors: Genetics and neurochemistry can predispose individuals to certain emotional tendencies and influence the intensity and frequency of emotional experiences.



How Emotions are Created



- Health and Physical Well-being: Physical health, including sleep patterns, diet, and exercise, can affect emotional states. Hormonal changes and medical conditions can also play a significant role.

- Past Traumas: Past experiences, particularly traumatic ones, can shape how we respond emotionally to current situations. Traumas can lead to heightened emotional responses or numbness in certain situations.

Key Points to Understand

1. Emotions are formed from the data we receive through our senses.

2 Our past experiences also influence how we interpret what we are taking in.

3. Our brains process these emotions, but our bodies register feelings before we even think.

4. Our feelings are designed to help us decide whether to act; we are programmed to freeze, fight, flee, or fawn.

5. Often, these things are happening without our awareness.

Women's Emotions

Consider these two quotes

"Anger is inevitable when our lives consist of giving in and going along; when we assume responsibility for other people's feelings and reactions; when we relinquish our primary responsibility to proceed with our own growth and ensure the quality of our own lives; when we behave as if having a relationship is more important than having a self." — Harriet Lerner, The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships

"Our society cultivates guilt feelings in women such that many of us still feel guilty if we are anything less than an emotional service station to others." — Harriet Lerner, The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships



Women’s Emotions

Anger

1. The inevitability of Anger: Lerner points out that anger is a natural response to situations where personal boundaries and self-growth are compromised. **This emotion signals that something in our interactions or environment needs attention or change.**

2. Assuming Responsibility for Others: The quote highlights the emotional burden and conflict that arise **when one takes responsibility for managing other people's feelings and reactions.**

3. Relinquishing Personal Growth: Lerner suggests **continuous self-sacrifice can fuel resentment and anger, degrading personal growth.**

4. Relationships vs. Self: The quote challenges the notion that **maintaining a relationship should come at the cost of losing one's individuality and self-identity.**

Women's Emotions

Guilt

1. Societal Expectations: Lerner highlights the **societal pressure on women to be perpetually accommodating and responsive** to the emotional needs of others, often at the expense of their own well-being.

2. Cultivation of Guilt: **Guilt is actively taught and reinforced,** leading many women to internalize a sense of guilt for not adhering to these norms.

3. Emotional Labor: The metaphor of women as **"emotional service stations" vividly illustrates the role women are often expected to play**—being always available to service the emotional needs of others without regard for their emotional fuel.

4. Self-Sacrifice and Self-Care: **This expectation directly conflicts with the practice of self-care.** Women might struggle with balancing self-care with the ingrained role of caring for others, which can lead to emotional burnout.

Group Exercise
Week 3

Women's Emotions

1. Group Discussion Question on Guilt

"Reflect on a recent situation where you felt guilt. Describe the scenario, focusing on what triggered your guilt. Was this guilt a reaction to your own expectations or the perceived expectations of others?

Considering Harriet Lerner's perspective that society often makes women feel guilty if they are anything less than an 'emotional service station,' how can understanding and managing these feelings help you set healthier boundaries?

Discuss how recognizing this guilt as an intuitive signal can guide you to accommodate your own needs better and reduce unnecessary guilt.

2. Group Discussion Question on Anger

"Think about a time when you experienced anger due to a specific situation.

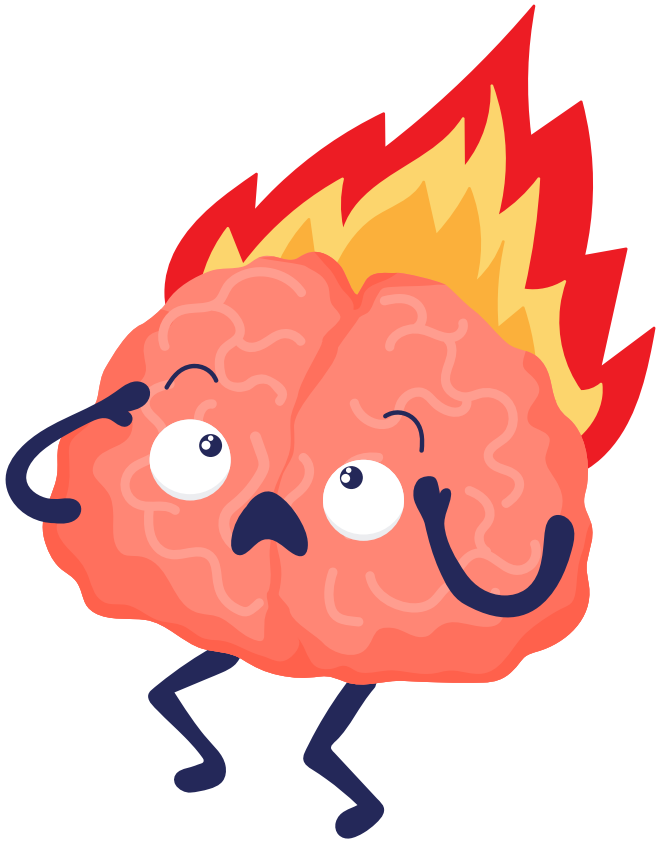
What were the circumstances that led to this feeling? In what ways do you think your anger was alerting you to something wrong in your environment?
Considering Harriet Lerner's idea that anger is inevitable when we assume responsibility for others' feelings and reactions, how can viewing anger as an intuitive response help you address and resolve the underlying issues?

Discuss how this understanding can lead to better emotional management and advocate for your own well-being.

Managing Stress and Emotions with ADHD

Emotional triggers can lead to **stress responses** often unhelpful in modern life. For women with ADHD, these responses can occur so frequently that they significantly disrupt their lives, leading to sickness, overwhelming feelings, and substantial emotional dysregulation.

When you are emotionally dysregulated, critical insights from your emotions may be obscured because your **fight, flight, freeze, or fawn** responses are activated. Our goal is to help you understand and navigate emotional processes and stress responses that may be detrimental, such as people-pleasing or shutting down.



Managing Stress and Emotions with ADHD

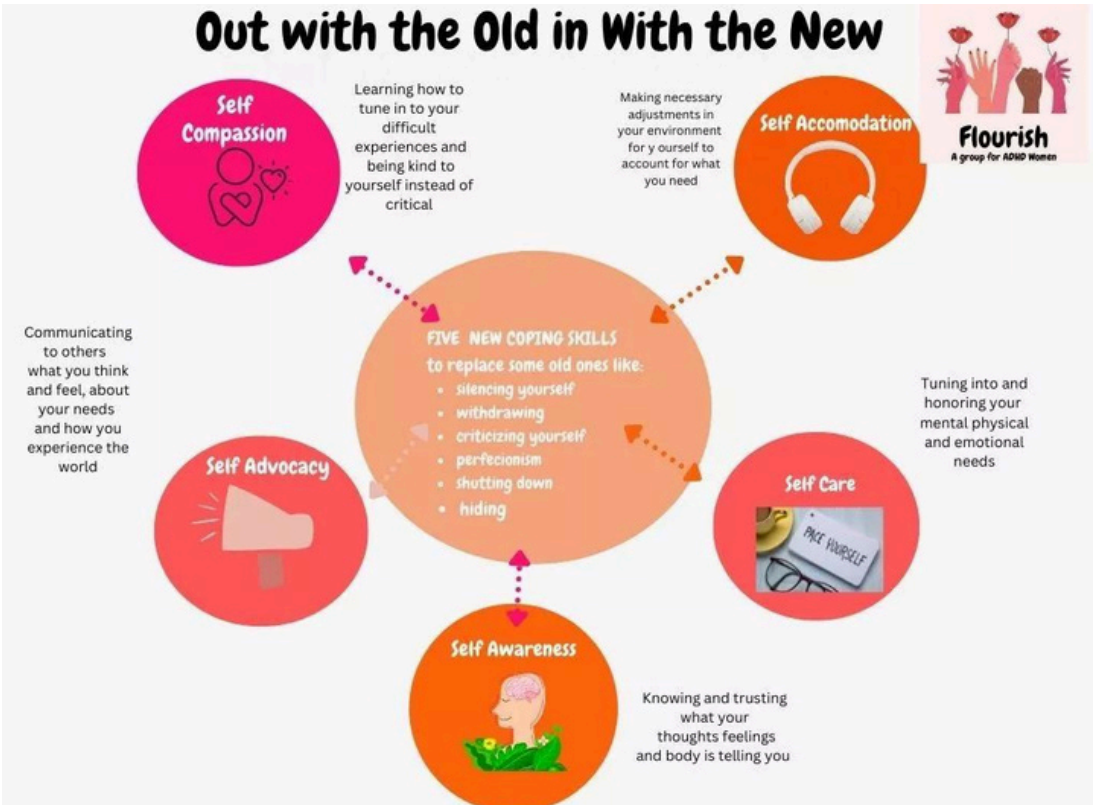
Regulating these stress responses can be particularly challenging for ADHD women. It might even be significantly more difficult.

In this group, we aim to give you some skills help you t**rust your emotions** by calming your stress and regulating your emotions, allowing you to understand more clearly what they are trying to communicate.



Managing Stress and Emotions with ADHD

The old coping skills are processes related to stress and emotions that might not work for you, like pleasing others or shutting down and silencing yourself**.** Here is a picture of the model in case you've missed it.



Difficulty with Emotions

There are many different reasons a person may struggle with their emotional experience.

1. How your family treated you when you had emotions.

One reason might be how they were treated when they had emotions.

If they didn't have good emotional regulation modeled, were taught that having emotions was destructive, or were shamed for their feelings in their family, they can struggle with emotional regulation.

2. Societal attitudes towards emotions

Another reason for difficulties with emotional experiences might be how society treats emotions. Certain groups are expected to display or feel emotions in certain ways.

For example, men and women are socialized to believe that certain emotions are not acceptable for them to have or express.



Difficulty with Emotions

3. ADHD brains and how they process emotions don't fit the world.

Another reason you may have a complicated relationship with emotions is if your brain processes emotions differently. ADHD brains process emotions differently.

Emotional regulation IS an executive functioning skill, so many ADHD women struggle tremendously with emotions.

The antidote for emotional difficulties is to learn self-compassion, self-awareness, self accomodation, self-care, and self-advocacy. We will also learn some specific skills to validate and tolerate strong emotions.



Double Whammy

ADHD women often carry a history laden with experiences and beliefs that complicate emotional processing. They may have been shamed for their feelings and subjected to severe criticism and stress, leading to involuntary reactions like fighting, fleeing, freezing, or appeasing others. These past negative experiences can leave women feeling embarrassed about their emotions. These experiences shouldn't have happened.



Double Whammy



ADHD influences how women process information and emotions, varying with each individual's unique brain wiring

Ways Neurodivergent Brains Process Emotions Differently

Up-Regulating: This is when the brain amplifies emotions and boosts motivation.

Addhders may need particular strategies to upregulate. This helps you engage more effectively with tasks by making you feel more energized and focused.

Down-Regulating: When the brain calms intense emotions or makes them smaller, it may work to prevent overwhelm and stress-induced reactions.

This might help you avoid going into freeze fight or flight or acting on impulse during stressful moments. Adders may need particular emotional regulation strategies or support safety and validation to help down-regulate.

Impulsivity: When the brain encounters high emotional peaks or intense stress, impulsivity can kick in, and neurodivergent brains may be more prone to it.

Double Whammy

Sensitivity to Rejection: ADHD women may react strongly to criticism or rejection, feeling intense emotions like sadness or anger from even minor triggers. This is known as Rejection sensitivity Dysphoria or RSD.

Emotion Differentiation: ADHD and AUDHD women might find it challenging to identify and describe their emotions, making it harder for them to manage how they feel. This is known as Alexithymia.

Stress Sensitivity: ADHD women often feel more stressed and anxious, which can make it challenging to stay regulated or see the message in emotions, creating a cycle that impacts their emotional stability.

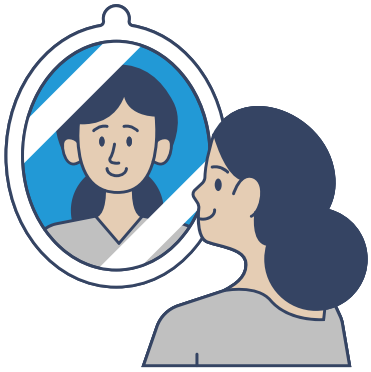


Double Whammy

Emotional Memory: ADHD can influence how emotions are remembered, leading individuals to recall how an event made them feel rather than the specific event details.

Emotional Exhaustion: Constantly managing emotions can be tiring for individuals with ADHD, draining energy needed for other tasks and affecting their mood and productivity.





Reflection Question

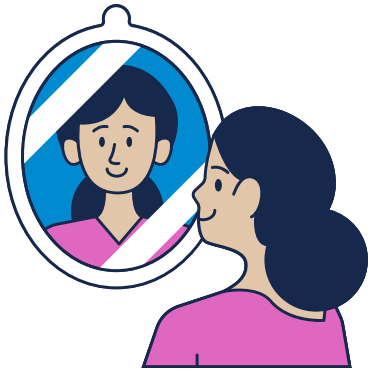
Reflecting on Emotional Challenges Linked to Neurodiversity

When you consider the unique ways your brain processes emotions, think about these different aspects:

- Up-Regulating: Generating more emotion to boost motivation.
- Down-regulating: Reducing intense emotions to make them manageable.
- Acting on Impulses: Responding quickly to feelings without pausing to think.

Reflection Questions:

Identifying Personal Challenges: Which emotional processes (up-regulating, down-regulating, acting on impulses) have posed challenges for you? Reflect on both past and present experiences.



Reflection Question

What about the five listed on the previous page? Do any of these resonate?

Looking back on your experiences, have you or others ever perceived your emotional challenges as deliberate choices or character flaws due to your neurodiversity?

How has this affected you?

What were you taught about emotions?

What were you taught about emotions?

It's crucial to reflect on what you believe about emotions. Often, our beliefs about emotions are implicit, formed without direct education from school or family. Instead, we might pick up messages by observing those around us or through our own experiences.

For example, being told to "go to your room until you can calm down" teaches that it's not acceptable to be upset. This doesn't teach you how to calm down. It also implies that your parents are not patient with your emotions and that there is something inherently wrong with being emotional.

Group Exercise Week 4



What were you taught about emotions?

What were you taught by society about your feelings?

What were you taught about your emotions in your family? How did your family express feelings?

Did they talk openly about them?

Did they teach that some were good or bad?

Do you feel any of your feelings or emotions have been judged due to your gender or race?

What did they teach you about anger?

- Worry?
- Sadness?

Do you think emotions can be " bad" or "good"?