Week 20 Silencing

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What is Silencing

Silencing is a societal process that discourages ADHD girls from expressing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

Shaped by norms and expectations, it suppresses their authentic selves and pressures them to internalize their unique perspectives.

From an early age, ADHD girls learn to silence themselves, gradually adopting this behavior as a way to shield against criticism and judgment.

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How ADHD Girls Learn Silencing

Why do ADHD girls silence themselves?

1. Experiences of Being Misunderstood

If you've had experiences as a young girl of feeling misunderstood when you tried to communicate, it may have caused you to fear sharing your thoughts and ideas.

Executive functioning differences may have made processing during communication exchanges hard. Or, you may have had periods of excessive enthusiasm or specialized interests that you wanted to share that led others to treat you as if your communication style was weird or different.





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How You Learned SIlencing

These interactions might have left you feeling alone and isolated as a child, so you might have just concluded that silence was the best choice.

2. Internalized Beliefs about Your Self-Worth

You might have learned as a girl that your thoughts and ideas were less valuable or less valid than others, leading you to hold back even when you had something important to say.

Society often implies that girls' voices, especially neurodivergent ones, are less important than boys.

3. The Burden of Emotional Labor

As a girl, you were likely expected to manage emotions, including providing emotional support, listening to others, and handling conflict, a task referred to as emotional labor.

This burden can make it hard for females to prioritize their own needs and desires because all of their (already compromised) executive functioning is used up on everyone else.

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Finding Your Voice

4. Lack of Representation

A lack of representation of neurodivergent girls in leadership roles or specific fields can make you feel your voice won't be heard or valued.

5. Punishment for Different Thoughts or Emotions

Girls are often socially conditioned to be agreeable, nurturing, non-confrontational, quiet, focused, and patient.

Those who defy these norms can face punishment and shame in school from peers, and at home, leading many ADHD girls to feel like they must silence their voices, feelings, and thoughts to fit in or avoid conflict.

6. Feeling Different, the Pressure to Conform and to Mask

Looking around and feeling different or out of place can lead you to keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself. This is a common experience for neurodivergent girls.

7. Internalized Stigma

Many women with ADHD do not realize the value of their thoughts, the validity of their emotions, and the need for their voices. This comes from internalizing messages that label them in girlhood as weird, as stupid, or lazy.

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Silencing

Finding Your Voice

8. Invalidation of Emotional Experiences

You may have felt like your emotions were dismissed as overly dramatic or sensitive, causing self-doubt and suppression. Difficulty with social cues and norms can lead to isolation and feeling like your struggles aren't real. In environments that didn't cater to your unique needs as a girl with ADHD, you may have felt like your experiences and challenges weren't acknowledged or understood.

9. The Gold Standard Girl

As a girl and young woman, you may have felt pressure to conform to societal expectations of being a "good girl." This often involves being polite, accommodating, and nurturing, even if it means neglecting your own needs and desires. Additionally, the fear of being labeled as "difficult" or "bossy" may have caused you to ignore your own needs and desires.

Unfortunately, society discourages all females, especially those who are neurodivergent, from listening to their bodies and advocating for themselves. This pressure can make speaking up and asserting yourself difficult, especially in male-dominated or neurotypical environments, when you have ideas or needs. This fear could stem from past experiences, observation of others, or **explicit warnings of potential consequences from adults and peers in your life.****



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The Impact of Silencing on ADHD GIRls

Society's encouragement of silence compounds the challenges faced by girls with ADHD, significantly hindering their development and functioning.

Research shows that when children are taught to suppress their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, it negatively impacts their emotional growth, self-esteem, mental health, communication skills, and cognitive development.

Yet this is what we encourage ADHD girls to do!

The Detrimental Effects

Encouraging children to suppress their voice, thoughts, and feelings (masking) has far- reaching effects. **For girls with ADHD, the adverse impacts of such silencing are particularly detrimental:**

Research shows that children who are discouraged from expressing themselves **may have more difficulty identifying, understanding, and managing emotions, exacerbating the emotional regulation challenges often associated with ADHD**



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The Impact of Silencing on ADHD Girls

- **Mental health disorders are closely linked to repression in children. Girls with ADHD, who are already at a higher risk of experiencing co-occurring mental health disorders, face an even greater risk when they are taught to suppress their thoughts and feelings.**

- **Effective communication is essential for successful personal and professional relationships. Silencing children can hinder the development of these crucial skills.**

- **Suppressing children's thoughts and ideas can limit cognitive development and problem-solving skills. This is particularly harmful for girls with ADHD, who may already experience challenges in these areas.**



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Why is it so scary for me to start using my voice?

Why is it so scary to use my voice and speak my truth?

This is a big question, and it has a complex answer. There are three main components.

1. First, silencing can be a tool deliberately used to keep groups marginalized and oppressed, and speaking out can and may be unsafe when that's you.

Throughout history, women and other marginalized groups—such as racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities—have often been silenced. For these groups, speaking up can lead to social penalties. Intersectionality explains how people who belong to multiple marginalized groups face overlapping discrimination. As a woman with ADHD, you may experience challenges related to both your gender and disability. Recognizing these systemic issues is an important first step before addressing self-silencing.

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Why is it so scary for me to start using my voice?

2. ADHD women and girls are often silenced in both obvious and subtle ways, as this behavior is deeply ingrained in our culture. From a young age, girls are taught to be polite, avoid making a fuss, and not stand out—in other words, not to take up space. Over time, this leads to self-silencing, where you suppress your voice without even realizing it. This coping mechanism is something you learned to protect yourself, and the part of you that relies on it may feel unsafe letting it go.

3. Third, there is a double standard in how being vocal is perceived. When women speak up assertively, they are often labeled as aggressive or bossy, while men are seen as confident and strong. This double standard is even harder for women with ADHD, who may already struggle with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy.

Speaking up can feel risky because it might seem unsafe.

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Why is it so scary for me to start using my voice?

You're not alone if you struggle with self- silencing. It's not your fault that you struggle with this. The issue is systemic and deeply rooted in how society views and treats women, particularly those with ADHD.

Yes, it can feel scary to use your voice, especially when you're not used to it, and especially when you're used to being silenced. But it's also okay to push back against the fear. It's okay to claim your space. It's okay to assert your needs. It's okay to be you WHEN YOU FEEL SAFE TO.

You don't have to find your voice overnight. It's okay to take small steps and do this as it feels right for you.

You bring equal value to all relationships, your voice isn't less just because you are a woman, or because you have adhd.



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Silence Breaking Tips

1. Cultivate Self-Awareness

Understanding yourself starts with small, focused steps:

Know What Matters Most:
Write down a few things that are most important to you, like kindness, creativity, or fairness. These are your values—they guide what feels right and meaningful in your life._____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Notice When You Hold Back:
Think about times when you didn't speak up.
What was happening?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____ _____
_____

Who was there? _____
_____
_____
_____
_____ _____
How did you feel?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____ _____
This can help you spot patterns in when and why you stay silent.

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Silence Breaking Tips

2. Remind Yourself of Your Worth:

Practice saying this to yourself:



My thoughts and feelings are valid.

My perspective matters.

It's okay to take up space and share my ideas.

Why This Helps:

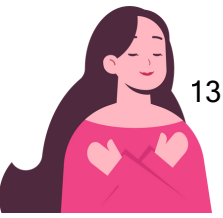
By understanding what's important to you and recognizing when you feel silenced, you'll start to see why your voice matters. Small steps like these can build your confidence to speak up when it counts.

3. Recognize that you have the right to bring equal value and not be criticized for your unique brain- based differences

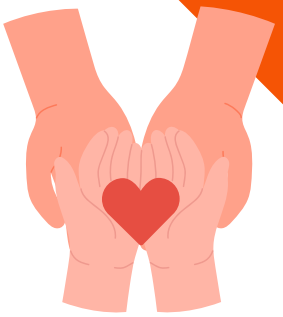
Who criticizes you for your brain based differences and makes you feel less valuable

_____ _____
__ _____ _____
_____ _____
_____. _____ _____
_____ _____
_____.

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Silence Breaking Tips



4. Learn Assertive Communication

Practice expressing your thoughts, feelings, and needs openly, honestly, and respectfully while considering the rights and perspectives of others. Assertive communication is about balance—it allows you to stand up for yourself without disregarding others.

Reflection:

How comfortable are you with assertive communication?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Build Self-Confidence

Boost your self-confidence by:

-Identifying and understanding your strengths.

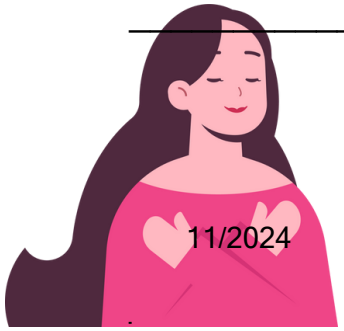
-Practicing self-compassion.

- Engaging in activities and passions that energize and inspire you.

Reflection:

What are your strengths, passions, and special interests?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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Silence Breaking Tips

6. Seek Safe Spaces

Find or create environments where you can express yourself freely. These could be physical places, like a trusted friend's home or a support group, or online communities that value respect and mutual support.

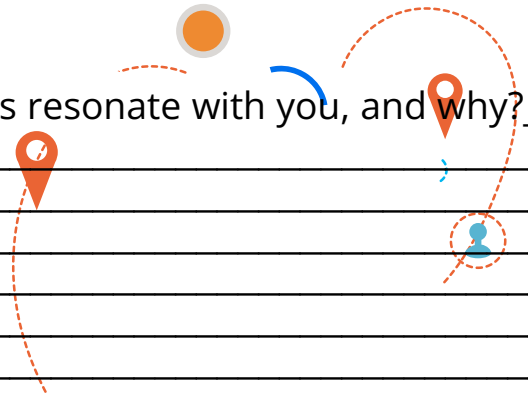
Reflection:

Where are your safe spaces for expressing yourself?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Draw Inspiration

Learn from women who have resisted being silenced, such as Malala Yousafzai, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Greta Thunberg, Emma González, and Tarana Burke. Despite facing significant challenges, they persevered and created meaningful change in society and politics.

Reflection:



Which inspirational figures resonate with you, and why?_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

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Silence Breaking Tips

Sometimes, especially if you are a late-diagnosed adhd woman, it's hard to know your thoughts and feelings. This may be because you have been masking them for so long that they are deep down and hard to find. Don't worry they are still there!

Below are some specific activities you can do that will help you reconnect with your voice if you are having trouble finding it.

1. Surround Yourself with Safe People: Find a quiet and comfortable space. Invite a trusted friend or family member to have a 10-minute conversation about a topic that interests you.

2. Form Opinions from Articles: Choose a short article from a newspaper or online source. Spend 5 minutes reading it, then spend another 5 minutes writing down your thoughts and feelings about it.

3. Daily Writing or Voice Recording: Find a quiet space. For 5 minutes, write in a journal or speak into a voice recording app about your thoughts and feelings for the day.

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Silence Breaking Tips

4. Identify Your Feelings: Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Scan your body from head to toe, noting any physical sensations. Then, try to connect those sensations with emotions and write them down. You can revisit our emotions section in the workbook and course, where the feelings wheel and faces can help you with this exercise.

5. Begin a Breathing Practice: Find a calm place. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Take a slow, deep breath in for a count of 4, hold it for a count of 4, and exhale for a count of 4. Repeat this cycle for 5 minutes. You can imagine the waves moving in and out.



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Silence Breaking Tips

6. Self-Reflection Time: Find a quiet space. Ask yourself these questions: What do I think? What do I feel? What do I need? Spend 5 minutes writing down your responses.These check-ins help build self-compassion and awareness of your needs, feelings, and body.

7. Embrace Contrary Thoughts or Feelings: Reflect on a recent event where your initial thought or feeling differed from the expected or conventional one. Write it down, then spend a few minutes exploring why you might have felt this way.

8. Freeform Drawing: Grab a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Spend 10 minutes drawing anything that comes to your mind, and let your hand move freely. Creative exercises help you connect to your authentic self.



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Silence Breaking Tips

9. Daily Dance Practice: Pick a song you like, stand up, and allow your body to move freely to the music for the duration of the song. Any similar exercise where you can freely connect to your body is beneficial.

11. Capture Your Perspective Through Photography: Take a walk with your phone or camera. Spend 10 minutes taking photos of things that catch your eye. Reflect on why you chose these subjects.

12. Build a Vision Board: Gather some magazines, scissors, and a piece of paper. Spend 10 minutes cutting out images that resonate with you. Glue them onto your paper to create a collage that represents your aspirations and beliefs.

13. Hum or Sing to Your Favorite Songs: Choose a song you love. Spend 5-10 minutes humming or singing along. Notice how the melody and lyrics resonate with your current feelings.

15. Create a Mind Map of Your Thoughts: Grab a pen and paper. Write a word or idea in the center of the paper. Spend 5-10 minutes writing-related ideas around it, drawing lines to connect them.

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Harriet Lerner and Sari Solden



Dr. Harriet Lerner is a prominent feminist therapist who has extensively worked in the field of emotional healing. Her approach emphasizes the importance of reclaiming emotions, connecting with inner experiences, and understanding personal needs. According to her, it's essential to permit ourselves to have feelings, thoughts and needs, honor those emotions, and create space for ourselves to think and reflect.

Dr. Lerner stresses the importance of emotional understanding and expression in fostering healthy relationships and effective communication.

Sari Solden has also made remarkable contributions to the study of how *silencing affects women with ADHD.*

The following are some of her ideas on being heard as an ADHD woman.

Remember to start with environments and relationships where you feel safe.

Don't push yourself too hard if you feel overwhelmed or uneasy.

Remember, it's normal to encounter some resistance when expressing your thoughts and opinions. Take note of how this makes you feel, and trust your instincts—they can guide you in navigating these moments.

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Sari Solden Tips

1. Don’t Give Up

It’s important to keep trying to be heard during conversations. If you have an important thought, idea, or feeling to communicate, aim to persist instead of giving up or shutting down.

Keep working to get your message across. This might mean taking a break and returning to the conversation later when you have the courage, energy, or executive functioning to pursue it.

2. Keep Practicing

Communication is a skill, and like any skill, it improves with practice. The more you practice expressing yourself clearly and assertively, the better you’ll become at making your voice heard.

3. Hold Onto Your Truth

Everyone has unique experiences, thoughts and feelings that form their individual " truth." Your experiences and self-understanding are valid and deserve to be acknowledged.

4. Refuse Character Attacks

Unfortunately, people with different brain wiring are often criticized or misunderstood. While it’s okay for others to feel confused or even hurt by your behavior, it’s never acceptable for them to attack your character. Stand firm in rejecting personal attacks.

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Sari Solden Tips

5. Equal Value

You bring unique and valuable contributions to every relationship. While your contributions might differ from those of others, they are equally important. Don't forget your worth!

6. Notice and Adjust

If you find that you' re being misunderstood or disrespected, take a moment to reflect on your reactions. Use this self- awareness to adjust your communication approach. Changing how you express yourself can help you connect more effectively without compromising your authenticity.

7. Establish Self-Worth

Before entering difficult conversations, remind yourself of your value and right to be heard. Developing a strong sense of self-worth helps you approach communication with confidence and resilience, making it less likely for others to undermine your self-esteem.

8. Take Baby Steps

Effective communication is a skill that takes time and effort to master. Focus on consistent progress, even if it's slow. Every small improvement contributes to long-term growth and helps build your confidence over time.

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Reflections

Reclaiming Your Voice: Individual Reflections

Reflection 1: Looking Back

Can you remember a time as a girl when you felt your voice didn't matter or you were discouraged—directly or indirectly—from using your voice to express yourself?

What were the circumstances, and how did you feel at the time?

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Reflections

Reflection 2: Exploring the Impact

What does it feel like in your body to think about being unable to freely share your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs?

Are there specific emotions, sensations, or memories that stand out?

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Reflections

Reflection 3: Envisioning Change

How do you imagine your life and relationships being transformed by finding and using your voice?

What would it feel like in your body to share your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs freely and safely?

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Reflections

Reflection 4: Embracing Self-Worth

How would your life change if you adopted the belief that you have equal right to your thoughts feelings and beliefs and to voice them?

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Reflections

Reflection 5: Action Steps

What is one actionable step you can take to practice using your voice more freely?__(Hint look through all tips)___

How will you remind yourself of your worth when challenges arise? (Hint Sari Solden tips)

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