Diagnostic Failures

Emotional regulation issues, including Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD), are not officially recognized in the DSM as part of ADHD, though research and clinical experiences tell us they are.

This omission has several significant implications:

- Women don't get diagnosed or get misdiagnosed as having borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder, or anxiety and are medicated improperly.

- When they are diagnosed, we have poor treatment guidance and outcomes because core features haven't been researched. We need strategies that make sense for adhd women when it comes to emotional regulation.

We don't know how to help RSD or emotional dysregulation in adhd people because they aren't issues that are extensively recognized or researched.

Emotional Regulation

The main goal of our group is to increase your self-confidence and self-trust.

One way to do this is to help you **learn to decode** and master your feelings so you can **trust your ability to understand** them and tend to yourself when you have emotions.

This can be hard when you get overwhelmed by them.

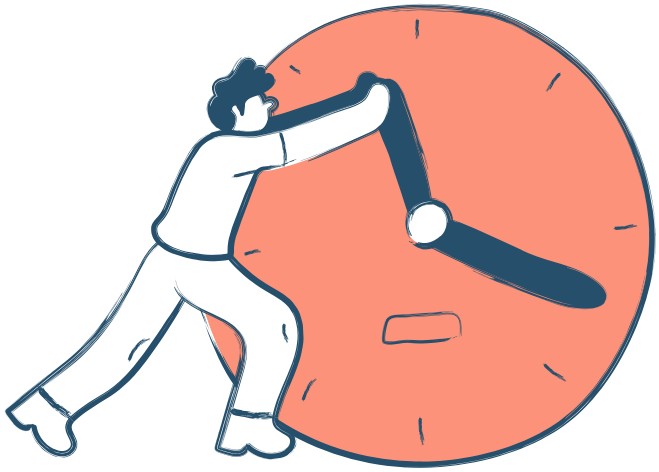
Emotional dysregulation is when you become overwhelmed with your emotions, and your body signals to your brain that you are in distress, making it hard to decide what to do or act. For ADHD women, this often results in coping skills of perfectionism, or pleasing or fight-flight and flee kicking in, and **compromised executive functioning.**

Let's take a look at how adhd brains might make emotional regulation hard for you.

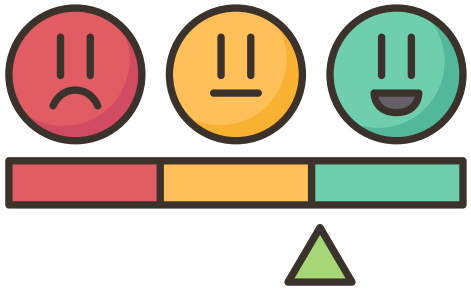
- 🟢**Postponing daunting tasks**
- 🟢**Unique perception of time**

Research shows that delaying gratification can be as distressing as physical pain for those with ADHD, who often struggle with procrastination and "time blindness." These challenges can make daily tasks more stressful.

Due to these preferences, the world will set your brain up for stress.



Identifying Emotions



Alexithymia and Interoceptive Awareness

As an ADHD woman, you might find yourself more often facing **alexithymia,** a condition where recognizing feelings and internal states like hunger or thirst is challenging—more so than in the general population. This is also common among autistic individuals.

Impaired **interoceptive awareness** might hinder your ability to sense and interpret stress signals and complex emotions, possibly triggering automatic coping responses such as freezing, fighting, fleeing, or pleasing.

These challenges can complicate communication, contribute to overwhelming feelings and lead to difficulties managing basic needs like eating, drinking, or sleeping.

If this resonates with you, continue to pay attention to exercises that build this awareness.

Seeing Postive Elements

- Recognizing the positive or " decreased early sensory encoding for the positive."

People with ADHD tend to pay more attention to the negative aspects of a given situation. For example, if presented with a field of both living and dead flowers, their initial focus will be on the dead ones. The cause of this is still unknown and could be due to either genetic or environmental factors.



In our session "Taking in the Good" we will learn awe, gratitude, and savoring. You can learn how to orient your brain more towards living flowers and take advantage of the neuroplasticity of our brains. This will help with emotional regulation.

Attentional Filter

Keeping out the bad stuff or filtering the "negative."

Neurotypical brains are like a dance club with a bouncer, while ADHD brains are like an outdoor dance party. When emotions are created, the neurotypical brain can more easily filter painful experiences, memories, and thoughts.



Getting stuck like glue to the "negative"

ADHD women have more difficulty pulling away from the "negative". This makes it difficult to stop ruminating when experiencing something difficult.

Not Being Able to Pull Attention Away from "Negative" Emotion



Getting stuck like glue to the "negative"

ADHD women have more difficulty pulling away from the "negative". This makes it difficult to stop ruminating when experiencing something difficult.

Cognitive Control

Making your big emotions smaller or cognitive "control".

As an ADHD woman, you may have a more challenging time thinking about your emotions to help make them smaller or right-sized once they start or are created.

It makes sense to help yourself before your emotions start rather than wait until they happen because it can be tough to reel them back once they start.

Default Mode Network

Quieting the chatter that overwhelms or brings you down or Default Mode Network (DMN) .

THE DMN is a part of the brain that turns off in neurotypicals when they do work or focus but doesn't in those with ADHD. It's likely chattering in some cases about things you did wrong, are worried about, or even want to do. You may also start to ruminate, worry or dwell obsessively due to this brain feature.

Emotional Sensitivity

Women with ADHD often face unique challenges with emotional regulation, such as:

🔵 Intense Emotional Responses: Strong emotions can arise from the present, past, or within the body and mind. Early relationships, family and cultural teachings, emotional education during childhood, and the beliefs you formed about yourself and the world can contribute to this.

🟢 Difficulty Regulating Emotions: Once emotions surface, it can be hard to regain control and calm down.

🔴 Trouble Differentiating Threat Levels: It's challenging to distinguish between major and minor threats, leading to strong reactions.

Emotional Sensitivity

- Impulse to Act on Emotions: There can be a strong urge to act impulsively, which may lead to regret later.

- Preoccupation with Emotions: Intense emotions can make it hard to focus, causing additional distress.

- Trauma and Triggers: Past trauma or difficult experiences can trigger challenging emotional responses, making regulation even harder.

Unreasonable Stress

Criticism, overwhelming sensory experiences, confusing social experiences, unmanageable routines and workload, and unreasonable executive functioning expectations can cause ADHD women to feel stress as DANGER. When your body feels too much stress, your sympathetic nervous system kicks in because it believes you are in danger. This can effectively render your THINKING BRAIN useless.

This is when your hiding, perfectionism, silencing, or whatever coping skills you rely on to protect yourself will be most prominent. All of these reactions happen without your awareness.

Flourishing SKills

We work on how our emotions are regulated by: regularly practicing:

- Self-compassion
- Self-care
- Self-awareness
- Self accommodation
- Self-advocacy





Reflection





What areas of emotional regulation difficulty did you recognize your brain struggling with? How have you coped?

ER and Self Awareness

What is Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness involves recognizing and understanding your thoughts, emotions, and bodily signals. It's the ability to observe yourself, notice your emotional responses, and understand the underlying reasons for your feelings. For women with ADHD, self-awareness is key to reconnecting with their fundamental needs, which are often overlooked or suppressed due to societal conditioning.

How Does Self-Awareness Relate to Emotional Regulation?

Self-awareness plays a critical role in emotional regulation. Here's how:

🔵 Understanding the Importance of Self-Care: Self-awareness helps you recognize the importance of self-care for maintaining emotional stability.

🟢 Recognizing Signs of Stress: By being aware of the signs of stress in your body and mind, you can better anticipate when you might become dysregulated.

ER and Self Awareness

🔴 Exploring Beliefs and Internalized Stigma: Self-awareness allows you to identify and challenge beliefs about emotions and internalized stigma that make emotional regulation more difficult.

🟠 Recognizing and Naming Feelings: It enables you to accurately identify and label your emotions, a crucial step in managing them.

🟣 Self-Talk for Regulation: With self-awareness, you can use positive self-talk as a tool to help regulate your emotions.

🔵 Practicing Self-Distancing Techniques: It helps you learn and apply self-distancing techniques to create emotional distance in stressful situations.

⚫🟢 Building Interoceptive Awareness: Enhances your awareness of internal bodily signals, aiding in self-care and stress management.

Befriending our Emotions

SKILL

You can improve your relationship with your emotions, understand them better, and let them guide you in life by:

● Unlearning False Beliefs

One of the most influential and quickest ways to work on emotional regulation is to challenge the societal beliefs that cause you to mistrust your emotions. By doing so, you can begin to build a more trusting and supportive relationship with your feelings.

Unlearning false beliefs is a form of self-awareness,



OLD BELIEFS

(✓ if you've felt this way)

- □ Emotions are irrational and untrustworthy.
- □ Some emotions are inherently bad.
- □ Strong emotions mean you're out of control.
- □ Positive emotions are always good; negative emotions should be avoided.
- □ You should be able to control your emotions at all times.
- □ Feeling certain emotions means something is wrong with you.
- □ Emotions linger indefinitely once they start.

New Beliefs

(Replace the old beliefs with these new truths)

- □ Emotions aren't good or bad.
- □ Emotions are valuable but must be decoded.
- □ They are meant to keep you safe, although your body and brain may get confused.
- □ All emotions are to be befriended.
- □ Emotions aren't permanent.
- □ Emotions don't mean anything good or bad about you as a person.
- □ If you feel emotions and don't fight them, they will go away quicker.
- □ You can learn to trust your emotions, and they can be a guide to help you make choices.
- □ Learning to understand and decipher what your emotions mean is essential.



ER and Self Care

What is Self-Care?

Self-care involves taking intentional steps to care for your physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being. For women with ADHD, self-care is essential, not just an indulgence. It helps navigate a world designed for neurotypicals, preventing burnout and promoting overall well-being.

How Does Self-Care Relate to Emotional Regulation?

Self-care is crucial for emotional regulation because it helps maintain balance, reduces the risk of emotional dysregulation, and enhances resilience against stress. By addressing your basic needs like nourishment, rest, hydration, and movement, self-care directly supports the brain and body, making it easier to manage emotions and avoid burnout.

We will develop a self care plan in group 25

ER and Self Compassion

How is Self-Compassion Related to Emotional Regulation?

Self-compassion is treating yourself with the same kindness, understanding, and support that you would offer a friend. We will learn to respond with understanding and kindness instead of reacting with criticism and shame when experiencing difficult emotions. This approach helps prevent episodes of dysregulation, as shame tends to exacerbate emotional instability rather than alleviate it.

Throughout our group, we will focus on building self-compassion. In and upcoming next session, we will learn and practice a self-compassion break to help us be kinder to ourselves. Remember, difficult emotions are opportunities to be gentle with yourself.



ER and Self Advocacy

How is Self-Advocacy Related to Emotional Regulation?

Self-advocacy is the practice of recognizing and asserting your needs, rights, and boundaries. By being aware of your needs and stress levels, and responding to yourself with compassion, you can be more motivated to stand up for yourself. When you don't advocate for yourself, feelings of resentment and anger can build up, adding to your emotional load.

Self-advocacy is a form of self-care. It involves asking for what you need, obtaining the information necessary to make informed decisions, and clearly communicating your boundaries to others. This proactive approach can help prevent emotional overload and support better emotional regulation.



ER and Self Accomodation

How is Self-Accommodation Related to Emotional Regulation?

Self-accommodation involves making adjustments in your life to better meet your own needs, rather than constantly putting others first. Growing up, women with ADHD were often taught to endure difficult situations to make others happy. While this coping strategy might have worked in the past, it can now lead to feelings of being overwhelmed.

By understanding yourself better and being kinder to yourself, you can begin to recognize that many of the challenges you face can be alleviated by taking care of yourself instead of always accommodating others. Self-accommodation means giving yourself permission to make changes that support your well-being—something that may not have been encouraged in the past.



Self Accommodation

Some examples of self-accommodation are:

🔵 Refraining from entering into stressful situations or relationships – Even though you may have been taught to do this to please others.

🟢 Creating safe sensory environments to reduce stress – Despite being taught that you must withstand discomfort to survive.

🔴 Setting boundaries – Even when it feels impolite.

🟠 Making alterations to expectations you have of yourself – Allowing yourself to do things more easily, even if it feels indulgent.



Group Exercise Self Awareness: Beliefs about Emotions



Research shows beliefs about emotions can cause us to be more or less emotionally regulated .

Understanding the Impact of False Beliefs on Emotional Regulation For example, if your family taught you that emotions are to be avoided, you might try to suppress or get rid of them when you experience them. This can lead to greater emotional dysregulation. Additionally, you may feel shame when you experience an emotion, creating a "double emotion" effect—the original emotion and the unnecessary shame that follows.

Reflect:

What false beliefs about emotions were taught to you that have caused harm and now contribute to your emotional dysregulation?

Emotions and Helpful Beliefs:

- Emotions aren't good or bad.
- They are meant to keep you safe, even though your body and brain may sometimes get confused.
- You can befriend your emotions.
- They aren't permanent.
- They don't define your worth as a person.
- If you allow yourself to feel and be curious about your emotions they will pass more quickly.

Group Exercise Self Advocacy: Assertiveness



ASSERTIVE BILL OF RIGHTS

The following rights highlight the freedom you have to stand up for yourself and be clear about your position without disrespecting others.

I have the right to:

- Express my feelings and opinions appropriately and have them taken seriously by others.
- Ask for what I want.
- Disagree with others regardless of their position or numbers.
- Take the time I need to respond.
- Say “no” without feeling guilty.
- Say “I don’t know.”
- Ask questions when I don't understand.
- Be treated with respect and not be taken for granted.
- Not sacrifice my comfort for others all the time.

Group Exercise Self Advocacy: Assertiveness



ASSERTIVE BILL OF RIGHTS

- Feel all of my emotions (including anger) and express them appropriately.
- Not explain to others the reasons why I say no.
- Set my own priorities.
- Make my own decisions and deal with the consequences.
- Make mistakes
- Change my mind.
- Feel good about me, my actions, and my life.
- Exercise any and all of these rights, without feeling guilty.

Reflection:
What happens when you read these rights?
If you were deprived of these rights or did not know you had them, what impact would it have on your emotions and your emotional regulation?

FLOURISH

Emotional Regulation

Group exercises
Make the easy hard and the hard easy
Learning About Your Rights
New Communication Skills
Non-Violent and Fact-Focused Communication
Boundaries
Communication Practices to say no
Choosing Neurodivergent Friends
Sensory Stimulation/Soothing
Self-Care Plans
Reflective Practices
Compassionate Breathing
Vision Board Creation

Timer Check-Ins
Head Heart Belly Meditation
Body Scans
Breathing
Grounding
Hand over Heart
Self-Compassion Break
Compassionate Being
What Would You Say to a Friend
Distanced Self-Talk
Externalizing Executive Functioning
Knowing your Rights

Mindful Eating Exercise
Meditations
Freeform Drawing
Daily Dance Practice
Naming and Taming Shame
Shame Resilience Techniques
Recognizing Stress Signals
Addressing Alexithymia
Walking Meditation
Breath Awareness
Dialoguing with Body Parts
Yes and No Boundary Practice
Managing Chronic Stress Through Embodiment

Self Accommodation | **Self -Advocacy** | **Self-awareness** | **Self compassion** | **Self Care**

SELF ACCOMODATION

What could I do to help myself be more comfortable?

Am I pushing through something I need not too?

What could I do to make myself feel more safe?

SELF ADVOCACY

Is there a boundary I need to set?

Do I need to say no?

Do I need to explain or communicate a need?

SELF AWARENESS

What do I feel?

What do I need?

What can I do?

SELF COMPASSION

Am I treating myself like I would a friend?

Am I being hard on myself?

Can I practice kindness in some way?

SELF CARE

Am I sleeping, eating, resting medicating, or however I have defined self care?

What's happening with my hormones and what can I do to care for myself?