FLOURISH



A neuroaffirming book for ADHD women

Group Introduction

Hello, and welcome to Flourish! This is a weekly group meeting specially designed to support women who have been diagnosed with ADHD. I'm SO happy you've decided to join!

First, let’s provide an overview of what to expect over the coming weeks.

Flourish is a mutual self-help coaching group for women who have ADHD. It is not a therapy group. This group will provide emotional, psychological, and moral support, education, and skills for its members.

Each of us is encouraged to participate to whatever extent we feel comfortable. The only rules are to be respectful and kind and treat one another with compassion and as you would want to be treated.

Also, please respect the privacy of all of our group members and remember not to share the names of other group members outside the group.



Our group will have a message board, video modules, and a group meeting and course to discuss and share the week's topic.

In this group, you will learn new skills to manage your life as an ADHD woman in a supportive community. We will do this through reflection and conversation.

You will also examine how growing up in a neurotypical world as a neurodivergent person has impacted you.

You will learn self-advocacy, self-accommodation, self-awareness, self-compassion, and self-care. At the end of this group, you will feel a greater sense of confidence and self-trust, something that many neurodivergent people are deprived of because they are othered as a minority in a neurotypical world.

Let's dive right in with some definitions and explanations.



What is ADHD?

ADHD: A Genetic, Chronic, Neurodevelopmental, Brain-Based Difference

ADHD is a genetic, chronic, neurodevelopmental, brain-based difference that impacts women differently than men in various ways.

Understanding the Causes of ADHD

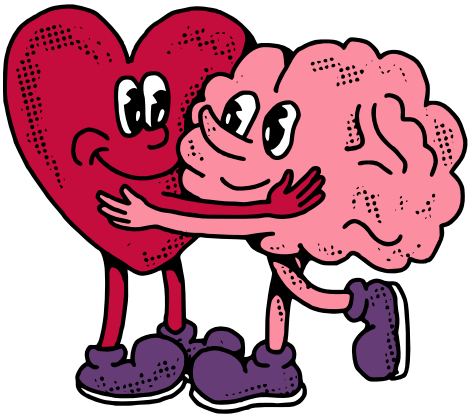
ADHD isn't caused by how you were parented, what you ate or what you did in childhood. It is NOT caused by trauma.

ADHD: A Highly Inheritable Condition

ADHD is highly inheritable. According to Russel Barkley – a leading researcher and authority on ADHD- it is more inheritable than height. This means if you have it, someone in your family likely has it.

Reflection Question





HOW DOES IT FEEL TO KNOW THAT DIFFERENT IS NOT DEFECTIVE?

What do we Know About ADHD Brains?

Researchers have identified several structural and chemical differences in the brain associated with ADHD, such as **variations in the cortex,** differences in **cortical thickness,** and unique characteristics in the **parietal, cerebellar, and basal ganglia r**egions. Additionally, the **white matter tracts and functional connectivity** show distinctive patterns.

These brain differences can lead to challenges in **environments not tailored to** neurodivergent individuals, such as difficulties with routine tasks not tailored to your brain and emotional regulation in taxing environments without support.

However, they MAY also contribute to unique strengths like enhanced creativity, deep emotional insights, and the ability to perceive the world in rich and varied ways.

ADHD and Neurotransmitters

The Role of Neurotransmitters in the Brain

The brain acts as the body's control center and is responsible for sending and receiving electrical signals. Nerve cells, known as neurons, are what enable this communication. However, there is a gap between neurons that must be bridged.

Understanding Neurotransmitters

Neurotransmitters are the chemicals that bridge the gap and allow messages to be transmitted. One of the most important neurotransmitters is dopamine, which has many functions.

Dopamine Pathways and their Significance

Four pathways in the brain enable dopamine to travel from one region to another and transmit important information.

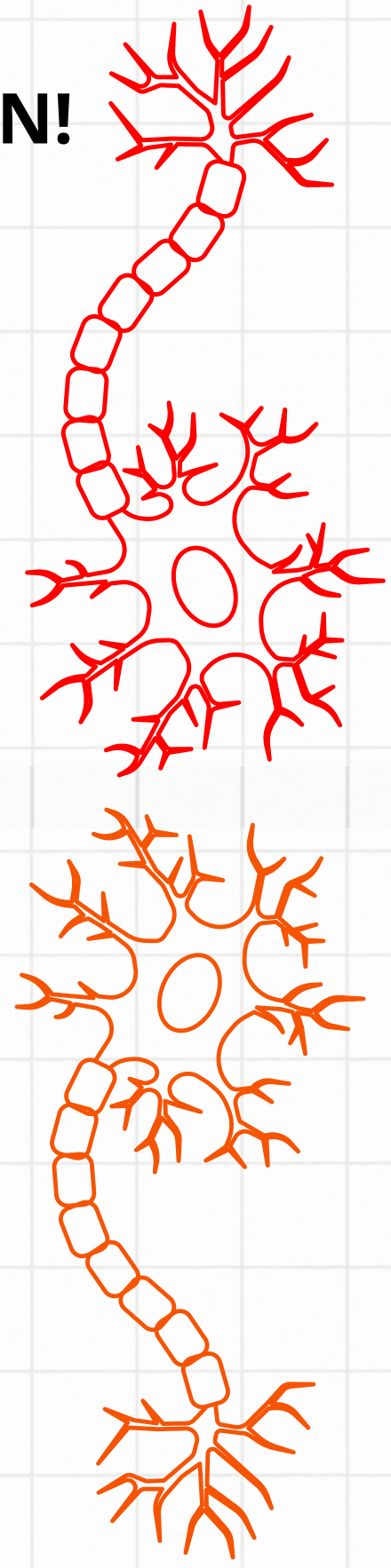
The Mesocortical and Dopamine Reward Pathways

Two of these pathways, the **mesocortical** and **dopamine** reward pathways, have been linked to cognitive differences in ADHD.

SPARKS IN YOUR BRAIN!

NEURONS

Neurons serve as the primary cells in the nervous system, transmitting messages throughout the body.

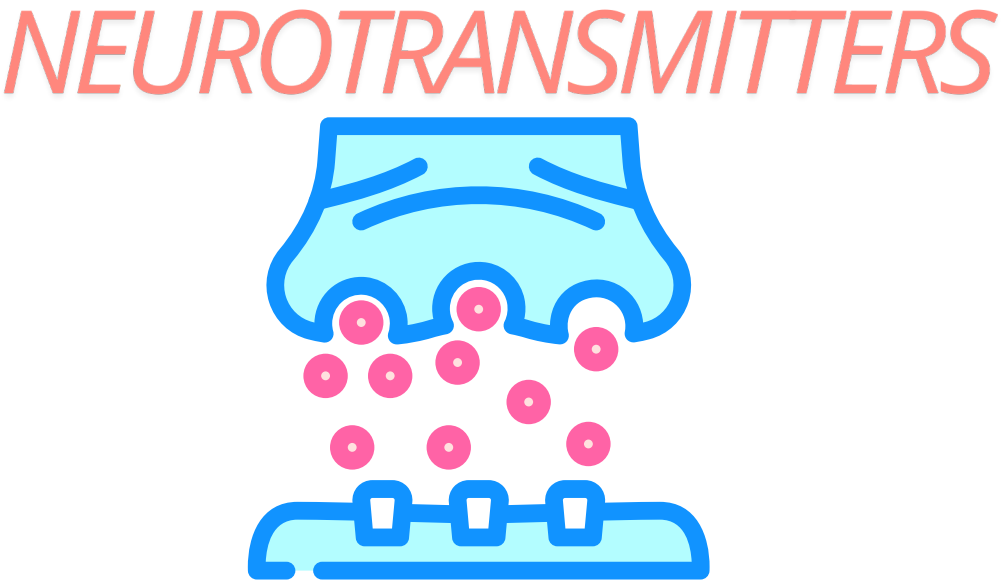


Synapse: The synapse is the junction between two neurons, consisting of a small gap known as the synaptic cleft. When an electrical impulse reaches the end of an axon, it triggers the release of neurotransmitters. These chemical messengers cross the synaptic cleft and bind to receptor sites on the dendrites of the neighboring neuron. This process allows the signal to be passed along the neural pathway.

ADHD and Neurotransmitters

What happens for ADHD people at the Synapse?

The primary issue involves the chemicals produced, released, and reabsorbed at the synapses, the connections between specific networks of neurons that regulate the brain's management system. ADHD'ers may have differences producing or regulating these essential chemicals, either not releasing enough or releasing and reabsorbing them too quickly. ADHD medication helps to stabilize this process.



ADHD and Genes

Researchers have not identified a single gene responsible for ADHD, but they have discovered several genes contributing to its development.

These genes typically influence neurotransmitter systems in the brain, such as those related to dopamine and serotonin.

Some of the key genes associated with ADHD include DRD4, DRD5, DAT1, and the serotonin transporter gene (5-HTT).

Ongoing research continues to explore the complex genetic landscape of ADHD, revealing new findings regularly.



ADHD and Executive Functioning

ADHD doesn't just impact attention; it also impacts executive functioning.

Executive functions involve a range of cognitive and behavioral domains, including:

- Organizing and coordinating tasks
- Prioritizing actions and responsibilities
- Establishing and maintaining routines
- Setting and achieving goals
- Initiating tasks and projects
- Transitioning or switching between tasks
- Staying motivated and managing procrastination
- Time
- Working Memory
- Regulating emotions
- Impulses



Each woman may experience these issues to varying degrees and, depending on how she notices them, need to find personalized ways to support herself.

The Gold Standard Women

So, what implications does the struggle with executive functioning have for women in particular? After all – this is the special focus of our group!

The expectation in our society is that women will be good at things that require good executive functioning skills. ADHD women suffer stigma, shame, and embarrassment because they may struggle with things that women are "expected" to be good at.

Women often compare themselves to society's vision of this "gold standard" woman who is exceptionally organized, focused, motivated and able to handle anything that comes her way. They find they are always playing 'catch up' and often need more support. But asking for help is hard and comes with intense feelings of failure.



Coping Skills

Most ADHD women develop very elaborate coping skills to manage their ADHD. That makes sense! They learned that others would judge or punish them if they revealed their authentic selves.

These coping skills take a lot of energy.

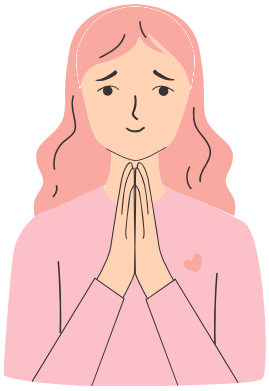
What are these “skills”?

Hiding, silencing, pleasing behaviors, self-criticism, and perfectionism are a few of the most common ones.

As women get older, many of these coping skills don't work anymore, and anxiety, burnout, anger, resentment, and sometimes depression can set in.







Coping Skills

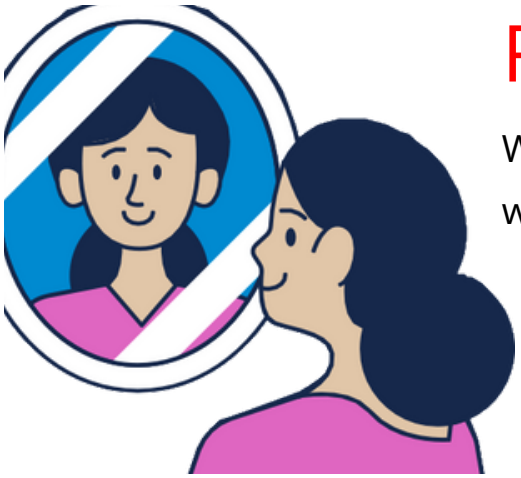


This is where Flourish is designed to help. This group will help you:

1. Learn new coping skills that take your history and your unique brain into consideration.

2. Help you connect with your authentic self.

3. Help you understand how your executive functioning may differ and support and strengthen it when you choose.



Reflection Question

When you think of what the gold standard women is what comes to mind?

How does it feel to know that she's not real?



Reflection Question

When you think of the list of coping skills: hiding, silencing, self-criticism, pleasing, perfectionism, which ones resonate with you most?

How does it feel to know that you have been trying the best you could to help yourself but there may now be better ways?

Group Framework

This group is designed to build your sense of self- confidence and self-trust.

It's important to believe in and depend on yourself..

The premise of this group is that we can build new coping skills that we can swap out for the old ones that may not be working for you. The old skills include hiding, shutting down, perfectionism, pleasing, and silencing yourself.

We will use the framework of learning skills in through five categories.

Self-Compassion

Learning to tune in to your difficult experiences and being kind to yourself instead of critical. Wanting for your difficulties to be alleviated and taking action to make your life easier.

Self Accommodation

Learning how to make things less stressful, modify your environment to help ease your life, make sensory experiences less intrusive and bolster your executive functions.

Group Framework

Self Advocacy

Knowing your rights and boundaries. Assertively communicating to others what you think, feel, and need when you feel you can do so safely.

Self-Awareness

Learning to be more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and body signals with kindness, curiosity, and non-judgment, so you can care for yourself, accommodate yourself, know your emotions and feelings and communicate and make choices in your best interest. The world has often made it difficult for you to have self-awareness because you have had to check out and abandon yourself to function.

Self Care

Learning to care for yourself and give yourself what you need to be well and show up best for those you love.

Building these new coping skills will help you to develop self- trust and more self-confidence.

Sometimes barriers are there to protect you, each person has to go at their own pace and respect their barriers.

Goals Sheet For Flourish

Look at some of these goals and pick one or two that resonate with you as goals for the group.

[ ]. Choose what makes you feel happy over always pleasing others.

[ ] Validate your own feelings.

[ ] Practice understanding towards your imperfections.

[ ] Identify and challenge negative self-talk throughout the day.

[ ] Stop blaming yourself for difficulties.

[ ] Improve sleeping, eating, and hydration habits.

[ ] Work through paralysis and procrastination.

[ ] Enhance motivation.

[ ] Prioritize what is important to you.

[ ] Reduce anxiety.

[ ] Process Grief related to late Diagnosis.

[ ] Focus Less on Negative Feelings

[ ] Spend less time with unsupportive people.

[ ] Learn about and practice setting boundaries.

Goals Sheet For Flourish

Look at some of these goals and pick one or two that resonate with you as goals for the group.

- [ ] Say no when you want to.
- [ ] Be kinder to yourself when you make mistakes.
- [ ] Understand and trust your emotions
- [ ] Foster better relationships.
- [ ] Work on reducing perfectionism.
- [ ] Learn about your brain differences.
- [ ] Discover and align with your values and strengths.
- [ ] Develop more effective tools to manage stress.
- [ ] Trust yourself more.
- [ ] Feel Less Shame *
- [ ] Speak Up

GROUP ACTIVITY MODULE 1

Feel free to share your name, where you're from, and a fun fact about yourself.

Get to know one another. You can choose to engage in our group exercise or simply spend this time connecting with each other.

Group Exercise: Deconstructing the "Gold Standard Woman"
Discuss:

1. What qualities or characteristics do you associate with the Gold Standard Women?

2. Have you ever experienced societal pressure to hide or downplay your ADHD symptoms in order to fit the mold of her ?

3. How has masking to these expected standards hurt or helped you?



My Journal

Title: _____ **Date:** _____

Flourish



coaching for women with adhd and anxiety

My Journal

