

# ADHD and Self Trust: Connecting with Your Body



# ADHD and Self Trust

## Connecting With Your Body

*"Embodiment is a way to heal the mind-body divide we experience within ourselves and, more systemically, within Western cultures. To do so we need to understand the self as a body. Our body and our personhood are so intimately connected that they can never be separated. We are not just a mind, or brain, carried around by a meat-puppet of flesh and bones. Embodiment is a kind of re-remembering of who we really are, because what we picked up along the way was disembodiment. But disembodiment is not how we come into the world. It can be unlearned, while embodiment, our birthright, can be remembered. So embodiment is a coming home, a remembering of our wholeness, and a reunion with the fullness of ourselves."*

Hillary L. McBride

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# Why Connection With Your Body May be Lost

There are several reasons women might lose touch with their bodies, a situation known as disembodiment. Let's look at some of the reasons:

- **Objectification:** Women are often treated as objects and made to feel that their value is based only on others' judgment and enjoyment. The constant societal and self-judgment can make them feel disconnected from their bodies and true signals about their worth and value.
- **Trauma and Abuse:** Women who have undergone physical, sexual, or emotional abuse may begin to feel disconnected from their bodies as a way to escape the pain and stress associated with these traumatic experiences. It is important to note that ADHD women face a higher risk of experiencing trauma and developing PTSD.

## Why Connection With Your Body May be Lost

- Masking: Being made to hide your true feelings, thoughts, or natural movements can teach you to ignore your body's signals. This kind of pressure can make you feel separated from your own body.



- Facing harsh criticism, feeling shame, experiencing sensory overload, and emotional dysregulation from stress can also cause disembodiment.



# Society and the Body: Disembodiment as Oppression

Societal practices restrict individuals' ability to fully experience and understand their bodily sensations and wisdom, which can be a vital part of their identity and well-being. Let's look at a few:

- **Cultural Disconnection:** The suppression of native languages and traditions causes a loss of embodied experiences that are deeply rooted in cultural expressions, disconnecting people from a rich heritage that resides in bodily wisdom.
- **Gender Norms:** Societal norms that objectify women often foster a sense of body alienation.
- **Children and Development:** From a young age, children may be discouraged from expressing their bodily autonomy and instincts.



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# Society and the Body: Disembodiment as Oppression

- **Autistic and ADHD Individuals:** Autistic and Adhd women often experience a unique relationship with their bodies, with heightened sensitivities and perceptions. Yet they are taught to mask these traits, punished for stimming, and rewarded for staying still, forcing them to disconnect from their natural bodily experiences and suppressing their authentic selves.
- **Educational Systems:** Traditional education tends to favor intellectual growth over bodily awareness. The reduction of physical education programs and the discouragement of kinesthetic learning styles fosters a disconnect between the mind and the body, depriving students of the opportunity to integrate bodily experiences into their learning process.
- **Work Environments:** Numerous workplaces expect employees to ignore physical needs for the sake of productivity. This expectation fosters a workforce that is detached from their bodily signals and needs, promoting a culture where individuals are forced to neglect their bodily cues, leading to a disembodied existence characterized by chronic stress and disconnection.

# Trauma

## **Big T and Little t Traumas**

Over the past decade, we've broadened our understanding of trauma. Trauma no longer includes big and horrible moments, but smaller moments that chip away at your relationship with yourself. It also includes a more comprehensive understanding of how it affects both generational trauma and our bodies.

### **Big T Trauma:**

Big T trauma involves severe, often sudden events like natural disasters or physical assault. These experiences can lead to PTSD, characterized by severe anxiety and flashbacks.

### **Little t Trauma:**

Little t trauma encompasses distressing but "less severe" events, such as bullying or emotional abuse. These events might not cause PTSD but can still significantly affect mental health.



# Trauma

Some people have gone so far as to suggest that all neurodivergent people are likely to have little t trauma caused by masking, othering, and criticism.

## **Relationship to Women with ADHD**

Women with ADHD might be particularly vulnerable to both big T and little t traumas. Trauma, whether it's big T or little t, can significantly exacerbate ADHD. The heightened sensitivity and emotional dysregulation often associated with ADHD can make people more susceptible to the adverse effects of trauma.

## Trauma and the Body

Traumatic experiences are often stored in the body, manifesting as physical symptoms such as tension, chronic pain, or digestive issues. This bodily retention of trauma can create a vicious cycle, where the physical symptoms further aggravate ADHD symptoms, creating a feedback loop of distress and heightened sensitivity.

Masking and chronic stress complicate this picture. The more you can become embodied the more you can heal these cycles.

# Chronic Stress and The Body

## What is Stress

Stress is a natural response that our bodies have developed to help us deal with perceived threats or challenges. It is designed to be a short-term response that mobilizes our resources to cope with the situation at hand.

When stress persists over an extended period, it can break down your body and harm your mind.



# Chronic Stress and The Body

## What is Chronic Stress?

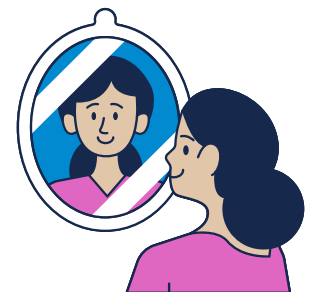
Chronic stress occurs when the stress response is constantly activated without sufficient periods of relaxation and recovery.

This can happen when a person faces ongoing stress, such as work pressure, relationship difficulties, and financial problems.

Chronic stress can also result from internal factors such as self-criticism or emotional overwhelm.

When stress becomes chronic, it can lead to a range of health problems, including cardiovascular issues, weakened immune systems, digestive disorders, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, and burnout. It can also negatively impact the ability to think, make decisions, or concentrate.

Reflection



What comes to mind when you hear this?

# Chronic Stress and The Body

## **The Nervous System**

The sympathetic nervous system plays a crucial role in preparing us to either confront or flee from threats. This system, however, is not designed to be active constantly. Historically, it was utilized during brief, intense situations, such as during a hunt or evading danger. After such events, the parasympathetic nervous system would take over, helping to return the body to a state of rest and recovery.

In the modern era, the balance between these two systems can be disrupted, leading to prolonged activation of the sympathetic nervous system without sufficient downtime. This can culminate in a condition known as neurodivergent burnout, representing a severe level of exhaustion. It underscores the importance of balancing periods of stress with adequate rest and recovery, highlighting the necessity to nurture both aspects of our nervous system for optimal well-being.

We will learn about this in one of our upcoming units.

Our model emphasizes different aspects than traditional models that solely prioritize productivity.

## Productivity and the Body

Women with ADHD have often been encouraged to work harder or longer and seek tools and strategies to increase productivity to the neglect of physical health.

Many coaching and therapy models focus on this, neglecting the fact that physical well-being and the connection to your body are so crucial for neurodivergent people.

Connecting with your body is more than just a practice; it's a necessity, especially when you have ADHD. It can be your reliable ally in making clear-headed decisions every day. Think of it as your built-in source of emotional wisdom that helps you understand and navigate the world more effectively.

Here are a few things becoming more embodied can help with:

- Making more informed decisions
- Tuning in to emotional wisdom
- Developing trust in yourself
- Gaining information about your environment
- Healing shame
- Becoming more authentic
- Discerning safety

# Self Trust

## Recognizing Stress Signals

Reconnecting with your body serves as a potent method to monitor your stress signals more closely, enabling you to take proactive steps toward self-care, a topic we explored in detail in Unit 5.

## Utilizing Your Body's Guidance System

It's important to remember that your body acts as a reservoir of emotional cues, functioning as an innate guide to assist you in making informed decisions and navigating life judiciously. Recognizing and interpreting these signals is vital, a concept we previously discussed in Unit 3.



# Self Trust

## Addressing Alexithymia

Alexithymia, characterized by a diminished awareness of these bodily signals, arises from a disconnection with your own body. Fortifying this connection can significantly alleviate stress levels and foster a deeper trust in your own ability to manage emotions and make decisions.

## Managing Chronic Stress Effectively

Nurturing a strong bond with your body facilitates more effective management of chronic stress. It empowers you to identify and respond to signs of distress promptly, preventing them from escalating into severe crises, and potentially enhancing your physical health in the process.



# Basic Exercises to Try and Build Embodiment

## 1. Breaths

Take five to ten slow breaths throughout the day that fully expand your lungs, focusing on the exhale to release tension in your body. This technique can help you feel calmer and more energized.

## 2. Body Scan:

1. Find a quiet space and sit or lie down comfortably.
2. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and relax.
3. Start at the top of your head and slowly scan down to your toes, noticing any sensations or tension in each body part.
4. If you encounter tension or discomfort, take a few extra breaths and imagine releasing that tension with each exhale.
5. Spend at least 5-10 minutes doing this body scan, allowing your awareness to settle into your body.

# Basic Exercises to Try and Build Embodiment

## 3. Timer check ins.

- Set a time for 1-3 times a day
- Set aside time for 1-3 check-ins per day.

### Activity A

During each check-in, ask yourself:

1. What sensations am I feeling in my body?
2. What can I do to help myself?
3. Do I need to change positions or stretch?
4. Focus on a specific area that feels tense or uncomfortable.
5. Imagine that body part has a voice.
6. Ask it what it needs, either out loud or silently, by saying something like, "What do you need, [body part]?"
7. Allow your body to respond through gentle movements or adjustments that address the discomfort.
8. Continue this dialogue and movement until you feel more at ease.



# Basic Exercises to Try and Build Embodiment

## 3. Timer check ins.

- Set a time for 1-3 times a day
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### Activity B

- 1.Steps to check in with your body:
- 2.Ask yourself what it feels like to be in your body at the moment.
- 3.Take note of any sensations you're experiencing in your body.
- 4.Pay attention to how your body is touching objects around you, such as chairs, floors, or clothes.
- 5.Check if there are any parts of your body that you can't feel.
- 6.Acknowledge any sensations that you don't want to feel.



# Basic Exercises to Try and Build Embodiment

## 4. Walking Meditation:

Here are the steps to practice a walking meditation:

1. Find a quiet outdoor space or park to walk in.
2. Take a leisurely walk, paying close attention to each step and the sensations in your feet as they connect with the ground.
3. Notice the rhythm of your breath and how it syncs up with your steps.
4. Let go of distractions and focus on the present moment, using movement and mindfulness to connect with your body and surroundings.



# Basic Exercises to Try and Build Embodiment

## 5. Breath Awareness :

1. Find a comfortable position.
2. Take slow, deep breaths and close your eyes.
3. Visualize your breath flowing into areas of tension or discomfort as you inhale.
4. As you exhale, imagine the breath carrying away the tension.
5. Repeat this process for several breath cycles, focusing on each inhale and exhale.
6. By following these steps, you can use breath awareness to help you reconnect with your body and release tension.



# Yes and No

Establishing healthy boundaries between ourselves and others is crucial for maintaining well-being and integrity.

Saying "yes" and "no" are powerful tools that can help you set these boundaries, but they can be challenging to use effectively. Consistently saying "yes" may lead to neglecting your own needs, while saying "no" can be difficult if you are conditioned to always agree or help others.

Learning to recognize bodily signals can help you navigate these challenges with yes and no, enabling you to establish boundaries or listen to the signals of what you truly want to do. It can deepen trust in your capacity to make the right decision for yourself and strengthen your resolve to do things that are consistent with your values and needs.

In our group, we will watch some videos and practice with yes and no to learn these concepts.