

Module 4

Emotional Regulation

Flourish



Emotional Regulation and ADHD

Emotional Dysregulation Explained:

Emotional dysregulation occurs when you're overwhelmed by your emotions. In these moments, your body sends distress signals to your brain, making it challenging to decide how to act or respond.

Regulating emotions is an executive function. So, for ADHD women, uncomfortable or large emotions often trigger a stress response.

This stress response can activate the **fight, flight, freeze**, or **fawn** reactions. As a child, when stressed, you likely began choosing your old coping responses, such as avoidance, aiming to please others, striving for perfection, or other masking behaviors. These habits impact how you react to stress today.

To trust yourself more, it's crucial first to become emotionally regulated. Then, you can try and decipher your emotions.

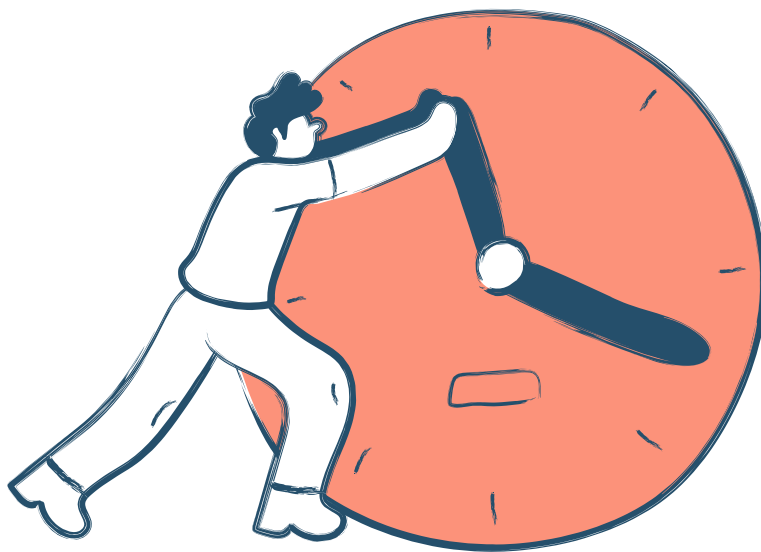
Let's dive deeper into how ADHD influences emotional experiences and their management.

ADHD Causes ER Issues

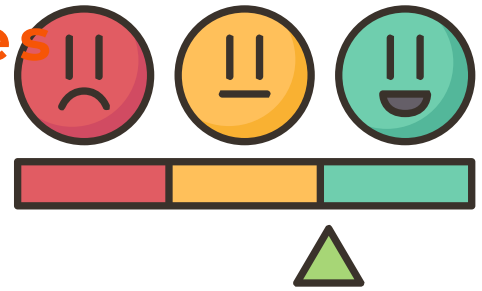
1. Delaying overwhelming things and a different understanding of time

Research has revealed that postponing gratification can activate areas of the brain associated with physical pain in Adhd'ers. Many Adhd'ers will prefer to put off something challenging until later. Additionally, the ADHD brain often has issues with "time blindness."

Due to these preferences, stress can build up in our fast paced world



ADHD Causes ER Issues



2. Neurodivergent brains struggle to identify emotions.

Studies in the ADHD population have reported rates of a condition called alexithymia at double to quadruple that of the general population.

Alexithymia is difficulty identifying your internal states of thirst, hunger, needing to go to the bathroom, temperature, and feelings. The rates are even higher for people with autism.

This means you may have trouble noticing you are having bodily signals of stress and identifying your feelings. Your coping skills of freezing, fighting, fleeing, or pleasing, or any of the skills you use to survive may kick in without your awareness.

Alexithymia can contribute to overwhelm, communication issues, and difficulty knowing when you need to eat, drink, and sleep. Making self care challenging at times.

We will learn beginning self-awareness skills of feelings identification and building interoceptive awareness which are crucial to start working on the other four new coping skills in future sessions.

ADHD Causes ER Issues

3. 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 on growing a positive brain we will learn about how to grow a more positive brain. 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.



ADHD Causes ER Issues

4. 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.



5. 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.



ADHD Causes ER Issues

6. 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 manageable 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.



ADHD Causes ER issues

7 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, or dwell obsessively due to this brain feature.



What Impacts ER?

Remember, emotions and emotional regulation are impacted by:

- Early development and attachment
- How you were regulated as a child by your family
- What you were taught about your emotions
- The beliefs you formed and how you think about yourself and the world
- Your brain and nervous system and how information is taken in and processed



Gross Model of ER

The primary model to help neurotypicals regulate emotions is the Gross model for emotional regulation.

This time-linked model is a framework to enhance our ability to regulate emotions before the "triggering event," during the event , and after the event. Our model will spend much more time teaching you to keep yourself feeling safe and calm rather than what to do before and after a triggering event. Once dysregulated ADHD brains have to exert too much energy to get back to a regulated state.

The triggering event can be something external, like an argument or a social event, or something internal, like a memory or a negative thought you have about yourself.

Let's look at the three components of this model.

Gross Model of ER

- Before: dealing with something difficult, consider your options and prepare yourself emotionally by changing what you do.
- During: change the situation by leaving, changing your attention, focusing on something less distressing, or changing your physiological processes through breathing.
- After: we need to change our "thinking" and "response."



Summary

So far, we have talked about emotions, how they are made, why they are so valuable, and how ADHD women have entirely different experiences.

Now we are talking about emotional regulation and our unique model of how to get you more regulated.

SUMMARY

Women with ADHD might:

1. Have strong emotions well up from the present, the past, in their bodies and mind
2. Have a hard time regulating themselves once the emotions happen
3. Have a hard time discerning between a significant threat and a small one
4. Feel compelled to act on an emotion and later regret it
5. Struggle to focus when emotions are preoccupying them and become distressed by this
6. Have a history of trauma or difficult experiences that can cause memories to trigger difficult emotions

Neurotypical Models Don't Work for ADHD Women

These issues can make it hard for you to deal with the day-to-day experiences that provoke emotions.

Stress feels like **DANGER** because of :

- years of criticism,
- overwhelming sensory experiences,
- confusing social experiences
- unmanageable routines and workload,
- unreasonable executive functioning expectation

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.

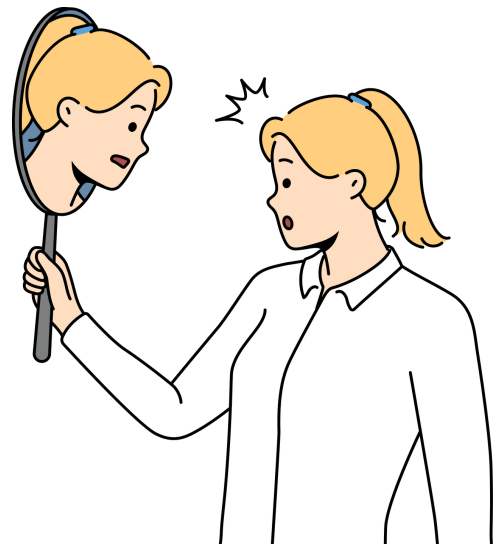
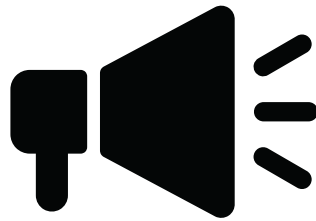
This is when you hiding, perfectionism, silencing, or whatever coping skills you rely on to protect yourself will be most prominent. All of these reactions happen without your awareness.

So when we talk about emotional regulation in our group, our model is much different than the "neurotypical model" which **ignores so much you need.**

Flourish Model

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

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



HALT
Breathing
Self Compassion Break
Tipp skills
Distance self talk

FLOURISH

Emotional Regulation



Reflection



When you think about this model of emotional regulation before, after, and during events.

How do you think this model relates to what you have learned about emotions and how it relates to your adhd brain?

Is it helpful? Unhelpful?

THE GOOD NEWS

You can have a better relationship with your emotions, decode them and help them guide you in life by:

1. Unlearning false beliefs about emotions
2. Learning about your unique brain and body, how it gets overwhelmed and how to bring it back to calm so you can think more clearly and make choices about how to care for yourself
3. Building and practicing our new skills at different points in the chain (before, after, and during events that might get you dysregulated)

Befriending our Emotions

One of the most powerful and quick ways to work on emotional regulation is begin to ferret out the false beliefs you were taught by society that cause you to mistrust and fear your emotions.



New Beliefs

1. Emotions aren't good and bad.
2. Emotions are valuable but must be decoded.
3. They are meant to keep you safe although your body and brain may get confused.
4. All emotions are to be befriended.
5. Emotions aren't permanent.
6. Emotions don't mean anything good or bad about you as a person.
7. If you feel emotions and don't fight them they will go away quicker.



The New Skills: Self Care and Self Awareness

How are the flourish model components of self care and self awareness related to emotional regulation?

Self-Awareness

Women with ADHD have often been conditioned to ignore their own needs and suppress their feelings of discomfort in order to nurture others, be successful, accepted, and meet the expectations of others. Self awareness helps you to become aware of these patterns, we will work on developing this skill in our group.

Self-Care

When you taught yourself how to cope with stress and survive as a child, you may have become disconnected from your fundamental needs, which can help you stay relaxed and emotionally regulated .

Relearning how to practice self-care helps you to become more emotionally regulated.

The New Skills: Self Awareness

Here are examples of self awareness skills.

- Learning to recognize through signs in your mind and body when you are more likely to become stressed.
 - Exploring how beliefs about emotions and internalized stigma make emotional regulation more difficult and replacing them with new beliefs.
 - Learning how to recognize and name your feelings.
 - Talking to yourself to help regulate yourself.
 - Practicing self-distancing talk techniques.
 - Building skills of interoceptive awareness to help you with self care and stress management with check ins.
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The New Skills: Self Compassion

How is self compassion related to emotional regulation?

Throughout our group, we will focus on building self- compassion. Instead of being critical and shaming when we experience difficult emotions, it's important to be understanding and loving. This can help to prevent episodes of dysregulation. Shame causes more not less regulation. In our next session, we will learn about and practice a self-compassion break to help us be kinder to ourselves. Remember that difficult emotions can be seen as chances to be gentle with ourselves.



The New Skills: Self Advocacy

How is self-advocacy related to emotional regulation?

Being aware of your needs and stress levels and responding to yourself in a compassionate way can often motivate you to stand up for yourself. When you are not advocating for yourself, resentment and anger may build adding to emotional load.

Self-advocacy is a way of taking care of yourself.

Self-advocacy includes:

- asking for things you need
- getting information you need
- making choices
- trying to understand things
- communicating boundaries to others
- learning about your rights



NEW SKILLS

Self Accommodation

How does self accommodation help with emotional regulation?

Growing up, women with ADHD were often taught to put up with difficult situations in order to make other people happy. This coping strategy can now lead to feelings of being overwhelmed. By understanding yourself better and being kinder to yourself, you can start to recognize how much of what you are going through can be improved by taking care of yourself instead of always accommodating others.

It's about giving yourself permission to make changes to help yourself to make things easier for you or more comfortable, something that was not allowed in the past.



NEW SKILLS

Self Accommodation

Some examples are:

- Refraining from entering into situations or relationships that cause you to stress even though you have been taught to do this to please others.
- Creating safe sensory environments to reduce stress even though you've likely been taught you must withstand discomfort to survive
- Setting boundaries even though you feel it's impolite
- Making alterations to **expectations** you have of yourself so that you can do things easier 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 .

For example if your family teaches you emotions are to be avoided you will try to get rid of your emotions when you experience them which will lead to more emotional dysregulation.

You may feel shame when you feel an emotion which will be a " double emotion" the second one being completely unnecessary.

What false beliefs do you have about emotions that were taught to you that have harmed you and are now causing you dysregulation?

Emotions and helpful beliefs

- They aren't good and bad
- They are meant to keep you safe although your body and brain may get confused
- You can befriend them
- They aren't aren't permanent
- They don't mean anything good or bad about you as a person
- If you feel your emotions allow and are curious, they will go away sooner

Group Exercise



Self Advocacy: Boundaries and Emotions

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.

Be treated with respect and not be taken for granted.

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.

Not sacrifice my comfort for others all the time.

Group Exercise

Self Advocacy : Boundaries and Emotions



- Feel all of my emotions (including anger) and express them appropriately.
- Not explain to others the reasons why I say no.
- Ask questions.
- 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.

Discussion Questions

1. 'What happens when you read these rights?
2. 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?