

Module 3

Emotions

Flourish





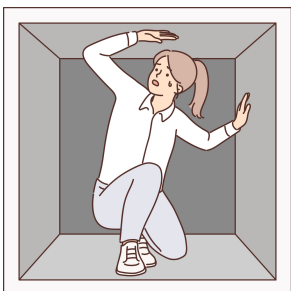
Emotions

Emotions are a mental state and are essential for our survival. They influence our thoughts, how we process information, and our behavior. They are caused by our assessment of the environment, its features, and our past experiences.

Emotions help maintain the body's balance and also help us make decisions and stay safe. They also aid us in understanding the world and making predictions. It is remarkable that scientists are only now realizing how important they are. They are important to you!

Are Emotions and Feelings the Same?

Feelings are the components of emotions that live in our body, although you will often hear the words used interchangeably.



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Core Beliefs

New definition:

Core beliefs

Core beliefs are a person's most ~~central ideas~~ about themselves, others, and the world. People are not born with core beliefs—they are learned.

Core beliefs usually develop in childhood or during stressful or traumatic adult periods. You can change your core beliefs.

Core beliefs influence emotions

Each person's emotions are influenced by their core beliefs, past experiences, and how their brain processes information in the present.

Emotions help us make predictions and guide us through life. Think about how a core belief like:

"I am not as smart as everyone else."

or

"I am defective." might effect your emotions and predictions.



How Emotions are Created

What else creates and influences emotions?

- Personal history
- Sensory systems
- The present moment
- Feelings in our body/stress response

KEY POINTS TO UNDERSTAND

👁️👁️ Emotions are formed from the data we are currently receiving through our senses.

📅 Our past experiences also influence how we interpret what we are taking in.

Our brains process these emotions, but our ❤️ bodies register feelings before we even think.

Our feelings are designed to help us decide whether to act or not; we are essentially programmed to freeze, fight or flee.

🚦 Our Automatic Emotional Reactions 🚦

- ❄️ Freeze: Sometimes, we just stop in our tracks.
- 🥊 Fight: At times, we might confront the situation.
- 🏃 Flee: Or, we might feel the need to get away.
- 😊 Fawning/Pleasing: We sometimes react by trying to please or placate others.

Emotions can get confusing

In the modern world this stress response can sometimes be unhelpful and happens without us choosing.

For ADHD women stress happens so often, these stress responses can wreak havoc on your life and cause a lot of emotional dysregulation.

In this group, we will try to teach you ways to calm your stress response so you have more emotional self-regulation.

Our emotions are filled with important information we need to decode, but when we are dysregulated we can't make sense of what they are trying to tell us. Our thinking brain is endowed with the ability to understand and circumvent processes related to your emotions that might not be working for you, like pleasing others, or shutting down. But we need to **REGULATE** our emotions first, which can prove a little harder if you have ADHD. In fact, maybe a lot harder.



Emotions and other people

Emotions also help us transmit vital information to others through our tone of voice and facial expression, and even help us to produce hormones like **oxytocin** which can reduce tension and assist a mother and child to form a bond. **Compassion and empathy** rely on emotions.

As you can see EMOTIONS ARE AMAZINGLY INTRICATE AND ESSENTIAL FOR OUR SURVIVAL but you don't learn much about them at all or - we are given misinformation.



Amazing!

Difficulty with Emotions

There are many different reasons a person may struggle with their emotional experience.

One reason might be how they were treated when they had emotions.

If they didn't have good emotional regulation modeled, were taught that having emotions was destructive, or were shamed for their feelings in their family, they can struggle with emotional regulation.

Another reason for difficulties with emotional experiences might be how society treats emotions. Certain groups are expected to display or feel emotions in certain ways.

For example, men and women are socialized to believe that certain emotions are not acceptable for them to have or express.



Difficulty with Emotions

Consider these two quotes

“Anger is inevitable when our lives consist of giving in and going along; when we assume responsibility for other people’s feelings and reactions; when we relinquish our primary responsibility to proceed with our own growth and ensure the quality of our own lives; when we behave as if having a relationship is more important than having a self.”

— Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships*

“Our society cultivates guilt feelings in women such that many of us still feel guilty if we are anything less than an emotional service station to others.”

— Harriet Lerner, *The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships*



Difficulty with Emotions

Another reason you may have a complicated relationship with emotions is if your brain processes emotions differently. ADHD brains process emotions differently.

Emotional regulation IS an executive functioning skill, so many ADHD women struggle tremendously with emotions.

The antidote for difficulties with emotions is to learn self-compassion, self-awareness, self-accommodation, self-care and self-advocacy. We will also learn some specific skills to validate and tolerate strong emotions.

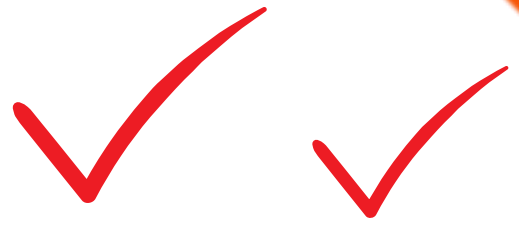
We will build on these skills throughout our group. Please trust and be patient.

Double Whammy

Women with ADHD tend to have a past full of experiences and beliefs that make it difficult to process their emotions. They may have been made to feel ashamed of how they feel and often faced with harsh criticism and stress, leading to involuntary reactions such as fight, flight, freeze or trying to please others. Moreover, many of these women have had negative experiences that have caused them to be embarrassed of their emotions or hindered their ability to have a healthy relationship with them.

I like to think of these as issues that have been inflicted upon them by society as a result of their differences we talked about in our last session between the neurotypical and neurodivergent world views.

Double Whammy



They also struggle in various degrees with certain aspects of how their neurodivergent brain filters and processes information which impacts emotions.

Every ADHD women's brain is impacted differently depending on the spectrum of her symptoms.

Here are the main 3 Ways ADHD Brains may make it difficult to process emotional experiences

Up Regulating

Up-regulating is generating emotion or making it more prominent. For ADHD people this usually looks like GETTING MOTIVATED

Down Regulating

Down regulating emotion means making emotions that are overwhelming or causing us to fight-flight, flee, fawn or fib manageable.

Impusivity

This usually refers to working with emotions so they don't cause us to act without thinking. I think of these as challenges due to adhd.



Reflection Question

When you think of difficulties you might have with emotions due to your different brain:

Up regulating - generating emotion to get motivated

Down regulating- tamping down big emotions and making them "right sized."

Acting on emotions that you feel or "impulsiveness."

Which ones have been issues for you?

Looking back on your past, or even thinking about your present, have you or anyone else treated you as if these were your emotional struggles due to your neurodiversity were either deliberate choices or character flaws?

What would your life be like if you were treated differently with accommodations and compassion rather than judgment?



What were you taught about emotions?

It's essential to think about what you believe about emotions. What you were taught about emotions is often implicit. We don't get any real education on handling emotions directly in school or our families.

We may get some messages from watching them. We may also learn through our behavior.

For example. "go to your room until you can calm down" teaches that it isn't okay to be upset. It doesn't teach you how to calm down. It also teaches you that your parents have no patience to be with your emotion and there is something inherently wrong with being emotional.



Group Exercise



What were you taught about emotions?

What were you taught by society about your feelings?

What were you taught about your emotions in your family?
How did your family express feelings?

Did they talk openly about them?

Did they teach that some were good or bad?

Do you feel any of your feelings or emotions have been judged due to your gender or race?

What did they teach you about anger?

- Worry?
- Sadness?

Do you think emotions can be "bad" or "good"?