

■ Flourish Workbook 2 Summary

Learning About Neurodivergence

■ Purpose

This workbook is designed to help ADHD women understand their neurotype, unpack internalized stigma, and reframe how they see themselves using a neurodiversity-affirming lens.

You'll learn:

- ADHD is a valid brain type, not a flaw.
- Culture influences how you see yourself.
- Shame often comes from the environment, not from you.
- Masking, perfectionism, and self-blame are survival responses—not character flaws.

■ Understanding Neurodiversity

Human brains naturally vary—there's no one 'normal' way to think or function. Neurodiversity includes conditions like ADHD, autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc. The idea challenges the pressure to conform and asks how environments can be more inclusive.

■ Key concepts:

- **Neurodivergent:** Brain works differently from societal norms.
- **Neurotypical:** Brain fits dominant expectations.
- **Neurominority:** Experiences marginalization due to brain differences.
- **Neuromajority:** Benefits from systems built for typical brains.

■ Reframing ADHD

ADHD is not a personal failure. It's a different brain pattern—particularly in executive function, attention, emotions, motivation, and time processing.

Instead of asking, 'What's wrong with me?', ask, 'What support does my brain need?'

■ Old vs. New Stories

Women with ADHD often carry messages like 'I'm too much' or 'I'm always failing at normal.'

Reframes:

- 'My brain works differently, and that's valid.'
- 'There's no such thing as normal.'

This reflection helps group members notice long-held stories about themselves and begin practicing more accurate, compassionate language.

■ **Activities: Releasing Labels**

The workbook invites you to reframe negative labels:

- 'Lazy' → 'Under-supported'
- 'Dramatic' → 'Emotionally expressive'
- 'Disorganized' → 'Different executive function style'

This exercise helps participants identify which labels they've internalized and separate who they are from how they were judged.

■ **Who Is Neurodivergent?**

Includes people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette's, and sensory processing differences.

Neurodivergence shows up in:

- Communication • Learning • Movement • Attention • Memory • Sensory processing

■ **Recognizing Strengths**

Neurodivergent people often have quick insights, deep emotional sensitivity, creative problem-solving, and unconventional motivation.

These aren't deficits—they're differences that need the right environment to shine.

■ Systems, Not You, Are the Problem

ADHD struggles are often worsened by rigid school/work systems, sensory-unfriendly spaces, and narrow expectations.

Supportive environments = thriving. Unsupported ones = trauma and shame.

■ Systemic vs. Personal Blame

ADHD women are often punished by systems (school, family, work), not by personal failure.

Recognizing this helps:

- Reduce shame
- Build self-understanding
- Focus on healing instead of self-fixing

This exercise helps group members clearly see where systems failed them, which can loosen self-blame and increase self-compassion.

■ Stigma → Shame

Stigma = being seen as 'less than.' Internalized stigma turns outside criticism into self-judgment.

Common reactions: masking, people-pleasing, perfectionism

■ The Gold Standard Woman

A mythical ideal of the 'perfect woman': neat, calm, emotionally contained, never needs help.

This standard is:

- Rooted in sexism, ableism, and perfectionism
- Harmful and unrealistic
- Especially damaging for neurodivergent women

This exercise helps participants recognize unrealistic expectations they've been measuring themselves against and imagine what it might feel like to stop chasing them.

■ Internalized Stigma

You absorb cultural messages:

- 'You're lazy' → 'I must not be trying hard enough'
- 'You're too emotional' → 'I should tone it down'

These messages feed shame and disconnection from self. This reflection helps group members trace where their inner critic came from and begin questioning messages that were never true.

■ Emotional Distress Syndrome (EDS)

Not a diagnosis, but a pattern of long-term emotional burnout from constant misjudgment and pressure to mask.

The cycle:

1. You're told your traits are wrong
2. You internalize it
3. You mask to cope
4. You disconnect from your needs
5. You feel exhausted and blame yourself

■ Discrimination

When ADHD stigma shapes how others treat you (e.g., doctors, employers), it becomes discrimination: denied diagnoses, misinterpreted symptoms, lack of accommodations.

Common myths challenged:

- 'ADHD only affects kids'
- 'Smart people can't have ADHD'
- 'Just try harder'

■ Executive Functioning Explained

Core challenges for ADHD brains:

- Task initiation • Focus • Planning • Emotional regulation • Switching tasks • Remembering steps
- Following through

ADHD struggles often come from inconsistent access to these skills, not laziness.

■ Recognizing Executive Function Challenges

Signs include:

- Time blindness • Trouble starting tasks • Emotional overwhelm • Messy spaces • Missed appointments • Forgetting daily needs • Shame from procrastination

This activity helps participants name specific challenges without judgment and understand them as brain-based differences.

■ The Dopamine Gap

ADHD brains often lack dopamine stimulation from routine tasks. You may need urgency, novelty, or emotional meaning.

Traditional tools like planners often fail because they don't fit your brain's wiring.

■ What Is Masking?

Masking = hiding ADHD traits to appear 'normal.' It often starts in childhood, becomes automatic, and is shaped by gender, race, class, and safety needs.

Examples:

- Over-preparing • People-pleasing • Suppressing stimming • Faking eye contact or small talk • Hiding confusion or strong emotions

■ The Cost of Masking

Masking protects in the short term, but long-term it leads to burnout, anxiety, loss of self, and difficulty identifying your needs.

You don't need to unmask all at once—go at your own pace.

This exercise helps group members recognize how masking once kept them safe, while gently noticing the cost over time.

■ Final Takeaways

- **You're not broken—your brain wasn't supported.**
- **Systems failed you—reclaim your story.**

- Masking helped you survive—you can now choose when to unmask.
- Language matters—reframe and reclaim how you describe yourself.
- You've laid a foundation for self-awareness, compassion, and advocacy.