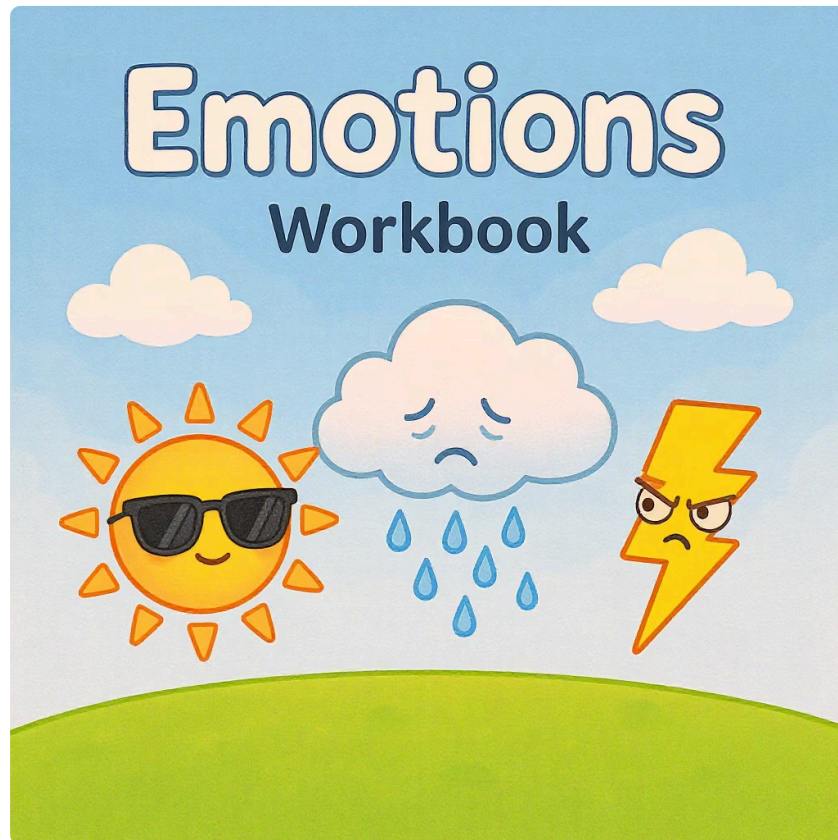


# FLOURISH WORKBOOK 3

# EMOTIONS



# Emotions

## In This Workbook You'll Learn

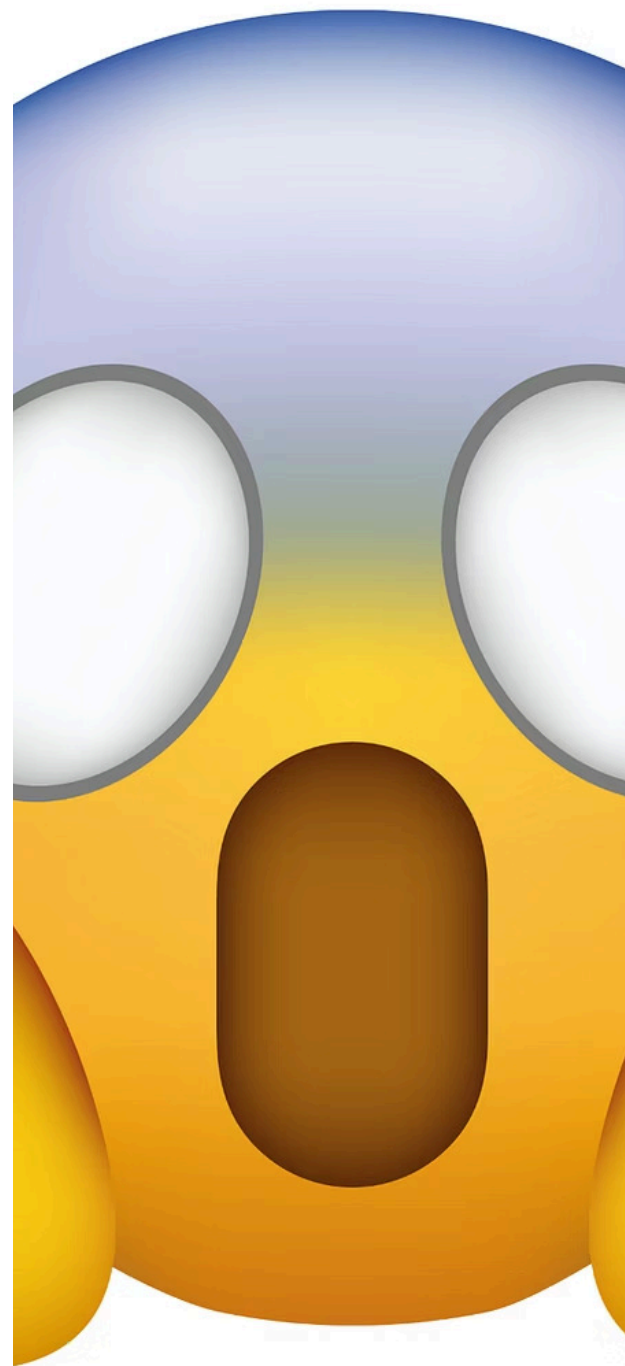
- How emotions begin in the body and how the brain makes meaning of them
- Why ADHD brains often experience emotions as intense or hard to explain
- How core beliefs shape your emotional reactions
- How family, culture, and gender messages affect emotional trust
- How to begin noticing, naming, and understanding your emotions

## Introduction

If your emotions feel intense, confusing, or hard to manage, you are not alone. Many ADHD women share this experience.

Most of us were not taught how emotions actually work. Instead, we were taught messages about them.

We learned that emotions are dramatic, irrational, inconvenient, or weak. We learned to label them as “good” or “bad” instead of understanding them as signals.





Modern neuroscience tells a different story.

Emotions are biological. They are fast. They are protective. They are part of how humans survive and connect.

But the old messages still shape how emotional women are treated.

If you were told you were “too sensitive,” “too dramatic,” or “too much,” it makes sense that you may have learned to doubt your feelings.

This workbook will not teach you to control your emotions.

It will help you understand them.

## Why Emotions Exist

### Emotions aren't random.

Emotions are not random.

They are part of your body's built-in guidance system. They provide information about safety, connection, and need.

Before you had language, your body already knew how to feel. Those signals helped humans survive long before logic developed.



# Emotions show up to help you:



**Notice danger when something feels off**

**Connect with others through empathy and bonding**

**Experience comfort and trust through brain chemicals like oxytocin**



**Focus attention and guide decide making**

**Hold complex experiences like grief and joy at the same time**

**Recognize your physical needs like hunger, rest or exhaustion**

Your body has its own kind of wisdom. Emotions are one way it speaks to you. Emotions are not weaknesses. They are signals.

When you understand them as signals instead of flaws, your relationship with them begins to shift.

## Emotions Vs Feelings

People often use the words "emotion" and "feeling" as if they mean the same thing. They are connected, but they are not identical.

Emotions come first.

They are fast, automatic, and physical. Your body reacts before your thinking brain catches up. You might notice a tight chest, a racing heart, heat in your face, or your body going still before you have words for what is happening.

Feelings come next.

Feelings are your brain's interpretation of those body signals. Your mind searches for a label: hurt, embarrassed, angry, anxious, proud.



Example:

Someone criticizes you.

Your chest tightens. That is the emotion.

A moment later, you recognize you feel embarrassed or hurt. That is the feeling.

You can think of it this way:

Emotion = body signal

Feeling = brain translation

This is why you sometimes react before you can explain yourself. Your body is faster than your thoughts. That is not a flaw. It is how human nervous systems are designed.



## How Feelings Are Constructed

You now know that emotions begin in the body and feelings are how your brain makes sense of them.

But that process is layered.

If your reactions feel confusing or overwhelming, it does not mean something is wrong with you. It means multiple systems are working at once.

Here is what shapes your feelings:

## Here's what shapes your feelings:

**1****Your Body Reacts First**

You may feel heat, tension, a tight chest, restlessness, or stillness before you understand why.

**2****Your Brain Searches for Meaning**

Your mind pulls from memories, beliefs, and past experiences to explain the body's signal.

**3****Your Environment Shapes Interpretation**

Culture, family, and early experiences influence which emotions feel safe, acceptable, or dangerous.

**4****Brain Chemistry Affects Intensity**

Dopamine, cortisol, and hormones, sleep and stress can increase or decrease emotional intensity.

**5****Your Physical State Matters**

Hunger, exhaustion, illness or overload can amplify emotions.

**6****Trauma Leaves an Imprint**

Trauma can make your system more sensitive or lead to shutdown responses.



When you understand these layers, strong reactions start to make sense. Your system is responding to more than just the present moment.


## What That Means for You

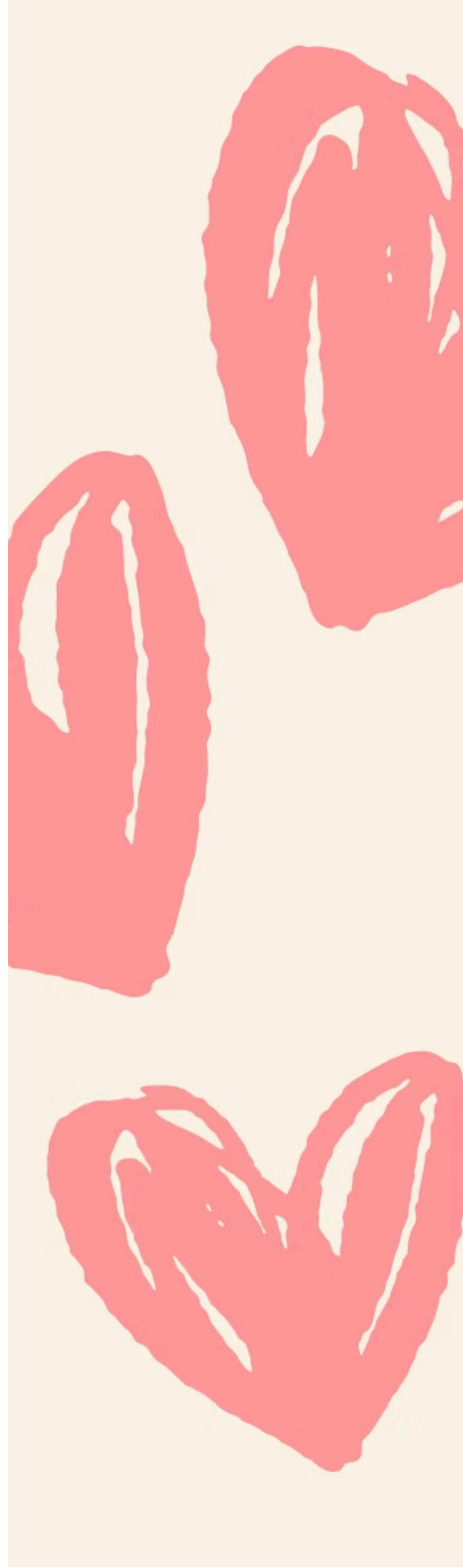
Understanding how emotions work changes how you interpret your reactions.

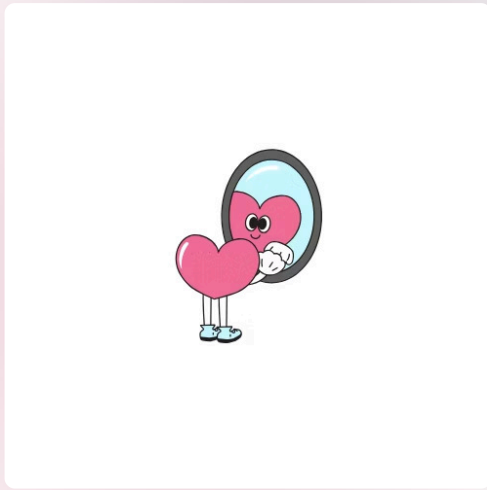
Instead of asking, "What is wrong with me?" you can ask, "What is happening in my system?"

You do not need to eliminate feelings. You need space to notice them.

Feelings are signals. Signals require attention, not shame.

 **Flourish Truth:** Feelings need space to be felt, not hidden or erased.





## Reflection

You're invited to explore this reflection:

What's one feeling you usually judge yourself for?

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What would it be like to just notice it instead

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You can write it down, draw it, record a voice note or just think about it.

## Core Beliefs

You have explored how emotions are built.

Now we look at another layer: core beliefs.

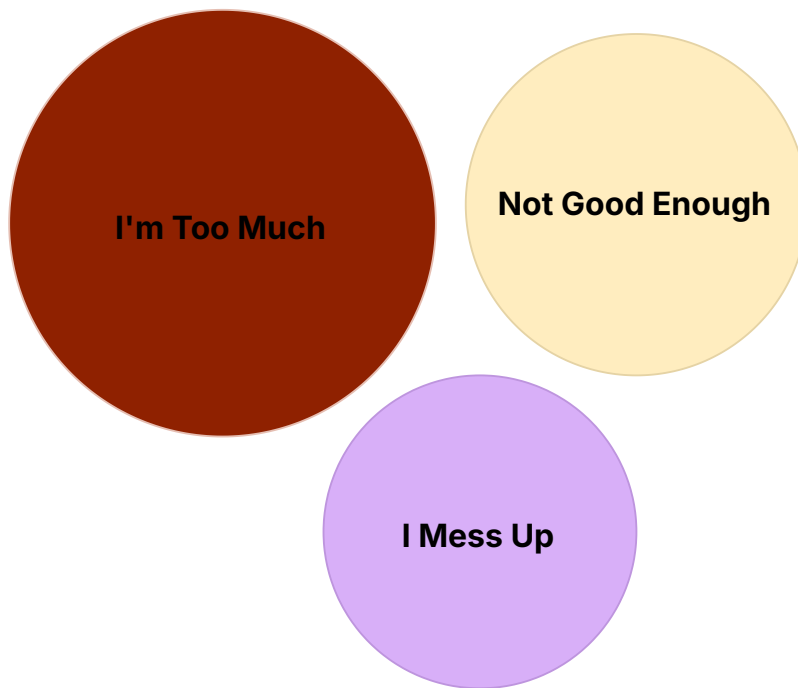
Core beliefs are deep ideas you carry about yourself, other people, and the world. Many form early in life, especially when you felt different, misunderstood, or unsupported.

Even when you are not aware of them, these beliefs shape how you interpret situations and how intensely you feel.

## Core Beliefs About Self

If you carry beliefs like:

- "I'm too much."
- "I'm not good enough."
- "I always mess things up."



Then even small moments can feel overwhelming or threatening.

The situation is not just happening in the present. It is passing through old beliefs.

## Core Beliefs about Emotions

You may also carry beliefs about emotions themselves.

Most people do not learn about emotions directly. They learn by watching how others respond.

You may have absorbed messages like:

**1**

**"Crying makes people uncomfortable."**

**2**

**"If I'm angry, I'll get in trouble."**

**3**

**"I need to calm down to be loved."**



These messages are often communicated indirectly through silence, discomfort, punishment, or withdrawal.

If emotions have ever felt unsafe, that makes sense. You may not have been taught how to feel them safely.

## Common Emotionally Conditioned Beliefs in ADHD Women

Over time, repeated experiences shape emotional habits.

If you were shamed for sensitivity or expected to stay calm no matter what, you may have learned to hide or minimize your feelings to stay safe.

**1** "I can't ask for help."

**2** "Something is wrong with me."

**3** "If I show emotion, I will be judged or rejected."

**4** "I can't trust my feelings."

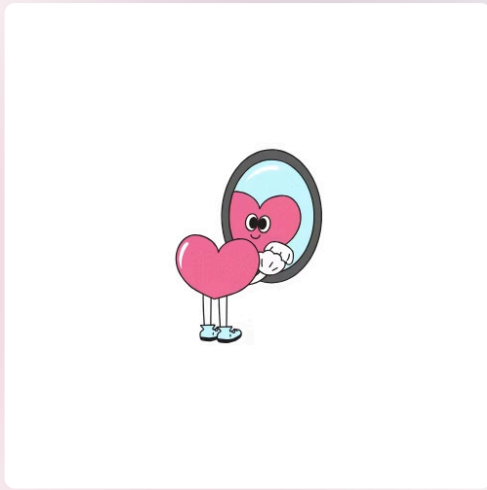
**5** "My needs are too much."

**6** "I have to hide my anger."

**7** "When I am overwhelmed, it is my fault."

**8** "I can't show people how I really feel."

You do not have to dismantlle these beliefs all at once. Just noticing them is enough for now.



## Reflection: Exploring Emotionally Conditioned Beliefs

Take a moment to check in with yourself.

1. *What core beliefs do I carry about emotions?*

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2. *Where do I think those beliefs came from?*

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You can write, draw, talk, or just notice. There's no right way or answer. The goal is awareness.

## Why Emotional Trust Matters

If you learned that your emotions were excessive, inconvenient, or unsafe, it makes sense that you may not trust them.

Emotional conditioning can teach you to manage, hide, or minimize what you feel. Over time, that can create distance between you and your own signals.



When emotional trust is low, you might:

**1****Dismiss or downplay what you feel****2****Judge yourself for strong reactions****3****Interpret overwhelm as a character flaw instead of a nervous system response**

Emotional trust does not mean every reaction is accurate. It means you are willing to get curious instead of immediately shutting yourself down.

Trust grows through awareness and practice.

## The ADHD Brain & Emotional Sensitivity

Understanding your wiring is part of rebuilding emotional trust.

ADHD brains often:




**Take in more  
emotional input**

**Process emotion  
with greater  
intensity**

**Struggle to slow or  
filter emotions in  
the moment**

This is simply how your brain works. Understanding this can help you respond to your emotions with compassion instead of self-criticism.

 **Flourish Truth:** Sensitivity is not a weakness. It is information, and learning how to work with it can turn it into a strength.

Emotional Sensitivity in ADHD can look like

Reacting strongly to changes or perceived threats

Feeling emotions in your body before you can name them

Becoming overwhelmed without time or space to regulate

Lingering emotions long after an event ends

Difficulty identifying or describing feelings

Experiencing rejection as deeply painful

In environments that value emotional restraint, these traits are often misunderstood.

Understanding your wiring reduces self-blame.



## Part Two: Reclaiming Emotional Trust

You have learned how emotions begin in the body, how beliefs shape them, and how ADHD sensitivity can intensify them.

Now we shift the lens.

In this next section, we look at how culture, gender expectations, and neurodivergence influence your relationship with emotion.

We will explore:

- The pressure to suppress or hide emotions
- How emotional traits are often misunderstood
- What it means to begin rebuilding emotional trust

This work can feel layered. Take it at your own pace.

## The Double Whammy

You are a neurodivergent woman living in a world built for neurotypical regulation and emotional restraint and compliance.

That creates pressure from two directions.

As a woman, you may have been expected to be calm, agreeable, and emotionally contained.

As a neurodivergent person, you may have been told your reactions were excessive, dramatic, or inappropriate.

When those messages combine, your emotions are filtered through two layers of misunderstanding.

You are not only managing intensity.  
You are managing other people's discomfort with it.

Over time, this can lead to self-doubt.

You may start to question your reactions instead of examining the environment.

That is the double pressure.

Understanding this context helps you see your emotional patterns more clearly.



# Common Emotional Features in ADHD Women

These patterns are common in ADHD nervous systems. They are not character flaws.

You might notice:

1

## Frozen or Flooded

At times you feel stuck, numb, or suddenly overwhelmed.

2

## Sudden Swings

Strong feelings appear quickly, before you understand where they came from.

3

## Emotions Linger

Feelings stay longer than the triggering event.

4

## Deadline-Driven Activation

Emotion rises sharply when urgency is present.

5

## Difficulty Naming Feelings (Alexithymia)

You know something feels off but cannot find the right word.

6

## Hard to Calm Down

Once emotion rises, it takes time to settle.

7

## Emotional Memory Bias

Feelings feel more powerful than facts.

8

## Rejection Sensitivity

Small shifts in tone or feedback feel intense.

Seeing these patterns clearly helps reduce shame.

They are signals of nervous system wiring, not personal failure.

The word "Activity" is written in a colorful, stylized font where each letter is a different color and has a unique shape, like a star or a heart.

## **Activity: Check In With Yourself**

If it feels okay, take a moment to see which of these emotional patterns feel familiar. This is about awareness, not judgment.

- My emotions feel more intense than others describe
- I get frozen or overwhelmed by emotion
- I struggle to name what I am feeling
- My emotions seem to come out of nowhere
- I have delayed emotional reactions
- I get stuck in shame, sadness, or anger
- Small rejections feel devastating
- I shut down when feelings get big
- I hide my real feelings to avoid judgment
- Feedback feels like a personal attack
- I have emotional hangovers after intense moments

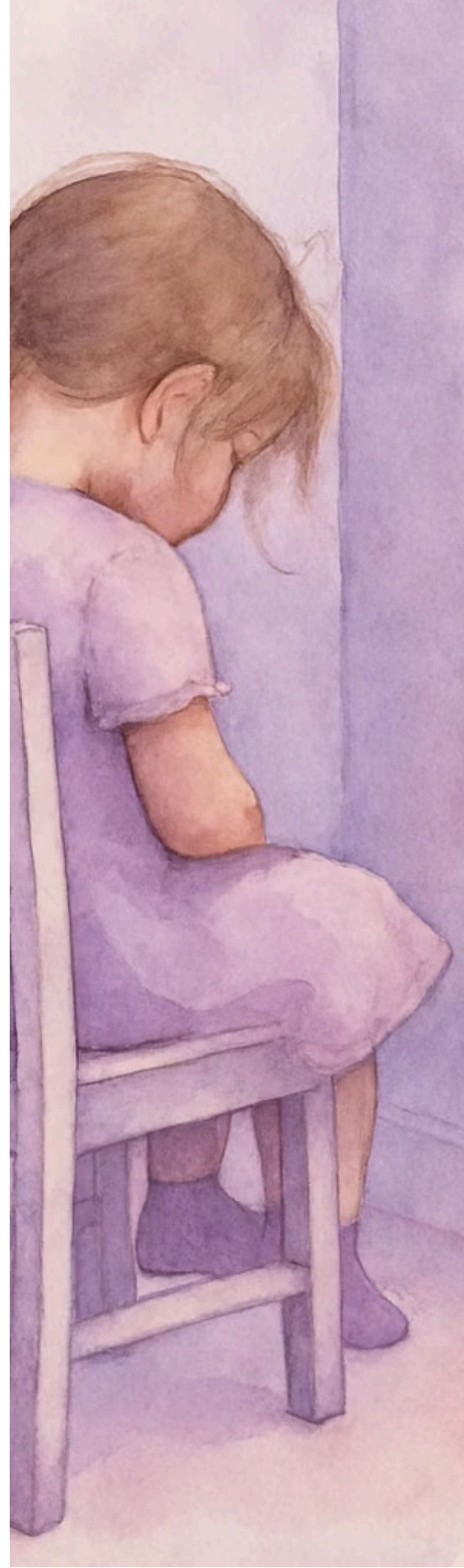
Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Check any that apply:**

For now, just noticing these patterns is a powerful beginning.  
You're building self-awareness.

## How Emotional Suppression Gets Learned

We have talked about the big picture, how culture, gender, and neurodivergence shape emotional shame. Now let's zoom in: what does that actually look like in real life?





You may have been:

- 1** Sent away to “calm down” instead of being comforted
- 2** Told your feelings were “too much” or “attention-seeking”
- 3** Praised for being emotionally low-maintenance
- 4** Ignored when you were overwhelmed.

Over time, experiences like these teach you what feels safe to express and what feels risky.

Many ADHD women learn to disconnect from their emotions to stay accepted.

This is not weakness.

It is adaptation.

And adaptations can be understood and adjusted.

## Emotional Conditioning: Creating Coping Strategies in ADHD Girls

- Shrinking your reactions
- People-pleasing from guilt
- Suppressing anger
- Over-explaining yourself
- Taking responsibility for other people's comfort

These strategies were protective.







They helped you survive environments that did not fully understand your nervous system.

You do not need to erase them overnight.

You are simply beginning to notice them.



In the Flourish model, we focus on building new emotional skills:

-   Listening to your boundaries instead of overriding them
-   Naming your needs instead of shrinking them
-   Honoring your emotional truth without fear or apology

These are **emotional sovereignty** skills. They take time to grow, and you are already developing them.

Next, we'll take a closer look at how this kind of conditioning shows up in two emotions that are often misunderstood: **guilt** and **anger**.

## Guilt & Anger: Signals, Not Flaws

Two emotions often carry extra shame for ADHD women: anger and guilt.

Anger is a boundary signal.

"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*

It often appears when something feels unfair, overwhelming, or misaligned with your values.

It is information.

Guilt is meant to signal when you have caused harm.

"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*

But guilt can also be conditioned.

You may feel guilty for resting, saying no, or prioritizing your needs.

That does not automatically mean you have done something wrong.

Sometimes guilt reflects old programming rather than present harm.

Instead of eliminating these emotions, you can begin asking:

What is this pointing to?

What boundary or value might be involved?

Understanding reduces fear.

## What Is Emotional Service?

Emotional service is when you feel responsible for managing other people's emotions. It can mean soothing, fixing, absorbing, or shrinking yourself to keep others comfortable.

It can sound like:

**"I need to stay calm or they will get upset."**

**"I cannot show anger, it will cause conflict."**

**"I have to make sure everyone else is okay first."**

Many ADHD women learned this early.

If strong emotions were punished, ignored, or labeled dramatic, it made sense to become the one who managed the room.

Emotional service is not weakness.

It is adaptation.

But over time, it can disconnect you from your own signals.

## What Is Emotional Sovereignty?

Emotional sovereignty means your emotions belong to you.

They are yours to understand, not erase.

Yours to feel, not perform.

Yours to respond to, not apologize for.

It does not mean you stop caring about others.

It means you stop abandoning yourself to keep others comfortable.

It means:

**1** You can feel angry without fixing it.


**2** You can feel sadness without apologizing.

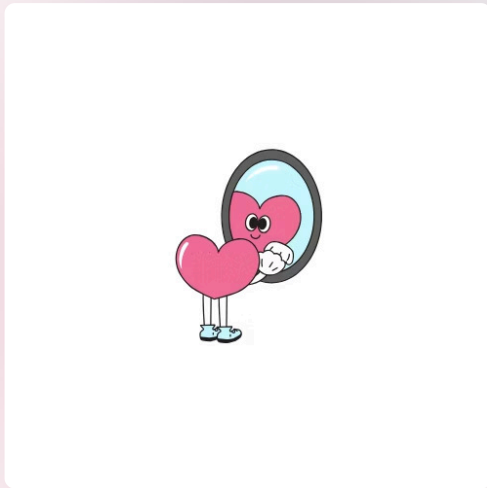
**3** You can notice resentment and ask what it is protecting.

Emotional sovereignty gives you permission to stop performing emotional safety for others and start honoring your own.



## Flourish Shift: From Emotional Service to Emotional Sovereignty

What You Were Taught	→	What You Deserve to Practice
"Keep the peace."	→	 <b>My peace matters too.</b>
"Be easy and agreeable."	→	 <b>I'm allowed to have needs.</b>
"Don't be too much."	→	 <b>There is no wrong way to feel.</b>
"Put others first."	→	 <b>I can care for others <i>and</i> myself.</b>
"Stay quiet."	→	 <b>I get to advocate for what I need.</b>



## Reflection:

### Emotional Sovereignty: What Does That Look Like for Me?

Use any prompt(s) that speak to you

**If I trusted my emotions more, I would**

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**I wish I were allowed to express**

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## A Shift Worth Practicing

This is one of the biggest emotional shifts we focus on in the Flourish model.

For many ADHD women, emotional service becomes a kind of masking. It's not just performing calm or caretaking — it's disconnecting from what's real inside to stay safe, accepted, or easy to be around.

Letting go of emotional service doesn't mean you stop caring.

It means you stop disconnecting from yourself. You begin to see that your emotions are valid, and that you are worthy just as you are.

This is the shift from **emotional service to emotional sovereignty**.

## Building Emotional Self-Awareness

Understanding emotion matters.

But insight alone does not shift patterns.

Self-awareness does.

Self-awareness is noticing what is happening inside you without immediately judging or fixing it.

For many ADHD women, that feels unfamiliar.

You may have learned to override your body, push through exhaustion, or minimize feelings to stay functional.

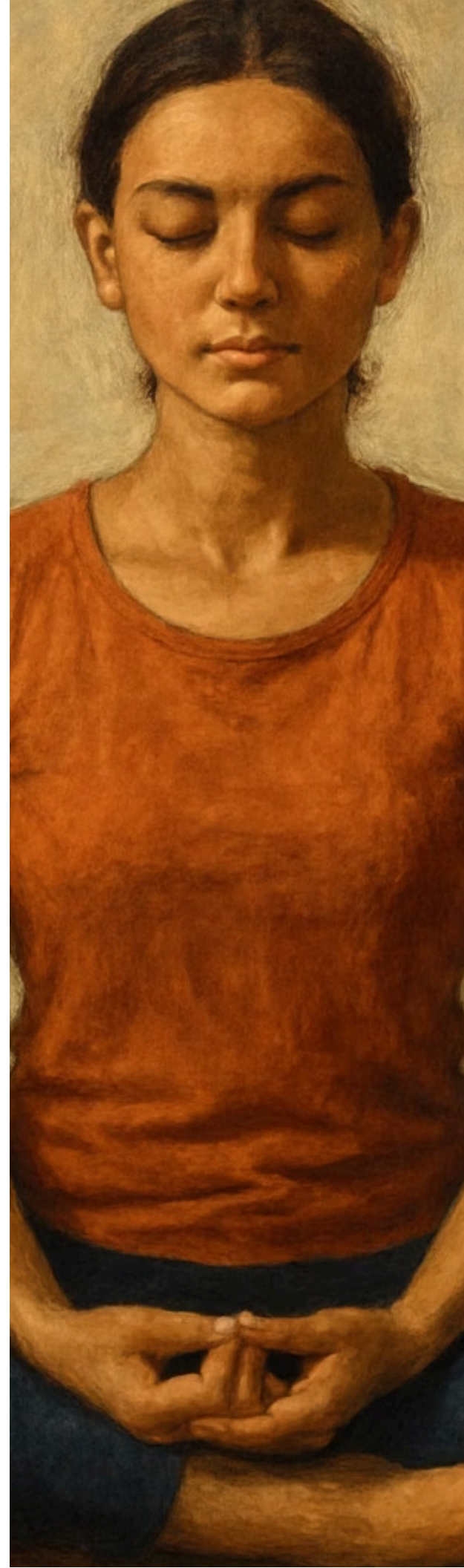
That made sense.

Now you are learning to notice.

Self-awareness supports regulation, self-compassion, and self-trust.

You do not have to master it.

You only have to practice it.



The following activities will help you:



- 1** Tune into your body's signals
- 2** Identify emotions as they begin
- 3** Expand your vocabulary so you can name what you feel more precisely

You don't have to do these things perfectly.

Just practice bit by bit to get more familiar with your own inner world, one moment at a time.



## Activity/Reflection: Curiosity

Pause for a moment:

**What do I notice in my body right now?**

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**What emotion might be here?** *(It's okay if you aren't sure yet.)*

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*You can use the feelings wheel or body sensations chart at the end of this workbook for support.*



## Activity: Try This: Noticing Practice

Find a quiet moment. You can do this anywhere, even in the middle of a busy day.

Take one slow breath in... and out.

Then ask yourself:



### What's happening in my body right now?

- Tension
  - Restlessness
  - Stillness
  - Heaviness
  - Tight chest
  - Something else:
- 



### What emotion might be here?

- Sadness
- Anger
- Joy
- Shame
- Anxiety
- I'm not sure yet (that's okay)



### What thought is connected there are mo?

- "I'm not doing enough."
  - "Something's wrong with me."
  - "I have to fix this."
  - "I wish someone understood me."
  - Something else:
- 



**Just notice. Breathe. You don't need to change anything.**

Awareness is enough.



The word "Activity" is written in a colorful, playful font. The letters are in shades of orange, purple, and blue, with some letters having small decorative elements like stars or dots.

## Activity: Expanding My Emotional Vocabulary

### How to use this page:

Sometimes we say "I'm overwhelmed," but what we really mean is something more specific:

- "I feel ignored."
- "I feel rushed."
- "I feel disappointed."
- "I feel like no one sees what I'm carrying."

You don't need perfect words to feel your emotions. But building **emotional granularity**, the ability to name your emotions more precisely, can help you feel more seen and better understood.

The more words you have for what you feel, the easier it is to know what you need.

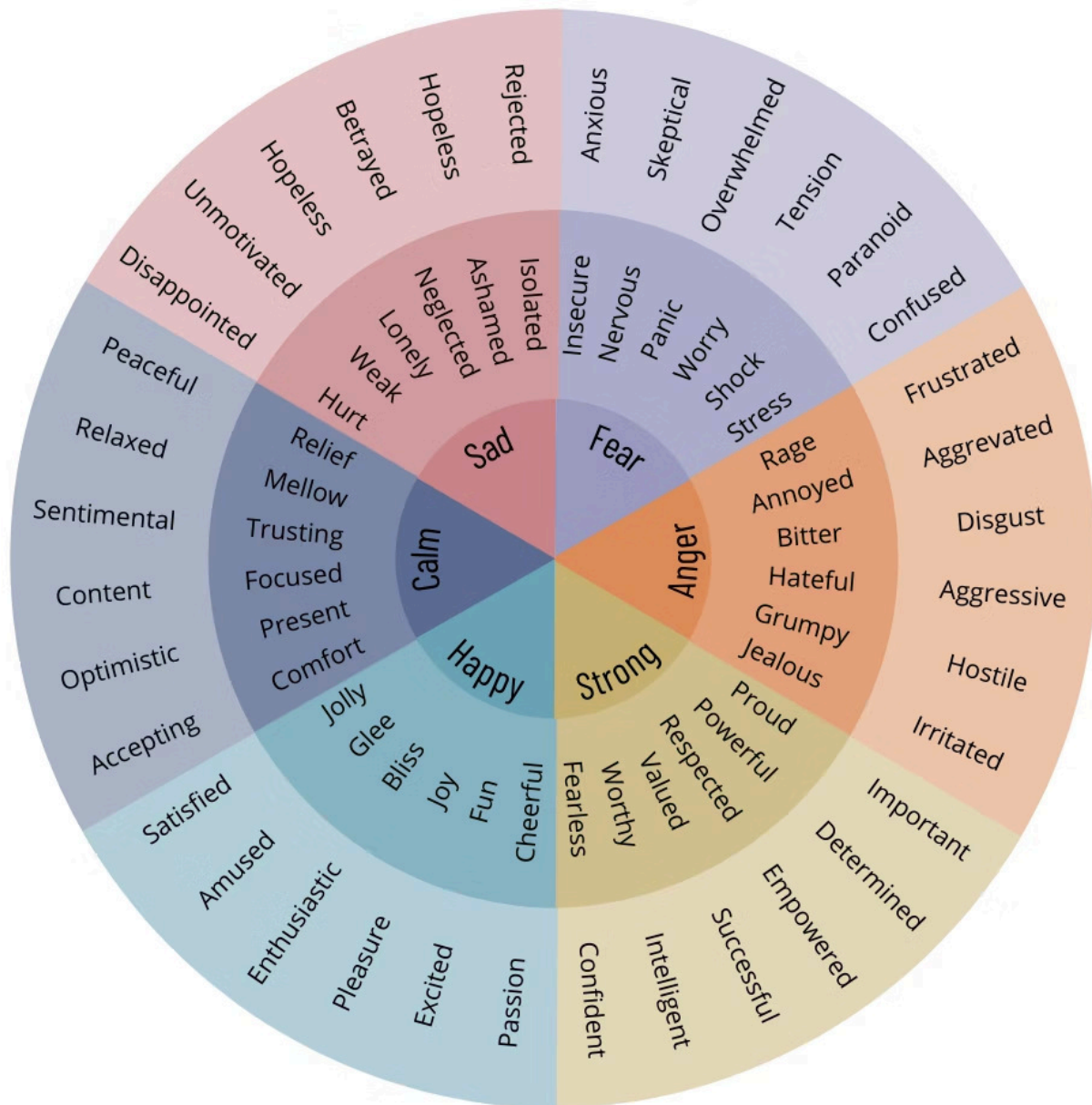
## Try expanding your words with these feeling families:

Primary Feeling	What Might Be Underneath
<b>Sad</b>	Left out · Grieving · Disconnected · Disappointed
<b>Angry</b>	Disrespected · Invisible · Pressured · Misunderstood
<b>Anxious</b>	Unprepared · Unsafe · Judged · Confused
<b>Numb</b>	Overloaded · Unmet · Disconnected · Tired
<b>Joy</b>	Connected · Hopeful · Energized · Curious

### You don't have to get it "right." Just practice trying

You can also use tools like a *feelings wheel* or feelings in your *body feelings wheel* to help you build your emotional vocabulary.

# The Feel Wheel



flourishingwomenllc



# BODY FEELINGS WORDS

tingly open clenched tight loose heavy swirly  
itchy fidgety knotted

Eyes feel stinging  
blurry or focused

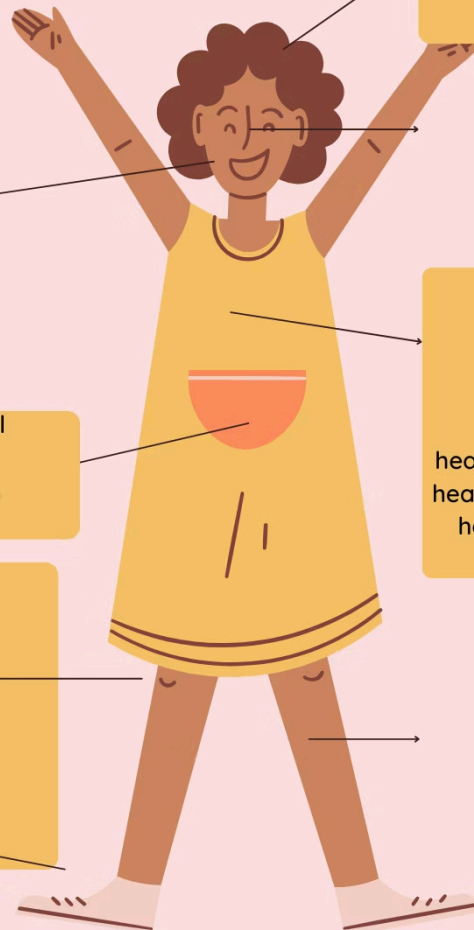
Head can feel buzzy,  
neutral, clear, dizzy  
swirly, heavy

Jaw can feel  
clenched or tight

Chest  
feels tight  
fluttery  
heavy  
open  
heart beating fast  
heart beating slow  
heart stopped

Stomach can feel  
fluttery, calm,  
neutral, knotted,  
nauseous

Legs can feel  
heavy, tingly  
like they want to  
run  
like they are  
stuck  
like they are  
numb



credit to Dr. Megan Neff for this idea



**Flourish**  
A group for ADHD Women



## Closing Reflection: You Did Something Brave

You've just moved through an entire workbook about something most people spend their whole lives trying to avoid:

### **Your emotions.**

- ✓ You explored the roots of your emotional experience
- ✓ You looked at shame, survival, and how the world has shaped your responses
- ✓ You began to replace old coping patterns with new possibilities
- ✓ You built self-awareness
- ✓ You practiced compassion
- ✓ You gave your emotions a voice

Take a moment to pause and honor what you've done.

## **What's Next: Workbook 4 – Emotional Dysregulation**

This is just one piece of your emotional journey.

In the next workbook, we'll explore:

- What happens when your emotions feel too big or too fast
- How ADHD brains experience overwhelm
- What tools and supports actually help when dysregulation takes over

You're building a foundation. The next step is learning how to support yourself during those moments when regulation feels out of reach.

Let's keep going—gently, at your own pace.

 You're doing meaningful work. And it matters.