



FLOURISH WORKBOOK 4

Emotional Regulation Workbook



What Is This Workbook About?

In the previous workbook, you learned how emotions begin in the body and how the brain interprets those signals into feelings.

In this workbook we focus on what happens when emotional signals rise very quickly or very strongly, making regulation difficult.

What You'll Learn

- What emotional dysregulation is and how it shows up in ADHD women
- Why emotions can feel sudden, intense, or hard to downshift
- How nervous system activation and executive functioning shape regulation
- How rejection sensitivity, alexithymia, misattunement, and interoception can complicate regulation
- Tools for steadiness, recovery, and self-trust

Introduction

Many ADHD women experience emotions that rise quickly and feel difficult to settle.

In Workbook 3 you learned how emotions begin in the body and how the brain interprets them.

This workbook focuses on what happens when emotional signals move too fast or become overwhelming, and how to support regulation.

You will learn how to recognize dysregulation, understand common emotional patterns, and practice tools that help your nervous system return to balance.



Important Note

Emotional regulation challenges are common in ADHD.

Because they are not part of the official diagnostic criteria, many ADHD women are sometimes misdiagnosed with anxiety disorders, mood disorders, or personality disorders.

This is not your fault. It reflects gaps in research, gender bias, and clinical misunderstanding.

You deserve a framework that reflects the reality of ADHD in women.



What Is Emotional Dysregulation?

Emotional dysregulation means emotions activate quickly and feel intense. Once activated, it may be difficult to calm down or think clearly.

When emotional dysregulation occurs, several things may happen:

- 1** Emotions appear suddenly, before you realize what is happening
- 2** The body reacts as if there is danger, even when there is none
- 3** It becomes difficult to identify what you are feeling
- 4** Thinking, focus, and problem-solving become harder because the brain is overwhelmed

When someone labels you "too emotional," stress often increases. Judgment does not calm the nervous system.

What helps is earlier detection of emotional signals, tools that support the nervous system, and enough time to recover.



Why Emotional Dysregulation Happens

ADHD brains are wired to experience emotions differently.

Emotions may activate quickly, take longer to settle, and respond strongly to stress or emotional cues.

These patterns reflect both neurology and life experience.



How Dysregulation Shows Up

Dysregulation can look like activation (bigger, faster emotions) or shutdown (going numb, quiet, foggy, or disconnected).



Emotional Reactions

- Crying or tearing up “out of nowhere”
- Feeling a wave of anger, then crashing into shame
- Lashing out
- Feeling overwhelmed

Thought Patterns

- Replaying conversations for hours
- Thinking, *“I should be able to stop this, but I can’t”*
- Thinking about a mistake you made over and over
- Anxiety
- Rejection sensitivity

Behavioral Struggles

- Procrastination
- Task paralysis
- Struggling to start or finish things

Body and Brain

- Going numb or silent
- Brain fog



Flourish Shift From Old to New Beliefs



Flourish Shift:

Old Belief	→	Flourish Reframe
"I'm too sensitive."	→	My sensitivity is a response to real experiences.
"I should be able to calm down."	→	My body might need more time and care to settle.
"This reaction doesn't make sense."	→	My brain is reacting faster than I can process.

How ADHD Brains Process Emotions



ADHD emotions can arrive quickly and with intensity.

They can also be harder to regulate when stress is high, sleep is low, or the environment is demanding.

The following patterns help explain why emotions can feel difficult to settle.

Pattern 1: Quick Activation

Emotions begin in the body.

Before the thinking brain understands what is happening, the nervous system has already reacted. This is true for everyone.

In ADHD, emotional activation can be faster or stronger.

This might look like:

1 Crying or snapping suddenly

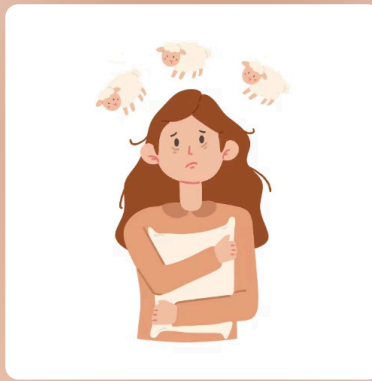
2 Shutting down quickly

3 Feeling overwhelmed before you know why

The body reacts first. The thinking brain catches up later.

When emotions rise quickly, it becomes harder to pause or think clearly. Regulation tools help create that pause.





Pattern 2: Emotional Loops

The Default Mode Network (DMN) is a brain network that becomes active during internal thinking such as memory, reflection, and self-evaluation.

In ADHD, this network can be harder to regulate. It may stay active when you are trying to rest, fall asleep, or shift focus.

You might notice:

- Replaying past conversations
- Getting pulled into worry or self-criticism
- Feeling emotionally stirred up when you meant to relax

When the DMN stays active, it can amplify emotional memory and make it harder for your nervous system to settle.

Regulation involves shifting your brain into a different mode through movement, grounding, sensory input, or structured focus.

Pattern 3: Slow Downshifting

Once emotions activate, ADHD nervous systems may take longer to settle.

Even after a situation has passed, the body may still feel activated.

When the nervous system stays activated, it becomes harder to pause, think clearly, or decide what to do next.

Your system often needs support to calm down.



Pattern 4: Stress-Conditioned Alertness

If your body has lived with ongoing stress, it may stay on alert.

Small stressors can trigger strong reactions.

Over time, the nervous system learns to react quickly because it is trying to protect you.

Regulation helps your system recognize that the present moment is safe.



Pattern 5: Negative Stickiness

ADHD brains can hold on to negative experiences more easily than positive ones.

Sometimes called **negative stickiness**, this pattern can cause painful memories to replay.

You might notice:

- Thinking about the same hurt again and again
- Reacting strongly to small reminders
- Feeling pulled back into old emotional moments

When this happens, your nervous system may react as if the past is happening again.

Regulation tools help your nervous system recognize that the present moment is different from the past.



Old Thought

Why can't I stop feeling this way?

Flourish Reframe

My brain and body may need more support for my emotions to settle



Activity ✓ Self-Check List for Emotional Dysregulation

Check anything that feels familiar:

- I feel overwhelmed before I know what's happening
- I struggle to explain what I am feeling
- Others have told me I "overreact"
- I replay situations in my mind
- I crash after being "on" for too long
- I feel shame about how long it takes me to calm down

Hiding Emotions Creates Extra Stress

Many ADHD women learned to hide emotions to avoid criticism or rejection.

Common patterns include:







These patterns are understandable adaptations.

However, hiding emotions keeps the nervous system under pressure and can make regulation harder over time.

Examples of Emotional Suppression

Suppressing emotions often becomes automatic when showing them feels unsafe.

-  Smiling when you are upset to avoid rejection
-  Saying "I am fine" when you are not because you are afraid to need support
-  Overachieving when you are exhausted to feel worthy
-  Agreeing to things you do not want to avoid conflict

These patterns are not something to be ashamed of. They are adaptations that helped you stay safe and connected.

The word "Activity" is written in a colorful, stylized font. Each letter is a different color and has a unique pattern or shape. The 'A' is orange with a flower, 'C' is orange with stripes, 'T' is purple with a star, 'I' is purple with a star, 'V' is purple with a star, 'I' is purple with a star, and 'T' is orange with a star.

Activity

Self-Check: Masking and People-Pleasing Patterns

Check what feels familiar.

- I hide my emotions to appear fine
- I overachieve or overfunction to feel acceptable
- I apologize after showing strong emotions
- I say yes when I mean no
- I try to appear "easy" or "low-maintenance"
- I only realize I am overwhelmed after I crash
- I overexplain so people will not misunderstand me
- I stay quiet in groups to avoid conflict

Chronic Stress & Emotional Regulation in ADHD Women

For many ADHD women, emotional regulation is affected by the environments they live in.

Workplaces, schools, and daily routines often rely on expectations that do not match ADHD wiring.

Tasks that appear simple from the outside can require large amounts of emotional, cognitive, and sensory energy.

Stress increases when there is:



Little flexibility at work or home



Sensory overload in busy spaces



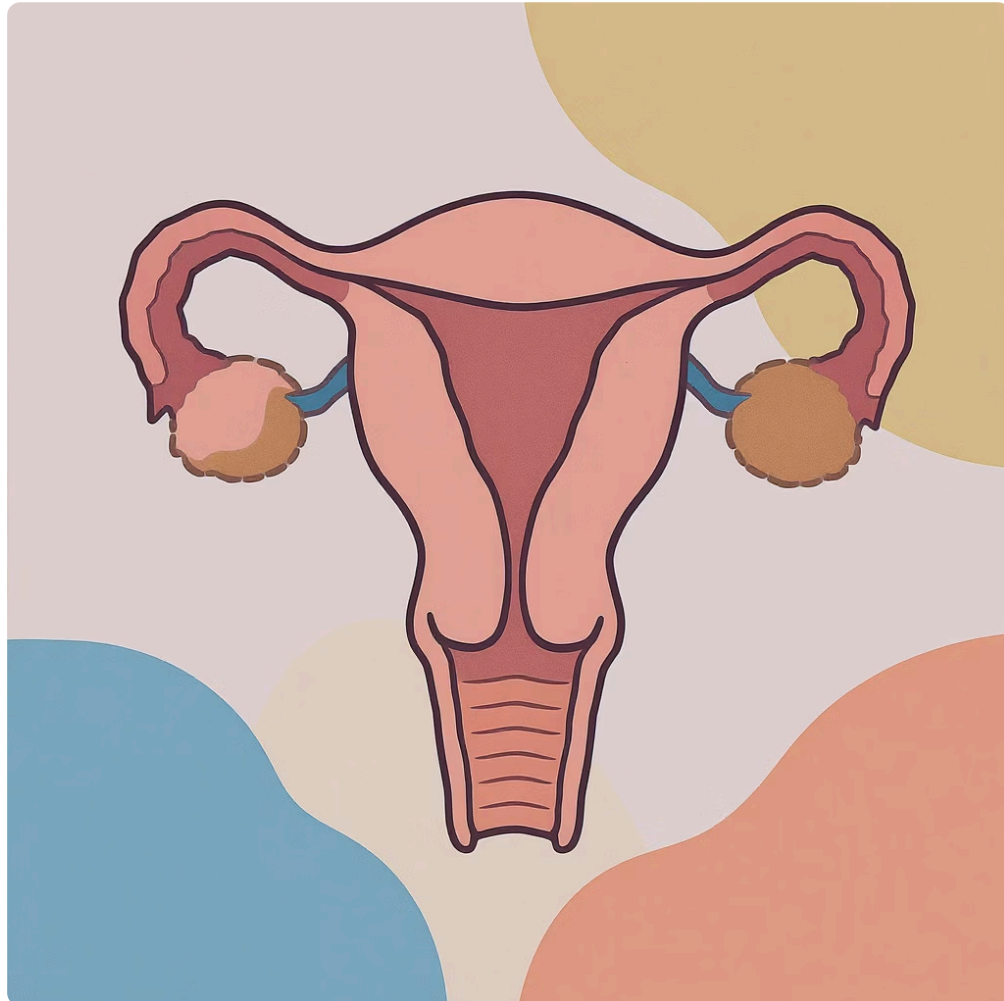
Unrealistic productivity expectations



Constant interruptions



Pressure to hide needs



Hormonal changes across the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, postpartum, and perimenopause can add another layer.

When these pressures are constant, the nervous system stays in a state of alert.

Over time, emotional regulation becomes harder.

The Cost of Constant Stress

The body is designed to handle short periods of stress followed by recovery.

When stress becomes constant, the nervous system has fewer opportunities to reset.

Over time, the body may remain in a state of heightened alert.

When the nervous system is already strained, emotions become harder to regulate.

This is the natural result of long-term stress on the body.





Activity

Noticing Signs of Chronic Stress

Check any that feel true:

- I feel tense even when things are "fine"
- I collapse when no one's watching
- I avoid asking for help because I don't want to be a burden
- I experience periods of mini burnout
- I carry emotional exhaustion into each day
- I feel like I'm always behind
- I rarely feel truly rested, even after a full night's sleep.
- I feel irritable or impatient more often than I want to
- I have trouble feeling joy or excitement

Emotional Patterns That Shape Emotional Regulation

Several emotional patterns are common in ADHD women and can make emotional regulation more difficult.

1. RSD (Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria)

RSD involves intense emotional pain in response to perceived or actual rejection, even in small moments. You may:

- 1** — Feel deep shame after a small comment
- 2** — Interpret neutral feedback as criticism
- 3** — People-please or over-apologize to avoid rejection



2. Alexithymia



Alexithymia means difficulty identifying or describing emotions.

You may:

- 1** Feel upset but not know why
- 2** Struggle to explain what you are feeling
- 3** Appear numb, blank, or distant to others

3. Misattunement

Misattunement occurs when emotions are repeatedly dismissed or misunderstood.

You may have heard things like:

You may have been told:

"You're overreacting"

"That's not a big deal"

"Calm down"

This can lead to:

1

Hiding feelings

2

Doubting yourself

3

**Working harder
just to be seen or
taken seriously or
giving up on it**

4. Interoception Gaps



Interoception is the ability to notice internal body signals such as hunger, fatigue, or tension.

ADHD brains may miss these cues until they become intense.

This can make emotions feel sudden or overwhelming.

Examples include:

Hunger

Fatigue

Overstimulation

Tension

When These Patterns Combine

These patterns often occur together.

RSD → emotional urgency

Alexithymia → confusion about feelings

Misattunement → self-doubt

Interoception gaps → emotions that feel sudden

When several patterns occur at the same time, emotional regulation becomes more difficult.

Understanding these patterns can help you respond with the right support.





Activity

Self Check: Emotional Patterns

Check any that feel true:

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria

- I panic, shut down, or feel intense shame after small rejections
- I've been told I overreact to comments or feedback

Alexithymia

- I don't always know what I am feeling in the moment
- I have trouble putting my emotions into words

Misattunement

- I doubt or mistrust my emotional responses
- I hide how I feel to avoid being misunderstood

Interoception Gaps

- I feel like emotions come "out of nowhere"
- I miss early body signals that I am hungry, tired, or overstimulated until it is too late
- I've learned to disconnect from my needs



Regulation is Connection, Not Control

Many ADHD women were taught that regulation means staying quiet or hiding emotions.

That is suppression, not regulation.

Emotional regulation involves reconnecting with what you are feeling.

It includes:

- 1** — **Feeling safe in your body**
- 2** — **Naming what's happening inside**
- 3** — **Reaching for support instead of shutting down**

Why This Matters

If emotions have been managed through suppression for years, the nervous system may struggle to trust emotional signals.

Regulation involves rebuilding that connection.



What You Were Taught vs. What Regulation Really Is



Suppression Says...

"Calm down!" →

"Stop being so reactive." →

"You're too much." →

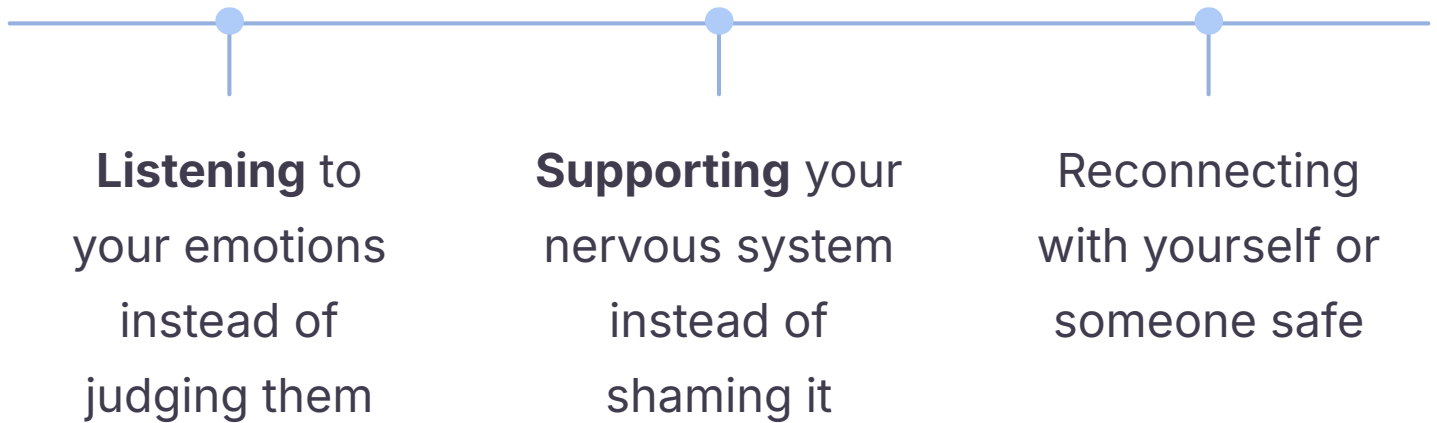
Regulation Means...

"Your feelings matter."

"Your body is communicating something"

"You deserve support"

What Real Regulation Looks Like



Regulation develops gradually through practice and support.



Flourish Shifts: From Control to Connection



Old Story

Flourish Reframe

I should handle this alone →

I can ask for help or co-regulation

I can't trust my emotions →

My emotions are signals that deserve attention

I'm bad at regulating →

I'm learning to reconnect with myself over time.

You Are Not "Too Much"

Many ADHD women were told their emotions were too big, too loud, or too dramatic.

When emotions were not met with understanding, it was easy to begin believing something was wrong with you.

In reality, many of these experiences were moments where your emotions were not supported.





The Flourish Skills

Emotional regulation develops through supportive habits and environments.

The Flourish framework focuses on five skills:

Self-Awareness — noticing emotions and internal signals

Self-Compassion — responding to yourself with care

Self-Advocacy — expressing needs and asking for support

Self-Care — supporting basic physical needs

Self-Accommodation — adjusting environments to support your brain

These skills strengthen with practice.

From Survival to Support

Many ADHD women move through shifts like these:

People-pleasing → Self-Advocacy

Perfectionism → Self-Compassion

Masking → Self-Awareness

Ignoring your needs → Self-Accommodation

Overfunctioning → Self-Care

These changes happen gradually. They are skills you return to again and again.



Flourish Skills Reflection and Checklist

Flourish Skills Reflection

Which Flourish Skill do you already practice, even a little?

Which one feels most unfamiliar?

Take a moment to notice without judgment.

- Self-Awareness – Noticing your emotions and needs
 - Self-Compassion – Meeting yourself with warmth instead of criticism
 - Self-Advocacy – Asking for help or setting boundaries
 - Self-Care – Tending to your body's basic needs
 - Self-Accommodation – Adjusting your environment or expectations
-

Different not Defective



Closing Reflection

You've explored some of the most common emotional patterns that affect ADHD women.

In this workbook you:

- identified how emotional dysregulation shows up
- explored how masking and chronic stress affect emotions
- learned about emotional processing patterns like RSD and alexithymia
- began building the Flourish skills that support emotional regulation

This awareness becomes the foundation for the next stage of the work.

