

FLOURISH



Flourish

A group for ADHD Women

A neuroaffirming
book for ADHD
women

Group Introduction

Hello, and welcome to Flourish! A group, meeting weekly, that is specially designed to support women who have been diagnosed with ADHD. I'm SO happy you've decided to join! You are the first group of women to be a part of this group.

First, let's begin with an overview of what you can expect over the course of the coming weeks.

Flourish is a mutual self-help coaching group for women who have ADHD. It is not a therapy group. This group will provide emotional, psychological, and moral support, education, and skills for its members.

Each of us is encouraged to participate to whatever extent we feel comfortable. The only rules are to be respectful and kind and treat one another with compassion and as you would want to be treated.

Also, please respect the privacy of all of our group members and remember not to share the names of other group members outside the group. You are not required to give any identifying information if you do not choose to.



Our group will consist of a message board, video modules, and a group meeting to discuss and share the week's topic.

In this group, you will learn new skills to manage your life as an ADHD woman in a supportive community. We will do this through reflection and conversation.

You will also examine how growing up in a neurotypical as a neurodivergent person has impacted you.

You will learn skills of self-advocacy/self- accommodation, self-awareness, self-compassion, and self-care. At the end of this group, you will feel a greater sense of confidence and self-trust, something that many neurodivergent people are deprived of because they are othered as a minority in a neurotypical world. Let's dive right in with some definitions and explanations.



What is ADHD?

ADHD: A Genetic, Chronic, Neurodevelopmental, Brain-Based Difference

ADHD is a genetic, chronic, neurodevelopmental, brain-based difference that impacts women differently in various ways.

Understanding the Causes of ADHD

ADHD isn't caused by how you were parented, what you ate or what you did in childhood. ADHD can be caused by harm to your brain during pregnancy or birth, such as lead poisoning or, in rare cases, a head injury.

ADHD: A Highly Inheritable Condition

ADHD is highly inheritable. According to Russel Barkley – a leading researcher and authority on ADHD- it is more inheritable than height. This means if you have it, someone in your family likely has it.



What do we Know About ADHD Brains?

Researchers have started to identify the structural and chemical differences in the brain that may cause the symptoms associated with ADHD. The differences explain the difficulty with executive functioning, motor response inhibition, memory, emotion, and behavior.

We know that ADHD brains are different in the following ways.

- o Specific areas of the cortex are different.
- o Cortical tissues vary in thickness.
- o The parietal and cerebellar regions are different.
- o The basal ganglia and white matter tracts that connect and provide essential communication between various areas of the brain are different.

All these differences explain things that people with ADHD struggle with. People with ADHD also have unusually high functional connectivity between brain regions involved in selective visual attention. This explain why they have difficulty selecting what to focus on.

ADHD and Neurotransmitters

The Role of Neurotransmitters in the Brain

The brain acts as the body's control center and is responsible for sending and receiving electrical signals. Nerve cells, known as neurons, are what enable this communication. However, there is a gap between neurons that must be bridged.

Understanding Neurotransmitters

Neurotransmitters are the chemicals that bridge the gap and allow messages to be transmitted. One of the most important neurotransmitters is dopamine, which has many functions.

Dopamine Pathways and their Significance

Four pathways in the brain enable dopamine to travel from one region to another and transmit important information.

The Mesocortical and Dopamine Reward Pathways

Two of these pathways, the mesocortical and dopamine reward pathways, have been linked to cognitive impairment in ADHD.

ADHD and Neurotransmitters

Thomas Brown, a clinical psychologist and author of several books on ADHD describes it this way:

"The primary problem is related to chemicals manufactured, released, and reloaded at the level of synapses, the junctions between certain networks of neurons that manage the brain's management system. Persons with ADHD tend not to release enough of these essential chemicals or to release and reload them too quickly. ADHD medication helps smooth out this process"

ADHD and Genes

Researchers have not found that there is a single gene that causes ADHD, although recent research has identified two different groupings related to ADHD and there are new discoveries being made every day.

ADHD and Executive Functioning

ADHD isn't really a deficit of attention; it's an executive functioning disorder.

Executive functions have to do with:

- organizing
- coordinating
- prioritizing
- maintaining routine
- reaching goals
- getting started
- shifting tasks
- staying motivated
- managing time
- remembering details
- emotional regulation
- impulse control



We will learn more about this as the group goes on.

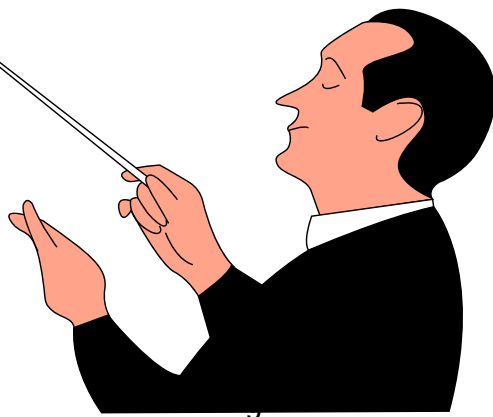
The Symphony Metaphor

Thomas Brown uses the metaphor of the conductor of a symphony to describe executive functions.

The musicians will struggle to produce good music if they don't have a conductor to:

- keep the pace and volume correct.
- coordinate everything.
- help them play together.
- keep their timing right.
- pick the piece.

When you struggle with executive functioning, your life can feel chaotic, like a symphony without a conductor.



The Gold Standard Woman

So, what implications does the struggle with executive functioning have for women in particular? After all – this is the special focus of our group!

The expectation in our society is that women will be good at things that require good executive functioning skills. ADHD women suffer stigma, shame, and embarrassment because they may struggle with things that women are "expected" to be good at.

They compare themselves to society's vision of this "gold standard" woman who is exceptionally organized, focused, motivated and able to handle anything that comes her way. They find they are always playing 'catch up' and often need more support. But asking for help is hard and comes with intense feelings of failure.



Women develop very elaborate coping skills to manage their ADHD. That makes sense! They learned others would judge or punish them if they revealed their authentic selves.

These coping skills take a lot of energy.

What are these “skills”?

Hiding, silencing, pleasing behaviors and perfectionism are a few of the most common ones.

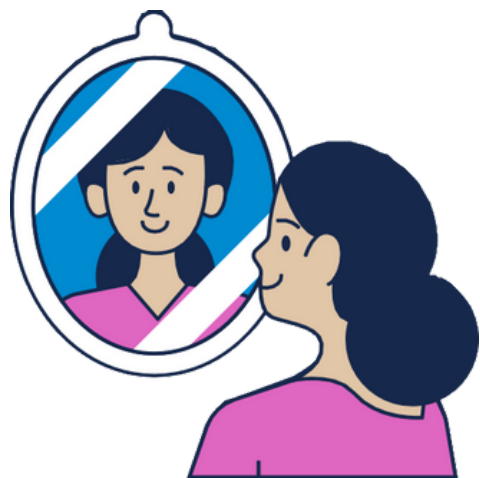
As women get older, many of these coping skills don't work anymore, and anxiety, burnout, anger, resentment, and sometimes depression can set in.





This is where Flourish is designed to help. This group will help you:

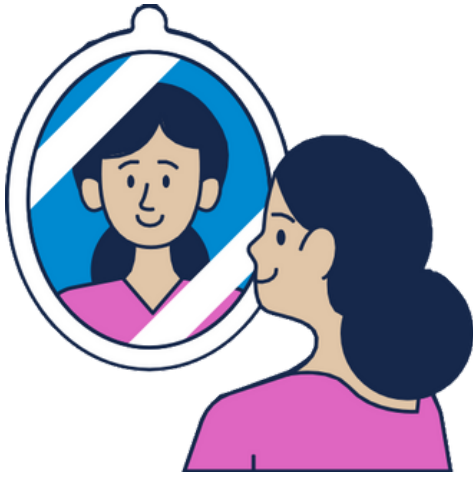
1. Learn new coping skills that take your history and your unique brain into consideration
2. Help you connect with your authentic self
3. Help you understand how your executive functioning may differ and support and strengthen it when you choose



Reflection Question

When you think of what the gold standard women is what comes to mind?

How does it feel to know that she's not real?



Reflection Question

When you think of the list of coping skills: hiding, silencing, self-criticism, perfectionism, which ones resonate with you most?

How does it feel to know that you have been trying the best you could to help yourself but there may now be better ways?

Group Framework

This group is designed to build your sense of self-confidence and self-trust.

It's important to believe in and depend on yourself..

The premise of this group is that we can build new coping skills that we can swap out for the old ones that may not be working for you. The old skills include hiding, shutting down, perfectionism, pleasing, and silencing yourself.

We will use the framework of learning skills in through five categories.

Self-Compassion

Learning to tune in to your difficult experiences and being kind to yourself instead of critical. Wanting for your difficulties to be alleviated and taking action to make your life easier.

Self Accommodation

Learning how to make things less stressful, modify your environment to help ease your life, make sensory experiences less intrusive and bolster your executive functions.

Group Framework



Self Advocacy

Assertively communicating to others what you think, feel, and need when you feel you can do so safely.

Self-Awareness

Learning to be more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and body signals with kindness, curiosity, and non-judgment, so you can care for yourself, accommodate yourself, know your emotions and feelings and communicate and make choices in your best interest. The world has often made it difficult for you to have self-awareness because you have had to check out and abandon yourself to function.

Self Care

Learning to care for yourself and give yourself what you need to be well and show up best for those you love. Building these new coping skills will help you to develop self-trust and more self-confidence.

Extra Credit!

Look at some of these goals and pick one or two which resonate with you as goals for the group

- Learn its okay to choose what makes you feel happy over always pleasing others
- Take time to validate yourself and your feelings
- Practice understanding towards yourself and your imperfections. Identify and challenge negative self-talk throughout the day
- Stop blaming yourself for the difficulties you experience
- Get better at sleeping, feeding and watering yourself
- Work through paralysis and procrastination
- Work on your motivation
- Get better at prioritizing whats is important to you
- Work on issues of memory
- Be less anxious
- Be less angry
- Focus on your negative feelings less.
- Spend less time people who aren't supportive
- Learn about and practice boundaries
- Say no when you want to
- Be kinder to yourself when you make mistakes
- Learn about your brain differences
- Learn how to communicate effectively
- Have better relationships
- Work on perfectionism
- Learn about your values and strengths
- Have more effective tools to manage workplace stress
- Have more effective tools to manage household stress

GROUP ACTIVITY MODULE 1

Welcome and Introduction

Feel free to share your name, where you're from, and a fun fact about yourself. Get to know one another. You can choose to engage in our group exercise or simply spend this time connecting with each other.

Group Exercise: Deconstructing the 'Gold Standard Woman'

****Objective:**** The goal of this exercise is to explore the societal construct of the 'Gold Standard Woman,' understand its impact on self-perception, particularly among women with ADHD, and discuss how it can lead to feelings of shame and the need to mask one's true self.

Question 1 - Defining the 'Gold Standard Woman':

Describe your interpretation of the 'Gold Standard Woman.' This figure is an imaginary ideal often perceived as the epitome of perfection, against which all women find themselves compared.

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Question 2 - Impact on Self-Perception:

Reflect on how your comparison to this 'Gold Standard Woman' has influenced your self-perception. Feel free to share any thoughts, feelings, or experiences you're comfortable discussing.

Question 3 - Masking and the 'Gold Standard Woman':

Consider whether you've ever felt compelled to 'mask' your ADHD symptoms or characteristics to align more closely with the 'Gold Standard Woman.' How has this affected you and your understanding of your ADHD?

