



FLOURISH WORKBOOK 2

Learning About Neurodivergence



Purpose + What You Will Learn

This workbook introduces the foundations of neurodivergence. It explains why ADHD is a valid neurotype, how culture shapes self-beliefs, and what it means to understand yourself through a neurodivergent lens. Many ADHD women grew up hearing that their differences were flaws. This workbook provides a grounded way to understand those messages, place them in context, and develop a clearer picture of who you are.

By the end of this workbook, you will:

- Understand neurodiversity as a natural human variation
- Learn the most common forms of neurodivergence
- Begin to separate ADHD from personal blame or character judgments
- Understand the role of executive functioning
- Identify how outside messages shape internal beliefs
- Learn where shame develops
- Understand masking and why it happens
- Recognize how discrimination appears in daily life
- Learn what the "Gold Standard Woman" is and why it harms ADHD women
- Build the language needed to describe your neurotype clearly

WELCOME & GROUNDING



Introduction

Many ADHD women arrive here carrying the belief that something about them is wrong.

You may have been described as disorganized, emotional, sensitive, unreliable, or too much. Over time, those descriptions often become internalized. They stop sounding like opinions and start sounding like facts.

This workbook is not about fixing you.

It is about helping you understand your brain accurately, through a neurodivergent-affirming lens, and beginning to loosen the self-blame that was never yours to carry.

As you move through this workbook, go slowly.

Some topics may bring relief. Others may bring discomfort, grief, or resistance.

All of that is information.

Before each section or activity, check in with yourself:

- If you feel steady, continue.
- If you feel unsettled, slow down.
- If you feel overwhelmed, pause or return later.

There is no right pace. There is no requirement to complete everything.

Understanding Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a framework for understanding that human brains vary naturally. There is no single correct way for a brain to think, feel, learn, or process the world.

The ideas behind neurodiversity developed within autistic communities through discussion, self-advocacy, and shared writing in the 1990s. Judy Singer, an autistic sociologist, later coined the term *neurodiversity* in her academic work to name this perspective.

Neurodiversity refers to the understanding that neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others are natural variations of the human nervous system rather than defects.

The neurodiversity movement challenges the belief that people should have to mask, push through, or change who they are in order to be accepted.

Instead, it asks why systems expect sameness, and what happens when environments do not support different kinds of minds.

The goal is dignity, respect, and support that fit how a person's brain actually works.

4 Things the Movement Teaches Us

1 Your brain is not broken. It is different and that difference is valid.

2 ADHD and autism are not problems to fix.

3 Most of the harm neurodivergent people face comes from the environment, not from a problem with them — things like rigid expectations, inaccessible systems, and stigma.

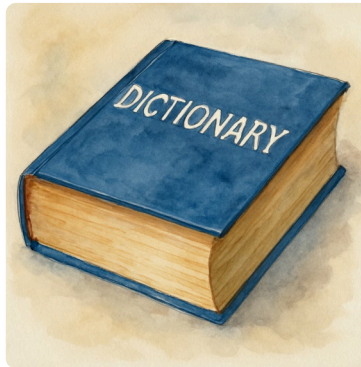
4 Society needs to change, not you.

A more flexible, understanding, and supportive world benefits *everyone*.

Flourish Shift:

There is nothing wrong with your brain. The real problem is a world that was not built to support different kinds of minds.

Key Neurodiversity Terms



Term	Definition	Example
Neurodivergent (ND)	Brain functions differently from societal norms	ADHD, autism, dyslexia
Neurotypical (NT)	Brain aligns with dominant expectations	Most educational systems assume this
Neurominority	Emphasizes marginalization and barriers	Facing discrimination in workplace
Neuromajority	Those for whom society's structures were built	Standard 9-5 workday suits them

Understanding this language helps you talk about your experiences without shame or confusion.

Why This Matters For ADHD Women



Many ADHD women were taught that needing help meant they were weak, irresponsible, or not trying hard enough.

They were expected to function in environments that assumed all brains work the same way. When they could not meet those expectations, self-blame often followed.

Understanding neurodiversity changes that explanation.

Differences in attention, executive functioning, emotional regulation, sensory processing, and time perception are not personal failures. They are differences in how the ADHD brain works.

This shift matters because it changes the question you are asking.

Instead of "What is wrong with me?"
the question becomes, "What support does my brain need?"

Old and New Story about ADHD

Seeing yourself through the lens of neurodiversity often means rewriting the entire story you've been told about yourself.

Old Story	Flourish Reframe
"My brain (I'm) is too much."	"My brain works differently, and that is valid."
"I'm always failing at normal."	"There is no such thing as normal"
"Why can't I just be like everyone else?"	"I'm neurodivergent. I'm meant to be"



Activity

Activity : Old Labels I'm Ready to Release

Circle /check the one that feels right for you.



- "Disorganized" → ✓ "Different executive function style"
- "Too sensitive" → ✓ "Highly perceptive to environmental cues"
- "Broken" → ✓ "Differently wired for creativity and innovation"
- "Dramatic" → ✓ "Emotionally intelligent and expressive"
- "Scattered" → ✓ "Able to see connections others miss"
- "Lazy" → ✓ "Under-supported by systems designed for neurotypical brains"

Who is Neurodivergent?

Neurodivergent is a term for people whose brains work differently from what is considered typical.

It can include people who are:

Autistic

Differences in sensory processing, communication, social expectations, and daily rhythms

ADHD

Differences in attention, executive functioning, motivation, time perception, and emotional regulation

or who have Specific Learning Differences such as

Dyspraxia

Differences in coordination, movement, and planning motor tasks

Dyslexia

Differences in reading, phonological processing, and language patterns

Dyspraxia

Differences in coordination, movement, and planning motor tasks

Tourette's and Tic Disorders

Involuntary movements or vocalizations

Sensory Processing Differences

Over- or under-sensitivity to sensory information

How Neurodivergence Shows Up

Neurodivergence can affect:

1 Communication

2 Learning

3 Movement

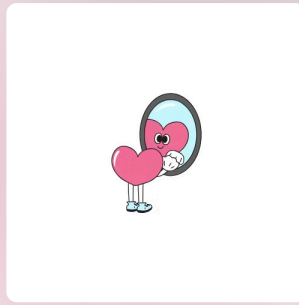
4 Attention

5 Memory

6 Sensory processing



Next, we will look more closely at the unique strengths that often come with neurodivergent brains.



Neurodiversity Reflection

If you want to pause, consider this:

When you learn your brain is different not defective what emotions or thoughts come up?

Do you feel any resistance, discomfort, or self-doubt?



ADHD Women Have Strengths

The neurodiversity movement does more than challenge stigma.

It also highlights the strengths and capabilities of neurodivergent people.

ADHD is not a defect or a behavior problem. It is a form of neurodivergence, a different way of thinking, focusing, and responding to the world.



Too often, ADHD people are judged only by what appears “wrong,” rather than being recognized for the creativity, adaptability, intensity, and insight they bring.

Many ADHD girls and women have spent years trying to fix themselves or masking who they are to avoid criticism and judgment in a world that was not built for them. In that process, their strengths were often overlooked, ignored, or dismissed.

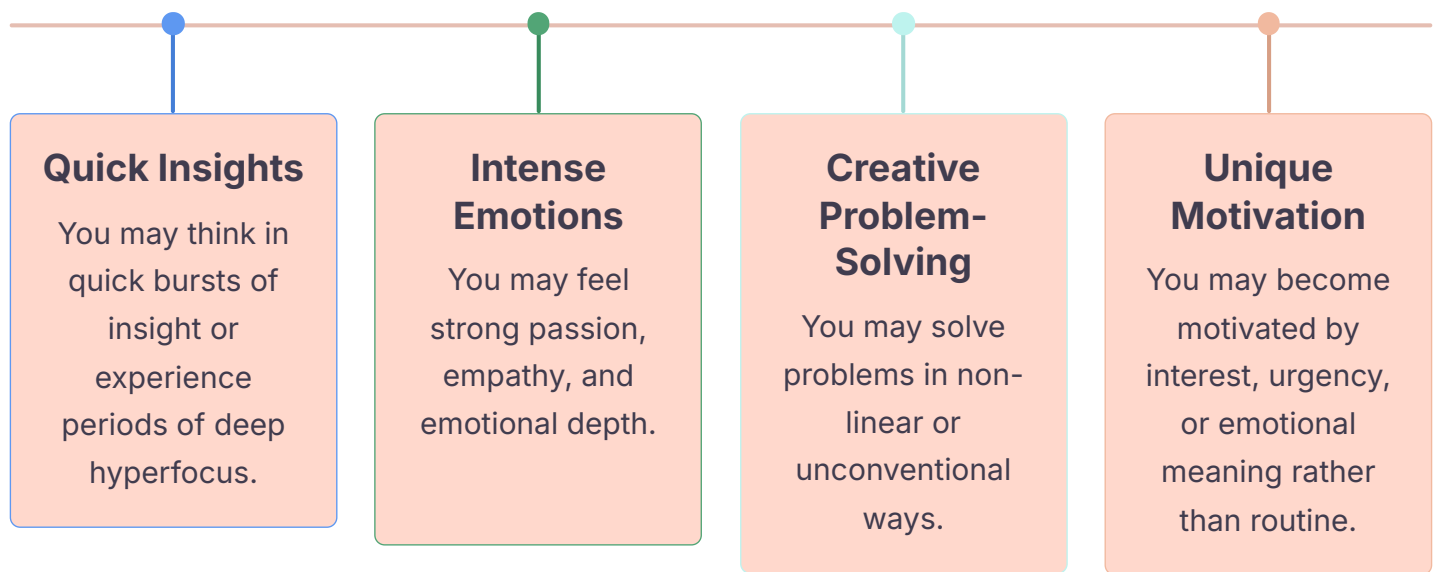
Does this resonate with you?

Those strengths deserve to be named, nurtured, and celebrated.

Thinking about Differences

Differences in how you experience and process sensory information, attention, emotions, motivation, and energy can become strengths in the right environments.

Here are some examples:

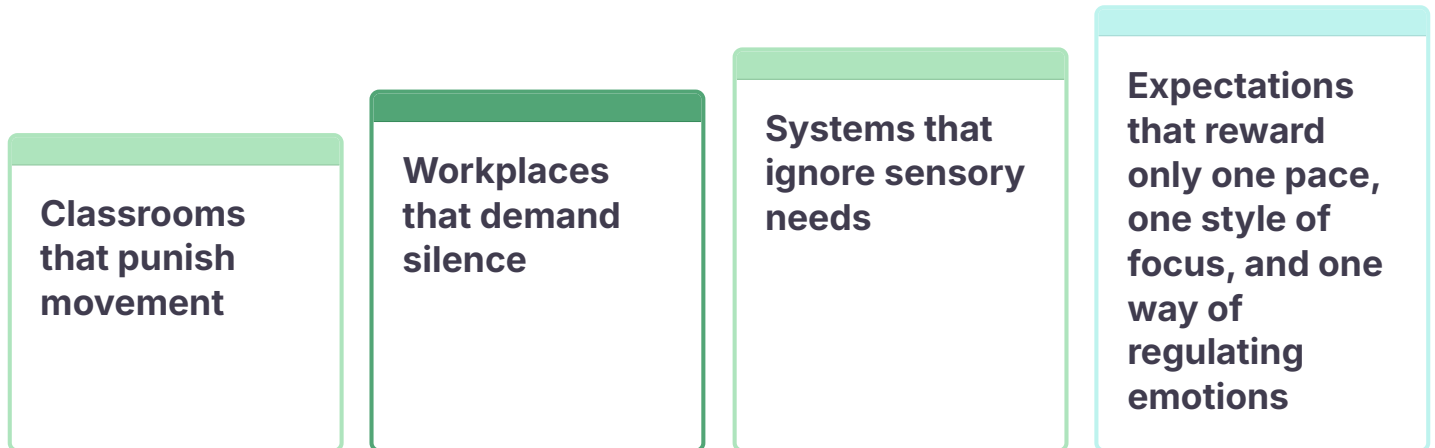


These are not defects. They are differences.

When environments do not match how your brain works, these differences can feel disabling. With the right support and understanding, they often become strengths.

The Problem with Environments and Systems

The difficulties ADHD women face are often not caused by their brains, but by environments that were not designed to support them.



These experiences can be traumatic and hide the parts of you that were meant to shine.

Support changes everything.

With the right tools, care, and community, ADHD girls and women can flourish.

Optional Reflection Prompt:

What would it look like to design your world *around* your strengths?





Activity : Systemic vs. Personal Blame

Systems where I was punished for being different:

- School
- Work
- Healthcare
- Family
- Social settings
- Church

One time a system failed me (not the other way around):

When I recognize it's the system—not me—I can:

- Feel less shame
- Understand my reactions better
- Stop trying to "fix" what was never mine to fix
- Make more space for healing



Stigma and It's Impact

The word stigma comes from ancient times, when people were physically marked **like cattle** to show they were "less than."

Today, those marks are invisible, but the judgment remains.

Stigma means being seen as wrong, less capable, or not normal.

Neurodivergent people, especially ADHD women, often experience stigma for:



1

Acting emotional

2

Struggling with routines

3

Speaking honestly or needing support

4

Learning or processing information differently

These judgments do not exist in isolation. They shape how others respond to you and how systems treat you.

Over time, stigma can also shape how you see yourself.

From Stigma to Shame

Stigma does more than hurt in the moment. When it happens repeatedly, especially during childhood, it can begin to change how you understand who you are.

Outside judgments often become internal messages. They stop sounding like opinions and begin to feel like facts.

This is self-stigma, and it plays a central role in shame.

Stigma and shame contribute to patterns such as:



1 Masking

2 Perfectionism

3 People Pleasing

These patterns are not character flaws. They are understandable responses to being criticized, misunderstood, or pressured to conform.

The Gold Standard Woman

Many ADHD women experience stigma when they do not meet the ideal of the “perfect woman.”

She is expected to be calm, productive, organized, emotionally selfless, and easy to be around.

This is the Gold Standard Woman.

She is a myth rooted in ableism, sexism, and perfectionism.

Trying to live up to this impossible standard can leave you feeling exhausted, inadequate, and constantly behind. The problem is not you. It is the standard itself.



Society Says The Gold Standard Woman Should:

Be neat, thin, helpful,
and happy

**Keep a perfect home,
job, and family**

**Never need help or
forget anything**

Stay quiet, polite, and emotionally contained

These expectations are unrealistic and unevenly applied, especially to neurodivergent women.



Activity: The Gold Standard Woman

What do you think of when you think of the gold standard women? Check or fill in the blanks.

- Always organized
- Anticipate everyone's needs
- Always on time
- Always put together
- Clean a good housekeeper
- Thin and beautiful
- A friend who always/never _____
- A perfect mother who always/never _____
- Emotionally low-maintenance
- Never need help

Letting Her Go

What it might feel like to stop chasing her and start honoring *me*
(e.g., relief, fear, freedom, grief, possibility)



Internalized Stigma

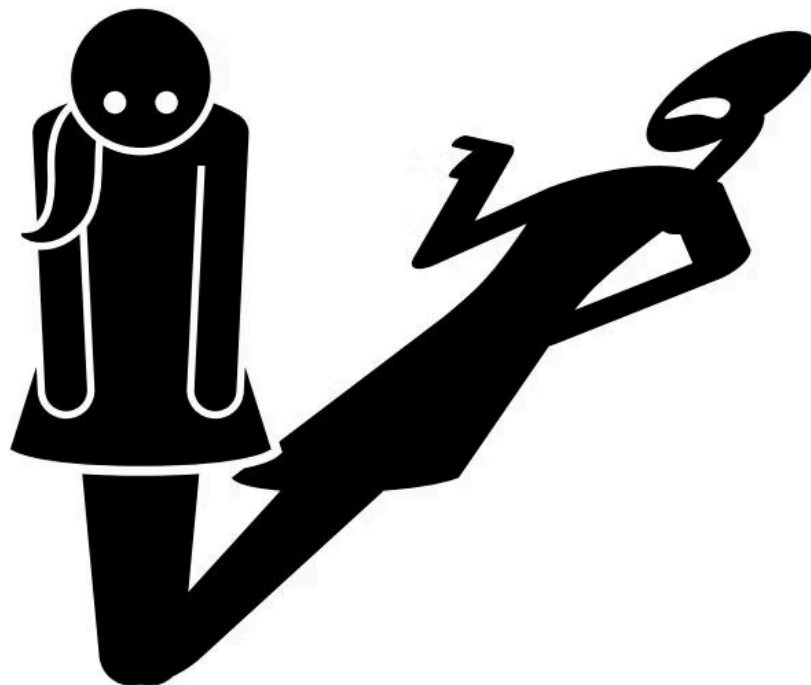
When you are surrounded by the Gold Standard Woman message long enough, it can begin to seep in.

You may find yourself comparing who you are to who you are "supposed" to be, often without noticing it happening.

This is how stigma moves from outside judgment into your own inner voice.

This is internalized stigma. It can shape how you understand your worth, your abilities, and what you believe you should be able to handle.

Society Says...	You Internalize...
☞ "You're too dramatic"	→ ☞ "I need to tone it down"
☞ "You're lazy" ☞	→ ☞ "Why can't I follow through?"
☞ "Just try harder"	→ ☞ "I must not be trying enough"
☞ "You're too sensitive"	→ ☞ "I shouldn't feel this much"
☞ "Why can't you sit still?"	→ ☞ "Something's wrong with me"



✨ Stigma Issues Unique to ADHD Women

Psychologist Sari Solden identified several types of societal messages that commonly contribute to self-stigma in ADHD women.

These messages are not always direct. Some are subtle, cultural, or absorbed over time. Together, they shape how ADHD women come to understand themselves.

1. "You" Messages – Direct Character Attacks

Examples include:

Explicit statements that confuse ADHD behaviors with moral failure:

- "You're lazy."
- "You could succeed if you tried harder."
- "You're irresponsible."

2. "She" Messages – Indirect Judgments

Hearing others talk about women like you:

Examples include:

- "She's such a mess."
- "She never follows through."

3. "Duh" Messages – Invalidating Advice

Examples include:

Oversimplified advice that implies your struggles are easy to fix:

- "Just use a planner."
- "Have you tried yoga?"

4. Absorbed Messages – Cultural Expectations

Examples include:

Wider societal beliefs that shape self-judgment:

- "Good mothers don't forget things."
- "Women should always be put-together."

These messages contribute to something called Emotional Distress Syndrome.

Emotional Distress Syndrome (EDS) and ADHD GIRLS

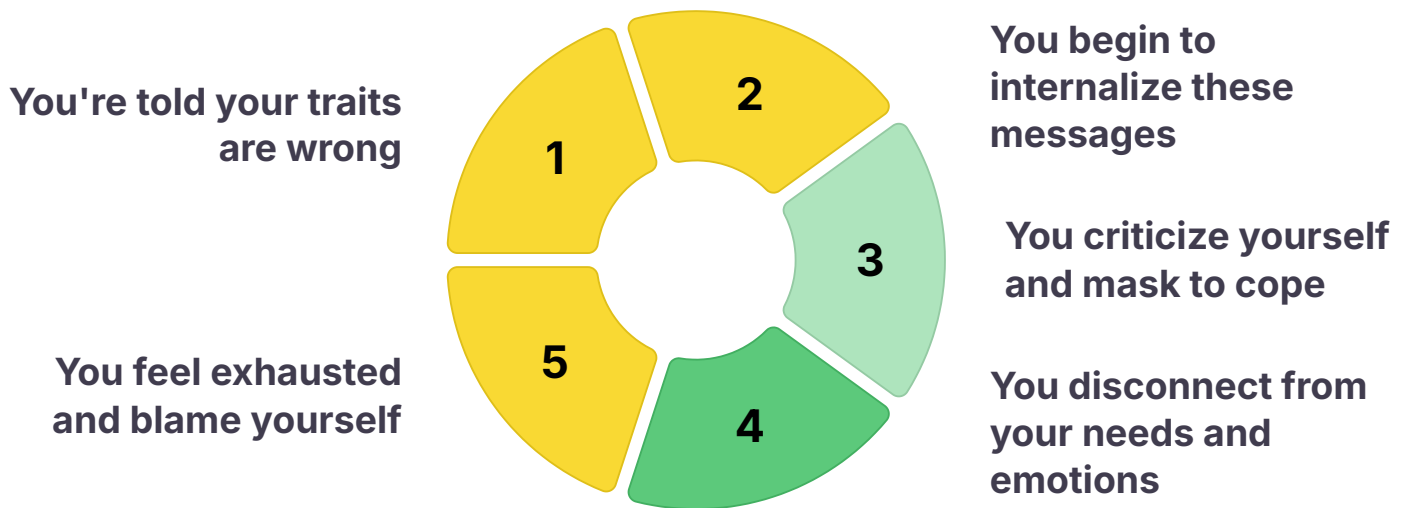
Emotional Distress Syndrome is not an official diagnosis.

It is a predictable pattern of emotional and physical stress that can develop after years of being misunderstood, invalidated, or pressured to conform to standards that do not fit your brain.

For ADHD girls and women, Emotional Distress Syndrome often develops after long periods of criticism, misattunement, and unrealistic expectations.

Over time, this creates an ongoing cycle of stress and self-blame.

The Cycle:



Emotional Distress Syndrome develops after spending too long in environments that do not work for you.

Recognizing this cycle is an important step toward interrupting it.





Activity: Mapping Your Stigma Story

Check which of these are true for you to map the story of your internalized stigma.

After, reflect upon the questions. Write the answers here or in your journal. Circle or check any messages you've heard. Fill in what feels right. You can skip, modify, or pace yourself.

"You" Messages:

Direct messages to you that devalue you

- "You're too sensitive"
- "You're lazy"
- "You're a mess"
- "You're not trying hard enough"
- "You're inconsiderate"
- "You have potential, but..."
- Other: _____

"She" Messages:

Messages you internalize about other women

- "She's scattered"
- "She never follows through"
- "She always makes excuses"
- Other: _____



"Duh" Messages: Being treated like you're stupid

- "Try a planner"
- "Just set reminders"
- "Have you tried meditation?"
- Other: _____

Absorbed Messages: Societal ideas about who women should be

- "Good women stay calm and organized"
- "Successful women don't forget things"
- "Always put others first"
- Other: _____

Reflection: One message I'm ready to question:

Self-Compassion Break: Hand on on your heart and say

"Those messages were wrong about me. I was always enough."



How Stigma leads to Discrimination

Stigma is not only an internal experience. When stereotypes and biases about ADHD women influence how teachers, doctors, employers, or others treat you, stigma becomes **discrimination**.

Discrimination is unfair treatment that affects access, opportunities, and support.

It happens when stereotypes or misinformation shape decisions, limit opportunities, or block access to care and accommodations.

Examples:

Area	Example	Harmful Myth
Diagnosis	"You did well in school — you can't have ADHD."	ADHD only affects academic performance
Treatment	"Just use a planner or try yoga."	ADHD is a lack of effort or discipline
Healthcare	Emotional dysregulation misdiagnosed as anxiety or BPD	Women are overreacting
Workplace	No accommodations provided	Only visible disabilities matter

Misinformation

Misinformation is one of the biggest drivers of stigma and discrimination.

False beliefs about ADHD show up everywhere — in schools, healthcare, workplaces, and even close relationships.

ADHD myths do more than shape opinions. They affect how people judge your abilities and whether they believe you deserve support.

One way to advocate for ADHD women is by challenging these widespread myths. This is part of self-advocacy.

Common ADHD Myths and the Truth

Myth	Truth
"ADHD isn't real."	ADHD is brain-based and supported by decades of research.
"It's caused by bad parenting."	ADHD is neurodevelopmental, not a result of parenting.
"ADHD only affects kids."	ADHD often continues into adulthood.
"Only boys have ADHD."	Girls and women are underdiagnosed due to subtler symptoms.
"ADHD is overdiagnosed."	ADHD is actually underdiagnosed in women and girls, although it is poorly diagnosed.
"Smart people can't have ADHD."	Intelligence and ADHD are unrelated.
"It's caused by trauma."	Trauma can worsen ADHD symptoms, but it doesn't cause ADHD.
"People with ADHD are overmedicated."	Medication is evidence-based and improves outcomes.
"Just try harder."	ADHD people need support to succeed and in ways that work for their brain.

Other ways discrimination can show up:

- 1** Being told you “don’t seem ADHD” because you are too successful and having symptoms dismissed.
- 2** Being denied accommodations because your ADHD is “not severe enough.”
- 3** Having emotional regulation challenges labeled as a personality disorder instead of understood in context.
- 4** Facing discipline for lateness, task-switching, or needing extra processing time without ADHD accommodations being considered.

Discrimination doesn’t just feel unfair it creates real barriers to diagnosis, delays support, and reinforces shame.

What are Executive Functions?

Many of the struggles that get misunderstood or judged in ADHD women are really about executive functioning.

Executive functions are mental skills that help you:



These skills help you do what you intend to do, especially when something is boring, complex, or emotionally charged.

For ADHD brains, executive functions can be inconsistent or harder to access during periods of stress, overwhelm, predictable hormonal changes, or when environments do not support how your brain works.

When these differences are misunderstood or criticized, that is stigma. When stigma shapes how you are treated in school, work, or healthcare, it becomes discrimination.

Signs You May Be Struggling with Executive Functioning

You feel overwhelmed or shut down when tasks have too many steps

It is hard to start something unless it feels urgent, interesting, or emotionally engaging

Emotions come on suddenly, are hard to name, and take a long time to settle

You are a strong big-picture thinker but struggle with managing the steps

Time can feel fuzzy or unreal, or very different from how it feels for people around you — it disappears or drags

You forget daily needs like eating, appointments, or medication

You get stuck in one task or feel overwhelmed trying to switch between tasks

Organizing your thoughts, space, or to-do list feels chaotic

You delay things you care about and feel ashamed afterward

You rely on last-minute urgency to get things done

You know what to do, but cannot make yourself do it consistently



ACTIVITY: Circle Your Executive Function Challenges

Everyone's brain works differently. Circle or check any of the experiences below that feel familiar to you. Be gentle with yourself this is just a learning activity. This isn't a time to be self critical.

Starting & Finishing Tasks

- I struggle to get started, even when I want to
- I leave tasks half-finished or jump between them
- I wait until the last minute because urgency helps me focus

Planning & Prioritizing

- Everything feels equally important
- I freeze when I try to figure out next steps
- I have trouble breaking big tasks into smaller chunks

Time Awareness

- I underestimate how long things will take
- Time seems to disappear or not exist
- I'm often late or forget appointments

Organizing & Managing Stuff

- My space gets messy quickly
- I "organize" by making piles I never return to
- I avoid anything that takes lots of steps or sorting



The word "Activity" is written in a colorful, playful font with various colors and patterns for each letter.

i Working Memory

- i** I forget what I'm doing in the middle of a task
- i** I need visual reminders or lists to keep track
- i** I feel mentally foggy when juggling too much

i Emotional Regulation

- i** I get overwhelmed by emotions quickly
- i** My emotional reactions feel too big or confusing
- i** I feel stuck in shame after making mistakes

i Self-Awareness & Focus

- i** I lose track of what I'm feeling or needing
- i** I daydream, get distracted, or zone out often
- i** I don't notice I'm dysregulated until I crash

The Truth About Your Brain

**1**

The Dopamine Gap

Many everyday tasks don't give your brain the dopamine it needs to get going.

You might need things like novelty, urgency, or emotional relevance to feel activated.

**2**

Traditional Tools Fall Short

Traditional tools like calendars, planners, and to-do lists are designed for neurotypical brains. They often do not match how your brain processes information.

**3**

Most systems leave out important factors such as hormones, sensory overload, and executive functioning fatigue.

**4**

Work With Your Brain

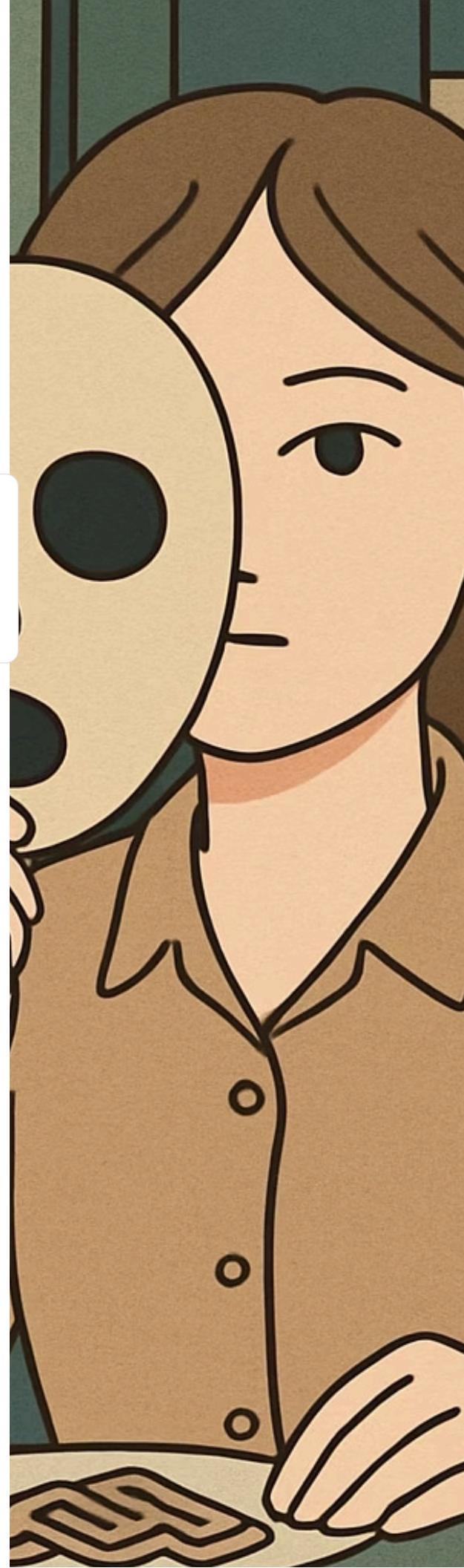
You need systems that work with your brain, not against it.

✨ What is Masking?

When ADHD differences are judged or punished, intuitive coping skills often develop to navigate the world. In Flourish, we refer to many of these as “old coping skills”. Also, many of these are masking behaviors.

Masking is a survival strategy: a set of actions used to hide, minimize, or overcompensate for how the brain naturally works.

In this context, masking often means concealing neurodivergent traits to blend in, stay accepted, or feel safe in a neurotypical world.



Masking often:


- 1 Starts in childhood
- 2 Is rewarded or expected
- 3 Is automatic and unconscious


Masking intensifies depending on your identities

- **BIPOC women** may be expected to hide anger or emotional expression to avoid stereotypes.
- **LGBTQ+ folks** may code-switch or mask for safety in certain spaces.
- **Working-class or immigrant women** may mask to blend in when survival depends on being accepted.


Masking is always shaped by both context and the need for safety.


 **Over-preparing or overworking**
To avoid mistakes or criticism


 **People-pleasing**
To make up for perceived "failures" or being seen as "too much"


 **Staying quiet in groups**
To hide distraction, confusion, or impulsive thoughts


 **Mimicking others**
To appear "normal" or fit in socially

 **Hiding reactions**
Pretending to stay calm


 **Hiding struggles**
Avoiding asking for help to prevent seeming incompetent

 **Double-checking everything**
Using perfectionism to keep forgetfulness or errors unnoticed

 **Over-apologizing**
For traits that are simply part of your neurotype

 **Pushing through fatigue**
Ignoring signs that you are exhausted

 **Suppressing stimming or movement needs**
Forcing stillness

 **Forcing eye contact or social engagement**
Even when it is exhausting

Activity

Activity Understanding Your Masking

Circle examples that apply to you. Becoming aware of your masking is a great first step. Remember masking isn't bad and serves a purpose.



Hide my true feelings



Over-prepare for everything



Apologize constantly



Pretend to understand when confused



Suppress movement/stimming



Say "I'm fine" when I'm not



Copy others' behavior



Script conversations



Engage in exhausting small talk



Force uncomfortable eye contact



Force myself through uncomfortable sensory discomfort



Hide stimming or things I do to comfort myself



Keep quiet when I want to talk



Imitate others when I am confused



Hide emotions

The Real Cost of Masking

Research shows masking does great harm to neurodivergent people. Masking contributes to:

- 1** Chronic fatigue and burnout
- 2** Disconnection from your true self
- 3** Anxiety about being “found out”
- 4** Confusion about your needs or identity

Reclaiming Choice:

It’s okay that you learned to mask it kept you safe!

Now, you may have more power to decide where, when, and with whom you unmask.

You don’t have to drop it all at once. You can loosen it, piece by piece, in ways that feel safe for you.

We are still learning how this process works from the lived experiences of neurodivergent people.

We will learn more about masking during the course of our Flourish group.

Congratulations — You Finished the Workbook!

You've done important work: naming harmful messages, seeing how masking protected you, and building a new language to understand ADHD from an affirming lens.

Workbook Takeaways:

- ✓ You're not broken , your brain was unsupported
- ✓ Masking helped you survive , but you can loosen it
- ✓ Systems need changing, not you
- ✓ Reframing language supports healing

You've begun laying the foundation for self-awareness, self-compassion, self-accommodation, self-advocacy, and self-care.

Now that you've explored how you've adapted to fit into systems that weren't built for your brain, the next step is understanding what's happening inside you with your emotions.

This will help you recognize what you're feeling in the moment, make sense of why, and respond in ways that honor your needs instead of masking them.