



NEURODIVERSITY

Understanding Autism and ADHD

M³AAWG
ENGAGEMENT SERIES

Rich Losee

Date: 03/011/25

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For questions, please contact Amy Cadagin at amy@m3aawg.org

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Help Desk - All rooms will have dedicated staff. If you have any technical issues, questions or concerns please send a private message via chat to the Panelist in this session

Q&A - Please submit your questions to the speaker in the Q&A box. You will find the button on the ZOOM bar at the bottom of the screen.

Chat - If chat enabled, please keep the chat production and be courteous to all participants.



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Date: 03/11/25

Richard Losee aka Rich

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY



Scrum Master for an Operations team



8+ Years at my current employer. 4 years as an Operations Lead. Switched to Scrum Master in 2021.



Computer Science/Mathematics BS degree, St. Joseph's College, Patchogue, NY

MORE ABOUT ME



I am Neurodiverse, and a passionate Neurodiversity Advocate.



I'm a fan of Marvel and Star Wars



In my free time I play **D&D** and



If Not A Scrum Master, I Would Have Been
A Writer/Director/Actor



Husband to Anna, Father to Rebecca and Riley, and Dog Dad to two goofy Newfies Oreo and Mousse



Home Town: Ronkonkoma, NY



Base Location: Winchester, CA



How did I get involved?

- As you can see from my professional experience, I did not have neurodiversity training
- I do not have a history of presenting
- In 2021 my daughter was diagnosed with Autism and ADHD, also known as Audhd



So I started doing Research

Social Media Content Creators and Advocates



Orion Kelly
Youtube/Podcaster/Author
<https://orionkelly.com.au/home>



Morgan Foley
Youtube/Instagram/TikTok
<https://www.youtube.com/@morgaanfoley>



Jessica McCabe – How to ADHD
Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/@HowtoADHD>



Kaelynn Partlow
Youtube/Instagram/"Love on the Spectrum"
<https://www.youtube.com/@Kaelynnism>



Jeremy Andrew Davis
Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/@jeremyandrewdavis>



ADHD Chatter Podcast
Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/@ADHD Chatter Podcast>



Rich Pink & Roxie Emery
Youtube/Instagram/Authors
https://www.youtube.com/@ADHD_love



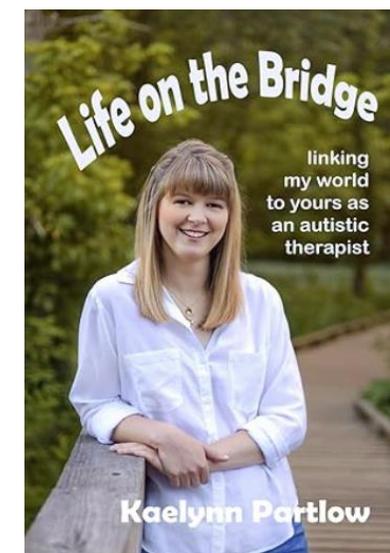
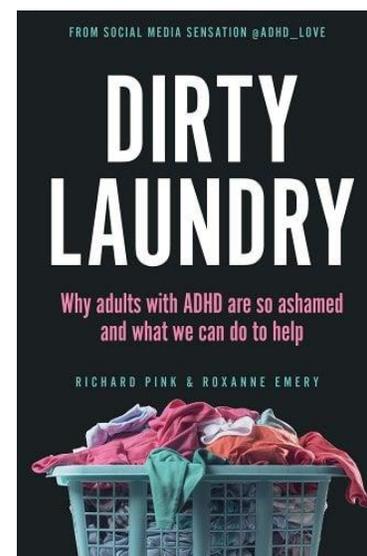
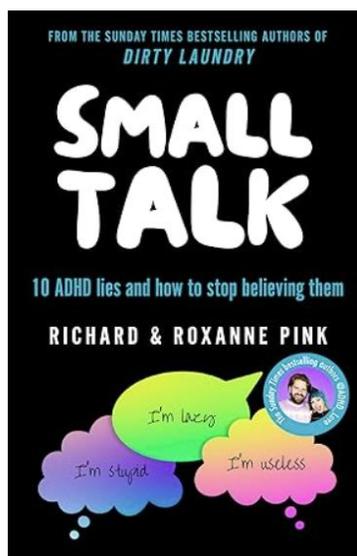
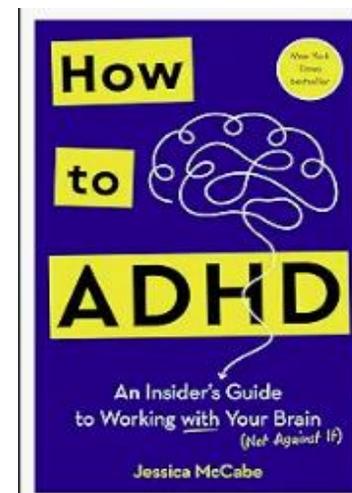
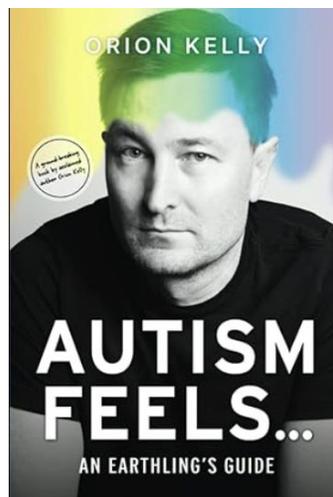
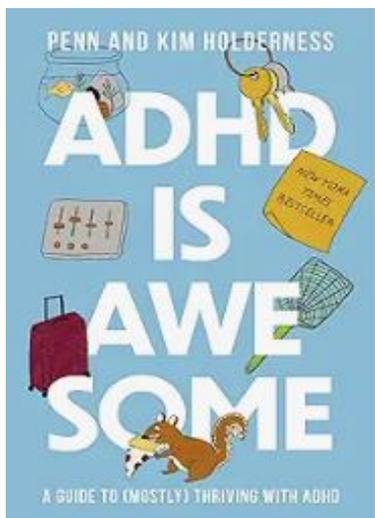
Hayley Honeyman
Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/@hayley.honeyman>



Olivia Lutfallah
Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/@olivialutfallah>

A LOT of Research

Books



What I did about it

- Nothing
 - Shockingly, nothing changed
- Complained about neurodivergence being an invisible disability, and not being represented enough
 - While cathartic, again nothing changed
- **GET BUSY.** Be the change I wanted to see
 - Surprisingly, this worked much better.



What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity is a concept coined in the 1990s by sociologist Judy Singer that recognizes and celebrates the natural variation in human neurological functioning.

**Diversity
and
Variation**

**Different
Perspectives and
Contributions**

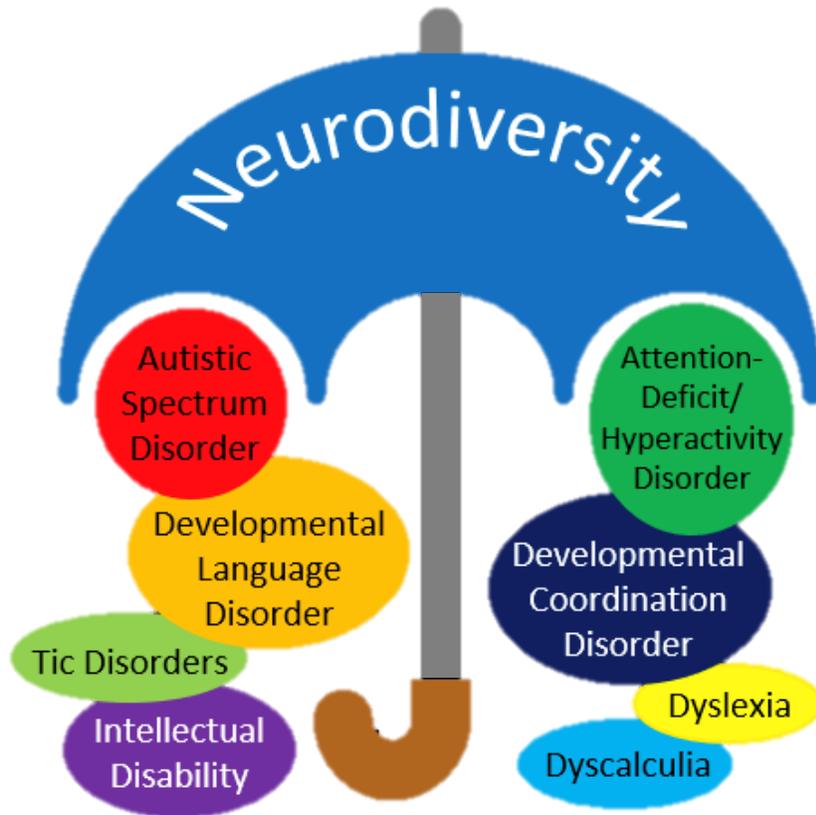
Affects approx.
1 in 7 people in
the workplace!

**Respect
and
Acceptance**

**Social Justice
and
Advocacy**

Overall, neurodiversity fosters a more inclusive and compassionate society by embracing the richness of human cognitive diversity and recognizing that **all brains are valuable and worthy of respect.**

The Neurodiversity Umbrella



- ❖ Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- ❖ Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- ❖ Dyslexia
- ❖ Dyspraxia (Developmental Coordination Disorder)
- ❖ Dyscalculia (Specific Learning Disorder in Mathematics)
- ❖ Tourette Syndrome
- ❖ Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
- ❖ Synesthesia
- ❖ Aphantasia
- ❖ Bipolar Disorder
- ❖ Schizophrenia
- ❖ Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- ❖ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- ❖ Social Anxiety Disorder
- ❖ Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

This list is not exhaustive, as neurodiversity encompasses the natural variations in neurological functioning beyond just these conditions. Each individual's experience with these conditions is unique, contributing to the diversity of human cognition and behavior.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in social communication and interaction, as well as restricted interests and repetitive behaviors.



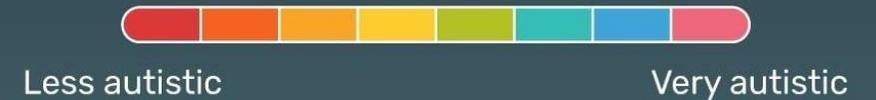
While there is currently no known cure for ASD, various therapies, educational interventions, and accommodations can help individuals with ASD thrive and reach their full potential.

A word about labels...

- ❖ **High/Low Functioning** labels are outdated and harmful because they don't adequately describe the autistic experience; rather they describe **how neurotypicals are affected** by autistic individuals
- ❖ Autistics and experts today use Support Levels, from **Level 1 (low support needs)** to **Level 3 (high support needs)**
- ❖ 'Support needs' refers to the level of assistance an autistic person needs to thrive in a neurotypical environment
- ❖ Even with levels, it's not unusual for someone who is considered generally Level 1, to have level 2 or 3 support needs in a **specific** area.

AUTISM SPECTRUM

The Autism Spectrum is NOT linear



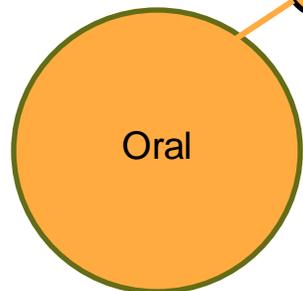
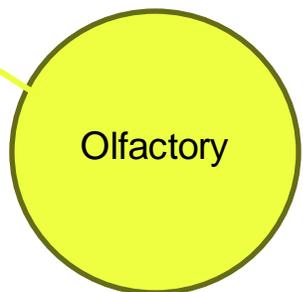
The Autism Spectrum looks more like:



Terms like "high functioning" & "low functioning" are harmful and outdated

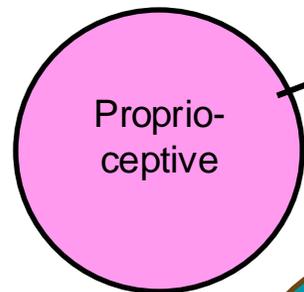
What is Stimming?

- Sniffing or smelling objects or surfaces
- Seeking out specific scents or aromas

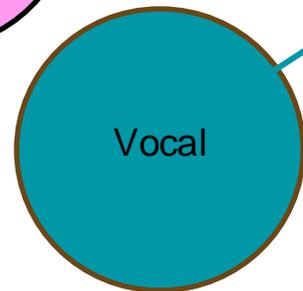


- Biting or chewing on objects like pens
- Licking lips or other body parts

- Pressing or squeezing objects tightly in hands
- Applying pressure to certain parts of the body

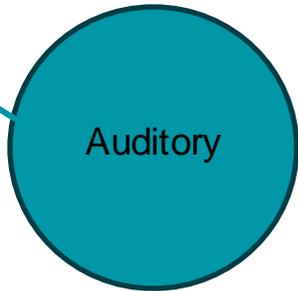


- Humming or making repetitive vocalizations
- Repeating sounds or phrases (echolalia)

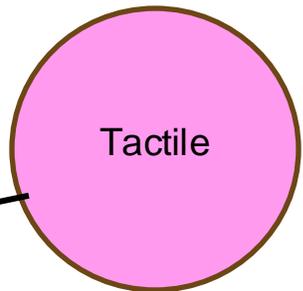


Stimming is the repetitive performance of certain physical movements or vocalizations, as a form of behavior by persons with autism or other neurodevelopmental conditions.

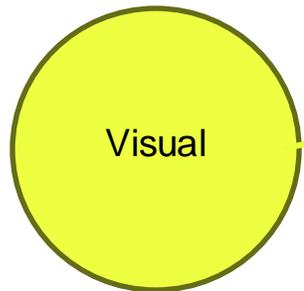
- Tapping objects to make sounds
- Listening to repetitive music or sounds on repeat



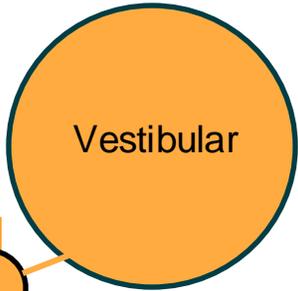
- Rubbing hands or fingers together
- Playing with fabrics or fidget toys



- Staring at flashing lights or ceiling fans
- Watching spinning objects like wheels



- Rocking back and forth
- Spinning in circles
- Jumping or bouncing



These behaviors serve to help regulate the nervous system, by calming and allowing expression of feelings.

Autistic Celebrities



Canadian-American actor, comedian, and filmmaker known for his roles in "Ghostbusters" and "The Blues Brothers."

Dan Aykroyd



Japanese video game designer and creator of the Pokémon franchise.

Satoshi Tajiri



Courtney Love

American musician, actor, and singer-songwriter known for her role as the lead vocalist of the band Hole.



Daryl Hannah

American actor and environmental activist known for her roles in films such as "Blade Runner" and "Splash."



Chris Packham

British naturalist, television presenter, and author known for his work on wildlife programs such as "Springwatch" and "Autumnwatch."



Paddy Considine

British actor, filmmaker, and musician known for his roles in films such as "Dead Man's Shoes" and "Hot Fuzz."



Susan Boyle

Scottish singer who gained fame after appearing on "Britain's Got Talent" in 2009.



Anthony Hopkins

Welsh actor known for his roles in films such as "The Silence of the Lambs" and "The Remains of the Day."



Temple Grandin

American professor of animal science and autism advocate known for her work in animal behavior and welfare.



Chloe S Hayden

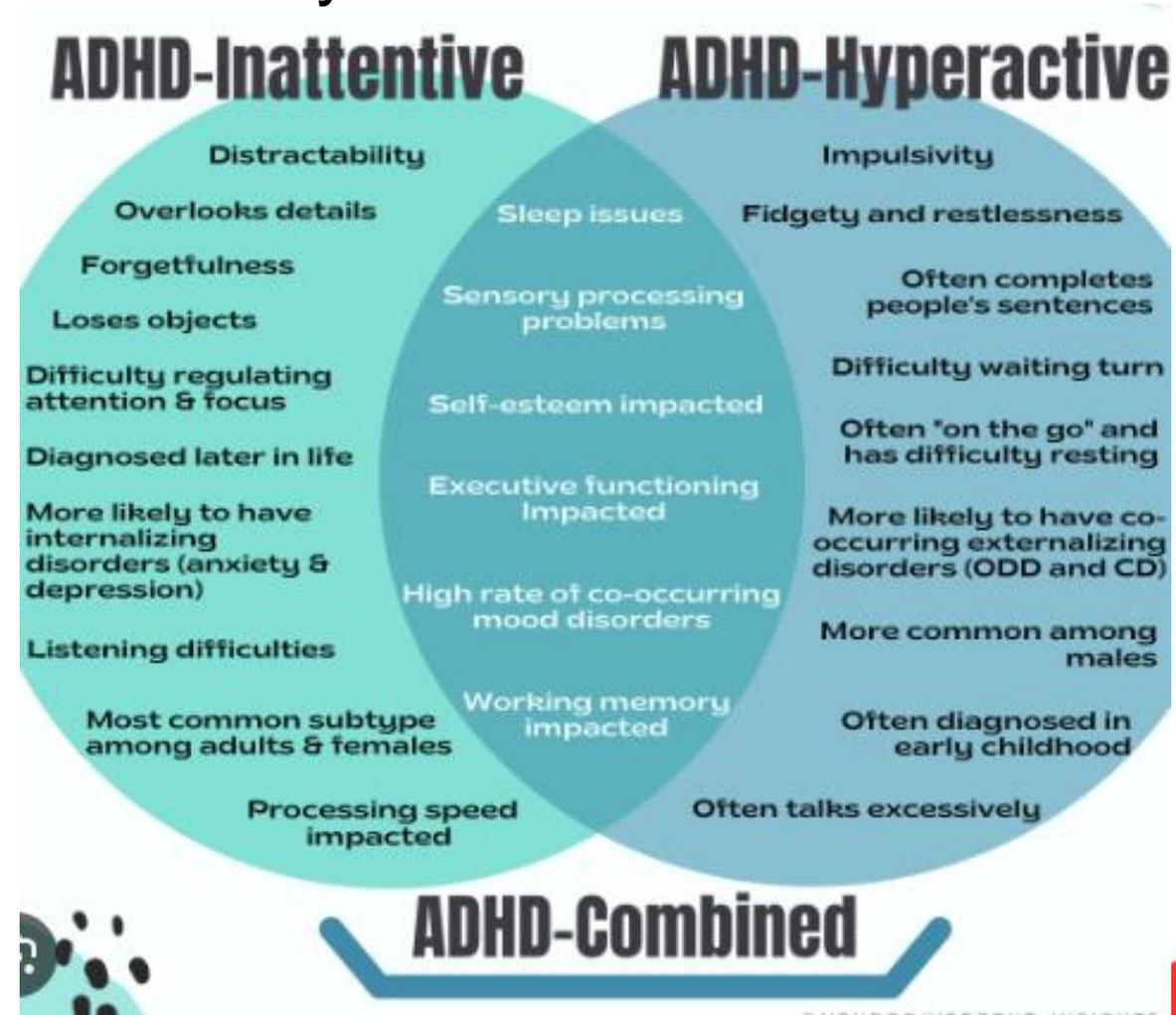
Australian actor known for their role in the TV show "Heartbreak High" and author of "Different Not Less", about the autistic experience

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Adhd)

What is ADHD?

Key features of ADHD

- **ADHD** stands for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.
- It is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent patterns of **inattention**, impulsivity, and **hyperactivity** that interfere with daily functioning and development.
- Note: the term 'ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)' is no longer used; classified now as:
 - **ADHD-I (Inattentive type)**
 - **ADHD-H (Hyperactive type)**
 - **ADHD-C (Combined type)**
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is not new
 - (1800s) **Minor brain damage**
 - (1903) **Morbid Defect of Moral Control**
 - (1960's) **Hyperkinetic Reaction of Childhood**
- **Not a deficit of attention, a lack of regulation**



ADHD and Dopamine



Dopamine is a neurotransmitter involved in regulating attention, motivation, reward processing, and executive functions. **Chronic low dopamine levels** in individuals with ADHD have a significant impact on various aspects of their cognitive and behavioral functioning, such as:

Attention Deficits



Executive Functioning



Impulsivity



Motivation & Reward Processing



Emotional Regulation



Understanding the role of dopamine dysregulation can inform targeted interventions and treatments aimed at addressing these underlying neurobiological mechanisms and improving outcomes for individuals with ADHD.

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria

Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD) is a term used to describe an intense emotional response to perceived rejection or criticism.

Intensified Emotional Responses



Difficulty Handling Criticism



Swift Mood Swings



Fear of Rejection



Negative Self-Image



Treatment approaches may include therapy, medication, and strategies to improve self-esteem, coping skills, and social-emotional regulation

Celebrities that have ADHD



Simone Biles

Olympic gymnast, considered one of the greatest gymnasts of all time.



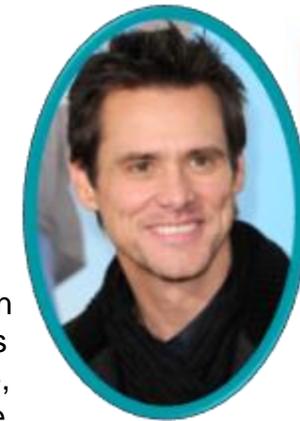
Michael Jordan

Retired professional basketball player, widely regarded as one of the greatest basketball players of all time.



Bill Gates

American business magnate, software developer, philanthropist, and author. He co-founded Microsoft Corporation



Jim Carrey

Canadian-American actor, comedian, and writer, known for his roles in comedic films such as "Ace Ventura" and "The Mask."



Sir Richard Branson

British entrepreneur, founder of the Virgin Group



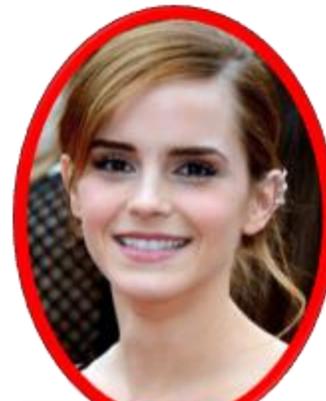
Michael Phelps

Olympic swimmer, holds the record for the most Olympic gold medals.



Adam Levine

Lead singer of the pop-rock band Maroon 5, also a coach on "The Voice."



Emma Watson

British actress, known for her role as Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter film series.



Greta Gerwig

Oscar-nominated American actress, writer, and director, most recently known for writing and directing the 2023 Barbie movie.

Challenges of Neurodivergence

Challenges of ASD

School



Home



Work



Social Challenges

- Bullying
- Difficulty joining group activities/making friends

Communication Differences

- Maintaining eye contact
- Verbal processing
- Unclear metaphors

Sensory Sensitivities

- Fluorescent Lighting
- Fire Drills
- Overstimulation in noisy classrooms

Rigidity

- Substitute teachers
- Sudden changes in schedule

- Interpreting facial expressions
- Unspoken societal norms

- Misunderstanding sarcasm and jokes
- Difficulty with phone calls

- Food sensitivities
- Textures/Fabrics
- Temperature regulation
- Pain Recognition

- Same foods every day
- Strict routines for getting ready or going to bed

- Networking / meeting new people
- Understanding hierarchies
- Modulating voice – volume and tone
- Directness mistaken for aggression
- ‘Unpleasant’ food smells from coworker’s lunches
- Fluorescent lighting
- Background noise
- Team changes/re-orgs
- Process changes
- Changing jobs

Challenges of ADHD

School

Home

Work

Inattention

- Focusing in verbal lectures
- Completing homework
- Being Prepared for Class

Impulsivity

- Waiting in lines
- Raising hand to be called on
- Frequent Interrupting

Hyperactivity

- Sitting still during quiet activities
- Frequent bathroom breaks
- Too many ideas at once

- Paying Bills on Time
- Household Maintenance
- Keeping Appointments

- Uncontrolled spending
- New projects (never finished)

- Dominating Conversations
- Difficulty appreciating quiet moments
- Hard to rest/sleep

- Motivation for Tasks
- Forgetting Verbal Instructions
- Missing Important Details

- Speaking out of turn
- Non-continuous employment
- Complete career shifts

- Difficulty staying focused in long meetings
- Distracting others with fidgets
- Overcommit to projects

Challenges of ADHD & ASD

School

Home

Work

Executive
Functioning

- Long-term projects
- Organizing complex materials/writing papers

- Meal planning/grocery shopping
- Organizing chores

- Time management
- Prioritization
- Organization of tasks

Academic &
Occupational

- Low grades/poor achievement
- Boredom (work too easy)

- Poor credit score
- The 'ND' tax – cost of fees, penalties and wasted food

- Little or poor career growth
- Maintaining employment

Co-occurring
Conditions

- Learning disabilities
- Social anxiety

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance Abuse

- Heightened levels of stress
- Insomnia/sleep issues
- Emotional dysregulation

Stigma

- Lack of awareness & understanding
- Bullying
- Missed diagnoses

- Societal barriers to diagnosis/treatment
- Being believed/having to 'prove' diagnosis

- Anxiety around disclosing
- Misconceptions about abilities

Masking

Masking refers to the conscious or subconscious effort to conceal or suppress one's neurodivergent traits, behaviors, or characteristics in order to fit in with neurotypical societal expectations

- Commonly observed in individuals with ASD and increasingly recognized in those with ADHD
- Can manifest in various ways, modifying one's
 - Behavior
 - Speech
 - Appearance
 - Emotions
- Prolonged masking can lead to
 - Social isolation
 - Mental fatigue
 - Sense of disconnection from one's authentic self
 - Unrecognized support needs



Encouraging acceptance, empathy, and understanding of neurodiversity can help reduce the pressure to mask and promote a more inclusive and supportive society

Women

Women and girls natural masking ability can hide neurodivergent traits, or cause them to be more subtle and thus overlooked in childhood

- Women and girls are diagnosed 3 times less frequently, and generally much later in life with ASD and ADHD
- Signs of autism in girls are generally more subtle than those in males, Female autistic traits may appear as:
 - Quirkiness
 - Shyness
 - Heightened literacy
- ADHD presentation in girls is usually the inattentive type. This is less disruptive than the blatant hyperactivity boys tend to demonstrate. Usually characterized as:
 - Difficulty paying attention and staying focused
 - Being easily distracted
 - Forgetfulness and losing things
 - Excessively talkative
 - Emotionally sensitive or prone to mood swings
 - Overly focused on details or perfectionistic

Condition	Average boy diagnosis age	Average age of girls if caught early	Average age of women if undiagnosed in childhood
ASD	3	4	15
ADHD	4	7	35

- **Impact of Late Diagnosis:** Missed early intervention opportunities.
- Increased risk of misdiagnosis and mental health conditions.
- Academic & occupational challenges.
- Social and relationship difficulties.
- Lifelong struggle with self-understanding.

Benefits of Neurodivergence

Benefits of ADHD and ASD

ASD Benefits

Loyalty and Dependability 

Honesty and Authenticity 

Specialized Talents 

Attention to Detail 

ASD/ADHD Benefits

We're funny 

Empathic 

Resiliency 

Creativity 

Unique Perspectives 

ADHD Benefits

Enthusiasm 

HYPERFOCUS! 

Willing to take Risks 

Spontaneity 

Workplace Accommodations

Workplace Accommodations

Autism

Clear Communication



Structured Environment



Sensory Considerations



Assigned Mentor/Buddy



ASD/ADHD

Flexible Work Environment



Breaks and Time Management



Encouragement and Positive Reinforcement



Visual Cues



Meeting Considerations



ADHD

Structured Tasks



Minimize Distractions



Body Doubling



Chunking Information



Many small, easy to implement things can be done to help improve the neurodivergent experience!

Why does this Matter?

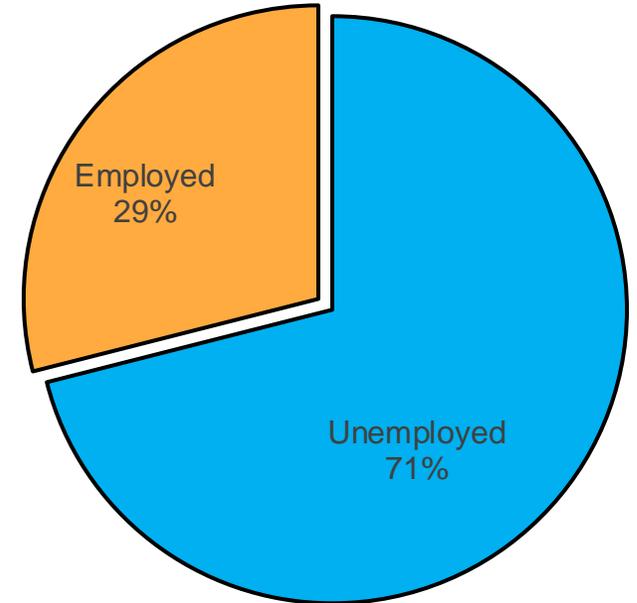
Employment

Autistic Individuals:

- Employment rates for autistic adults are significantly lower than those for the general population. Estimates suggest that only around 16-29% of autistic adults are employed.
- Underemployment is also a significant issue, with many employed autistic individuals working in jobs that don't fully utilize their skills and abilities.
- Factors contributing to these challenges include difficulties with social communication, sensory sensitivities, and a lack of understanding and support in the workplace.

ADHD Individuals:

- ADHD can also impact employment outcomes, with studies suggesting that adults with ADHD are more likely to experience unemployment, job changes, and lower income levels.
- Challenges with attention, impulsivity, and executive functioning can make it difficult to secure and maintain employment.



Life Expectancy

AUTISM

- According to multiple studies, autistic adults average lifespan is 14-20 years lower than their neurotypical peers. The higher support level you are, the lower your lifespan.
- While ASD individuals more likely than those without to die from all causes of death, and are more likely to have epilepsy than the general population, Suicide is a significant risk factor.
- ASD individuals were found to have a 7.55 increased suicide risk, with lower support level individuals at greater risk than high support level individuals. Unusually it is women being most at risk, as compared to the general population in which Men are 3.5 times more likely than women to commit suicide.

ADHD

- Research suggests that adults with ADHD also have a reduced life expectancy compared to the general population, with some studies estimating a reduction of around 10 years.
- This increased mortality risk is linked to factors such as higher rates of accidents, injuries, and risky behaviors, as well as increased likelihood of co-occurring mental and physical health conditions.

While there's no single solution to completely eliminate the life expectancy gap for autistic and ADHD individuals, early intervention, education, advocacy, and workplace accommodations can play a significant role in improving their overall health and well-being, potentially leading to longer lifespans.

Feedback



I feel so seen

Great presentation,
WOW! Really
opened my eyes!

Very eye-opening and
compelling!

This is amazing! Thank
you for talking about
this.

I can't believe a big company
is talking about this, thank
you

I'm getting my son evaluated because
of this presentation, Thank you

It was amazing, courageous, and also hit
home kind of hard, too. Well done to all
of them.

I just got my ADHD diagnosis

That was Amazing!,
Congrats!

Thanks so much for your
willingness to talk openly
on these calls

My son is autistic, we
watched your presentation
together.

I didn't know how much I
needed to see this
presentation, but I am so
glad I took the time

Can you help me
navigate how to get
accommodations for my
son?

I thought I was
the only one
who did that!