



Autism & ADHD: Living A Paradox



A Late Diagnosis

Autism diagnosis in 2016
age 36
-ADHD diagnosis in 2020
age 42



My Story:

autistic traits after diagnosis of my child. Had struggled with mental health difficulties
assessed by local NHS autism service (using diagnostic interview and aspects of ADOS)
of child. Had struggled academically and in career due to difficulty with focus, organization
is really working in terms of strategies and self care to make a difference to my life

Diagnosed initially via private assessment,
confirmed by NHS assessment later

**Between 30-80% of
autistic people
would meet the
diagnostic criteria
for ADHD**




**Even at the lower end that's just under $\frac{1}{3}$ of
autistic people**

two conditions were considered mutually exclusive - you couldn't get diagnosed with both
So it feels like relatively early days in exploring what living with both means

Helpful to get assessed for ADHD if you're

nuanced assessment that considers non stereotypical



The dream: an assessment of a person's strengths, needs, and challenges considering a range of neurodivergent conditions. In one assessment process.

Difficulties/differences in the areas of social communication and interaction - autism

Sensory processing differences - autism?

Need for repetition/sameness/routine - autism

Easily bored and restless -

Need for newness/novelty - ADHD

Fidgety/need to move - ADHD

Difficulty recognising emotions - autism

Emotional dysregulation - ADHD

Meltdowns/shutdowns/easily overstimulated and overwhelmed - both

Impulsivity - ADHD

Difficulty focussing/getting stuff done - ADHD

Demand avoidance - autism & ADHD

What is the difference between autism/ADHD?



The Clash Of Conditions

- Communication Difficulties V Being Unable To Stop Talking
- Social Exhaustion V Dopamine Seeking
- Meltdowns + Emotions Flooding / Dysregulation
- Self Care V Distraction
- Routine V Spontaneity



Different kinds of meltdowns;

ADHD

Caused by emotional flooding;
Brain is flooded by one emotion
leaving no room for
rationality/processing

forget that we didn't always feel this;
feels like we have always felt
and will always feel this way

Can be triggered by RSD
and other sensitivities
due to past negative messages

Autism

Caused by overload -
sensory, emotional, stress

Usually caused by a build up of things,
not one single thing

Soothed by reduction of stimulation &
time to regulate

Socialising



ADHD;

Autism

Misses social cues due to distraction

Difficulty reading social cues

Interrupts - impulsivity/excitement

Talks a lot - increases dopamine & has a lot to share due to busy brain

Feels perceived rejection deeply so can struggle to trust/feel safe

Social style differs from neurotypicals -

- lack of eye contact

- different body language

- speech intonation

- expresses empathy differently

- lack of small talk

- special interest monologues

Things I've Been Experimenting With....

Daily Rhythms:

- r than a strictly scheduled day - change the pace dep
- Planning the day on the day based on where I'm at

Mini Routines:

Routines triggered by
parts of the day.

Flexibility for small changes to
keep the dopamine coming



Healthy Dopamine Seeking

- Studies suggest ADHD is linked with lower levels of dopamine in the brain.
- ADHD medications work by increasing those levels.

...e levels and put their brains at an optimal arousal level - sometimes this goes wrong

...s negative consequences it's useful to learn healthy dopamine seeking - safe and



Healthy Dopamine Seeking Examples;

es of stimulation - playing videos games with background TV show/cooking with

Online socialising; easier to set time limits

Exercise

y drinks; I make special teas/iced drinks/smoothies - in nice glass/mug with straw

Music; upbeat music, kitchen karaoke/disco

Consider activities which don't cause us harm,
and can be time limited and planned to avoid overstimulation

Working On Trauma

response to an event or events that cause you to feel unsafe, threatened and/or very

Being neurodivergent can lead to trauma;

Negative sensory processing experiences

Feeling different, bullying, isolation, negative messages

People pleasing/masking leads to accepting treatment which isn't OK

My starting point for working on trauma. I still feel the pain, but understanding wh

Working on managing emotions;

Started by sitting with emotions

Resisting the urge to fix - which is super hard

Reminding myself that this emotion is temporary

Spend some time doing soothing things -
for me it's animal videos, chamomile tea, and weighted blanket

Taking some time once I'm calmer to work out - what was the emotion,
was I being triggered, why did I feel the emotion, do I need to do anything



Allowing for imperfection;

I have a tendency to be black and white - did the thing or didn't do the thing

this led to giving up on strategies, low self esteem, feeling like constantly failing

for imperfection means offering yourself self compassion when you don't do the thing
or when strategies fail and you have the meltdown anyway

Treat yourself as you would a good friend

I am a work in progress. I am enough even when I don't succeed

What Do I Want?

- Find ways to embrace my strengths and accommodate my support needs
- Research, resources and awareness of the dual diagnosis of ADHD and autism and the impacts of having both
- Community building amongst AuDHDers - share strategies and support
 - Acceptance and understanding in wider society of different kinds of minds
- Training in autism and ADHD for professionals





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Any questions?