

AuDHD

WHEN ADHD AND AUTISM MEET

Understanding conflicting needs with compassion

A gentle guide to attention, sensory needs, masking, executive functioning, burnout and building support that works with your whole neurodivergent self.

Two neurotypes, one whole person

Autism and ADHD are separate neurodevelopmental conditions. When they occur together, a person is not split into two halves. Their experiences overlap and shape one another.

“

A diagnosis can offer language and understanding, but it does not define your personality, strengths or future.

A gentle next step

- Learn from reliable information.
- Keep what fits and leave what does not.
- Describe your own experience in your own words.

When your needs seem to pull apart

You may crave predictability yet struggle to maintain routines. You may seek novelty but become overwhelmed by change. You might want connection and also need significant time alone.

“

What looks inconsistent from the outside may be two genuine needs competing for limited energy and attention.

A gentle next step

- Build flexible routines, not rigid rules.
- Plan novelty within a safe structure.
- Allow recovery after stimulation.

Interest, focus and executive functioning

Starting, switching, organising and completing tasks may take more effort, even when something matters to you. At other times, deep interest can lead to intense focus and losing track of time.

“

Difficulty beginning is not proof that you do not care. Executive functioning is about access to action, not a lack of intention.

A gentle next step

- Make the first step very small.
- Use visible reminders and body doubling.
- Create stopping cues for deep focus.

Sensory seeking and sensory overload

AuDHD can include both avoiding and seeking sensory input. Sound, light, touch, movement, taste or internal body signals may feel different from one moment to another.

“Your sensory needs can change with stress, tiredness, hunger, environment and how much you have already processed.”

A gentle next step

- Carry a small sensory support kit.
- Reduce input before reaching crisis point.
- Use movement when your body seeks input.

The effort of appearing to cope

Masking can involve copying social behaviour, forcing eye contact, hiding movement, suppressing distress or rehearsing every interaction. ADHD traits may also be concealed through over-preparation and perfectionism.

“

Looking capable does not mean something is easy. The cost may only appear later, in private.

A gentle next step

- Notice where you feel safest to unmask.
- Replace performance with clearer support.
- Schedule recovery after demanding situations.

Recognising overload and burnout

Long periods of masking, sensory strain and unmet support needs can lead to profound exhaustion, reduced functioning and increased sensitivity. Ordinary tasks may suddenly feel impossible.

“

Burnout is not laziness. It can be a sign that demands have repeatedly exceeded available capacity and support.

A gentle next step

- Reduce non-essential demands.
- Prioritise rest without earning it first.
- Seek professional help if wellbeing declines.

Supporting a busy nervous system

Regulation is not about staying calm all the time. It is the ability to notice what your system needs and respond with the right amount of support.

“ Movement, repetition, quiet, pressure, music, special interests or connection may all help - depending on the person and the moment.

A gentle next step

- Create a personalised regulation menu.
- Use supports before distress escalates.
- Do not remove harmless self-regulation.

Adjustments that reduce unnecessary strain

Helpful support might include written instructions, clearer priorities, extra processing time, fewer interruptions, quieter space, flexible communication or help planning and sequencing tasks.

“ The best adjustment is not the one that sounds most impressive. It is the one that removes a real barrier for you.

A gentle next step

- Name the barrier before the solution.
- Trial one change and review it.
- Record what helps across different settings.

Working with your brain, not against it

Understanding AuDHD can bring grief, relief, anger and recognition. There is no correct emotional response and no deadline for making sense of yourself.

“You deserve a life built around sustainable support, genuine connection and room to be fully yourself.”

A gentle next step

- What drains me?
- What helps me feel safe and capable?
- What is one compassionate change I can make?

Until next time, give yourself space to breathe. With love, Maggie.