

Listening and Learning Session // May 10, 2022

Adult Women with ADHD

SUMMARY

10 attendees		23-60 Age Range average age 35.9	 recruited via social media, newsletter		LISTENING AND LEARNING SESSIONS The goal of these virtual forums is to better understand the lived experiences and unique challenges and strengths of females with ADHD, their family members and other community partners.
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During the session, the women discussed a variety of issues they've experienced, such as challenges related to their symptoms; barriers to receiving evaluations, diagnoses, and care; and what they need to thrive. Some participants reflected on the strengths that can come with having ADHD and how they have worked towards acceptance and embracing their ADHD.

THEMES

A number of themes emerged during the session, with at least two women out of ten making similar comments about related topics. The themes – and representative quotes from the participants – included:



Masking ADHD to fit into a neurotypical world

“ We're all master maskers. I know that I am. I have been on this [ADHD] journey over the last year, and part of that is to learn how to take off my mask. And it's been a real struggle because it's all I have known my entire life from coping [with untreated ADHD]. ”

“ I wish the people around me had some sort of understanding that my brain works differently...The message became 'Something is wrong with me.' I am just living [with ADHD] in a neurotypical world. ”



Barriers to receiving an ADHD diagnosis

“ I was on a waitlist [to be evaluated for ADHD] for two years. My mom had to fight to get me diagnosed because they were like, 'Oh no, she's a girl. She can't have this.' ”

“ My dad and my brother had both been diagnosed with ADHD, and no one had ever looked at me because when I was in high school, I was good at school, so they were like, 'She can't have it.' But in my 20s [ADHD symptoms have] been taking over my life. ”

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Misunderstandings about ADHD presentation and impairment in females

“ I was not diagnosed with anything as a kid, but looking back there was the anxiety, the depression. I was a hot mess. But my family of origin is not into mental health services, so I never really got help for any of that until I became an adult. Then it was just depression and anxiety. [It was] not until this year – I’m almost 40 – that I realized that a lot of [the anxiety and depression] comes down to [undiagnosed] ADHD. ”

“ I decided that I was going to be transparent and authentic with my new boss, and that I was just going to share up front that I have ADHD. So in my first conversation with her, I said, ‘You know, I wanted to share something about myself, and I feel a little vulnerable saying this: I have ADHD.’ Her response was, ‘We all have a little bit of [ADHD]; it’s nothing to worry about.’ I just didn’t know how to respond. I felt invalidated. ”



Strategies and interventions that help women with ADHD thrive

“ Creating systems to trick myself into accomplishing things. I work in finance and I do a lot of project-based work, so I have checks and balances for everything. I’ve got spreadsheets, lists...I’ve got stuff on my calendar, links from one spreadsheet to another spreadsheet. ”

“ Having my [ADHD] meds, being interested in what I’m doing, and pairing myself with a super-organized person. ”



What they would tell their younger selves about self-acceptance

“ Your worth is not defined by your productivity. You don’t need to feel bad about yourself. ”

“ You’re ok exactly as you are, and you deserve to be happy, thrive, and [be] successful. You’re not too loud, you’re not too much, and you’re not too this and you’re not too that. ”