

ADHD Awareness: 7 Keys to Unlocking Your ADHD Potential

INTRODUCTION

With some time and effort, you can increase your ADHD Awareness!

Here are some targeted exercises, suggestions, resources, and more to help you achieve your goals.

Some of the exercises will challenge you! If you feel there is something of value, consider taking the risk.

Good luck!

1) The “Gift” – what is ADHD? How does it manifest in MY life?

Exercise #1 - ADHD Diagnosis – How Do You *Really* Feel About It?

PURPOSE: If you have unresolved or negative feelings about your ADHD diagnosis, it might be holding you back.

Sometimes acceptance comes only after allowing oneself to move through various emotional and cognitive stages. As our understanding deepens, and time passes, we accept – we move on.

After your diagnosis, did you:

Grieve

e.g. your non-ADHD status; loss of hope for certain outcomes; not knowing sooner, etc.?

Celebrate

e.g. you finally have some answers!

Learn

e.g. by reading blogs, books, articles, speaking with others, joining a support group, etc.?

Share

e.g. with close friends, family, a therapist, coach, etc.?

Accept

e.g. come to terms with what ADHD is and means for you? For your family? For your future, etc.?

Plan for the future

e.g. treatment; ongoing learning about ADHD; re-visiting your life through the lens of ADHD to find understanding, acceptance, forgiveness (of self and others)?

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Consider the above. Ask yourself if you've missed any of these stages and if you might want to experience them now to deepen your awareness of ADHD.

How will you do that?

What is the value in allowing yourself to feel your feelings?

We can discuss this at the October 26 follow-up webinar.

Exercise #2 - 9 ADHD Treatments / Approaches You Didn't Know About (Or Forgot About)

I've listed just a few possible benefit areas of each of these modalities in brackets beside the titles.

EAP – Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (social skills & insight)

No riding experience required. This approach is not about developing horse riding skills, it's about developing social skills and insight. Look for an afternoon workshop for adults in your area. To learn more, read: [The Horse Who Read My Mind](#)

Friends (time management, organization, self-esteem, stress relief)

Practice the friendship skills that we've talked about in our first webinar. See handouts for the Friends section.

Yoga (relaxation, stress relief, decrease anxiety, increase calmness)

Many adults with ADHD have trouble doing yoga because of boredom. Try taking a class with an instructor whose voice appeals to you, at a pace that keeps you engaged. For a test-run, try a drop-in class.

Meditation (time management, stress reduction, increased focus)

There is some growing evidence that meditation alleviates or decreases many ADHD symptoms. Try meditating with a friend, in a group, at a class, a retreat, or a local Buddhist or other center. Meditation can raise your ADHD awareness by inducing insights into your ADHD and other aspects of your life.

CBT – cognitive behavioural therapy (reframing, building self-esteem, overcome anxiety)

Seen as an effective ADHD treatment, learn more about CBT here: [CBT for ADHD: Manage Adult ADHD with Leading Edge Group Therapy](#).

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Dietary Supplements and Herbs (sleep aid, anxiety reliever, antidepressant, mood stabilizers)

I am NOT a master herbalist, physician, or any other kind of health care practitioner. Please consult a professional before trying any natural remedies, including herbal. That said, I am aware that herbs have been used to address difficulties with sleep, anxiety, depression, hormonal fluctuations, etc.

It's important to talk to your doctor or a qualified healthcare practitioner to ensure that any herb is safe for you. I have successfully used fresh herbs from my garden to help me sleep and herbs have been used for centuries to help with women's natural hormonal fluctuations across the lifespan.

Here are a couple of resources if you want to try an herbal or alternative remedy:

- Master Herbalist Susun Weed's website: <http://www.susunweed.com/>
- ADDitude Magazine: [Ten Foods to Boost Your ADHD Brain](#)

Debating / Standup Comedy / Public Speaking (channel hyperactivity, stimulate brain, create a sense of well-being)

Any of these can be a great way to challenge a fast mind and channel verbal impulsivity for the good.

TRY THIS:

- sign up for a Toastmaster's course or joining a local chapter of Toastmasters International;
- write and perform a short standup comedy routine at a local open mic night or comedy club;
- join a debating team
- offer to give a speech at your friend or relative's wedding;
- teach an adult education course on a hobby or topic you're knowledgeable about
- other speaking opportunities?

Video Yourself (social skills, empathy)

I have no (or a very underused) "neutral" expression, apparently. This can be problematic in social situations, whether casual or work-related. Try setting up a video camera while you're talking to someone to observe your body language and facial expressions. You might be surprised.

Feedback (social skills, communication)

If in doubt, ask! I once asked two employers who'd interviewed me if they would meet with me after I didn't get the job. I was straight-forward in asking for feedback: How did I come across at the interview? What had prevented me from getting the position? Their answers were

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revealing, offering many insights into how I came across to others versus how I thought I'd presented.

TRY THIS:

Ask a close friend, family member, co-worker (whom you trust), neighbour, or even someone who's interviewed you for a job for feedback on how you came across:

- did you seem nervous?
- too rushed?
- anxious?
- lacking in confidence?
- did you fidget?
- other observations?

Compare their feedback with what you were actually feeling, what you were aware of doing at the time, etc. to deepen your self-awareness.

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2) Yourself – What are MY ADHD warning bells?

Exercise #3 – tracking physical responses

Becoming more aware of physical sensitivities will help you to make plans to avoid, alleviate or lessen them.

– is your clothing, bedding, lighting, noise, etc. tripping your ADHD response of hypersensitivity? Can you alter your physical environment?

List every physical sensitivity you have that you can think of.

- when does it happen?
- what are the physical feelings? (e.g. – a rush of adrenaline that almost feels like physical pain, etc.)

Examples:

Sensitivity to light

Sensitivity to sound (ambient, such as lots of voices in a crowded room; or intermittent, such as a bird calling outside)

Sensitivity to loud or sudden noises (loud movie theatres, sirens, car doors slamming close by, etc.)

Sensitivity to touch: tags, seams, etc. in clothing; sensitivity to textures (itchy, scratchy, etc.) in fabric; your hair tickling your neck; etc.

Allergies

Taste sensitivities (be specific)

Hot or cold

Other?

Once you have your list, notice where and when these occur. What can you do about them?

e.g. buy clothes without tags; change bed linens to smoother fabric; buy blackout blinds for windows; share with a friend about your discomfort at loud movies, etc.

Implement at least ONE of these changes or actions.

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Exercise #4 – tracking emotional responses

Many of us with ADHD are emotionally hypersensitive. Becoming more aware of emotional sensitivities will help you to make plans to avoid, alleviate or lessen them.

TRY THIS:

Read Elaine N. Aron's book [*The Highly Sensitive Person – How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You*](#).

Read Chapter 16, "Being Highly Sensitive: Honk If You Hate Loud Noises," in [*ADHD According to Zoë*](#)

Read Chapter 7, "Emotional Allergies: ADD and Sensitivity" in Dr. Gabor Mate's book, [*Scattered – How Attention Deficit Disorder Originates and What You Can Do About It*](#).

Exercise #5 – tracking situational responses

Which situations bring out your most problematic ADHD hypersensitivity symptoms?

Parties?

Going to the movie?

Driving to work?

Getting the kids off for school?

Meeting someone new?

Large gatherings?

Job interview?

Too much stimulation (busy waiting rooms with tv screens, lots of people and noise; lots of people talking at the same time, etc.)?

When you're too tired? Overbooked? In a new situation? Some other time?

Solutions:

What can you do to prevent this?

e.g. address sleep issues / get regular sleep

Meditate before a new situation or visualize it going well; positive self-talk: I'm worthy; I'm calm; I love and respect myself; it's not the worst thing in the world if it goes wrong; etc.

Can you avoid the situation?

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Lessen the stress (by leaving early? Getting help with the kids? Sharing / confessing your discomfort? etc.)

Listen to calming or fun music while driving to work instead of the news? (do physical symptoms come up when you're listening to the news? e.g. clenched teeth, tightening stomach, headaches, etc.?)

Try any of these or a solution of your own, track and record the results.

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3) Your Family – where do you fit in?

Exercise #6 – Test your ADHD IQ

Often family members will balk at an ADHD diagnosis. Denial, lack of understanding, stereotypes, fear, and stigma can all get in the way.

- it's easier to explain to family if you have your ADHD facts straight
- remember that it's what you think that counts; others don't have to agree
- reframing can be helpful; emphasize the positives (e.g. you are relieved to have a diagnosis and way forward)

TRY THIS:

- give them a copy of [ADHD According to Zoë!](#)
- print out a good article that describes ADHD – do your research and find one or two or three that especially speak to your most prominent ADHD traits
- let them know you are working on ADHD management – and back this up with actions!

Exercise #7 - Taking time for you

- cutting or lessening ties – may be temporary but consider if you need a personal “time out” from certain family members
- learn to say no; we're people-pleasers – it's ok to say no sometimes to avoid overwhelming or negative people or situations. Try it! (See exercises on emotional hypersensitivity to do this without guilt)

Exercise #8 – Slow down!

Managing a family can get frantic. If ADHD shows up mostly in your family life, ADD a step when you're in a rush – physically stop what you're doing and think:

- run your mental checklist – have I turned off the burner? Did I remember my presentation? Did I remember my shopping list? Is there water out for the cat? Etc.

REMEMBER:

“More hurry, less speed.”

That was my mom's favourite motto when I was growing up (a hyperactive, undiagnosed ADHD girl). It never made sense to me growing up; it sure does now!

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Exercise #9 - Rebuilding self-esteem and self-confidence

Awareness of the results, or secondary effects, of undiagnosed ADHD is critical in moving forward. How can you implement strategies to manage your ADHD if you don't believe in yourself enough to follow through? If you believe you're programmed for failure?

Re-building self-esteem and self-confidence can be a long, slow, arduous – but necessary - process for many of us.

Learning to love, forgive, and accept yourself can be fun!

TRY THIS:

I Love ME, Ya, Ya, Ya!

For the next two weeks, implement the strategy here:

[I Love Me, Ya, Ya, Ya... Self-Love for ADHDers](#)

4) Work – make your workplace work for you

Exercise #10 - tweaking the workplace

Maybe you like where you work, but your ADHD is preventing your best performance. Here are some ideas:

- ask for flex time if you need total peace and quiet for mission-critical thinking – come in before others and leave earlier
- ask for accommodations – move to a quieter place in building if you need to
- if meetings are agony, bring in something quiet to fidget with so you won't distract others
- take notes at meeting; keeps you physically active, helps with poor memory; be sure to record meeting also (with permission) if you can't read your own writing! (many of us have dysgraphia)
- take a short walk before meetings to retain focus during

Exercise #11 - finding feedback & meaningful mentors

It's likely there will be a work task (or tasks) that intersect with an ADHD challenge. Here are a couple of exercises to try.

TRY THIS:

SHADOWING

Find a competent co-worker

- with ADHD awareness, you know what your deficits are – find a co-worker who does it well and watch them (ask permission) – have them show you how they do and emulate them

FEEDBACK

Take initiative!

- ask your boss / supervisor for feedback
- keep it positive! E.g. "I'd like to become faster / more efficient at this, do you have any pointers for me?"

Exercise #12 - finding a new workplace

A workplace mismatch can be incredibly stressful. We may feel stuck, that there is little we can do about our current employment. But think again.

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Does your job fit you? Do you fit the job?

It may be time to make a bold change. Part of ADHD awareness is knowing our strengths, and finding places where we can apply them.

Here are some ideas:

- visit your community employment centre and have your aptitudes tested, talk to an employment counsellor, and get help creating a new resume and your job search
- take a personality test to discover your most prominent personality features. Here are a few to consider:
 - o [True Colors](#)
 - o [Enneagram](#)
 - o [Myers Briggs](#)

Keep the results of your personality testing and ADHD awareness in mind and read: [What Colour is Your Parachute?](#) to determine a good workplace fit.

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5) Friends – let best buds bring out the best in you

Exercise #13 - friendship survey: time to take stock

Let's be honest, many, if not most, of us have lost one or several friends due to our unmanaged ADHD traits. Raising your awareness about which ADHD traits contribute to this painful reality will help to curb or overcome this pattern.

Ask yourself and answer honestly: *Have I ever lost a friend because of ADHD? Which symptoms or traits contributed?*

- time management
- forgetfulness
- impulsive blurting
- social inappropriateness
- anger / quick temper
- distraction
- other? _____

How can I address these symptoms? Consider:

- ADHD treatment review: do you need to add another modality? Increase or start medication? Address a co-occurring disorder (e.g. sleep disorder? depression? Etc.)

Is your current friend willing and able to help you achieve your goals?

TRY THIS:

Ask your best bud for feedback and share your concerns re: friendship history. Put a strategy in place together. For example, agreeing that an apology will be forthcoming after outbursts of temper; your friend will flag when she sees you've zoned out during a conversation and you can tackle this immediately, etc.

Come up with at least ONE strategy to share with your friend to maintain and nurture a healthy relationship between you.

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Exercise #14 - friendship 101 – the basics

Check out [Friends: A Natural Treatment for ADHD](#)

Exercise #15 - choosing and finding your best bud

As we saw in the webinar, there are pros and cons to having friends with ADHD, and non-ADHD friends. Whether or not they have ADHD, what are the qualities you desire in a friendship? What are healthy traits for a close friend to possess to nurture a healthy, happy friendship?

Consider these and choose the most important ones to you. Use as a guide when choosing close friends.

What positive qualities do I look for in a friend?

| | |
|------------|--------------------|
| Patient | Smart |
| Supportive | Has ADHD |
| Funny | Does NOT have ADHD |
| Creative | Rational |
| Calm | Other? |
| Reliable | _____ |

What qualities do I NOT need in a friend?

| | |
|---------------|------------|
| Sarcastic | Judgmental |
| Condescending | Boring |
| Unkind | Exhausting |
| Demanding | Addicted |
| Needy | Other? |
| | _____ |

Where can I find my new best friend?

Here are some ideas. Pick one and see what happens!

- go to a meeting at a club you're interested in
- join a support group (online or otherwise)
- volunteer at a community event

Other? _____

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Exercise #16 - enlist your best bud

Best friends who are aware of your ADHD can be enlisted to help you manage it. Just make sure it's a barter: she'll organize your office, and you'll take her kids to the park. Don't let friends feel taken advantage of – or soon they'll be your ex-friends.

Friends can help with:

- balancing your checkbook
- filing
- office organization
- laundry
- housework
- time management – e.g. call you to remind you to start getting ready for movie date!

What can you do for them in exchange? _____

Contact your friend and arrange a barter to help manage your ADHD.

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6) Romantic Relationships – rethink and reframe

Exercise #17 - Reframe

In a relationship, it's important to remember that, ADHD or not, it takes two to tango and two to tangle.

Don't ever let yourself be identified as "the problem" in the relationship! Blame and shame will never be helpful in building a healthy relationship.

TRY THIS:

What issues in your romantic relationship can you reframe by thinking about in a new way? Think of at least 1 – 3.

e.g. The ADHD partner acts like the adult and treats the ADHD partner like a child.
Action: reassign responsibilities in the relationship so that the ADHD partner(s) have tasks that use their strengths, not challenge their weaknesses.

Put structures and strategies in place to handle any tasks you have that necessarily encompass an ADHD deficit.

e.g. enlist your best friend to help with the task (see **Exercise #11 - enlist your best bud**)

Exercise #18 - check out any one of Melissa Orlov's offerings

There are other ADHD relationship experts, but I am most familiar with Melissa's work having interviewed her on several occasions. Feel free to substitute another expert if their work speaks to you.

TRY THIS:

Choose one resource and pick at least one action step from that resource to try for the next 2 weeks. e.g. read and choose an exercise from one of the books or webinar; join in the online Forum discussion; read blog posts; watch the webinar; sign up for a workshop, etc.

PsychCentral Webinar: [The Couple's Guide to Thriving with ADHD: A Conversation with Author Melissa Orlov](#)

Books:

[The ADHD Effect on Marriage – Understand and Rebuild Your Relationship in Six Steps](#)

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[The Couple's Guide to Thriving with ADHD](#) (co-written with Nancie Kohlenberger, LMFT)

[Blog](#)

[Online Forum](#)

[ADHD Couples' Seminar](#)

[Recovering Intimacy Couples' Seminar](#)

7) The big picture – where do I fit in? What’s my life purpose?

Some ADHD strategies, treatment, and approaches that can teach awareness are subtle and not usually thought of as leading to greater awareness about personal ADHD.

Spirituality

My belief is that if we can fill our well from a source of spiritual connection, in whatever form we personally choose, we are stronger and better able to handle insights – no matter how painful – into our own ADHD traits and behaviours (past and present).

A spiritual practice can also give us hope and emotional resilience. It can teach us to forgive ourselves, an essential step to living a more stress-free, anxiety-free, and positive life in which we can move forward and grow.

Life Purpose

Do you have an over-arching sense of purpose? It can be difficult to know your life’s path when you keep getting lost, straying off the path because you’re distracted by a squirrel, or giving up on the path altogether! Figuratively speaking, ADHD challenges can cause all three of these.

Exercise #19 - why am I here? What is my life’s purpose?

TRY THIS:

During ADHD Awareness Month, carve out some quiet, contemplative time for yourself. This could be a walk in the woods on a beautiful fall afternoon; a meditation session; a visit to a trusted spiritual advisor or therapist; write free-form in a journal to answer this question without consciously trying; or choose any activity (or non-activity) that inspires you to move into a deeper mental and emotional state of calmness and clarity.

See what comes up for you and if you can confirm your life’s path, or discover a new one.

What steps will you take to further yourself along your path? List at least one.

Exercise #20 - values: the Big Picture exercise

In order to live authentically, we need to have a deep understanding of what’s important to us and what gives meaning to our lives.

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This seems obvious, but often, especially if we've grown up with undiagnosed ADHD, we've adopted the values of others in an effort to fit in, to please, to avoid punishment, to achieve goals that are not our own and may not be realistic for us.

On the other hand, realistic goals based on our deeply-held personal values and using our ADHD strengths can help us soar to new heights, to thrive and flourish in a way we never thought possible!

Reframing your life's "Big Picture" might set you free.

TRY THIS:

- identify what overarching expectations you have for yourself, your life, your achievements
- ask yourself:
 - o are these MY expectations? Or someone else's?
 - o do I agree with them?
 - o if not, am I brave enough to change them and adopt my own?
- Identify your new life values and personal expectations of what you'd like to achieve, accomplish, or experience in life

Exercise #21 - What do you need for you? Jumping in exercise

Be brave!

Now that you've honed your ADHD awareness, is ADHD holding you back?

Are you expecting too much or too little in some area of your life, or in general?

Are you suffering from a fear of failure? Of success?

My motto is, if there is something in my life I'm not happy with, I change it. Period. It may take a long time. I may not know how. But somehow, I'll find a way. It's a motto that's kept me on track (or at least gotten me back on track) over the years.

Ask yourself:

What is one thing I wish I could do, have always wanted to do, but haven't?

Try it! – even if it's in a modified form.

e.g. – I always wanted to drive a Formula One race car. I've told lots of people about that over the years. One day, while being driven home from Toronto, the airbus driver said he'd rented Formula One type cars, taken driving instructions, and driven them around a track. All in my local area. Whoa! Suddenly do-able.

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Be tenacious! You never know what will fall in your lap.

Here are some ideas:

- take a class
- teach a class
- do something creative that's new
- pursue a lifelong interest (I'm finally a full-fledged Astronomy nerd 'cause I was brave enough to walk into a meeting, where I knew not a soul, all alone. In less than a year, I became Vice President of the club! Classic ADHD story. You can do it too.)

Exercise #22 - The Big Picture – where do I fit in?

Be you!

Conforming versus non-conforming – where is your personal line? Do you mimic neurotypicals? When? Why? Is it worth it? Or does it cost too much? (energy; self-esteem; effort; at the expense of something else you could be spending your time and energy on).

Many of us want to be liked by everyone, we want to fit in, to be accepted. But that's not always possible so why try fulfill an impossible expectation? To what end?

Ask yourself:

Are you trying to make up for all the years you spent trying to please everyone and failing? If so, refer to **Exercise #1 - ADHD Diagnosis – How Do You *Really* Feel About It?**

– and reconcile your ADHD! That was then, this is now! You can let go of trying to be perfect for everyone else and just be you – and build the life YOU want. You'll be happier, you'll be modelling healthy choices for your kids and others, and others around you will be happier too.

Your happiness will spread – and that's gotta be good, right?

TRY THIS:

Read Cheri Huber's book [There is Nothing Wrong with You – Going Beyond Self-Hate; a compassionate process for learning to accept yourself exactly as you are](#)

NOTE: this book is very ADHD-friendly! You can read it starting anywhere and still benefit.