



9. Autism and ADHD (AuDHD)

Spotlight on
Supporting Autistic
Girls and Gender
Diverse Students
at School

ADHD is one of the most common co-occurring conditions associated with autism, with up to 70% of autistic people also meeting the criteria for an ADHD diagnosis. Although the underlying traits associated with ADHD and autism are currently evaluated as being different, the experience of being both autistic and ADHD (AuDHD)* includes some common experiences such as intense passions/hyperfocus for areas of interest, differences in social communication styles, sleep challenges, executive functioning differences, as well as sharing other commonalities including Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD) and co-occurring mental health conditions.

- Being an AuDHD young person can have its own unique and sometimes contradictory challenges, for example, needing to navigate both the autistic brain requiring routine and structure, and the ADHD brain getting bored quickly and needing novelty and stimulation.
- Being aware of the similarities, differences and the contradictions and shared experiences that come with being autistic and ADHD can assist in understanding the needs of AuDHD students.
- A particular commonality for AuDHD girls and gender diverse young people is that they may be more likely to have an internalised and therefore less outwardly visible presentation of both autism and ADHD.**



I think of it as autism and ADHD are like having conflicting parts. My autistic side is the reason why I leave a party early because of the sensory overwhelm that my ADHD side drove me to when it impulsively said yes to the party. They're good mates, both of them. But it's all about working out and making sure both sides, or both parts, get what they need.

When we learn to respect and work with the differences and needs of each part of the brain, that's when it can get really magical.

Sandhya Menon, AuDHD psychologist

*AuDHD (Autistic and ADHD) is a valid and accepted abbreviation within the combined autistic/ADHD community.



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The table below gives some insights into some of the specific experiences associated with autism and ADHD, along with the shared traits that may be experienced by AuDHD students.

AUTISM	SHARED TRAITS	ADHD
Preference for routine, stability and predictability	Hyperfocus on special interests	Seeks new experiences, novelty and spontaneity
Stimming, repetitive behaviours and movements as a form of regulation	Creative and able to think outside of the box	Interest-wired brain – due to differences in the way dopamine is accessed and processed.
Literal thinking and understanding of language	Fidgeting – need for movement to focus and regulate	Hyperfocus, high energy and enthusiasm when motivated
Use of social scripts/prompts	Masking	Struggles with attention and motivation for ‘boring’ tasks or activities
Detail orientated	Info dumping	Risk seeking and impulsivity
Highly empathetic	Sleep challenges	Time blindness – lack of awareness of time
High level of social justice	Perfectionism – often as a compensation strategy or when masking internalised struggles	Talkative or ‘chatty’- may jump around in conversations following own train of thought.



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AUTISM	SHARED TRAITS	ADHD
Rules focused or strong preference for fairness and consistency	Rejection sensitivity, anxiety, depression and other co-occurring conditions	Can thrive in high pressure situations when motivated
Interoceptive differences – under or over-awareness	Perceived to have social communication differences	Easily distracted, daydreaming, or 'drifting off'
Monotropic thinking resulting in deep level of knowledge on topics of interest	Executive functioning differences	Thrives on stimulation and variety, often able to adapt quickly to change
Sensory sensitivities	Creative problem-solving strengths	
Differences with emotional expression and regulation – often due to alexithymia	Emotional regulation differences	

Further reading: Spotlight on Autistic and ADHD Minds
[Spotlight on Autistic and ADHD Minds (Physical copy) – Yellow Ladybugs]

****This table is for information purposes only. It reflects common themes based on lived-experience insights but is not exhaustive and does not speak to every autistic, ADHD or AuDHD experience.**