The AuDHD Teen Survival Guide

Develop Self-Knowledge, Confidence, and Thrive as an AuDHDer!

SONIA ALI

Illustrated by Tim Stringer



Jessica Kingsley Publishers

London and Philadelphia

First published in Great Britain in 2026 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers
An imprint of John Murray Publishing Group

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A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library and the Library of Congress

ISBN 978 1 80501 929 9
eISBN 978 1 80501 930 5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group

Jessica Kingsley Publishers' policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Jessica Kingsley Publishers
Carmelite House
50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

www.jkp.com

John Murray Publishing Group
Part of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd
An Hachette Company

The authorised representative in the EEA is Hachette Ireland,
8 Castlecourt Centre, Dublin 15, D15 XTP3, Ireland (email: info@hbgi.ie)

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Introduction

Imagine you have been reading a very suspenseful murder mystery novel. You are gripped by the storyline and desperate to find out who the murderer is, but you can't...because five pages have been ripped out of the last chapter!

Have you ever gone shopping, picked out what you needed, queued to pay for your items, and then realized that you'd left your card or cash at home?

It is frustrating to find out that something you need is missing!

If you are about to read this book, you may have learned about either Autism *or* ADHD, but what you learned didn't fully reflect your experience. Something was missing.

Of course, everybody is unique and will have their own individual experiences in the world (regardless of their neurotype), but it could also be true that you are one of many people who has traits of **both ADHD *and* Autism—in other words, AuDHD!**

> **DID YOU KNOW?**
> - ➔ AuDHD is not a diagnostic term but a nickname that some people with both ADHD and Autism use.
> - ➔ As many as 50–70% of autistic people have ADHD traits.
> - ➔ Up to 50% of people with ADHD have autistic traits.

While people have always related to traits of both ADHD and Autism, a dual diagnosis of ADHD and Autism has only been recognized by medical science since 2013.[1] Since then, more and more people are being diagnosed with both Autism *and* ADHD.

So what does it mean to have ADHD and Autism? **How is being an AuDHDer different to being either autistic or having ADHD?**

Being an AuDHDer brings its own set of experiences that is unique and different to having ADHD or being autistic:

> "I get bored easily, but I don't like unexpected events. I can be very impulsive, but also very cautious. Being autistic didn't seem to explain these contradictions. Then I read about ADHD as well and it started to make sense." – *Libby*

The aim of this book is to explore AuDHD: the associated strengths and challenges, and **the ways in which it may impact thinking, attention regulation, emotions, social communication, and sleep**. If you only learned about ADHD or Autism, you'd miss out on key information to help you understand your neuropsychology.

As you read this book, you may find that some parts are more relatable to you than others. Everyone with AuDHD will have a different experience of the world and will respond to situations differently, so **it's okay to focus on the parts that seem more relevant or useful to you**.

HOW SHOULD YOU USE THIS BOOK?

- You don't have to read this book from cover to cover, or read every part (unless you want to, of course!).
- You can dip in and out of the book over time and focus on a chapter when it's relevant.
- You can read with a trusted adult and use the "Reflective questions" at the end of each chapter as a way to think about your own experiences.

There are no rules!

Chapter 1
What Is ADHD?

ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, but if you have ADHD, you don't have a deficit of attention—**you have a surplus of attention, focused on many different things**!

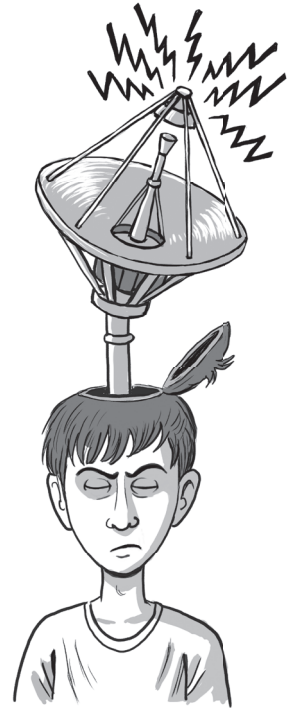
> **DID YOU KNOW?**
> ➔ The Māori word for ADHD is *arororetini,* which means "attention goes to many things."

Your ADHD brain is like a powerful radio transmitter, picking up hundreds of signals.

You notice many things and have so many thoughts whizzing around in your head that it can be difficult to filter out all this "noise," and to focus on just one task.

There is simply too much going on!

When you have many thoughts and ideas in your brain, your focus may "bounce" between these ideas or thoughts, as if you were switching between radio stations to find a song you like best:



> "I sat down to begin revision for a History test, and ended up watching YouTube videos on cat personality types then researching the feeding and mating habits of anglerfish. I know everything there is to know about anglerfish, but I haven't revised for History." – *Milo*

Strengths and challenges

Believe it or not, your ADHD attention style has advantages:

Creative thinking!

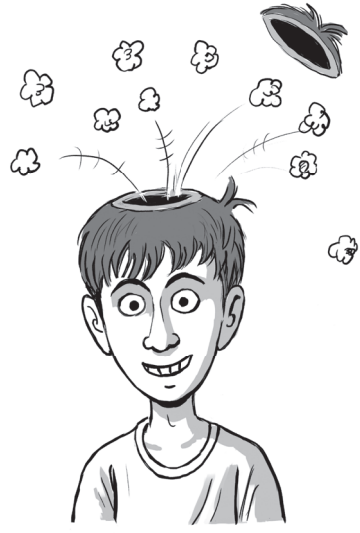
Your brain is so active at times that you may experience "popcorn thinking," when lots of ideas come to you all at once. There is evidence to suggest that **having ADHD may help you come up with creative "outside the box" solutions to problems**.[2]

Creative thinking skills could be useful for inventing or designing products, coming up with business or story ideas, creative uses for everyday objects, or even funny anecdotes.

Hyper-focus

People with ADHD have an interest-based attention style rather than a priority-based attention style. You are very motivated to do things that interest you, but find it very difficult to do tasks that aren't interesting to you, even if they are important.

When a task interests you, your attention becomes laser-focused.



> "When I am really interested in something, I put all my energy into it and I become very determined." – *Bilal*

Of course, **an ADHD attention style also has associated challenges**:

Lots of mind wandering

Your mind will wander or daydream more easily unless you are really interested in what you are doing. You have to work very hard to focus in some lessons and you may often "tune out."[3]



Low boredom threshold

When you are not really interested in what you are doing, it becomes far harder to filter out distractions and complete tasks that need to get done! Homework may get put off or avoided, chores unfinished—even having a shower could seem like a massive task at times:

> "I wish that my brain would do what I want it to, sometimes!" – *Macy*

Have you ever wondered **why** it can be harder for you to do things you know you need to do? Perhaps you have noticed that it takes all your effort to focus in some lessons?

DID YOU KNOW?

- ➔ Attention regulation is hugely affected by chemicals in the brain called dopamine and norepinephrine:
  - › Dopamine is the "feel-good" chemical that is activated by doing things that you find are enjoyable or rewarding.
  - › Norepinephrine is a chemical that helps ignite your attention and motivates you.
- ➔ People with ADHD probably have lower levels of these two chemicals moving around their brains.[4]

Dopamine boosters for ADHD

A lot of behaviors associated with ADHD are linked to the need for increased levels of dopamine transmission. For example:

Moving about a lot

Movement increases dopamine, whether it be walking, running, climbing, or tapping your feet. Ever wondered why you get the urge to move or rock on your chair, to fidget, or doodle? It's your body's way of regulating your attention and increasing your dopamine.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ➔ Hyperactivity can be an advantage! ***There is some evidence to suggest that ADHD may be more common in elite athletes.***[5]

Hobbies and interests

Special interests and favorite hobbies instantly provide a dopamine boost, so **it's a no brainer that what interests you is going to fire up more dopamine around your brain**.

Mind wandering and daydreaming

When you are bored, your mind will wander or even daydream. Mind wandering may keep you entertained, but it becomes harder to focus on what you are supposed to be doing!

Last-minute urgency

Ever wondered why you can only get started on a task when the deadline is just around the corner? That's because **a little bit of last-minute urgency can also increase dopamine levels**.

Novelty

Something new, original, or interesting can provide an element of excitement and increase stimulation.

Sensory stimulation

Your favorite foods or drinks can give a temporary dopamine boost, which is why it may be hard to stop eating or drinking them. You may crave soft fabrics or bouncing around.

KNOW YOURSELF

How does your ADHD attention style affect you? Take a look at these statements, and tick which you agree with:

- I can concentrate for hours when I am interested in something. ☐
- I often put things off like homework until the very last minute. ☐

- I talk a lot in class and get into trouble for "being off task." ☐
- I often don't finish class tasks because I get distracted. ☐
- I can become really focused when I set myself a goal or I am motivated by something. ☐
- My mind wanders often and I daydream quite a bit. ☐
- I can often miss teacher explanations or instructions because I lose focus. ☐
- I can get bored very easily. ☐

How many of these did you tick? Four or more? Although everyone will experience these to some degree, if you have ADHD, it may happen a lot more.

ABOUT MEDICATION FOR ADHD

Some people with ADHD may choose to take ADHD medications. ADHD medications may have brand names like Elvanse® or Adderall®, but the primary ingredients in most ADHD medications are stimulants like methylphenidate and amphetamines, which act to increase the transmission rate of the two chemicals dopamine or norepinephrine.

ADHD medications do not affect autistic traits but impact ADHD traits related to attention and concentration. Some people say that they help reduce the internal "noise." Some find that ADHD medications make autistic traits more apparent.

Some people prefer to use lifestyle changes or wish to wait until they are older to take medication. For others, medication may be helpful in managing the demands of school. Some find they feel strange on medication, or it

doesn't work for them. This may require titration, which is the process of getting the correct amount or trying different types of medication.

An NHS website provides some useful information about ADHD medication.[6]

ADHD and impulse

> "I often blurt things out without thinking or say something and wonder why I said it afterwards." – *Robbie*

Impulse control is the ability to pause before acting or reacting. If you have ADHD, it may be harder to pause before responding. Differences in brain structure and a drive to increase dopamine may be part of the reason.

Impulse control can be a useful survival tactic—pausing before you cross a busy road rather than running to catch that bus could be life-saving. Impulsiveness is more likely to affect your day-to-day life, like blurting things out in a conversation or eating too many sweets and feeling sick, or being quick to anger.

Some people with ADHD present with more impulsive traits than others. Do you agree with any of these statements?

- I call out things when I feel less regulated and don't even realize what I have said.
- I have often reacted very quickly when I'm upset or angry.
- Sometimes I do or say something without thinking, and it upsets people.
- I often reach out for snacks even though I'm not hungry.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS



- What did you learn about ADHD that you didn't know before?
- What is dopamine, and why does it matter in ADHD?
- Have you recognized any of the associated strengths of ADHD? How do you think you might use your strengths in your day-to-day life?
- Are there any lessons or times of the day when you find it harder to focus? If so, when?
- Is there anything you have done which has helped you control an impulse? For example, distracting yourself or movement?