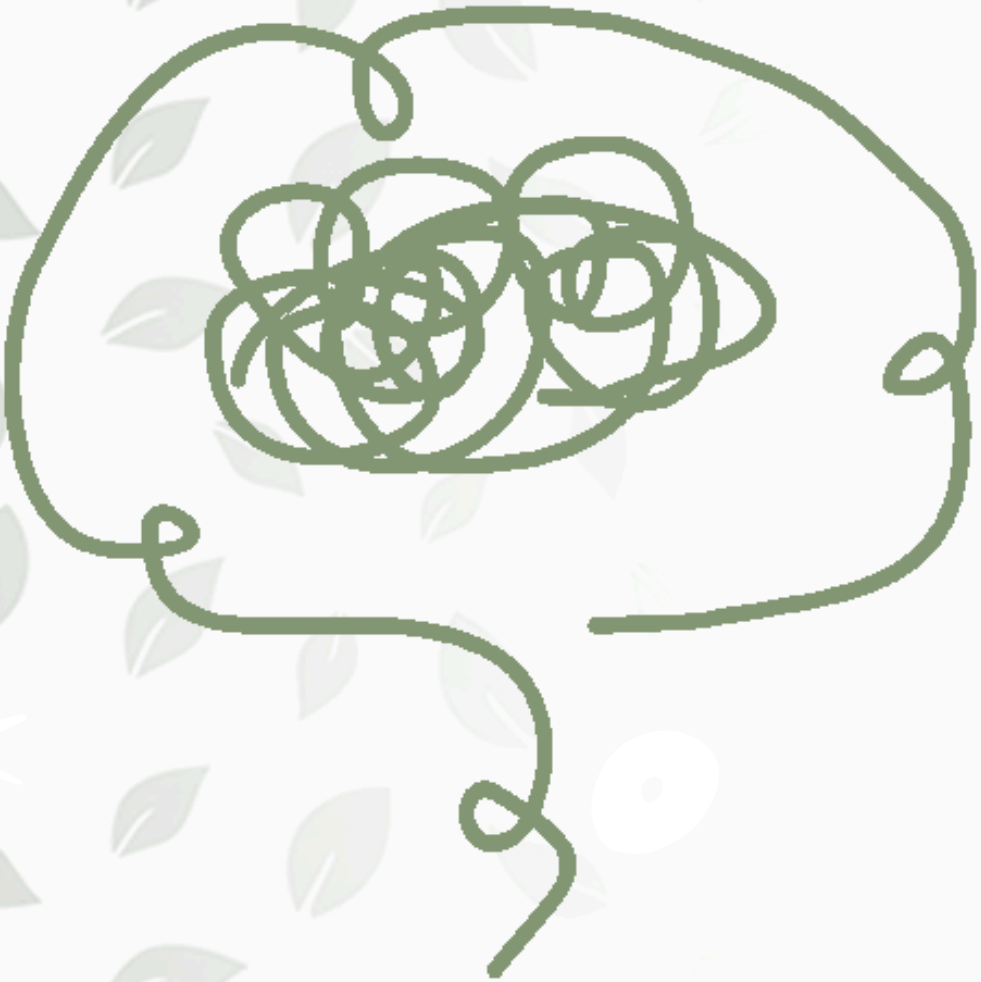


What is ADHD?

By Carleen Ross, MSc, MAPPCP

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What is ADHD?

Definition of ADHD

"ADHD is characterized by developmentally inappropriate levels of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, that impair a person's functioning. Some individuals have problems with all three types of symptoms, whereas others have problems primarily with inattention, or primarily with hyperactivity/impulsivity. Related to problems with inattention, people with ADHD often have difficulty following instructions, keeping things organized, and following through on tasks. Related to problems with hyperactivity and impulsivity, they also may tend to act without thinking, interrupt others, talk excessively, or feel fidgety or restless. ADHD begins in childhood and many individuals continue to show ADHD symptoms into adulthood. ADHD occurs in approximately 5-8% of school-aged children and adolescents, and is more common in males than females. (Canadian Psychological Association, 2021)"

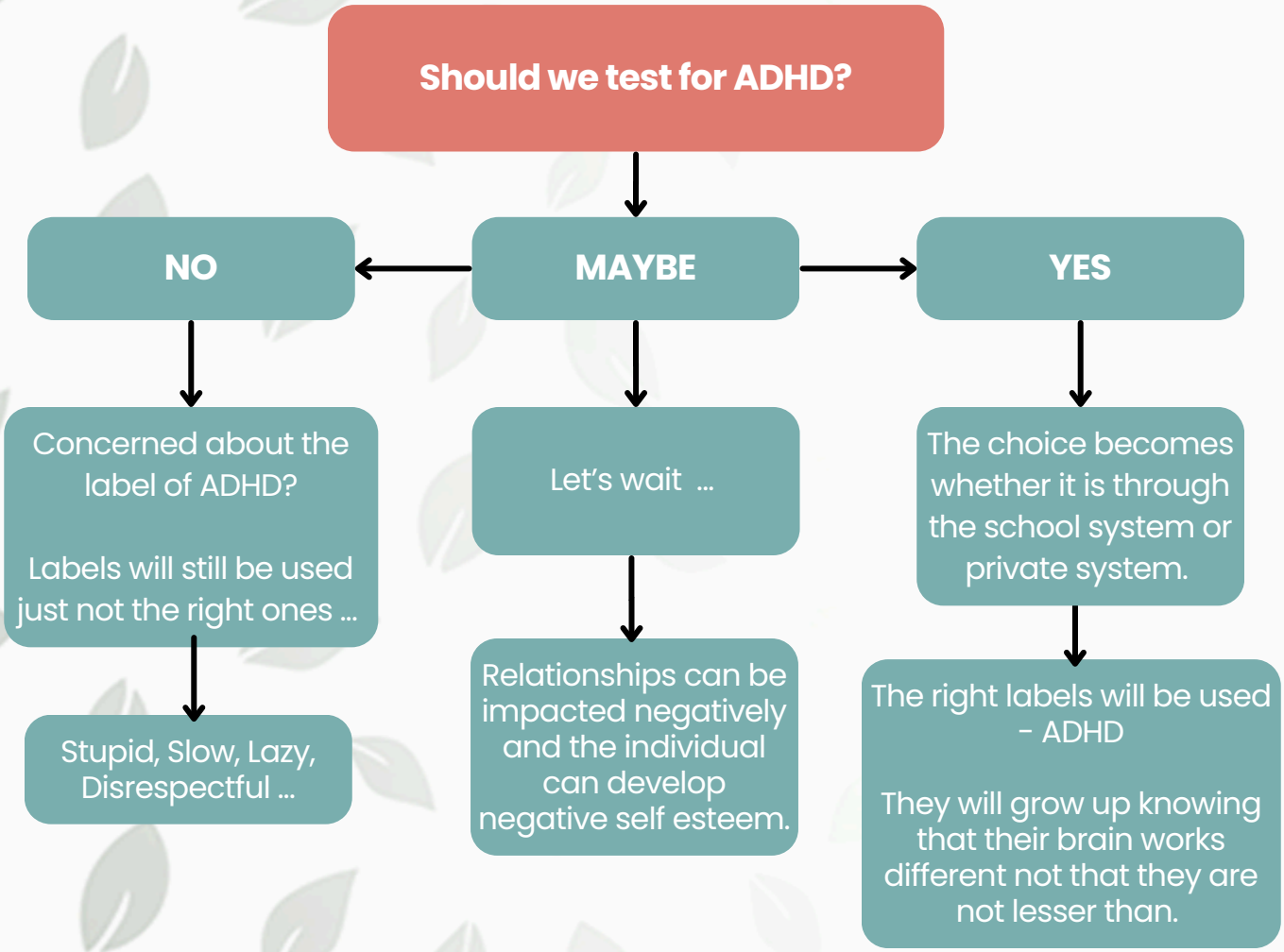
Additional information about ADHD ...

- No one test can firmly diagnosis for ADHD.
- It is biological - it runs in families.
- It an present slightly different for women and men.
- ADHD and ADD are the same diagnosis.
- The ADHDer is not lazy, they are working hard against how their brain naturally functions.
- ADHD can also presents as learning disorder or difference (doesn't always mean that the person also has dyslexia - could just be ADHD).
- More than half of people with ADHD were not diagnosed in childhood.
- ⅓ of adults never receive their diagnosis.
- Coaching, well-being practices and medicine can support an ADHDer.

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To diagnosis or not

Whether you diagnos or not, there are various considerations to contemplate.



Insight:

By the age of 10 the ADHDer will have heard 20,000 more negative or corrective messages than their neurotypical peers.

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Models of Thought

Different models of thought used towards ADHD

Medical Model (first used in 1760):
The search for what is wrong and what can be fixed.

Social Model (used since mid 1970's):
That society's misunderstandings contribute to the decreased well-being of the ADHDer due to barriers that it puts in place – discrimination and prejudice.

Biopsychosocial Model: (used since late 1970's)
That along with the biological differences of the ADHD brain, their social, physical and emotional environment also creates impact on how this processing style impacts them.

Neurodivergent Model (used since late 1980's):
Natural variation of brain function which focuses on unique abilities and perspectives of those with ADHD.

Society still uses the medical model

It is time to not view ADHD as something that needs to be "fixed."

Instead society should be viewing the ADHD brain as having a unique processing ability. While there are definate challenges that come with the ADHD processing style, however when the individual understands what their challenges are they can create healtheir and more sustainable habits to compensate.

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Types of ADHD

Hyperactive:

- squirm, fidget, or feel restless
- have difficulty sitting still
- talk constantly
- touch and play with objects, even when inappropriate to the task at hand
- have trouble engaging in quiet activities
- are constantly "on the go"
- are impatient
- act out of turn and don't think about consequences of actions
- blurt out answers and inappropriate comments

Inattentive:

- Trouble staying focused on tasks
- Frequently does not pay attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Difficulty organizing activities and tasks
- Being easily distracted
- Not following through on instructions or failing to complete chores or work assignments
- Forgetting to do routine chores
- Avoiding things that require long periods of focus
- Losing items needed to complete activities or tasks
- Not listening when directly spoken to

Combined: Experience both inattention and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms.

ADHD does not present the same for everyone.

Levels of ADHD: Mild, Moderate, & Severe

Levels of the ADHD are not stable levels but fluctuate within the individual's days as their level of well-being influences how they will present.

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ADHD & Well-being

ADHDers carry an invisible stigma that fosters misperceptions and discrimination, potentially leading to devaluation in social settings.

Research shows these consistent results:

- Lower self-concept (self-esteem, self-image, self-perceptions, and self-worth; Cueli et al., 2020).
- ADHDers in Canada have a up to 14% increase in suicide ideation than the non-ADHD (Fuller-Thomson, 2022).
- ADHD and anxiety are closely related (Kessler et al., 2006).
- ADHDers try and hide their traits from others.
- ADHDers have lower self-compassion and higher perceived criticism (Beaton et al., 2020).
- 30% ADHDers experience physical abuse before the age of 18 (Fuller-Thomson & Hooper, 2014).

Tip:

It is time that we begin supporting ADHDers for the beauty that they bring to society rather than shame them for the aspects they cannot change. To do this we need to shift how we view them and move away from a deficit medical model base to a strength base neurodivergent approach.

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Abilities & Challenges

Some of the ADHD Abilities	Some of the ADHD Challenges
Problem Solving	Reading, Writing, & Spelling
Imagination	Absent-Mindedness
Creativity	Restlessness
Full of Ideas	Disorganization
Humour	Impulsivity
Perseverance	Distractible
Divergent Thinking	Prospective memory
Mulit-Tasking	Working Memory
Laser Focus	Episodic Memory
High Energy	Communication Issues
Thrive in Uncertanity	Bored Easily
Long Term Memory	High Rejection Sensitivity
	Overcommits to Plans

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Masking & Stimming

- Memorizing
- Excuses
- Perfectionism
- Self harming humour
- Class Clown
- Quiet Achiever
- Over Studying
- Suppressing Emotions
- Social Scripts

Fidgeting

Repetitive noises

Rocking

Chewing / biting

Doodling

Rubbing / stroking

Light manipulation

Humming / vocalizing

Pacing

Oral sensory

Re-reading

Pressure

Visual patterns

Spinning / jumping

Skin picking

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Positive Psychology



Positive psychology is the study of flourishing and well-being. It focuses on strengths, wellbeing, positive mindset, resilience, gratitude, meaningful life, positive emotions, positive relationships, meaning and happiness, which allow individuals, communities, and institutions to thrive.

Working with ADHDers, positive psychology can help:

- Identify ADHDers innate strengths
- Improve communication & relationships
- Understand where support is needed
- Build up the ADHDer's well-being

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The Upside of ADHD

The ADHD individual is not broken! In fact, society NEEDS them. ADHDers are simply trying to thrive in a world not designed for them.

Industries that want ADHD thinking skills

Advertising, design, content creation, filmmaking, and journalism thrive on novelty, associative thinking, and tight deadlines.

Electrical, plumbing, HVAC, mechanics, and repair work put you on your feet solving concrete, real-world problems with immediate feedback.

Paramedics, firefighters, dispatchers, and ER or surgical nurses deal with high-stakes situations where staying calm under pressure and making rapid calls matters.

Software development, QA/testing, IT support, and engineering let you jump between active puzzles and tap into hyperfocus on tricky bugs or builds.

Early-stage startups, sales, and event coordination reward big-picture ideas, adaptability, and high energy when things go sideways.

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Questions to ask yourself

The family's understanding of how ADHD impacts the individual directly impacts the ADHDer's self-esteem.

Questions to ask yourself

Q: How do I view ADHD?

Q: What are my biases around ADHDers?

Q: Where do my views on ADHD need to change?

Q: What are my ADHDers strengths and how can I support these?

Q: Where do I need to be my ADHDers ally and voice for change?

Q: How can I create a supportive home environment for my ADHDer?

Q: To what extent is my belief around extra education opportunities for my child for my benefit more than they are for my child's?

Q: When does extra learning become too much and I need to allow them to have a break?

Learn as much as you can about ADHD from a neurodivergent perspective. Understand that your loved one has unique challenges AND amazing abilities - encourage these abilities and create a neuro-affirming home for them to thrive within.

Remember that ADHD has 70 to 80% hereditary rates - meaning that your child is not alone within your family. Someone else is also ADHD, whether they know it or not.

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Carleen & All That I AM

Carleen's work holds a simple but powerful belief: We all matter. And when we understand the unique meaning we bring into the world, we begin to live more fully, love more deeply, and lead with purpose. She offers individual coaching sessions, work shops, and presentations.

Social Skills & Confidence-Building Coaching Sessions:

Interactive sessions designed to strengthen communication, develop social skills, and build self-esteem in a supportive environment.

Educational Workshops & Training:

Informative sessions for schools, families, and workplaces to promote understanding, empathy, and practical strategies for the social world to support ADHD and Dyslexic individuals.

Advocacy & Awareness Campaigns:

Community outreach and public awareness initiatives aimed at challenging stigma, reshaping perceptions, and celebrating the strengths of dyslexia and ADHD.

Virtual World Wide Sessions:

• Positive Psychology Coaching • Unmasking Dyslexia • Health Coaching • HeartMath Coherence sessions • Highly Sensitive focused sessions • Grief Recovery Method
• Family Neurodivergent Mentoring

Carleen is dyslexic and has a Master of Science in Applied Posiitve Psychology Coaching Psychology, a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Health Coaching Certificate, Heart Math Practitioner Certifications, and has conducted Dyslexic reserach which was presented at the European Conference of Positive Psychology in 2026.

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Further Support:

Schedule your first introductory session.
Start following and listening to Unmasking Dyslexia Podcast.



Schedule your free introduction session:

https://www.carleenross.com/book-online

Take one of Carleen's online self directed programs:

https://www.carleenross.com/virtual-programs

Unmasking Dyslexia explores the lived experience and untold strengths of dyslexic minds.

Hosted by Carleen Ross, Positive Psychology Practitioner & Coach. Each episode blends personal stories with science-backed insights from psychology and neuroscience.

Discover practical tools, reframe the narrative, and reconnect with what it truly means to thrive with dyslexia.

UNMASKING
DYSLEXIA
Podcast

Listen Here

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