

Making room for yourself

A gentle guide for people of all genders discovering or exploring neurodivergence later in life

You do not have to figure out your whole story today. You can begin with curiosity about what takes effort, what brings relief, and what helps you feel more like yourself.

This guide welcomes people of all genders who connect with these experiences. You may have a diagnosis, identify as neurodivergent, or still be wondering.

A note about language

Neurodivergent is an umbrella term, not a diagnosis. This guide focuses mainly on experiences that some autistic and ADHD adults describe; it does not represent every form of neurodivergence. There is no single way to be a neurodivergent person.

Use this in your own way

Choose one page or one question. Write, type notes separately, draw, or simply think. Skip anything that does not fit. There is no score and no timeline.

For reflection and education only. This guide is not a screening tool, diagnosis, or substitute for individualized health care. The prompts and examples are original exercises, not validated assessment items.

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A new way to read your story

Late discovery can bring more than one feeling: relief, uncertainty, grief, anger, or hope. You do not need to turn it into a positive story before you are ready.

Some autistic people are identified later in life because their differences were not recognized earlier [1]. Masking can involve hiding or adjusting natural responses to fit expectations [2]. This is one possible part of a story, not an explanation for every difficulty.

What am I beginning to understand differently about my past?

What did I need then that I would like to offer myself now?

What feels meaningful, enjoyable, or deeply mine—whether or not it relates to neurodivergence?

A sentence to borrow: “I can respect the ways I adapted and still make room for different supports now.”

Notice the effort. Name the need.

These are prompts for noticing your daily life, not signs that establish a diagnosis. Similar experiences can have many explanations. Focus on what happens and what helps.

Sensory surroundings

Which sounds, lights, textures, smells, or busy spaces are difficult? Which sensations are comforting?

Attention and everyday tasks

When is starting, switching, remembering, or finishing hard? Would fewer steps, written reminders, or company help?

Social expectations and recovery

When do I rehearse, hide discomfort, or agree before checking my capacity? Where can I communicate more comfortably?

One recent moment that took more effort than others could see:

What was happening around me? What support might have changed it?

You can be skilled, caring, and capable while also needing substantial support. Your strengths do not cancel your needs.

One small change is enough to begin

Choose an optional experiment that feels affordable, accessible, and safe. You do not need certainty about a diagnosis to try ordinary changes that make daily life easier.

Reduce one source of strain

Try a quieter shopping time, softer lighting, comfortable clothing, or a brief pause between commitments.

Make a task more visible

Write only the next step. Put a reminder where you use it. Ask someone to sit alongside you while you begin.

Give yourself time to respond

Try: "Let me check my capacity and get back to you." Or: "Could you send the key points in writing?"

You control what you share

Changing how you mask or disclosing an identity can have consequences in different settings. Choose where, when, and with whom you feel safe. You do not owe anyone disclosure.

This week, I would like to try:

I will notice whether it helps by asking myself:

If it does not help, that is information. Adjust it, leave it, or ask for support.

Support that makes room for you

If you want to explore assessment, speak with a primary care provider or a qualified professional experienced in adult ADHD or autism. Ask about their experience with late-identified people of all genders, fees, wait times, and the process. Screening questionnaires alone do not establish a diagnosis [3].

New, severe, or worsening difficulties deserve attention in their own right. Sleep, stress, physical health, trauma, and other factors may also need assessment. You do not have to attribute everything to neurodivergence.

Questions you can bring to a professional

“How do you work with people who mask?”

“How will you consider my history and current support needs?”

“What support is available while I am deciding about assessment?”

My next kind step, or someone I could ask for support:

Read more • clickable sources

[1] National Autistic Society. (n.d.). [Signs that a child or adult may be autistic](#). Explains autistic characteristics and recognition in adulthood.

[2] National Autistic Society. (n.d.). [Masking](#). Explains masking and its possible costs.

[3] Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (n.d.). [Adult ADHD: Screening and assessment](#). Canadian clinical information; screening is not diagnosis.

General educational sources support the brief background information; the reflection exercises are not a treatment protocol.

Explore psychotherapy with Pauline O'Brien, RP:

www.paulineobrienrp.com

Keep exploring, at your own pace

Canadian resources

[Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada \(CADDAC\)](#)

Adult ADHD information and connections to Canadian resources. Explore its programs and events for learning and support options.

[Autism Canada](#)

A national starting point for autism information. Its Autism Junction directory helps you explore services and supports across Canada.

[Autism Ontario · Adults](#)

Ontario-focused information, resources, and referrals for autistic adults and their families.

Neurodivergent perspectives

[Neurodivergent Insights · Dr. Megan Anna Neff](#)

Accessible articles, visual explainers, and tools about autism, ADHD, and neurodivergent experiences. Start with the free website materials; some workbooks and programs are paid.

[Unmasking Autism · Devon Price](#)

Unmasking Autism: Discovering the New Faces of Neurodiversity. Explores masked autistic experiences and making room for identity and needs. An optional book, not a diagnostic guide. Ask your public library about print, e-book, or audiobook access.

[Late-Identified AuDHD: A Starter Workbook · B.Z. Brainz](#)

An optional workbook for adults exploring co-occurring autism and ADHD (often called AuDHD). Includes introductory language and guided writing prompts for reflecting on personal experiences and support needs. A paid resource, not a diagnostic manual.

Choose what fits

You do not need to read everything or purchase anything to use this guide. These resources offer different perspectives; keep what is useful and leave what does not fit. Take what resonates and leave the rest.