



Inner Meridian *Life Coaching*

Could neurodivergence be part of your story?

A gentle guide for women wondering whether there's another explanation for why life has always felt harder than it seems to for other people.

Bonus guide



The Inner Meridian Compass Journey

Notice - Reflect - Understand - Realign



Find your way back to yourself



A letter from me

For years, I thought I simply wasn't trying hard enough or not good enough.

I wondered why I could achieve so much in some areas of life while struggling with things that seemed effortless for everyone else.

I became very good at hiding how overwhelmed I felt. Very good at appearing capable and pushing through.

When I was diagnosed with AuDHD as an adult, so many pieces suddenly fell into place.

It didn't change who I was. It helped me understand who I'd always been.

Whether you're simply curious or seriously questioning, I hope this guide helps you approach yourself with curiosity rather than criticism.

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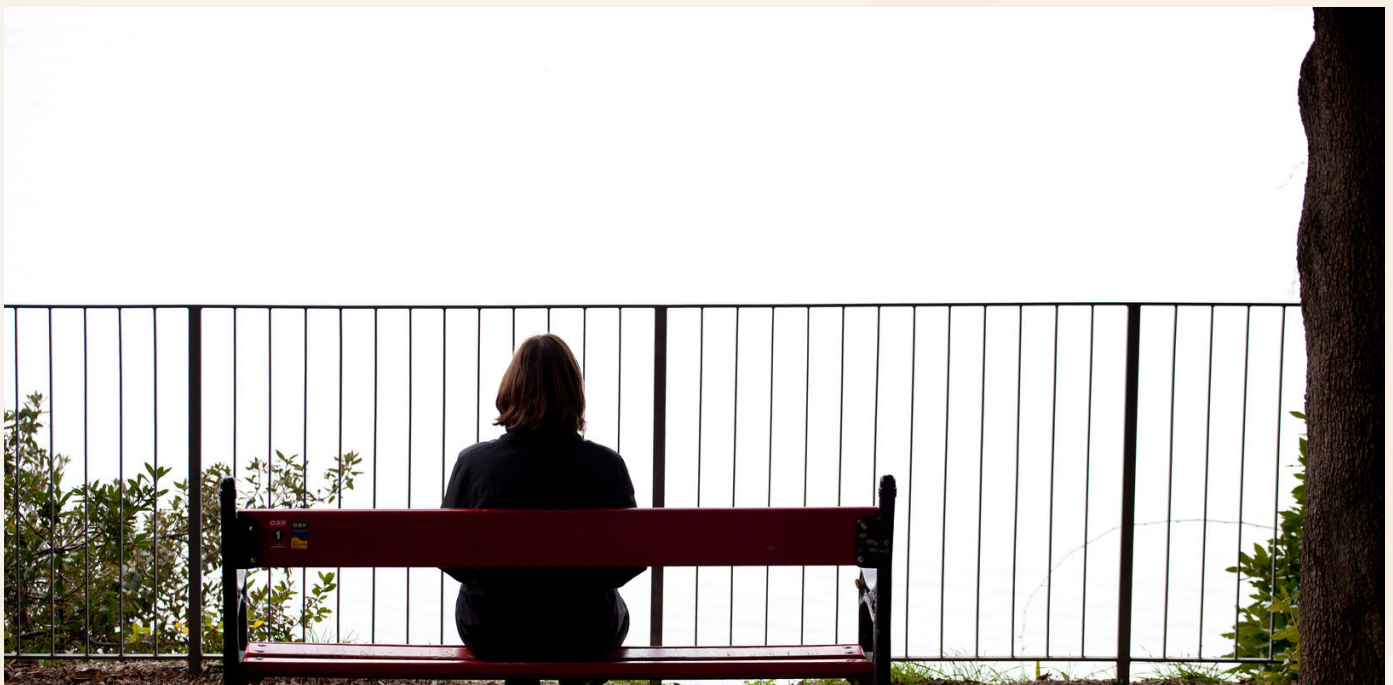
Why are so many women missed?

For many women, discovering they're autistic or have ADHD isn't about suddenly becoming neurodivergent. It's about finally understanding who they've always been.

Research and growing awareness have shown that many women aren't identified until adulthood because their experiences often look different from the stereotypes many of us grew up with.

Instead of causing disruption, they may quietly adapt, compensate and work incredibly hard to appear as though they're coping.

That can make it difficult for anyone - including themselves and the adults around them - to recognise what's really going on.



Girls often learn to adapt



From a young age, many girls receive strong messages about being polite, helpful, organised and considerate of others. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they may begin observing the people around them and learning how to "fit in."

This might look like:

- copying how friends dress, speak or behave
- rehearsing conversations before they happen
- forcing eye contact because they think they should
- laughing when everyone else laughs, even if they don't fully understand why
- hiding sensory discomfort or overwhelm
- becoming the "good girl" who doesn't want to cause problems

Over time, these adaptations can become so automatic that they no longer feel like a mask, but simply feel like their personality.

Success can hide struggle

Many late-diagnosed women are intelligent, capable and high-achieving. They've built careers; raised families; managed busy lives.

From the outside, they often appear to have everything together. What others don't always see is how much effort it takes behind the scenes:

- Perhaps you're the person everyone relies on at work, but getting out of the house each morning feels like climbing a mountain.
- Perhaps you can organise a complicated project, but forget why you walked into the kitchen.
- Perhaps you're constantly praised for being calm while your mind feels like it's racing at a hundred miles an hour.

Success doesn't mean life is easy. Sometimes it simply means you've become incredibly good at compensating.





From my compass

For years, I thought my struggles cancelled out my achievements.

I couldn't understand how I could confidently teach a class, lead whole-school projects or organise complex events, yet struggle with everyday things like getting out of the house on time, remembering appointments or feeling completely thrown by a change of plan.

I assumed I just needed to be more organised or more disciplined.

Looking back, I can see those strengths and struggles were never contradictions: they were simply part of how my brain works.



The hidden cost of masking

When you're constantly trying to fit in, meet expectations or keep up appearances, it takes energy.

Many women describe feeling as though they're performing throughout the day, only to come home completely exhausted.

Over time, this can contribute to:

- chronic exhaustion
- anxiety
- burnout
- perfectionism
- feeling disconnected from who you really are
- wondering why life seems harder than it appears to be for everyone else



The difficult thing is that if you've always lived this way, you may assume everyone else is working just as hard too.

A gentle reminder

If you're recognising yourself in these experiences, it doesn't automatically mean you're autistic or have ADHD.

However, if these patterns have been present for much of your life, and especially if they've left you feeling different or like you're constantly working harder than everyone else, neurodivergence may be worth exploring.

You don't need to have all the answers today. Curiosity is enough.

Does any of this sound familiar?

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- I've always felt different somehow.
 - I replay conversations afterwards.
 - I become fascinated by certain topics.
 - I struggle with transitions.
 - I copy how other people behave socially.
 - I'm constantly exhausted after being around people.
 - I feel "too much" or "not enough."
 - I struggle to switch my brain off.
 - I can organise huge projects but forget everyday tasks.
 - I notice details other people miss.
 - I become overwhelmed by noise, clothing or busy environments.



If several of these resonate, keep reading with curiosity - not judgement

Understanding masking

What is masking?

Masking is the process of consciously or unconsciously changing how you behave in order to fit in or avoid standing out.

Many neurodivergent women become so skilled at masking that they don't realise they're doing it.

Over time, it can become difficult to know which parts are genuinely you and which parts you've learned to perform.

It might look like:

- Smiling when you're overwhelmed
- Rehearsing conversations beforehand
- Watching how other people behave and copying them.
- Constantly analysing whether you've said the "right" thing.
- Pushing through exhaustion because everyone else seems to manage.
- Hiding sensory discomfort.
- Trying to be "easy-going" when inside you're struggling.



The hidden cost

Masking often helps us fit in. However, it can also lead to exhaustion, burnout, anxiety, perfectionism, loss of identity and more.

Many women reach adulthood without realising how much energy masking has been costing them.



From my compass

I became very good at learning the unwritten rules. I'd watch people, copy how they interacted and mentally rehearse conversations before they happened.

People saw confidence. They didn't see how much analysing was happening behind the scenes, or how exhausted I felt afterwards.

I didn't realise I was masking because it had simply become my normal.



*What parts of yourself feel easiest to show the world?
Which parts do you keep hidden?*

ADHD in women

What it can look like

Many women don't recognise ADHD because it doesn't always look like the stereotypes.

For some, it looks more like...

- Having a brain that never feels quiet.
- Starting projects with huge enthusiasm...then struggling to finish them.
- Hyperfocusing for hours.
- Forgetting everyday things despite caring deeply.
- Feeling paralysed by simple tasks.
- Constantly underestimating how long things will take.
- Always feeling busy, but rarely caught up.
- Being incredibly creative and full of ideas.
- Feeling emotionally intense.



ADHD strengths

ADHD can also come with many strengths. These vary from person to person, but can include:

- creativity
- curiosity
- innovation
- enthusiasm
- empathy



From my compass

One of the biggest contradictions in my life was that I could spend hours researching something that fascinated me, yet struggle to start a five-minute task I wasn't interested in.

I thought it was laziness or a lack of discipline. Now I understand that my attention wasn't broken - it was interest-driven.

That realisation changed the way I approached work, rest and even how I spoke to myself.

When do you find yourself completely absorbed?

When do even simple tasks feel almost impossible to begin?

Autism in women

What it can look like

Like ADHD, autism can often look different in women.

Many women describe it as:

- feeling like they're acting rather than simply being
- needing recovery time after social situations
- feeling different without knowing why
- taking things literally
- loving routine but feeling frustrated when plans change
- noticing sensory experiences more intensely
- deep passions and specialist interests
- finding friendships confusing
- learning social "scripts"



Autism strengths

Autism can also be associated with many strengths. These vary from person to person, but can include:

- loyalty
- honesty
- attention to detail
- deep thinking
- integrity
- creativity



From my compass

Looking back, I can see how much energy I spent trying to work out the rules, like trying to understand social situations, learning the intricacies of a system or making sure I'd done something the "right" way.

If a rule made sense, I followed it wholeheartedly. If it didn't, I found it almost impossible to follow just because someone expected me to. I now see this wasn't a flaw - it was how my brain made sense of the world.

“Have you ever felt like everyone else was given a social rulebook that you somehow missed?”

When autism and ADHD meet



Many people assume autism and ADHD are opposites. In reality, they often exist together and are often shortened to AuDHD.

This can create what feels like constant internal contradictions. You might:

- Love routine, yet crave novelty.
- Need structure, yet struggle to stick to it.
- Long for connection, yet become exhausted by socialising.
- Need quiet, but your brain never feels quiet.
- Love planning, but constantly run late.

The characteristics AuDHD people show are like dials on a cooker - each turned up or down depending on the situation and constantly changing as you move through the day, week, month...

These contradictions can feel deeply confusing, particularly before someone understands AuDHD



From my compass

Before my diagnosis, I couldn't understand why I seemed full of contradictions.

I loved making plans but struggled to follow them.

I liked routine but got bored by it.

I could organise a project involving dozens of people but found leaving the house on time surprisingly difficult.

Some days I'd be hyperfocusing, but incapable of focus the next.

I kept wondering why I couldn't just be consistent. Learning about AuDHD helped me realise these weren't contradictions, but two neurotypes interacting.

Which of these contradictions feels most familiar?



It's not just about challenges

This page is really important.

Many people spend years believing neurodivergence only explains what's difficult. It also explains many strengths.

You might recognise strengths like...

- Deep curiosity. You don't just like learning: you dive deep.
- Creativity. You often connect ideas in ways others don't.
- Justice. You care deeply about fairness.
- Empathy. You feel with people, not just for them.
- Seeing patterns. You notice details others miss.
- Passion. When something matters to you, it really matters.





From my compass

One of the biggest shifts for me wasn't discovering new strengths.

It was realising that many of the qualities I'd always valued in myself were connected to my neurodivergence too.

My curiosity, creativity, deep empathy and love of learning weren't separate from my AuDHD; they were part of it.

Understanding that helped me stop seeing my brain as something to battle against and start appreciating it for what it brings.

Instead of asking, "What's wrong with me?"...try asking, "What might my brain be particularly good at?"





What if this resonates?



If you've recognised yourself in many of these experiences, you might be feeling lots of different emotions. Perhaps relief; sadness; excitement. Perhaps grief for the years you've spent wondering why life felt so much harder than it seemed to for everyone else.

Or perhaps you're thinking, "Maybe I'm reading too much into this".

All of these reactions, and more, are completely understandable

Many late-identified autistic and ADHD women describe a mixture of validation, confusion, relief and grief. Realising there might be another explanation for your experiences can bring comfort, but it can also raise new questions.

Whatever you're feeling right now, try not to rush yourself. You don't need to decide anything today. You don't need to prove anything. You certainly don't need to have everything figured out.

Understanding yourself is a journey, not a race

Things to remember

You don't have to relate to every experience in this guide.

Autism and ADHD look different in every person.

Diagnosis is one path, but not the only path.

Your experiences are valid, regardless of whether you choose to pursue an assessment.

Self-understanding can be life-changing in its own right.



From my compass

One of the biggest surprises after my diagnosis wasn't the label.

It was the kindness.

For years I'd spoken to myself in ways I would never dream of speaking to someone else.

Suddenly I found myself replacing "Why can't I just get my act together?" with "No wonder that feels hard."

That shift didn't solve everything overnight, but it completely changed my relationship with myself.

What would change if you responded to yourself with curiosity instead of criticism?



Where could you go from here?

There isn't one "right" next step.

Different people find different paths helpful.

The important thing is choosing what feels right for you.



Learn more

Read books. Listen to podcasts. Follow neurodivergent creators. Learn from people's lived experiences.

Sometimes hearing someone describe your own experiences can be incredibly validating.

Talk to someone you trust

Sharing your thoughts with a trusted friend, partner or family member can help you process what you're discovering.

You don't need to have all the answers before starting the conversation. Sometimes simply saying, "I've been reading something that's made me think..." is enough.

Consider assessment

Some people decide to pursue a formal assessment. Others don't.

A diagnosis can bring validation and, in some situations, access to workplace or educational adjustments.

For others, self-identification provides enough understanding.

Only you can decide what feels right for your circumstances.

Start experimenting

You don't need a diagnosis before making life a little easier.

You might try:

- wearing noise-cancelling headphones
- scheduling more recovery time after social events
- using reminders and visual prompts
- breaking tasks into smaller steps
- allowing yourself more flexibility
- noticing what genuinely helps your energy

*Understanding yourself isn't about waiting for permission.
It's about becoming more compassionate towards yourself.*



From my compass

After my diagnosis, I realised I didn't have to wait until I had everything figured out before making changes.

I started paying attention to what genuinely helped, like walking when my thoughts felt noisy, allowing myself quiet time after busy days, using reminders instead of relying on memory and stopping apologising for needing things that supported me.

None of those changes made me "more" autistic or ADHD. They simply made life fit me better.



“What's one small adjustment you could make this week that would make life feel a little easier?”



How coaching can help

Understanding yourself is an important beginning, but understanding alone doesn't always tell you what to do next.

That's where coaching can help.

Coaching isn't about fixing you.

It isn't about making you appear more neurotypical.

And it certainly isn't about changing who you are.

It's about helping you understand how your brain works, identify what matters most to you and create a life that works with your strengths instead of constantly fighting against them.



From my compass

One of the greatest gifts coaching has given me isn't that I have everything sorted - it definitely hasn't!

It's that I've stopped measuring success by how well I can keep up with everyone else.

Instead, I ask a different question: "What works for me?" That single shift has helped me build a life that feels calmer, more sustainable and much more authentic.

Coaching isn't about becoming someone else.

It's about becoming more fully yourself.

Together we might explore:

- Understanding your unique neurodivergent profile
- Recovering from burnout
- Reducing masking
- Managing overwhelm
- Building sustainable routines
- Strengthening relationships
- Navigating work or career changes
- Building confidence and self-trust
- Understanding your values
- Creating a life that feels authentic, not performative



If you stopped trying to live according to everyone else's expectations, what might your life look like?



Your next compass bearing

You've already taken an important step: you've been curious enough to begin understanding yourself more deeply.

Whether you choose to explore neurodivergence further or simply use what you've learned to be kinder to yourself, I hope you leave this guide knowing one thing:

You were never broken. You were never failing. You were simply trying to navigate life without a map that truly reflected how your mind works.



Now, perhaps, your inner compass is becoming a little clearer.

Whether you're questioning, self-identifying, waiting for assessment, newly diagnosed or simply learning more about yourself, you don't have to navigate it alone.

The goal isn't to become someone different. It's to understand yourself well enough to create a life that truly fits.



Ready for the next step?

Route 1: continue learning

There are loads of great resources out there. Some of my favourites are:

- “Unmasked: the ultimate guide to ADHD, autism and neurodivergence” - Ellie Middleton
- “ADHD Chatter” and “ADHD Women’s Wellbeing” podcasts (both explore autism too)

Enjoy exploring these and/or others to continue your journey.



Route 2: explore coaching

If you'd like a supportive space to understand yourself, work with your brain rather than against it, and create a life that feels genuinely aligned with who you are, I'd love to walk alongside you.

Book a free Discovery Call



www.innermeridian.co.uk

Find your way back to yourself