

YOUR BRAIN'S NOT BROK*e*N

Strategies for Navigating Your
Emotions and Life with **ADHD**

TAMARA ROSIER, PhD

“Tamara is your new best friend. She is smart and funny and has a lot of good ideas to help you better understand your ADHD. With her help, you’ll create a more fulfilling life by getting more things done and feeling good about yourself while you do it. Trust me, you will love this book.”

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, CST, author of four books on ADHD, including *ADHD After Dark: Better Sex Life, Better Relationship*

“*Your Brain’s Not Broken* is the best kind of ADHD book. You can open it up to any random page and find practical, actionable ideas. And those ideas are shared in a relatable, easy-to-understand style that makes you want to apply them! Read this book!”

Brendan Mahan, MEd, MS, host of the *ADHD Essentials* podcast

“Love the approach *Your Brain’s Not Broken* takes with ADHD. After my ADHD diagnosis, I devoured books about what science thought was happening in my brain. And I compared that to how it manifested in my life. I soon realized adult ADHD is not one-size-fits-all. Many of the ADHD descriptions didn’t apply. Others were close but not quite right. And big pieces of the puzzle were missing. For years, the emotional aspect of ADHD was, at best, mentioned in passing. At worst, they ignored it completely. Yet the emotional volatility related to my ADHD has cost me the most. In relationships, in jobs, in most aspects of my life. What I discovered in *Your Brain’s Not Broken* is how entwined my emotions, and the energy that comes from them, are in everything I do! Even better, there’s something I can do to take control. And now you can discover what you can do too!”

Duane Gordon, president of the Attention Deficit Disorder Association

“What joy, what relief are in these pages of hope from the expertise of Dr. Rosier. There are clear, sound strategies for navigating ADHD for you or a loved one. This means a new freedom, a new understanding, and a new plan of hope!”

Dr. Gregg Jantz, author of 40 books and founder of The Center a Place of HOPE

“Too many books on ADHD present a simplified paint-by-numbers approach to ADHD. Tamara brings a robust palette of colors illustrating the multifaceted hues and textures of ADHD. Her writing style is engaging and entertaining with a balance of compelling and

thought-provoking stories, relevant science, and brilliant and original tools and strategies that can be put into play immediately. Make space on your bookshelf for this fresh take on ADHD!”

Cameron Gott, PCC, executive ADHD coach and
cohost of the *Translating ADHD* podcast

“If you or someone you know struggles with ADHD and you want something more than medication can provide, then this book is for you. Medications for ADHD are like glasses for near-sightedness—they help with focus but don’t teach people how to read. Treating ADHD with medications alone leave millions still struggling to function with everyday life. *Your Brain’s Not Broken* is the best book I have ever read on teaching people with ADHD (and their family members) how to “read”—how to understand their own brain and develop effective strategies to succeed. As a psychiatrist who has treated thousands of people with ADHD, I believe this book provides a comprehensive toolkit for success. I recommend it!”

Timothy R. Jennings, MD, DFAPA, author of *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life*,
president of Come and Reason Ministries, and past president
of the Tennessee and Southern Psychiatric Associations

“Dr. Rosier tactfully addresses the very real and painful emotions that most children and adults with ADHD experience. Dr. Rosier, through examples of her own experiences, shares with us the insights and mindset shifts that helped her cope with the big emotions.”

Caroline Maguire, MEd, author of *Why Will No One Play With Me?*

“Dr. Rosier does a masterful job of giving language to the experience of being an adult with ADHD. She uses concrete, relatable examples to explain the difficulties adults with ADHD often experience and then provides practical strategies for successfully navigating these difficulties that can be easily adapted to fit a variety of circumstances. This is an excellent resource for adults with ADHD and for anyone who wants to better understand someone struggling with adult ADHD.”

Jean Holthaus, LISW, LMSW, author of *Managing Worry and Anxiety* and *When Anxiety Roars*

© 2021 by Tamara Rosier

Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Rosier, Tamara, 1968– author.

Title: Your brain's not broken : strategies for navigating your emotions and life with ADHD / Tamara Rosier, PhD.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2021]

Identifiers: LCCN 2021006605 | ISBN 9780800739423 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800741334 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493431984 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Attention-deficit disorder in adults. | Attention-deficit disorder in adolescence. | Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Classification: LCC RC394.A85 R67 2021 | DDC 616.85/8900835—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021006605>

The names and details of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the author has worked.

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In keeping with biblical principles of creation stewardship, Baker Publishing Group advocates the responsible use of our natural resources. As a member of the Green Press Initiative, our company uses recycled paper when possible. The text paper of this book is composed in part of post-consumer waste.



CONTENTS

- Acknowledgments 11
- Introduction: No More Pretending 13
1. And Then *Ping!* Goes My Brain 19
 2. Elves, Dirty Babies, and Lucille Ball 29
 3. The Case of the Missing Butler 39
 4. Following the Rabbit 53
 5. The Monsters We Face 73
 6. Malicious Motivation 83
 7. Solving Motivational Murders 97
 8. Living on the Grid 109
 9. Predictable Patterns 121
 10. Climbing the Ladder: Cultivating Emotional Health 135
 11. Welcome Home: Creating Healthy Boundaries 151
 12. Dancing through the Day: Hacks for Adulting 163
 13. The Island of Misfit Toys: Parenting the ADHD Child 173
 14. Now What? Writing Your ADHD Story 183

Contents

Appendix A: Your Life on the Grid	191
Appendix B: Writing Your ADHD Story	195
Appendix C: If You Love Someone Who Has ADHD	197
Appendix D: Resources for Those with ADHD	199
Appendix E: What Is ADHD Coaching?	201
Notes	203

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While writing this book, I slipped into all of the malicious motivational snares that I write about in chapter 6—avoidance, anxiety, procrastination, anger, shame, and self-loathing. I want to thank my family and others who helped me confront those manipulative scoundrels.

To my husband, Tom Emigh: You believe that “properly supported,” I can do anything. You are my proper support. Thank you so much for listening as I worked out my ideas.

To my children with ADHD, Kaitlynn Tefft, Brooke Rosier, and Megan Lorenz: Thank you for all that you have taught me about your experiences with ADHD. It has been a privilege to walk beside you as you matured. I am so relieved that you all grew up to be the beautiful adults you are. You kept me guessing for a little bit.

To my child who doesn’t have ADHD and kept asking if she could be in this book, Lauren Rosier: Here you are. I study you when I want to understand how a neurotypical thinks. Thank you for your consistency, love, and patience with those of us who are consistently inconsistent.

To my son-in-law, Adam Lorenz: Thank you for your encouragement to write a book proposal and for believing that I had

Acknowledgments

something to say. Your encouraging texts chased away the malicious motivators.

To my writing coach, Lissa Halls Johnson: Thank you for convincing me to abandon my academic-toned voice for something real. Your gentle prodding helped me develop more confidence. You were this book's doula.

To the fantastic team at Revell: Thank you to everyone on the Revell team who helped me so much. Special thanks to Andrea Doering, acquisitions editor, for the opportunity to tell my ADHD stories. Her team of editors, Kristin Kornoelje and Jessica English, polished the text. I appreciate your attention to detail. Thank you to Laura Palma for the cover design.

To Oren and Chris Mason at Attention MD: Over ten years ago, Chris and I met for coffee. "You should be an ADHD coach," she said. And for once, I followed directions. Thank you to both of you for supporting my career in this field from the beginning.

Finally, to my clients: there would be no book at all without you. Each of you gives me a deeper insight into what it is like to have ADHD. Thank you for sharing your journey with me.

INTRODUCTION

No More Pretending

Put me at any large party, networking event, or fundraiser, and I will naturally gravitate toward the individuals in the room with ADHD. This isn't intentional. It just happens. It's not because I founded the ADHD Center of West Michigan, nor because I have worked in this field for over twelve years. It's not because three of my four children have ADHD. It's because I instinctively know my tribe. You see, I also have ADHD. But you most likely wouldn't see it—at first.

The symptoms of ADHD are mostly invisible—unless you know where to look. For the most part, others wouldn't notice that I struggle to sit still, because I don't visibly fidget much, and I don't get up and move around when I shouldn't. Instead, I secretly keep myself busy by wearing jewelry I can fidget with or tracing the ridges of the glass in my hand.

In social situations, you might not see all the ways I am trying to fit in, nor that it takes a tremendous amount of energy to look “normal.” I am continuously working diligently to suppress ADHD tendencies by pretending that I care about polite small

talk, not interrupting people, and listening carefully. Eventually, the combination of pretending to be a grown-up and hog-tying impulsive thoughts and actions causes social fatigue. So I wander toward the people who are more like me—the impish and interrupting type. With other people who have ADHD, conversations bounce around many topics in a freestyle stream of consciousness. Now I'm no longer pretending to fit in. I am not overly focused on ADHD symptoms. I am in the moment, enjoying the party and being comfortable with my ADHD self.

Unless you spend time with me, you may not know how ADHD affects me daily. You may see me struggle, however, to remember things, to pay attention in meetings, to listen to directions, to complete tasks. You are very likely to see me look for misplaced items, mumbling to myself, “Now where could that be?” If you don't know that those are symptoms of ADHD, you may judge me as irresponsible, scattered, untrustworthy, or even just dumb. That's because the symptoms of ADHD are often misconstrued and judged as character traits instead of seen as a result of neurological differences.

Because I know that many people don't understand ADHD and misunderstand the symptoms they see, I do my best to look “normal”—which requires me to fake it. Each day I struggle with the apparently simple tasks in life. For example, I would like to call and meet my friends for coffee, but anything that isn't happening *right now* seems too overwhelming to plan. Some days I feel like I can't get my scattered thoughts in order long enough to start a task, let alone stay on track and finish it. Sometimes my attempts to bury my symptoms fail miserably. Little ADHD errors throughout my day pile up: I double-book clients, forget to pay a bill, or leave my car windows open on a rainy day. By evening, I am exhausted and feel like a failure. And I am sure that others see me as a failure too.

I know too well how those of us with ADHD are assessed by a non-ADHD world. Previous supervisors, friends, and even family

members have interpreted my symptoms as carelessness, laziness, or stupidity. Even when people know that I have ADHD, they often attribute my symptoms to flaws in my character, telling me to pay more attention to this or that.

I frequently speak to various groups about how ADHD affects individuals. On one such evening, I was talking to a large group of parents on the topic of raising emotionally healthy children who have ADHD. During the session, I highlighted the importance of empowering their children to problem-solve. I explained how easily people with ADHD feel shame and inadequacy. Afterward, some of the parents formed a line to ask additional questions, and I helped the participants develop the next steps in their parenting. A well-meaning non-ADHD parent came up to me at the podium and said, “I will take your glass. I know you will forget to do it,” then winked and laughed at her own joke. I must have looked shocked, because she stopped and said, “Oh, did you need this glass?”

Her words had felt like a slap to my face. She had assumed I would forget and made a punch line out of my struggles, landing the all-too-familiar jab, “I will do this for you because you are too careless/stupid/unreliable to do it.” I had already made allowances for my forgetfulness by placing the remote control I was using next to the glass so I wouldn’t leave it behind.

On the flight home, I reflected on how easily I could feel inept. I wished the woman had just said, “I would love to take care of this for you.” I know she really didn’t mean to send the negative message that I was careless. But because those of us with ADHD receive so many small messages like that, they build up and leave dents in our sense of well-being.

Part of this problem is how others judge me, but another part is how hard I judge myself. Like so many with ADHD, I am sensitive to rejection and criticism. I make the cognitive mistake of seeing criticism where it wasn’t intended, such as with that helpful parent at the conference.

I have tried to hide my natural way of thinking or behaving from people so that I can fit into a non-ADHD world. I have studied the patterns of non-ADHD people—how they think and act—to help me blend in. I have come to the conclusion that I cannot fake being neurotypical any longer. Instead, I need to be honest about how ADHD affects me, how I think, and how I tend to act, then use that understanding to help me navigate the world in which I live. It is a constant game of accommodating, but it works! I don't need to pretend any longer. I accept that I am different from others who don't have ADHD. And even though I live in a fast-paced, detailed world full of distractions, I can figure out how to navigate by continually developing new skills and attitudes. Learning how my brain tends to function helps me develop hacks and workarounds to get things done and to be gracious to myself when I don't.

If you have ADHD, you need to know that your brain is not broken. It doesn't work in the same way as a “normal,” or neurotypical, brain does because it's wired differently. Some parts of the ADHD brain are overactive compared to the non-ADHD brain, and some are underactive. Seeing how the ADHD brain works differently from the neurotypical brain helps us understand, accept, and compensate for our differences.

This knowledge that ADHD is a complicated disorder that affects each part of a person's life is the first step to managing it. It is my desire for you to learn to see your ADHD patterns and then make the adaptations necessary for you to live effectively. The knowledge you will gain about ADHD will empower you so that you can manage your symptoms without needing to pretend to others and yourself.

In chapters 1, 2, and 3, you will learn about the complicated emotional landscape of those with ADHD. You will see that emotional difficulty can show up in many different ways. For example, some might have trouble putting the brakes on their feelings when they're angry or stressed about something. Others might struggle

to get revved up to do something when they're feeling bored. Spotting the emotional components of ADHD helps to compensate for the impact of it.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 delve into the ADHD thought life. Persistent negative messages that we send ourselves are common distractors in the ADHD brain. Like naughty little elves, they sneak around, whispering lies that we believe. They implant messages of fear, failure, and unworthiness. You will learn how to identify these cognitive errors, address them, and move on from them.

In chapters 7, 8, and 9, you will learn how people with ADHD understand time, energy, and motivation and how to work within that understanding. You will learn how to use the Solve-It Grid to analyze your tasks and manage your calendar—and, most importantly, to begin to approach life's details in an ADHD-friendly manner.

Chapter 10 presents a way to understand how managing your emotions, thought patterns, and actions contributes to your overall level of emotional health. As the ADHD Ladder of Emotional Health helps you see what is happening in your emotional landscape, you will be able to better manage your moment-by-moment situation and make informed choices.

Chapter 11 brings up the important topic of boundaries. Personal boundaries are guidelines, rules, or limits that a person creates to identify reasonable and safe ways for other people to behave toward them. Many people with ADHD have unhealthy boundaries, which leads to difficulties in managing healthy relationships, balancing activities and rest, and coordinating appropriate emotions to match the situation. Setting boundaries can help you navigate your world more safely and efficiently.

Chapter 12 looks at three practical areas to help you improve your ADHD symptoms—managing your sleep, protecting your peak times, and learning to rehearse tasks. Focusing on these areas will provide you with a solid foundation for creating other ADHD-friendly strategies for your life.

Chapter 13 discusses how to raise emotionally healthy children who have ADHD. You can teach your child the power of self-efficacy and resiliency. Children with ADHD can grow up to be confident adults if given the necessary nurturing and skills.

As the book concludes, you will have learned patience and kindness for yourself as well as for the person you now recognize as having this disorder. Most of all, you will have confidence that although living well with ADHD has its challenges, it is possible to live productively and contentedly.



And Then *Ping!* Goes My Brain

“My brain keeps pinging!” Kristine said, explaining the chaos that ruled her days. “*Ping!* Oh, I gotta remember that. *Ping!* I need to do that now before I forget. *Ping!* Do this. *Ping! Ping! Ping!* All day. Like a berserk iPhone ringing in my head.” She let out a long, heavy sigh that turned to tears. “I can’t handle it all. I just can’t.” I handed her the box of tissues on the table as she continued, “Everything’s a mess: my car, my apartment. I keep making stupid little mistakes. I’m tired and overwhelmed all the time. I keep telling myself, ‘Kristine, you can do better. Get it together!’ But it seems like I just can’t. My fiancé asks how he can help me—I don’t even know what help to ask for. I have so many people willing to help. But what do I tell them to do?”

As she talked, I could hear the frustration spilling out in her words and tone of voice that are typical in adults who share her disorder. Her complaints were far from unusual. Many of my clients, adults of any age or gender, tell variations of the same story. They are exhausted from having so many thoughts that seem to collide

at the same time. They are frustrated and angry with themselves for struggling to complete tasks, even ones that seem simple. Yet many explain that they have a strange ability to hyperfocus for hours on some tasks they find interesting. And, like Kristine, they often tell me that they have a tendency to overlook details, leading to errors or incomplete work.

Kristine has a neurological disorder that affects nearly 5 percent of the United States adult population. It's called attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. Adults with ADHD, previously known as ADD, often struggle to regulate attention and impulses due to differences in the way their brains have developed and function. Although ADHD is still often thought of as the naughty-boy disease that will eventually go away with maturity, science now shows that one does not outgrow ADHD. Some symptoms can lessen or disappear as a person gets older, but that is not the same as outgrowing them.

Not only does adult ADHD exist, but it also has an immense impact on the quality of one's life experiences. Most people with ADHD will continue to have symptoms throughout adolescence and adulthood. These symptoms often shift as a person becomes more sophisticated in their approach to life, but the basic ADHD patterns are still present. Some people don't become better at managing their symptoms; they become better at hiding them—until they can't.

I was able to reassure Kristine that she was exhibiting the most common ADHD symptoms among adults: problems with working memory, trouble directing focus, struggles with organization and time management, and emotional hypersensitivity. Like many adults with ADHD, Kristine had been able to compensate for her symptoms when she was younger, but as a young professional amid significant transitions in her life and increasing responsibilities, she felt the strain on her ability to cope. She had just finished graduate school, moved back to her hometown, and started a new job, and she was getting married in a month.

Her difficulty dealing with everyday life is not unusual. The more someone with ADHD tries to manage the complexities of life—pursuing a career, raising a family, running a household—the greater the demand on their abilities to organize, focus, and remain calm. Though these things can be challenging for anyone, for someone with ADHD, it can feel downright impossible.

“People don’t have any idea how hard I have to work to do normal stuff,” Kristine said, tearing up again. “It’s just so hard.”

As I listened, I heard the all-too-familiar refrain: *It’s hard to be me*. This refrain is not an exaggeration or symptoms of a pity party. When a person has ADHD, it not only *feels* very difficult to manage even the average day-to-day challenges of life; it actually *is* more difficult.

“I feel like that too,” I assured her. “Many of us with ADHD do.”

I am open with my clients about my own struggles. I want them to know I more than empathize with them and the challenges they face with ADHD; I live it as well.

“Here’s what it feels like for me,” I told her. “It’s like I’m at a starting line of a race. The whistle blows, the pistol fires. As I move, I stumble and fall. Confused, I look down to see why and find that I’m missing a part of my leg! It’s clear I won’t be able to run like the others, but no one seems to notice my missing appendage. Instead, they expect me to participate in the race like everyone else! They only fault me for the falls I take and my lack of speed and agility.”

Kristine’s expression changed from sad to intrigued. She was athletic and loved playing sports, so the metaphor made sense to her. “I guess for me it feels like I’m trying to run an obstacle course,” she said. “I have stairs to run, tires to dance through, and ropes to climb—and no one gets that half of my leg is missing!” She continued with the metaphor that was now hers. “I tell myself, ‘Run faster, Kristine.’ But I keep falling. People ask me why I don’t run the course like everyone else, demanding I compete with people who have two legs. I know I can’t keep up. But what I’m really

wondering is, what if I just can't compete in an obstacle course at all?" She paused at the significance of her own question, landing on the distinct disadvantage those of us with ADHD often feel compared to our non-ADHD peers. Our symptoms whittle away at our efficiency in life and erode our beliefs in our own ability to succeed.

I told her that it seemed clear to me that she was working hard at all the things she was doing and then said, "But your challenges aren't about strength or willpower, are they?"

Kristine, like so many of my clients, was frustrated with herself and blamed her failures on a lack of effort or weak character, when the reality was that so many of her struggles were because of a brain that worked very differently than the neurotypical, or non-ADHD, brain.

ADHD's wide variety of frustrating symptoms can hinder everything from relationships to careers. It is invisible and yet unmissable. Once you know what to look for, spotting an ADHD pattern in someone you know becomes clear and obvious. Roberta, a spouse of someone with ADHD, returned from her husband's family reunion and said, "I can see the ADHD patterns of thinking throughout his whole family—but they can't!" She and her husband have been learning how ADHD affects their marriage, and that knowledge has been beneficial in helping them thrive. "Seeing those patterns has helped me develop patience not just for my husband but for that side of the family."

Trouble Directing and Sustaining Attention

There is a misconception that those with ADHD lack the ability to pay attention or stay focused. The reality is that ADHD causes us to pay too *much* attention to everything most of the time—especially when it comes from our environment. We may become easily distracted by irrelevant information that our five senses are detecting: people whispering, crooked artwork on the

wall, perfume that is too strong, the itchy tag of our T-shirt, lights that are too bright. Because we don't have the filters to sift out unnecessary information, these distractions, which are nearly invisible to the neurotypical person, compete for our attention. Because of our brains that go *ping!* our attention is often inefficiently redirected.

Bouncing from one activity to another isn't uncommon in individuals with ADHD. Kristine explained how she would flit from one thought or activity to another, and then another and another. Quickly moving between activities leads to a tendency to overlook details, causing errors or incomplete work.

ADHD can help someone focus, however, on tasks they find stimulating or engaging because a specific part of their brain is emotionally invested in the activity. I have a student client, for example, who spends hours reading about World War II. He has dug into original texts examining the thinking of that time. His parents shake their heads because their eighth grader who can process this part of history so deeply didn't pass social studies. World War II is fascinating to this young man, but his routine middle school curriculum isn't.

Because of how the ADHD brain operates, we have a hard time paying attention if something isn't inherently interesting or emotionally engaging. Functions that we find monotonous or mundane create more difficulties for us. That is why we will so often get distracted by lower-priority tasks—they are more interesting or more easily accomplished than our higher-priority tasks.

There is also the “Wait, what?” phenomenon that happens when those of us with ADHD forget to listen. We think we are listening, and then our minds begin to drift. We zone out without realizing it, which leads to difficulty in remembering conversations or following a complex set of directions. This occurs not because we don't care about what is being said but because we have difficulty sustaining our attention for very long.

Hyperfocus

Conversely, sometimes it will look like those of us with ADHD can actually sustain focus, but it's not a normal type of focus. When we deeply and intensely concentrate on something that we find very interesting, we will unconsciously tune out any irrelevant thoughts and senses. This is a single-minded trancelike state called hyperfocus. It's our way of tuning out the chaos inside and outside of our heads. Hyperfocus happens when we completely immerse ourselves in an intriguing task, like working out complicated math problems or editing photos and film. Some of us become so engrossed in a project that it looks like we are completely unaware of anything else happening around us.

A person who is hyperfocused often wears an intense stare, has no perception of time passing, and has no recognition of physical needs (thirst, hunger, etc.). Parents and spouses are often confused by the fact that their loved one can focus on something like a video game, an intricate puzzle, a Lego set, or model building for hours but won't put the same effort into other tasks. This hyperfocus is often interpreted as selfishness, laziness, or defiance.

Hyperactivity or Restlessness

Some people fit the stereotypical ADHD personality, which means they are living out their hyperactivity externally. They talk excessively, attempt to do many things at once, and have trouble sitting still, constantly fidgeting. They are highly energetic and perpetually on the go as if driven by a motor.

However, ADHD expert William Dodson explains that “the vast majority of adults with ADHD are not overtly hyperactive, though they are hyperactive internally.”¹ For many of them, their hyperactivity feels more like an inner restlessness or agitation. They will likely worry about what may happen in the future. Like

their outwardly hyperactive counterparts, they also have racing thoughts and a craving for excitement, but it occurs inwardly.

Impulsivity

Impulsivity is a spin-off of hyperactivity and restlessness combined. That internal churning can cause people with ADHD to have difficulty managing their behaviors, comments, and responses. They might act before thinking or react without considering potential consequences. When they have impulse problems, staying patient is challenging. For better or for worse, they often dive headlong into situations and find themselves in potentially precarious circumstances.

There's the dad who wants to get that play structure erected for his kids, and he rushes through the building process without planning or reading directions and finds he has to go back and rebuild much of it. There's the man who has trouble behaving in socially appropriate ways and frequently interrupts his friends, talking over them in his rush not to forget what he was going to say. There's the employee who has difficulty sitting still in a company meeting, or the person who blurts out thoughts that are rude or inappropriate. Even the repetitive questions from a spouse that can be perceived as nagging can be traced back to ADHD impulsivity. Poor self-control is an issue for some and can lead to acting recklessly or spontaneously without regard for consequences or can contribute to addictive tendencies.

Difficulty Managing Emotions

Although we may not like to talk about it or admit it, many of us with ADHD have a hard time managing our feelings. And because we don't talk about it, people don't understand this emotional side of ADHD. They are unaware that we are very sensitive, experiencing emotions with great intensity.

This emotional hypersensitivity takes on a variety of forms. First and most importantly, what would be a small emotional event to most people would feel like a big event to those of us with ADHD. When our ADHD brains confuse what is a big deal and what is a small deal, we can respond to minor irritations with the same intense emotional energy as we would in dangerous situations. Fueled by our exaggerated emotions, we overreact to criticism with fear of rejection, worries that we are inadequate, low self-esteem, and insecurity. Something as simple as a forgotten library book can bring deep shame and embarrassment. A store clerk's flippant comment about our messy purse is crushing and puts us into hiding for the rest of the day. We may never feel truly confident at work—living in constant fear that we will be fired for any small failure.

We can be more easily flustered, stressed, or irritable. Some of us are short-tempered, exploding in the face of frustrations. Out of frustration over a broken garbage disposal, we snap at our spouse. Or we lash out at a friend because they accidentally spilled water on our paperwork.

When the intensity of our feelings doesn't match the situation, we might realize it and feel embarrassed. Other times we may not even catch that we have overreacted because we see our emotional intensity as normal. Many family members of those with ADHD tell me that they feel like they are walking on eggshells around their spouse or children, working hard not to set them off.

Should I Seek a Diagnosis?

Life can be a balancing act for any adult. But when you have ADHD and don't know it, it's easy to conclude that there's something wrong with you—especially if you don't have a framework for understanding what you are experiencing. Undiagnosed and untreated ADHD can have wide-reaching effects and cause problems in virtually every area of your life, including home, career, and

relationships. These effects can lead to embarrassment, frustration, hopelessness, disappointment, and loss of confidence.

If you recognized yourself in the above descriptions and scenarios, chances are you may have adult ADHD and have suffered over the years in shame and frustration due to this unidentified issue. You may feel like you've been struggling to keep your head above water, overwhelmed by constant stress. Each day your symptoms of trouble directing attention, impulsivity, or difficulty managing your emotions frustrate you to no end. You may even feel like others have labeled you lazy, irresponsible, or stupid because of your forgetfulness or difficulty completing specific tasks, and you may have begun to think of yourself in these negative terms as well. You may feel like you'll never be able to get your life under control or fulfill your potential. For you, a diagnosis of adult ADHD can be an enormous source of relief and hope.

A diagnosis can also often help explain past struggles. After being diagnosed at age forty-five, John exclaimed, "Finally, it all makes sense! I always felt like I was losing my mind. Now I see why some things are just hard for me." Tracking his ADHD patterns helped him strategize and approach things differently. "I now know that I need to take ADHD into account for everything I do." It doesn't change that he has to work harder to achieve the same level of success as his non-ADHD peers, but it helps him understand his ADHD and decide what to do about it.

What about Medication?

Many people with ADHD cannot effectively regulate certain brain chemicals—dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin. Medication for ADHD works on brain chemistry to help govern its dynamics. Although medication may not be the solution for everyone, we have pretty good evidence that it works well for a majority of people. Taking medication can help individuals modulate emotions, initiate tasks more quickly, and appear less distracted.

For some people, medication helps their symptoms immensely. Others might improve substantially, and for a few others, medication helps a little but not that much.

However, it is not advisable to rely solely on medication. There's a saying in the ADHD coaching world: "Pills don't teach skills." This truth reminds those of us with ADHD that we still need to develop specific skills and strategies for managing the details of a modern, complex world. Learning how ADHD affects our lives daily will help us develop healthier behavior patterns.

Yes, Having ADHD Is Difficult, But . . .

For those of you who are neurotypicals, my hope is that after reading this book, when you come across a person who appears disorganized or manic or just can't seem to get it together, you will reach for your compassionate understanding and become a part of the solution rather than adding to that person's guilt and shame, encouraging them as they run their difficult race.

For those of you who have ADHD, I hope that by the end of this book you will rejoice in the good news that no matter how overwhelming they feel, the challenges of ADHD can be addressed. No matter your age (my oldest client is sixty-five), it's never too late to begin tackling the symptoms. With knowledge about ADHD, support of loved ones, effective strategies, and possibly medication, you can learn to manage your "pinging" brain and start feeling good about your life again.