

uPLifted Series

An Informational Digest of EmpowerM3 by Coach Cindy

ADHD- Connection Disconnect

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Individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) want to be accepted and fit in like everyone else. But, sometimes, symptoms of ADHD can stand out in troublesome behavior or make fostering relationships harder.

Connection is a vital need for wellness. Maslow states connection is one of the basic needs after food, water, and shelter. Connection is what creates a wholesome, happy feeling. Dr. Edward Hallowell refers to connection as the vitamin C we all need most (Hallowell, 2018). With connection, life feels more significant and beyond self.

For ADHDers, forming relationships can be tricky. A 2021 study found adults with more ADHD symptoms are at an increased risk of feeling lonely (Stickley et al., 2017). Forming friendships is often difficult when self-regulation is a struggle. Neurotypical brains may lack the knowledge to understand the nuances of the ADHD brain style leading to judgment and fractured relationships. ADHDers' executive functioning skills are often lagging up to three years on the developmental scale, making some social skills awkward. Senses can be heightened with little regulation. The brain is swirling and racing, stealing presence and causing irritation and frustration. Judgment spews.

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friendship

Making friends is a skill that requires self-awareness, attention, regulation, and timing—all areas affected by ADHD. ADHD children are learning how to interact often through trial and error. What gets attention and what doesn't? An ADHD child may knowingly or unknowingly seek attention in class to get laughs, a great source of dopamine, but miss the forethought of the consequences that may ensue.

For adult ADHDers, friendships can sometimes be hard to foster, with all the demands required to balance daily living. Even quality friendships can fall by the wayside, out of sight, out of mind. It's not that friendship isn't appreciated; it's just not on the radar screen. The ADHD brain lacks the bandwidth to nurture the relationship trying to keep up with everything else. The connection is missing. Adult ADHDers sometimes lose meaningful friendships without knowing why. The non-ADHD friend might get tired of doing all the "work" in the friendship and stop putting forth effort.

They say relationships are a two-way street. I wonder if it isn't more about being on the same road going in the same direction.



Curious Question #1: What do you want from feeling connected to someone or something?



”

ADHD is like having a Ferrari engine for a brain with bicycle brakes. Strengthen the brakes and you have a champion.

-Dr. Edward Hallowell

(The Hallowell ADHD Centers, 2019)

Getting down to the next layer is vital. Why?

It is essential to define what you desire from a connection. Common responses to this question have been;

- To feel someone gets me.
- To finally be myself.
- To be accepted.
- To not feel alone.
- I'd don't need connection.

The Connection Challenge

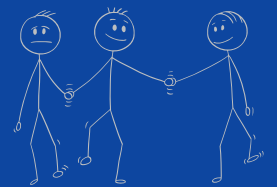
Connections can be challenging to make. The ADHD brain is wired for interest. It's not that ADHDers don't want friends. In fact, they are craving inclusion. But, sharing interests with others isn't always easy due to the intensity or quick fizzle. Sometimes interests are not the common age-predicted interests. They may be engrossed in chess play when their friends are trying to defeat the hottest video game. Other teens buy stocks in the stock market rather than the newest shoe. My adult clients are often so devoted to their craft at work that they leave little time for outside life. Some add even more work by starting a side business. The ADHD brain is engrossed at 110%, where interests are ignited. For those on the outside, it may feel overbearing and too intense. Then add the case of interests shifting, and suddenly, commonalities wane. Friendships fizzle out.

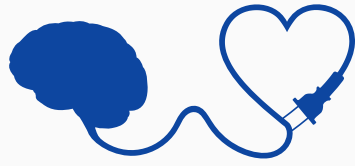
In May, the United States Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, published a report stating loneliness as the epidemic of 2023, raising attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. Dr. Murthy said loneliness is as bad for our health as smoking fifteen cigarettes daily (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). Being lonely is damaging.



According to a 2021 study, 49% of Americans have fewer than three close friends, and 12% report having no close friends.

(Cox, 2022).

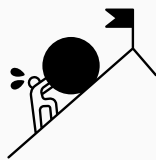




If the brain is wired for connection, what makes it hard for ADHDers?

Common Connection Struggles for ADHDers

- Over-sharing
- Interrupting the conversation
- Trying to relate too much to fit in, "Me, too!"
- Forgetting to follow-up
- Lack of empathy- Making it about them
- Not staying connected
- Forgetting the details
- Lacking forgiveness
- Lacking sensitivity- making fun of others
- Lack of self-awareness
- Impulsive
- Emotional dysregulation
- Coming off rude
- Appearing too sensitive
- Waiting for the invite
- Hating small talk, bored by others



Connections left at the surface level are often due to trust. Choosing to trust someone is risky. And much more so for brains wired differently. Expert William Dotson estimates an ADHDer will hear 20,000 more negative comments by age ten than their neurotypical counterparts (Frye, 2017). The vulnerability that comes with deep friendship requires trust. Depending on life experiences, defenses can increase, making fostering connections harder.

“We’re afraid of imposing on someone by sharing our struggle and that they won’t have the space to support us, but when we hide our challenges, our loneliness peaks even more.”

-Vassia Sarantopoulou

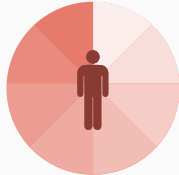


Okay, Now What?

Become your own best friend!

What is your Personality Type?

What personality type do you lean toward? Your personality type is what drives your connection needs. You are either introverted, extroverted or an ambivert. Knowing your connection type is essential to what will create wholeness in your life or your child's. This distinction can benefit parents trying to help their children develop connections. Your personality type may not match your partners' or your child's. Appreciating one's personality type is essential in fostering relationships that work for each person.



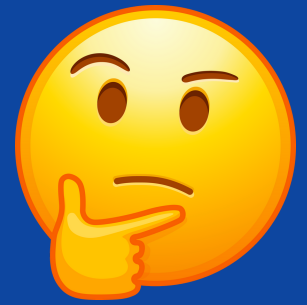
Personality Types Defined

Introvert- a person predominantly focused on internal thoughts and feelings rather than external things or social interaction, often characterized as quiet or withdrawn.

Extrovert- a person predominantly focused on external things or social interaction rather than internal thoughts and feelings, often characterized as being outgoing and socially confident.

Ambivert- a person displaying introversion and extroversion based on mood, situation, and goals.

Understanding your personality type and the type of need you desire from your connections is essential. Some friendships are surface-level, like acquaintances, while others deepen as more is shared. You may be more gregarious desiring group interactions. You may feel better having quiet, decompression time alone or thrive sharing time with others and crave quiet time alone.



"There's a word for 'people who are in their heads too much': thinkers."

-Susan Cain



What is your Attachment Style?

Mel Robbins dives deep into Attachment Styles on her podcast with Dr. Marisa Franco, How to Improve Any Relationship: The 4 Attachment Styles You Need to Know & Tools to Become More Secure. Understanding your attachment style and identifying that of others aids in the ability to initiate, foster and maintain healthy relationships. The four attachment styles highlighted by Dr. Franco are Secure, Anxious, Avoidant, and Disorganized. Your attachment style is on a spectrum and may differ from relationship to relationship (Therapist Reveals Why You Struggle with Relationships & How to Let More Love into Your Life | the Mel Robbins Podcast, 2023).

Attachment styles can be important, especially with ADHD wiring. It has been debated whether insecure attachment leads to increased ADHD symptoms or if ADHD symptoms lead to insecure attachment. Developing healthy and meaningful secure relationships strengthens a person's overall happiness.

Discover your attachment style by taking Psychology Today's Attachment Style Self-Assessment (Relationship Attachment Style Test, 2023).

Self-
awareness
is the key
to self-
mastery.

-GRETCHEN RUBIN



**Learn Your
Attachment Style**

START



Build Your Self-Awareness

The most important step is to be aware of yourself, especially your ADHD symptoms which can make forming and maintaining connections difficult. We don't know what we don't know until we know. Becoming a curious detective of yourself and being one without judgment is essential. Notice and be curious. This is where ADHD Life Coaching can be an invaluable partnership. Raising your self-awareness quotient can sometimes require someone to help you see what you cannot see alone. It's like seeing the rock but not taking the next step to be curious enough to discover what is under it. Building self-awareness is looking around and becoming keenly aware of yourself.

- What are your top thinking patterns?
- What do you notice in your body?
- How do you participate with others?

Ask yourself not why but **what**. Reframing questions using what instead of why helps you gain deeper meaning rather than focusing solely on the cause. Using what questions accesses greater reflective thinking versus getting stuck in the accusation?

Word Play

“Why did you do that?” -> Ask instead, “What were you expecting to happen with those actions?”

“Why don't you do it this way?” -> Ask instead, “How do you see yourself moving forward?”



“Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.”

— Rumi

Hints to Fostering Meaningful Connections



Be Yourself

In a world of fitting in, it is vital that you be you. Living authentically is crucial to feeling contentment and joy. The healthiest relationships are built on authenticity. For some with ADHD, being comfortable in their authenticity can be difficult. Take a moment to reflect; what do I like about myself that I want others to know or see more of?

Start there and step into your light. You may find what you have been hiding is what others desire most. Perhaps you know a little about everything or a lot about random stuff, or you are witty and fun-spirited. You may have shortcomings, and likely they have been routinely pointed out, but others do, too.



Create Fun Time

Nowadays, schedules are often jam-packed with to-dos. Fostering friendship requires assigning importance to it. Designate time in your calendar to have fun with your friends or yourself if that suits your personality best.



Join a Group or Create a Group of Your Interest

Likely there are others as interested in the same thing as you. Find like-minded people and share your interest. ADHD minds crave interest. Common interests help form connections. Like-minded groups are often where fast friends are born.



Digest Criticism

If someone is critical of you, instead of taking it personally as if you are "bad," digest what is shared. Break the information into opportunities to be aware and grow. Criticism is information, and that information may not be factual. Use reasoning rather than emotion to digest a growth opportunity.



Spark Conversation

Set the tone- start any in-person interaction by noticing something you like about an individual. Genuine compliments go a long way. If you are meeting over Zoom or by phone, use your senses to pick up on something in the environment. What do you notice? Do they sound peppy or look ready for the day? A simple smile can go a long way in starting on a positive note. Be curious- instead of sharing about yourself, ask curious questions about the person you are with that you genuinely want to hear the answer of. Steer clear of the traditional "How are you?" and instead ask one of these curious questions to spark a conversation.



- What's your day been like so far?
- What have you been hard at work on?
- What do you have going on this weekend/ after school/at work/ tonight?
- What do you enjoy most about event/class/person/sport?
- If you could enter any video game world, what would it be?

Find more conversation starters with Hilary Lebow on PyschCentral, where she shares [45+ Conversation Starters To Bond With Friends and Family](#). (Lebow, 2015).



Do Not Keep Score

Friendship is best fostered when it is not about what one person does over the other. Being open to each other's differences, strengths, and needs allows space to be your authentic self. One may be better at scheduling and the other at creating the fun location.

Keeping score of who did it feeds judgment and harms connection.



Build Trust

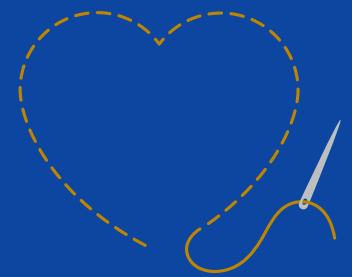
A healthy relationship is built around trust. Trust is formed over time and through experience. Trust builds through honesty, dependability, respect, forgiveness, active listening, interest outside yourself, and presence. Building trust may come easy for some; for others, it takes a long time to beat down the wall. It is essential to foster open

communication so resolutions can be made when something upsetting occurs. Even healthy relationships experience their challenges. Undoubtedly, over time, someone will have their feelings hurt or make a mistake. Addressing the problem as quickly as possible and with the person involved is crucial. Learning conflict resolution skills can help diffuse tensions so the relationship can weather storms.

In a published article in ADDitude Magazine, Dr. Sharon Saline offers, [The Conflict Resolution Guide: Tools and Scripts For Settling Disagreements](#). Saline's resolution strategies help everyone take ownership of their feelings, not what the other person did to them. For example, switching from "I think" to "I feel _____ when you _____" places ownership of your behavior in what happened. Using the words "I heard" instead of "You said" communicates how a person's message lands (Saline, 2023). Sometimes words are said and received with entirely different meanings or interpretations than the sender originally intended. A quick reflection can diffuse tensions before things get overheated simply by allowing the sender to clarify. Sweeping problems under the carpet only builds a tripping hazard in the future and breaks down trust. Communication is key.



Connection is a vital human need to live a wholesome and happy life. Being connected to others requires a level of vulnerability. It's too easy for anxiety to creep in, especially at this time of year. Kids are preparing to go back to school. Adults are shifting from a more relaxed summer work environment to amping up for the last quarter of the year. At some level, connection is the Vitamin C you need in your life, whether previous experiences have proven it or not. Becoming a detective and being your best friend allows you to tune into your personality type and attachment style and foster ways to build meaningful connections despite your ADHD symptoms. Knowing and noticing your own behavior is the first step to being able to be someone else's friend. Don't let your ADHD symptoms become your connection disconnect. Having an ADHD brain style carries other attributes with it, too. You may be the fun-loving, witty, zesty one in the bunch. Smile. It's the first, best way to spark a connection.



**Invisible
threads are
the
strongest
ties.**

— FRIEDRICH
NIETZSCHE



Hello

Thank you for joining me. My name is Cynthia North, but people know me as Cindy. I am ACC Certified Life Coach with the ICF as a Certified ADHD Life Coach (CALC) and Certified PQ Coach™ (CPQC) with Positive Intelligence® devoted to partnering with clients to create self-success within ADHD and living life. I work with all ages having a special interest in how the brain affects the outcome. I help ADHDers and stuck people move from crippled in doubt to capable with clarity. I have expanded to offer personalized Mental Fitness Coaching through Shirzad Chamine's Positive Intelligence® Program. New possibilities bloom with deeper self-awareness and through the strength in your mental fitness. I have an innate desire to empower others no matter what difficulties they face with or without ADHD. I believe everyone is worthy of stepping forward out of stuck.

ADHD has touched me personally and professionally.

I know first-hand how ADHD symptoms and behavior can wreak havoc on family dynamics, school, and work success. I chose to become a Certified ADHD Life Coach as well as a member of Positive Intelligence® as a PQ Coach™ because I want others to discover their greatness within ADHD strengths while working with their executive functioning challenges through a positive mindset. I am where I am today because of my two dynamic ADHD children. They both teach me and open my mind to more each day. Their needs were beyond a hug, discipline, structure, or praise. So, I sought professional help, ultimately finding a trained ADHD Life Coach. And here I am serving people who want different and deserve ease and flow.

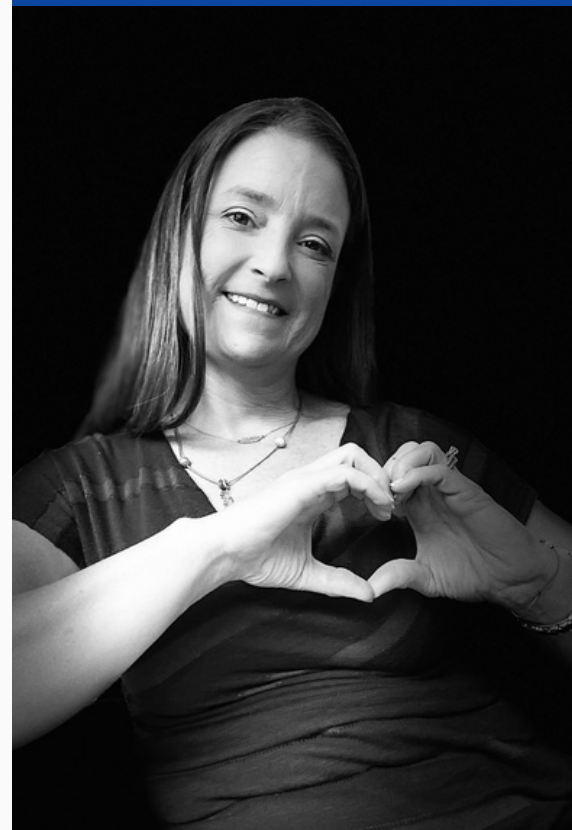
Life experiences have made way for opportunity. I am on a journey to slay stigmas surrounding brain differences. Finding a Life Coach to empower my child led me to become a Certified ADHD Life Coach myself to serve others past their stuck ways and ADHD stigmas. Choosing to strengthen your inner self is where Empower M3 starts. The work is an inside job where your "M3" begins. Connecting your heart and brain with a Coach creates empowerment opportunities. EmpowerM3 - is where the 3 connect to take flight.



There is a more extraordinary tomorrow when your discovery starts today.

ADHD is not
something you
outgrow. ADHD
is something
you grow with.

— CINDY NORTH,
LIFE COACH AND AUTHOR



Resources

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Notes & Takeaways



Disclaimer:

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