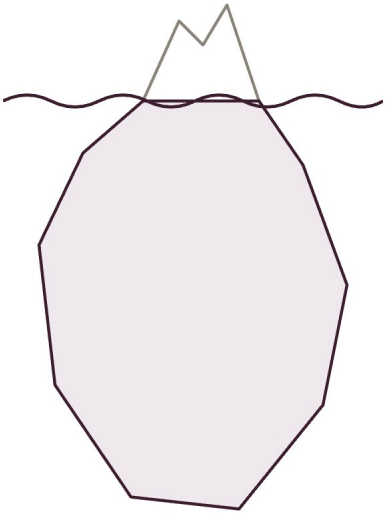
Hidden in Plain Sight

How ADHD and autism can show up in women and girls

Much of the early research on ADHD and autism was done with boys. Girls and women who meet the same criteria are more likely to be missed, misread or recognised years later.

ABOVE AND BELOW THE SURFACE



WHAT PEOPLE EXPECT TO SEE

bouncing off the walls · disrupting the class · obvious social struggles

the surface

WHAT OFTEN GOES UNSEEN

ADHD

- daydreaming
- losing track
- talking a lot
- overwhelm and big emotions
- perfectionism

Quinn & Madhoo, 2014

Autism

- typical-looking interests
- copying others
- scripting conversations
- fine at school
- shutting down at home

Hull, Petrides & Mandy, 2020

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

3 : 1

NOT 4 : 1

Screening whole populations finds about three autistic boys per girl, not four. Girls who meet criteria more often go undiagnosed.

Loomes et al., 2017

5 yrs

LATER

Symptoms began at the same age for women and men, but women were diagnosed about five years later.

Amoretti et al., 2025

More

CARRIED LONGER

At diagnosis, the women had more depression, anxiety and day-to-day impairment than the men.

Amoretti et al., 2025

WHY IT GETS MISSED



Referral bias

Referrals often start with disruptive behaviour. Quiet struggles draw less attention (Quinn & Madhoo, 2014).



Camouflaging

Masking hides traits from teachers and clinicians. See the Double Masking handout.



Anxiety first

Many women first seek help for anxiety or depression (Amoretti et al., 2025).

SITTING WITH IT

What did your neurodivergence look like when you were younger?

What have you worked extra hard to make look easy?

What do you wish someone had noticed sooner?

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

This research mostly studies cisgender women and girls. Trans, nonbinary and intersex people are underrepresented, and their experiences matter just as much.

SOURCES

Hull, L., Petrides, K. V. & Mandy, W. (2020). The female autism phenotype and camouflaging: a narrative review. *Review Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. · Loomes, R., Hull, L. & Mandy, W. (2017). What is the male-to-female ratio in autism spectrum disorder? *J. Am. Acad. Child Adolesc. Psychiatry*. · Amoretti, S. et al. (2025). Age of onset and diagnosis in 900 adults with ADHD. *European Psychiatry*. · Quinn, P. O. & Madhoo, M. (2014). A review of ADHD in women and girls. *Primary Care Companion for CNS Disorders*.

This handout summarises research. It does not speak for any community.