

behind the
smiles

AuDHD

Exploring what it means to
be both Autistic and ADHD

- THE BASICS -



THE 'GOLDEN' GLOSSARY

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (or Condition, ASD) is a **lifelong** condition that affects how an individual **perceives and interacts with the world**. As a **spectrum** condition, it **impacts each person differently**, with **unique strengths** and **varying support needs**. Many people view autism as a **key part of their identity**. It's important to note that autism is not an illness and doesn't require a 'cure'.

ADHD

A condition characterised by specific behavioural patterns. Individuals with ADHD often exhibit persistent inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with daily activities. What is often overlooked in defining ADHD is that it also involves a developmental impairment of executive functions, which are the self-management systems of the brain. ADHD can be categorised into three types: Hyperactive, Inattentive and Combined.

AuDHD

AuDHD refers to the co-existence of autism and ADHD, a combination that is far more common than many realise. Although estimates suggest up to half of autistic people also have ADHD, the two conditions could not officially be diagnosed together until 2013. AuDHD creates a unique blend of strengths and challenges, where traits from both conditions may mix, contradict each other or present in new ways. Many people with AuDHD feel they don't fully align with the stereotypical presentation of autism or ADHD alone, which can make self-understanding and recognition difficult.

AuDHD TUG OF WAR

Many people with AuDHD describe a daily "tug of war" happening inside their minds. ADHD often drives a need for novelty, stimulation and spontaneity, while autism may crave predictability, familiarity and calm. These opposing forces can create internal conflict: wanting change but fearing it, seeking activity but burning out, or craving order while struggling to maintain it. This push-pull can feel exhausting and confusing, even to the individual themselves.

Why AuDHD gets missed, Diagnosis Challenges



AuDHD is often missed because the traits of one condition may mask the traits of the other. For example, autistic structure can compensate for ADHD disorganisation, or ADHD energy can hide the social exhaustion common in autism. This can lead professionals to overlook or misinterpret symptoms, especially as the presentations may not fit typical diagnostic expectations. Historically, autism and ADHD could not even be diagnosed together, which means many older individuals were overlooked entirely.

AuDHD in Females

This is particularly common in females, who are more likely to mask and camouflage their difficulties. Their interests may appear socially typical but are often intense; their anxiety may be hidden behind competence; and emotional struggles may be dismissed as sensitivity. Many women and girls are first misdiagnosed with anxiety, depression, or personality difficulties before AuDHD is recognised.





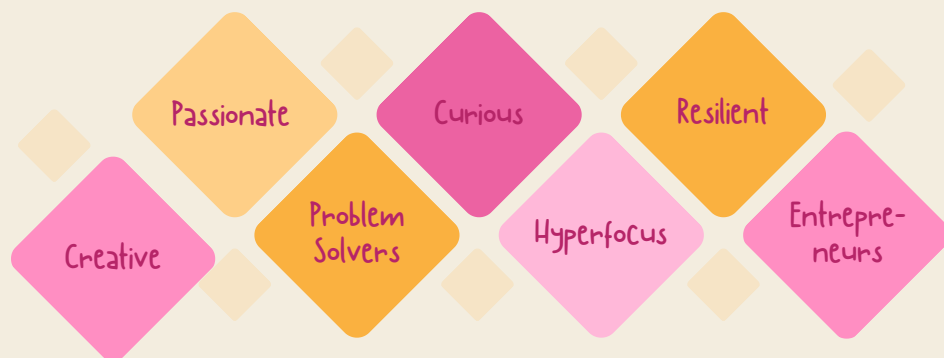
How it can present



AuDHD can present in many different ways, often blending contradictory needs. A person may frequently change routines yet still rely heavily on structure. They may make impulsive decisions and then feel anxious about the change. Environments can become messy and overwhelming, while certain areas of life remain meticulously organised. Interests may shift rapidly in theme or intensity, and many experience burnout from being constantly busy yet struggle to slow down enough to recharge. It is common to have an excellent long-term memory combined with a weaker working memory, which can make day-to-day tasks more challenging.

STRENGTHS

Living with AuDHD can be vivid, intense and sometimes chaotic, with needs that shift from day to day. Life may feel unpredictable and emotionally charged, nonetheless AuDHD individuals bring enormous strengths.



Challenges

Alongside these strengths, common challenges may include executive functioning difficulties, emotional regulation struggles, sensory overload, and cycles of burnout. Food-related difficulties can also appear, especially when autistic preferences combine with ADHD dopamine-driven cravings. Despite these challenges, life with AuDHD can be deeply rewarding, and with the right support, individuals can thrive.

SUPPORTING AuDHD INDIVIDUALS

01. Listen and Learn

Take the time to understand an individual's unique mix of autistic and ADHD needs, preferences, and experiences. Actively listen without judgement or assumptions and educate yourself on neurodiversity to become a more supportive ally.

02. Support Individual Needs

Understand an individual's challenges and offer support that balances both autistic and ADHD needs. Their needs can shift day to day, so a flexible approach is essential. Tools that support executive functions (such as planners, reminders, or breaking tasks into smaller steps) can help reduce overwhelm. Clear communication, predictable routines, and thoughtful adjustments to the environment also make daily life easier and more manageable.

03. Harness Strengths

Recognise an individual's strengths and create space for them to use these naturally. Many AuDHD individuals thrive when tasks align with their creativity, focus, interests, and problem-solving style. Providing flexibility and choice helps their strengths flourish.

03. Advocate for Acceptance

Promote acceptance and understanding, not just awareness. Encourage others to see the strengths and perspectives neurodivergent individuals bring to the community, and work towards creating an inclusive, supportive culture.



LEARN MORE

To learn more about AuDHD and neurodiversity, visit **Behind the Smiles** - a community built to educate, support, and empower, regardless of neurotype.

We provide **resources**, **share experiences**, and offer **guidance** to foster acceptance of all ways of thinking. By raising awareness and breaking down barriers, we create a **safe, non-judgmental space** for growth.

Behind the Smiles **empowers** individuals to build **confidence**, **embrace** their neurodivergent identities, and **connect** with a supportive, inclusive community.

Explore our content and join us in supporting all minds at **BehindTheSmiles.co.uk**.

