



ADHD Women Unite – Session Summary

Date: 26 March 2026

Attendees: 12 participants (UK + international incl. US)

Source: Transcript

Overview

This session focused on impulsive indulgences and coping behaviours in ADHD, including:

- Smoking
- Alcohol use
- Eating behaviours
- Spending
- Doom scrolling
- Repetitive/soothing behaviours

The discussion blended research-informed framing with lived experience sharing, creating a psychologically safe and validating space.

Key Discussion Themes

1. ADHD, Dopamine & “Fast Relief” Behaviours

You introduced the concept of:

- ADHD brains seeking fast stimulation / relief
- Reduced tolerance for delayed reward
- Use of behaviours as self-regulation tools

Participants strongly resonated with:

- “It stops the noise” (alcohol)
- “Instant hit then regret” (food/spending)
- “Scrolling for the rush” (phones)

This framing was accessible and non-clinical, which worked well.

2. Addiction Beyond Substances

A key insight from the group:

Non-substance behaviours (food, shopping, scrolling) are equally addictive but less recognised

Examples shared:

- Compulsive spending (dopamine hit)
- Emotional eating (comfort + reward cycle)
- Sugar replacing alcohol post-recovery
- Cleaning/organisation as a “high”

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Important emerging narrative:

Addiction in ADHD is often about regulation, not recklessness

3. Emotional Regulation & Self-Medication

Participants described using behaviours to:

- Slow thoughts
- Create calm (“pause” effect)
- Numb overwhelm
- Replace internal chaos with control
- Particularly powerful:
- Alcohol described as “everything stopping at once”
- Sleep used as shutdown coping
- Food used for both celebration and distress

4. Shame, Identity & Self-Perception

Strong thread across discussion:

- Difficulty accepting compliments
- Internalised shame about behaviour
- Fear of lack of control (especially weight/food)
- “All or nothing” thinking

Also, awareness of impact on children (mirroring behaviours)

5. Systemic Issues (Education, Work, Society)

Discussion highlighted:

- School systems not designed for ADHD reward systems
- Misdiagnosis → vulnerability to exploitation
- Workplace misunderstanding of neurodivergence

Clear takeaway: The problem is not the individual – it's the system mismatch

6. Sensory & Repetitive Regulation (Stimming / Safety)

Participants identified:

- Rewatching familiar shows (predictability = safety)
- Subtitles vs auditory processing differences
- Fidgeting / needing hand movement
- Repetitive phrases, songs, routines

Also: Strong emotional empathy (feeling others' pain physically)

7. Practical Coping Strategies

Shared Peer-led strategies included:

Accountability photos (before/after tasks)

Body doubling (suggested by you)

Using alarms / reminders

Oral substitutes (lollies vs smoking)

Safe/background shows

WhatsApp support between sessions

8. Recovery & Change Important moments

- 11 years sobriety shared
- Ongoing attempts (2-week cycles, 30-day attempts)
- Harm reduction vs abstinence discussion (implicit)