



ADHD Women Unite – Session Summary

Topic: Boundaries, Nervous System Regulation and ADHD

Guest Speaker: Liz Mulhall, ADHD Coach & Business Psychologist

Facilitator: Katherine Irvine

Format: Online peer support session via Microsoft Teams

Approximate Attendance: 11 participants

Key Themes: Nervous system regulation, boundaries, burnout, people-pleasing, rejection sensitivity, trauma, emotional regulation, self-protection

Overview

This ADHD Women Unite session explored boundaries through the lens of nervous system regulation, facilitated by ADHD coach and business psychologist Liz Mulhall.

The session introduced participants to the concept of the nervous system as a safety-monitoring system that continually assesses whether we feel safe or under threat. Discussion focused on how ADHD, trauma, burnout and chronic stress can create heightened nervous system responses, making emotional regulation and boundary setting more challenging.

Participants reflected on their experiences of hyperarousal, hypoarousal, people-pleasing, emotional overwhelm, rejection sensitivity and the difficulties many women experience when attempting to prioritise their own needs.

The session combined psychoeducation, lived experience discussion and an interactive reflective exercise designed to help participants identify and visualise healthy boundaries.

1. Understanding Nervous System Regulation

Liz introduced participants to the concept of nervous system regulation and the role it plays in everyday functioning.

Discussion explored:

- Safety versus danger responses
- The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems
- How the nervous system constantly scans for threat
- Why executive functioning becomes harder when people feel unsafe
- The impact of stress on attention, planning and emotional regulation

Participants reflected on how rarely nervous system regulation is discussed within ADHD support despite its significant impact on daily life.

2. ADHD and the Window of Tolerance

The group explored the concept of the “window of tolerance” — the state in which people feel calm, regulated and able to access their thinking skills.

Discussion highlighted:

- Hyperarousal (feeling activated, overwhelmed or anxious)
- Hypoarousal (shutdown, exhaustion and low energy)
- The experience of being both “wired and tired”
- How ADHD may contribute to a narrower window of tolerance
- The cumulative impact of daily demands

Several participants recognised patterns of cycling between overwhelm and exhaustion, often without noticing the gradual progression until they reached burnout.

3. Recognising Personal Nervous System States

Participants reflected on their own experiences of activation and regulation.

Women described:

- Feeling overwhelmed by waiting or uncertainty
- Sudden crashes following periods of high activity
- Exhaustion after social interactions
- Difficulty identifying needs before reaching burnout
- Emotional responses that appeared to come “out of nowhere”

Discussion highlighted the importance of regularly checking in with oneself and identifying personal signs of dysregulation.

4. Trauma, ADHD and Emotional Responses

The conversation explored the relationship between ADHD and trauma.

Participants discussed:

- Hypervigilance
- Emotional sensitivity
- Shame following emotional reactions
- Rage and frustration
- Chronic stress responses

Several women reflected on experiences of feeling stuck in survival mode and the impact this has had on relationships, self-esteem and everyday functioning. The group also discussed therapeutic approaches including EMDR and their experiences of trauma-informed support.

5. Boundaries as Protection Rather Than Rejection

A key theme throughout the session was reframing boundaries as a form of self-protection rather than something negative or selfish.

Liz encouraged participants to consider:

- What needs a boundary is protecting
- How boundaries support safety and wellbeing
- The role of boundaries in preventing burnout
- Protecting energy, capacity and recovery time
- The connection between boundaries and nervous system regulation

Many participants recognised that they frequently prioritise the needs of others ahead of their own.

6. People-Pleasing and Overcommitment

Participants shared experiences of:

- Automatically saying yes
- Taking responsibility for other people's needs
- Feeling unable to disappoint others
- Overcommitting despite exhaustion
- Feeling resentful after agreeing to things they did not want to do
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Several women reflected on how years of masking and social expectations had contributed to difficulties establishing healthy boundaries.

Discussion highlighted how people-pleasing often creates a cycle of overwhelm, resentment and burnout.

7. Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)

The group discussed how rejection sensitivity can influence boundary setting.

Participants reflected on:

- Fear of upsetting others
- Difficulty saying no
- Anxiety around conflict
- Internalised criticism
- Emotional reactions to perceived rejection

Discussion suggested that nervous system regulation may help reduce the intensity of RSD responses by creating greater emotional flexibility and resilience.

8. The Respectful Boundary Exercise

Participants were introduced to a reflective coaching exercise exploring the concept of a “respectful boundary.”

The exercise encouraged women to:

- Identify a relationship or situation where a boundary was needed
- Consider what a respectful boundary would look like
- Explore the feelings associated with that boundary
- Visualise safety, protection and personal needs
- Reflect on how maintaining boundaries supports wellbeing

Participants responded positively to the exercise and expressed interest in further interactive sessions using similar techniques.

Emerging Insights

- Many ADHD women spend significant periods operating outside their window of tolerance.
- Burnout, people-pleasing and emotional overwhelm are often closely connected.
- Understanding nervous system regulation can provide a useful framework for understanding ADHD experiences.
- Boundaries are often easier to maintain when individuals feel safe and regulated.
- Rejection sensitivity can make boundary setting particularly challenging.
- Trauma and ADHD frequently interact in ways that amplify emotional responses.
- Visualisation and reflective exercises can help women better understand and maintain healthy boundaries.
- Participants valued practical tools that combine self-awareness with actionable strategies.
- There is strong interest in further sessions exploring nervous system regulation, trauma and boundary setting.