

Why ADHD Was Missed In So Many Girls

Research historically centered on hyperactive boys. Girls looked completely different.

How It Looked In Boys

Bouncing off walls
Visible, disruptive hyperactivity

Disrupting class
Sent to the principal's office

Failing visibly
Poor grades, obvious struggle

Impulsive and reactive
Outwardly explosive behavior

Evaluated early
Disruptive behavior flagged quickly

The world said: "Problem child."

How It Looked In Girls

Daydreaming quietly
Internal, invisible inattention

Chatty, social, "too much"
Labeled talkative, not disordered

"Capable but scattered"
Performing well through exhausting effort

Internalizing everything
Anxiety and depression diagnosed first

Diagnosed in adulthood
Often after becoming a mother

The world said: "She's just sensitive."

We didn't fail. We were failed by a system that wasn't looking for us.

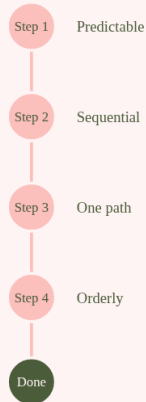
Girls with ADHD are more likely to present with inattentive symptoms rather than overt hyperactivity. When you combine that with cultural expectations to be organized and compliant, many of us learned to mask early.
We Got You, Mama — wegoyoumama.com

Chapter 11: When Your Brain Makes Sense for the First Time

We Don't Think In Straight Lines.

We think in constellations. And that is not a deficit — it is a different kind of brilliance.

Linear Thinking



Constellation Thinking



The ADHD brain generates more ideas, more possibilities, more creative pathways.

We don't think in straight lines. We think in constellations.
Yes, that means we can spiral. But it also means we can solve.

We Got You, Mama — wegotyoumama.com

Chapter 11: When Your Brain Makes Sense for the First Time

Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria (RSD)

Not dramatic. Not weak. Neurological. And it has a name.

What is RSD?

Rejection doesn't register as a mild emotional sting — it activates the nervous system as if there is real danger. The reaction isn't dramatic or chosen. It is neurological. And it is extremely common in people with ADHD.

"Rejection doesn't register as a mild sting —

it activates the nervous system as if there is real danger." — Jehri South, ADHD Coach

What Can Trigger RSD

External triggers:

- ◆ Criticism — even gentle or constructive
- ◆ Perceived tone shifts in someone's voice
- ◆ Being left out or not invited
- ◆ Feeling like you disappointed someone
- ◆ A friend who doesn't text back

Internal experience:

- ◆ Pain that feels physical, not emotional
- ◆ Shame flooding the entire body
- ◆ Collapsing inward rather than lashing out
- ◆ Ruminating for hours or days
- ◆ The past replaying on a loop

Why This Matters Especially in Motherhood

- ◆ Mom guilt activates RSD constantly — the sense of never being "enough" hits like a physical wound
- ◆ A partner's frustrated tone can spiral into hours of shame and self-doubt
- ◆ Parenting criticism from family — even well-meant — can feel devastating and take days to recover from

Understanding RSD doesn't eliminate the reaction — it removes the shame.

Chapter 11: When Your Brain Makes Sense for the First Time

ADHD and Motherhood

Motherhood doesn't create ADHD. It exposes it.

Clinicians often see women receive ADHD diagnoses in their 30s and 40s —
not because it suddenly appeared, but because parenting overwhelmed their compensatory strategies.

What coping looked like before

Adrenaline-driven deadlines
Crisis mode activates focus

Hyper-focus on one project
Deep dive masking the ADHD

Controlling your environment
Systems and structure kept things together

Sleep as a reset button
Restored executive function overnight

Performing competence
Looking capable while privately drowning

What motherhood demands instead

Sustained low-urgency attention
Feeding schedules, slow routines, patience

Constant task-switching
Never finishing anything — baby, toddler, work

Unpredictable chaos you can't control
Every system fails when a baby arrives

Framented sleep for months
Already-strained executive function collapses

No hiding place left
The coping system finally breaks down

This is not a character flaw. This is neurobiology.

You were never the problem. You were never given the instruction manual your brain deserves.

If this resonates — it's worth exploring:

- ◆ Ask your provider about a formal ADHD evaluation — specifically female presentation
- ◆ Start at chadd.org or add.org for screening tools and provider directories

Chapter 11: When Your Brain Makes Sense for the First Time

Tools That Actually Work for ADHD Brains

Traditional productivity systems often fail ADHD brains. These don't.

The goal isn't to become neurotypical. It's to build systems that allow your brain to thrive.
Stop moralizing your neurology. Start designing your environment around how you actually function.

Environment Design

- ◆ Visual systems — keep tasks in plain sight
- ◆ Reduce decisions — lay out tomorrow's things today
- ◆ Body doubling — work alongside someone else
- ◆ One landing spot for keys, phone, wallet
- ◆ Chunked spaces — one task per location

Nervous System First

- ◆ Regulate before you attempt discipline
- ◆ Movement before hard tasks — walk first
- ◆ Identify your window — when are you sharpest?
- ◆ Noise management — music, white noise, quiet
- ◆ Sleep protection as non-negotiable

Working With Time

- ◆ Timers — visible, audible, concrete not abstract
- ◆ Transition cues — 5-min warnings before switching
- ◆ Time blocking — schedule type of work not just tasks
- ◆ Buffer time — always add 50% more than needed
- ◆ Done is better than perfect. Always.

Effective Treatment Is Rarely One-Dimensional

- ◆ Medication — may support dopamine regulation. Not a verdict. A tool.
- ◆ Therapy — CBT and ADHD coaching are most evidence-based
- ◆ Environmental design — systems that match your brain, not fight it
- ◆ Nervous system regulation — sleep, movement, sensory needs, connection

You are not the problem to solve. You are the system to support.

Stop trying to shrink. Start building scaffolding.

Chapter 11: When Your Brain Makes Sense for the First Time

ADHD & Neurodivergence — Resources

Specialists, organizations, and research we trust. All in one place.

You were not defective. You were not diagnosed.

When you understand your wiring, you stop moralizing your neurology. That changes everything.

Expert Featured in We Got You, Mama

Jehri South

ADHD Coach — Headspace Hub

ADHD-focused behavioral coaching,
executive function education for families

Organizations & Support

CHADD

Children and Adults with ADHD
Evidence-based resources,
local chapters, provider directory
chadd.org

ADDA

Attention Deficit Disorder Assoc.
Focused specifically on
adults with ADHD
add.org

ADDitude Magazine

Expert articles, webinars,
and symptom guides
specifically for women
additudemag.com

Research Worth Reading

Ohio State College of Medicine (2026)

"Research shows increase in ADHD in women post-pregnancy and when kids reach preschool age"
Confirms that motherhood places significant strain on executive functioning and that sleep deprivation amplifies and unmask core ADHD symptoms. medicine.osu.edu

Attoe & Climie — Journal of Attention Disorders (2023)

"Miss. Diagnosis: A systematic review of ADHD in adult women"
Systematic review finding 85% of teachers and 57% of parents believe girls are more likely to remain undiagnosed — the research behind why so many women weren't identified until adulthood.

Frontiers in Global Women's Health (2025)

"Research advances in female ADHD: the lifelong interplay of hormonal fluctuations with mood, cognition, and disease"
Reviews how estrogen fluctuations during pregnancy and postpartum directly affect ADHD symptoms and mood — why the postpartum period is a critical window for unmasking and diagnosis. [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12277363](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12277363)

We Got You, Mama — wegotyomama.com

Chapter 11: When Your Brain Makes Sense for the First Time