

Communicate WITH CONFIDENCE

With March 17-23 being Neurodiversity Celebration Week, we shine a spotlight on ADHD and hear from Amy Carroll, who shares practical tips for those with ADHD wanting to improve their communication skills.

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AS A COMMUNICATION coach working with multinational organisations around the world for the past 25 years, I've had the opportunity to coach neurodiverse clients with ADHD on their communication skills and have witnessed first hand the impact on both their personal and professional relationships.

Recently, the UK has experienced a notable increase in ADHD diagnoses among adults. 'A study analysing data from more than seven million individuals aged 3-99 between the years 2000 and 2018 revealed that by 2018, the prevalence of ADHD diagnoses in adults was 74.3 per 10,000 men and 20 per 10,000 women... the relative increase was largest among adults (e.g. among men aged 18-29 years, approximately 20-fold).'*

The current number is rising due to numerous factors, such as increased awareness and education, pandemic impact, recognition of lifelong symptoms and workplace challenges. Cultural and societal acceptance is also playing a major role. Luckily, there's a broader acceptance and understanding of mental health issues in society today. This cultural shift is making individuals more comfortable seeking a diagnosis and even discussing their symptoms openly.

ADHD brains are wired to make connections that others might overlook, leading to innovative ideas and solutions. As a result, people with ADHD have a remarkable ability to think creatively and approach problems from unique perspectives. Also, adults with ADHD bring incredible energy and focus to the things they are passionate about. This enthusiasm can be contagious, helping to motivate teams, inspire colleagues and drive projects forward.

In addition, navigating the challenges of ADHD often means resilience is needed. As a result, adults with ADHD are accustomed to finding creative ways to adapt and overcome obstacles, making them highly resourceful and persistent. Their ability to bounce back and try

again contributes to their success in dynamic environments where flexibility is key.

At the same time, adults with ADHD often face daily challenges such as inattention, impulsivity, difficulty managing emotions, and hyperactivity, to name a few, which can all hinder good communication.

Strong communication skills enable adults with ADHD to express their thoughts and emotions more clearly. This can reduce conflicts and enhance mutual understanding. It also aids in maintaining social connections, which can sometimes be a challenge for individuals with ADHD, due to their tendency to interrupt, get distracted or be impulsive during conversations. The following tips will help improve things...

LISTEN AND SUMMARISE

Active listening is fundamental for effective communication. It ensures both parties feel heard and understood. The importance of actively listening to the other person, summarising what they have said and confirming understanding, is indispensable. If you have ADHD and are easily distracted or appear inflexible, this technique can help you stay engaged, focused and open during conversations.

TRY THIS

During a back-and-forth exchange, repeat key points that the other person has made to ensure you are tracking them. For example, you might say, 'If I understand correctly, what you're saying is... is that correct?'. This not only helps reinforce your understanding, it also shows the other person that you are paying attention and valuing their input. This is especially beneficial in disagreements, challenges or unexpected situations, helping both parties to keep any strong emotions in check.

TAKE A PAUSE

A key technique in effective communication is the power of pausing. Pausing just a few



seconds before responding allows you to think through your words. Consider the other person's perspective, and swap an impulsive reaction for a conscious response. For people with ADHD, developing the habit of pausing can be particularly beneficial and ensure your contributions are thoughtful and relevant.

TRY THIS

Practise counting to three before responding (and take a deep breath while you're at it). This simple pause can provide enough time to filter impulsive thoughts, ensure you have understood the other person correctly, and help you formulate a clear and concise response. By practising this for three minutes a day in a low-stress conversation, this habit will become second nature to you, leading to more effective and respectful communication.

BE CLEAR AND CONCISE

Some ADHD brains need to talk through their ideas before making decisions, going off at tangents and veering off topic or struggling to convey thoughts succinctly. The techniques I use in my courses advocate for clarity and conciseness when communicating, which can help you stay on track and make your points more effectively.

TRY THIS

Before speaking, take a moment to mentally organise your thoughts. Ask yourself: 'What is the main point I want to convey?' By focusing on this central idea, you can avoid going off on tangents and ensure your message is clear and direct. Check in with yourself after you've spoken to determine whether you've covered your main point. If you want to say more or need to "think out loud", simply say, 'talking my thoughts out

loud helps me to understand and make decisions. Allow me a few minutes to think this through'.

LOOK FOR THE NON-VERBAL CUES

In my coaching sessions I look at the significance of non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, body language and facial expressions. You may struggle with reading or sending these cues if you have ADHD. Becoming more aware of your own non-verbal communication can enhance your awareness and, in turn, your interactions with people.



Join Amy at one of her online training events or face to face at her Communication Catalyst Retreat in Chexbres, Switzerland, June 9-12. Find out more at carrollcoaching.com/events. And get more great tips on communication, for anyone, in her book, *The Ego Tango*, available on Amazon.



TRY THIS

Practise maintaining eye contact (both online and face to face), use open and relaxed body language, and be mindful of your facial expressions during conversations. These non-verbal cues can help convey attentiveness and sincerity, making you look even more confident and competent, which will then improve your communication skills and your confidence! TIP: be wary of negative facial expressions, they can be misinterpreted and get you in trouble.

ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE INTERRUPTED

The importance of being open to interruptions is a key communication skill. If you struggle with impulsivity and unintentionally dominate conversations, allowing others to speak can lead to more productive and respectful interactions.

TRY THIS

Practise setting limits on your speaking time, encouraging others to contribute more to the conversation.

You can also make a conscious effort to listen more than you speak! This can help you better understand the other person's perspective and create a more collaborative dialogue.

If or when you fail with any of the above, rather than spend time beating yourself up, as soon as you can – whether an hour, day or week later – analyse the situation and replay it in your mind as you ideally would like it to have gone. This is creating new neural pathways in your brain and will increase the chances you'll be able to do it successfully in the future. This will also help reduce some of the excess self-criticism many people, especially women, with ADHD experience. By honing and practising these skills your communication will improve, and you'll navigate relationships with greater ease. You'll likely experience fewer frustrations, and other people's frustrations towards you may decline too – a win-win!