

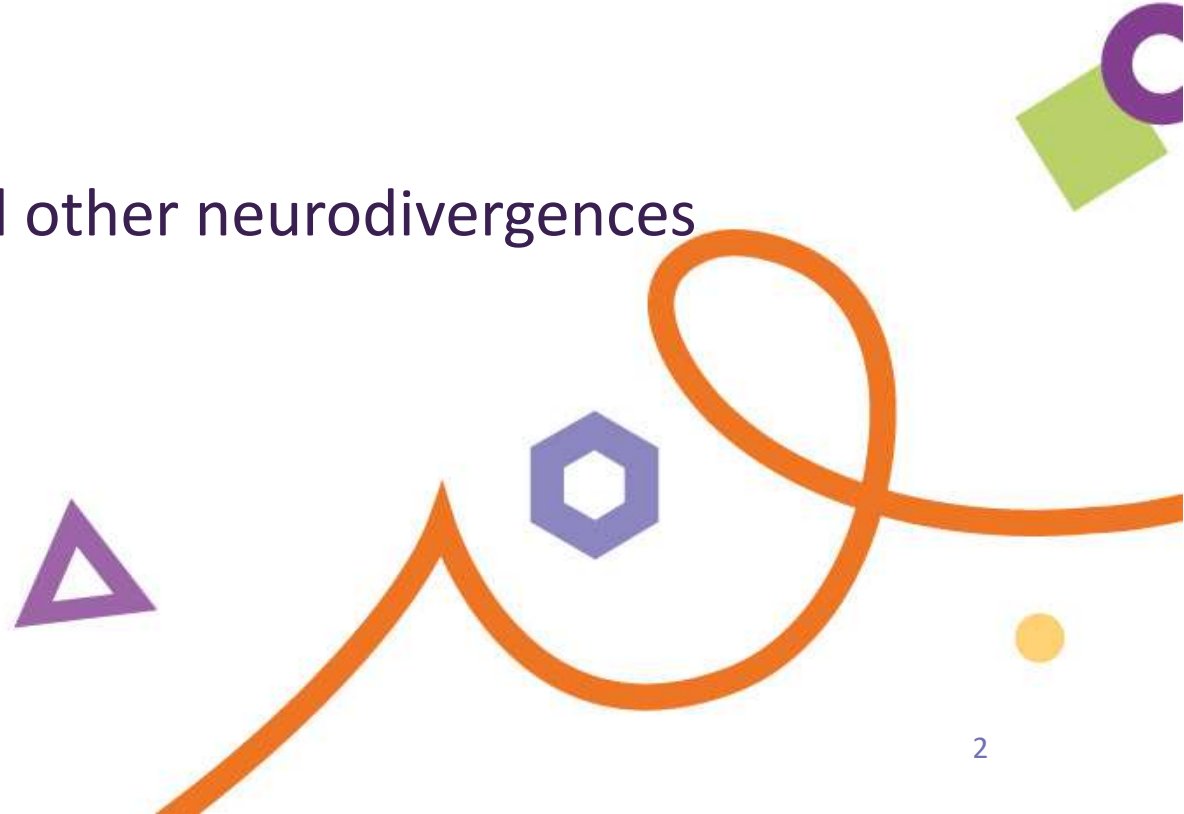


# Girls – Autism and ADHD

By Katie Wade (OT) & Jessica Lofthouse (SaLT)

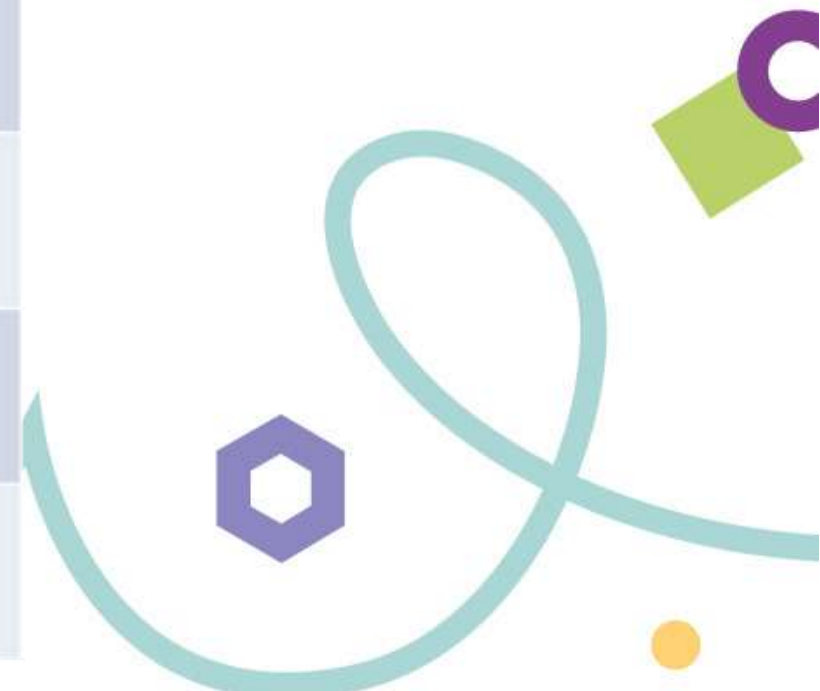
# Outline

- Stats on gender difference
- Impact of late diagnosis
- Masking
- Different presentation – autism
- Different presentation – ADHD
- Overlap with developmental trauma and other neurodivergences
- Support
- Activity – application to practice
- Signposting for support
- Further resources



# Stats on gender difference

	<b>Autism (stats from NAS)</b> <a href="https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls">https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism/autistic-women-and-girls</a>	<b>ADHD (stats from ADHD UK and ADHD foundation)</b>
Prevalence (current)	3:1 ratio of males:females  0.2% female population compared to 1.8% male population	Global prevalence estimated to be 5% with a gender split of 4 boys to every girl
Historical	None! 15:1 ratio of males:females diagnosed with Asperger's	10:1 split
Average age of diagnosis	Girls tend to be diagnosed later than boys, and the diagnostic process takes longer.	Girls more likely to get a later diagnosis
Estimated missed diagnosis	The ratio could actually be 2:1 males:females (or lower)	Between 50-75% of ADHD women and girls are undiagnosed



# Impact of late diagnosis

## Autism

“I always felt that I was different. The trouble was, I couldn't explain how, and certainly not why. It felt as if I had been provided a different rulebook. And that I lacked a community to fall back upon that could confirm to me that the way I interpreted the world was valid too. So I grew up feeling very misunderstood by pretty much everybody, even within my own family. If I applied what would have been my motives, my intentions upon someone else's behaviour, or vice versa, the outcome was often negative, and very confusing. So to me, the social world became scary and unpredictable.”

**Elisabeth Wiklander**  
**(London Philharmonic Orchestra)**

## ADHD

“The impact for me was poor self-esteem. Although I presented as confident, I secretly thought I was lazy and rubbish for not achieving things which I was clearly intellectually capable of doing”

**Amy, diagnosed ADHD in her forties**

If not properly diagnosed and supported, girls with ADHD experience the same negative consequences as boys, including poor academic performance and increased likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system.

# Masking

- Charl Davies video: watch from 1:46 to 3:41  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=dxJwH74o1Ck>
- Anyone can mask
- Concealing neurodivergence
- Mirroring the social interaction style of others
- Motivated by wanting to fit in
- Start to lose sense of self
- Others may not recognise or understand needs
- May affect identification and diagnosis
- Masking is exhausting



# How does autism present differently in girls and women

- A different autism phenotype
- Not just women
- Historically seen as a 'male' condition so people may not be open to considering autism as a possibility
- Typically have more speech at an earlier age
- Special interests more in line with peers'
- Communicative differences become more apparent around puberty
- Quiet and under the radar
- Repetitive actions may be more discreet
- Exhausted due to masking
- Parents/carers report very different presentation at home
- Creative and good at imaginative play
- May process feelings inwardly rather than express outwardly/explosively
- Hyperlexia

# How does ADHD present differently in girls and women

- Symptoms may be lower in severity – particularly hyperactivity/impulsivity
- More likely to have inattentive type (twice as likely than compared to males)
- Inattention is exhausting – can lead to chronic tiredness and burnout
- Hyperactivity and impulsivity can present in more socially acceptable ways – such as talkativeness
- Some evidence hormones may exacerbate symptoms during menstrual cycle, pregnancy and menopause and more likely to experience severe premenstrual mood instability
- Reported higher rates of mental ill health including anxiety, depression, eating disorders
- More vulnerable to bullying

# Overlap with trauma and other neurodivergence

- It is common for individuals to be multiply neurodivergent
  - **30-80% of autistic individuals are also ADHD, and 20-50% of ADHD individuals are also autistic**
  - **Individuals who are autistic and/or ADHD are also more likely than non-autistic/non-ADHD individuals to be dyslexic, dyspraxic, or have Tourette's**
- The presentation of autism and ADHD can overlap with developmental trauma, making it even harder to get a clear diagnosis
- Girls' experiences of autism and/or ADHD can result in complex trauma
  - **Traumatic sensory overload**
  - **Bullying or social isolation**
  - **Masking**



# How to support

- Be open to considering neurodivergence
- Be a neurodiversity ally
- Talk about masking
- Know where to signpost for further support
- Ensure training/resources/therapy is tailored to the individual and is autism/ADHD-specific
- Specific support around puberty, periods, sex and relationships

# Activity – application to practice

- Think of a girl you know who may be undiagnosed
- What makes you think she may be neurodivergent?
- What steps will you take to support her following this workshop?

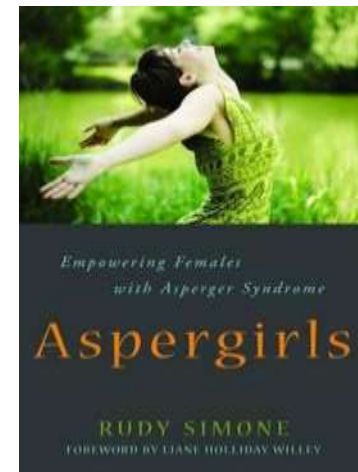
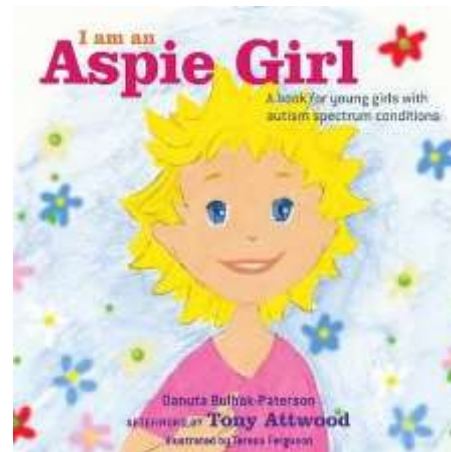
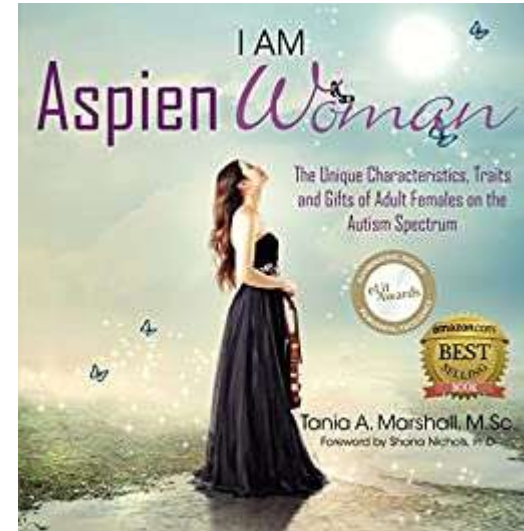
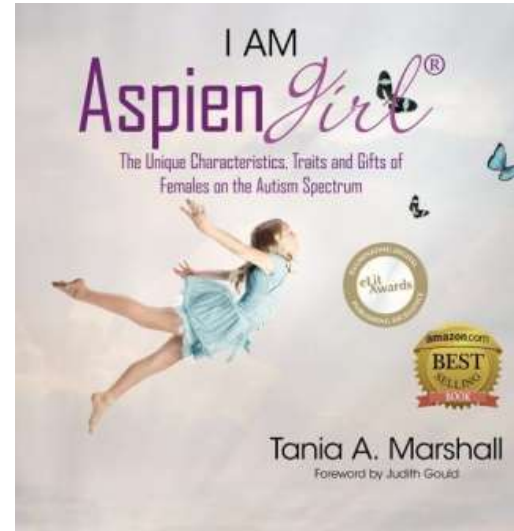
# Signposting for assessment

- If you suspect a child is neurodivergent speak to class team, SENCo, parent(s)/carer(s) and young person (where applicable)
- If in agreement a referral can be made
- The process differs greatly depending on geographic location
- Usually local CAMHS can advise on assessment process, SENCo may already have referral forms for your area
- Some services will accept referrals from parents/carers/schools/ clinicians/GP only
- It is generally beneficial to input into referral form with class team
- If you/an adult you know would like an assessment they can usually refer directly into your local NHS trust

# Activity – application to practice

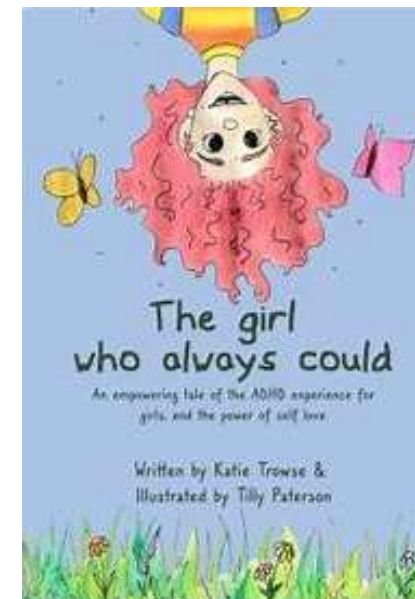
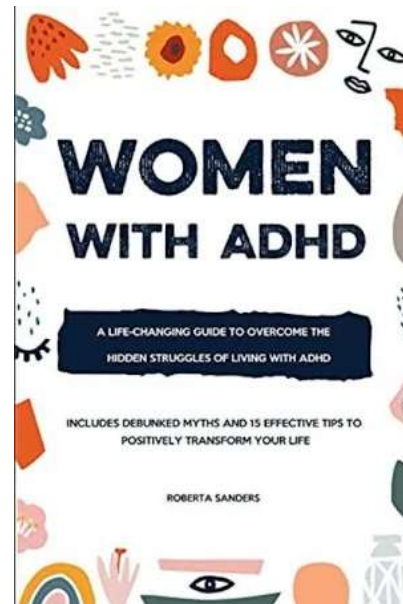
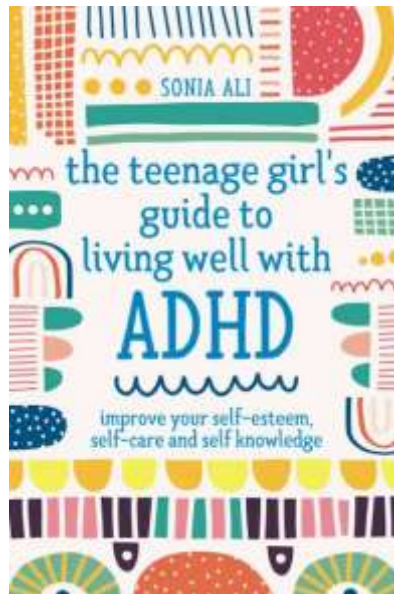
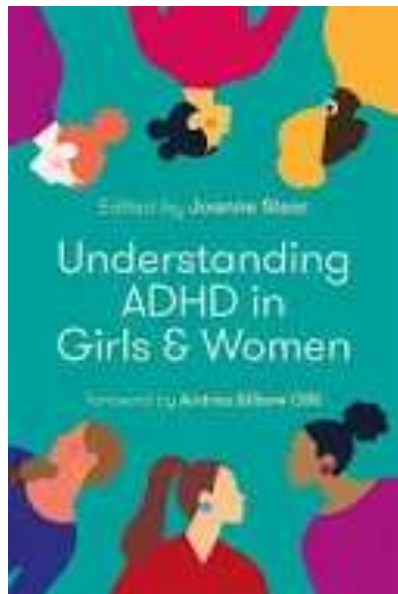
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# Further reading - Autism

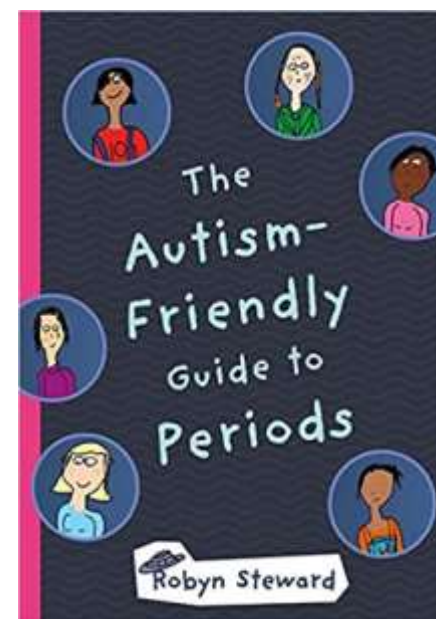
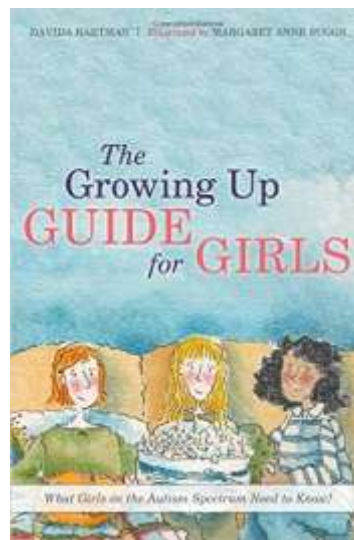
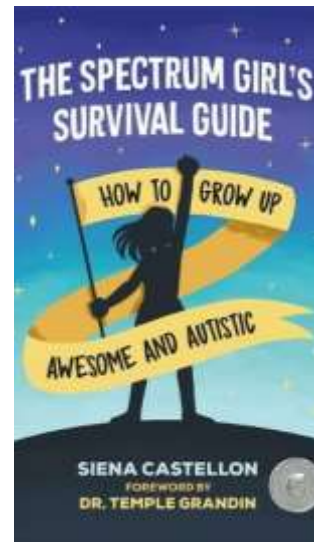


# Further reading - ADHD

[The-Anonymous-Doctor.pdf \(adhd.foundation.org.uk\)](https://adhd.foundation.org.uk) The personal experiences of a woman diagnosed as ADHD in adulthood



# Further reading - SRE



# Further watching

- Neurodiversity – the key that unlocked my world | Elisabeth Wiklander | TEDxGöteborg: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qvvrme5WlwA>
- Diagnosing Autistic Women and Girls (Purple Ella & Ros): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pjsi7wjs4ko>
- How autism freed me to be myself – Rosie King: [https://www.ted.com/talks/rosie\\_king\\_how\\_autism\\_freed\\_me\\_to\\_be\\_myself](https://www.ted.com/talks/rosie_king_how_autism_freed_me_to_be_myself)
- Autism in girls Q&As: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adwC1dOvpCo>
- What's it like living with Autism | Day in the life of an autistic person | Autism symptoms in girls: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz0SBqMmc2g>



# Online training and resources

- NAS online training: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/professional-development/training-and-conferences/online/women-and-girls>

