

# Black Women with ADHD

with  
INGER SHAYE COLZIE

Hi, I'm IngerShaye Colzie and I coach all kinds of people but I specialize in working with Black women with ADHD, because I am one too!

ADHD is a real, diagnosable condition that affects every aspect of your life. First comes education, then awareness, then acceptance, which then creates resilience.

When you have awareness and can accept it, you can make better choices in your life and live the life you want.

On the left, you'll find a few definitions to help clarify some of the unique challenges Black women with ADHD face. Below, I have included 3 case studies to help illustrate a few of the challenging scenarios we find ourselves in everyday.

I invite you to respond to the questions after each in an honest way, and welcome you to then join me on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BlackWomenwithADHD>

so that we can address them head on together. There's nothing like community!

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## EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

Executive function is a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. We use these skills every day to learn, work, and manage daily life. Trouble with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle emotions, among other things.

## PERFECTIONISM

The wish for everything to be correct or perfect. A personality trait characterized by striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high performance standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.

## EMOTIONAL DYSREGULATION

Refers to the inability of a person to control or regulate their emotional responses to provocative stimuli.

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marginalized as a Black woman, when people expect you to fail or worse, they don't have your back, they don't expect much from you, is when ADHD and perfectionism take over. We have to work twice as hard to get half as far as Black women, but with ADHD and the challenges with executive functioning playing a role here, we have to work twice as hard just to get to our baseline, anyway.

## DONNA

Donna requested that her landlord come fix her washer and dryer. He did but unfortunately, put on a faulty part. This meant Donna was unable to wash her clothes leaving her nothing to wear to work. At least nothing to wear that she felt good in. She was already stressed due to the fact that she was managing a household of three children and had a job where her appearance mattered. In fact, it had a big impact on her success in making good impressions. When she requested that the landlord come back a second time to fix the washer correctly, she was told that she was being unreasonable and pushy. "Living with ADHD has made me feel like I constantly have to explain my actions, because I'm ALWAYS misunderstood by people. So I've gotten very, very good at explaining, and it's now one of my best skills."

Questions to ask yourself:

- Have you ever felt like Donna?
- How would you handle putting in a second request?
- What advice would you give Donna?

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The Angry Black women myth: we are often perceived as nasty, mean, and bitter. The stereotypes and and micro-aggressions we experience can cause trauma because being perceived this way when all you are doing is standing up for yourself (which is hard enough to do) can leave you feeling unsafe. “Am I even allowed to feel emotions?” “What happens if I express myself?” (and ADHD gives us stronger emotions!) We are forever managing our responses. Again, this takes up your bandwidth, leaving you with less energy to deal with overwhelm. It also leads to our masking. “Do I have to pretend its all okay all while each time I lose a little bit of myself?” When you are aware that this is happening, where the emotions are coming from ... this is where a little bit of coaching can go a long way.

## LISA

Lisa worked in senior management at a prominent tech firm. She was one of the few Black women in the workplace, which left her feeling like she was on an island much of the time. It was hard to deal with micro-aggressions like, “You are so articulate” and “How were you able to move up the ladder so quickly?” What they did not know is that Lisa would stay at work until the wee hours of the night to be sure that all of her work was done perfectly. She was also afraid to ask for clarity on projects when she was not able to focus during long meetings. This caused Lisa to sacrifice time with her family and to make matters worse, when it was time for another promotion she was passed up several times and told she just did not fit in with the team.

Questions to ask yourself:

- What micro-aggressions have you had to tolerate ?
- How would you react if you were Liisa?
- What sacrifices have you made due to your ADHD?

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## MICRO-AGGRESSION

A term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioural indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups.

## MASKING

Masking is a process in which an individual changes or "masks" their natural personality to conform to social pressures, abuse, and/or harassment.

## CODE SWITCHING

Code-switching is an age-old practice that is familiar to many Black people—and people of color—in the United States. It facilitates several functions including to help align and unify among familiar group in certain settings.

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## BELINDA

Belinda landed her dream job last fall and moved 4 hours away from home for it. She worked hard but knew she needed disability accommodations so as to not have to take so much work home to complete every night and weekends. After applying for them 5 months passed without a response. When she mentioned to her manager and supervisor (both older white women who had been there for 22+ years) that she would be reaching out to the EEOC, they began to retaliate and build a false case against her. Ultimately, she was constructively discharged within a month of mentioning the EEOC. It was the worst blow that Belinda could have imagined and she's still recovering from it. "I know that I cannot have the job back but justice should not only be done, but should manifestly and undoubtedly be seen to be done."

Questions to ask yourself:

- Would you tell people in your workplace about your ADHD?
- Have you ever tried to declare your ADHD or get accommodations in the workplace?
- Would you try and take legal action, if so, how?