

THE NeuroDiversity PODCAST

with Emily Kircher-Morris

Adult Diagnosis ADHD

EPISODE #144

Sarah Schneider 0:00

You develop all these coping mechanisms on the way as a matter of survival and to you they're not ADHD interventions to you, you're just trying to get through your day. And so yeah, you could get used to it over decades of that kind of work and, and, and feel like you outgrew it.

Emily Kircher-Morris 0:20

Being diagnosed with ADHD as an adult brings a lot of questions to mind. What did I miss? What would my life be like if I had been diagnosed as a child? How can I adapt to this new diagnosis or should I adapt at all? Today we'll talk with Sarah Schneider. Sarah is the host of the "Adulting with ADHD" podcast and joins us as we wrap up our special series for ADHD Awareness Month. Adult ADHD straight ahead on episode 144. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris, and this is the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Intro 0:58

What is neurodiversity? This is the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Emily Kircher-Morris 1:19

We'll talk with Sara in just a bit. But first, there is still time to pre register for our six module course for educators called "Strategies for Supporting Twice Exceptional Students." Independent Study registrants get 20% off through October 31, and the course opens on November 1. Also, our second course is about dyslexia and we'll be releasing it soon. We'll have details here on our podcast website and at neurodiversity.university. Sarah Schneider is the host of a podcast called "Adulting With ADHD", she was diagnosed with ADHD later in life, and her podcast is a valuable resource, so we encourage you to check it out. We will talk with Sara in just a minute, stay here.

Narrator 2:03

On a previous episode of the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Phyllis Fagell 2:06

I think there is this kind of in our cultural DNA still, this idea that properly behaving, you know, children should be seen and not heard. I think there's kind of this mystical, unspoken idea that behavior management is appropriate and, and somehow valued somehow, with how the research was interpreted as successful, it became the mainstay of our education system. And when you look at the science, the neuroscience of resilience, and you lay that side by side to behavioral management, the two don't line up very well.

Narrator 2:48

That's episode 116. Find it in your favorite podcast app. You're listening to the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Emily Kircher-Morris 3:07

Today, our guest is Sarah Schneider. Sarah is the host of the "Adulting With ADHD" podcast and continues our series for ADHD Awareness Month. So Sarah, thank you so much for joining us.

Sarah Schneider 3:18

Yes, thank you for having me.

Emily Kircher-Morris 3:20

So to start off, I always think a bit of backstory is good, and I like to hear from people about their own journey with neurodiversity. So can you tell us a little bit about your ADHD story?

Sarah Schneider 3:33

So I was diagnosed in my mid 30s by surprise, I was, I was at a job really, really good job, and it was one of those kind of dream jobs for me at the time. And then I started hitting some hurdles after the honeymoon period, and I wasn't meeting expectations. And then I had my first annual review, which is the first time I had even experienced that whole process, and it was devastating to hear I wasn't living up to expectations. I would later learn about RSD, but yeah, it was just extremely devastating, and so I was already seeing a psychiatrist for other stuff, I've always been a chronic depression and an anxiety sufferer, and I would later learn that a lot of women with depression and anxiety are living with undiagnosed ADHD and I ended up being one of those people, and so first step was to get diagnosed. I went through the whole formal process with a

specialist and did all the questionnaires and I had some sort of computer tests where I was tapping on buttons and all that good stuff. So yeah, so that was that was probably, gosh, it's had to have been it's almost a decade at this point, I was in my mid 30s I'm 42 now, so it's, I've had a lot of ups and downs since then. And along the way, like a lot of other women diagnosed late in adulthood I, I had my oh my gosh, this is a thing women have I didn't know that, oh my gosh. And then I would later become a mother and oh my gosh, this is highly inheritable my daughter has this, oh my gosh, and then I started entering perimenopause, and then it was another shocker, like, oh, so hormones are a part of this, too. So it's just like, it's, you know, getting diagnosed was the beginning of dramatically improved life, my quality of life really improved after diagnosis. But I continued to be surprised and challenged, and that's kind of how the show came about. It was an outlet for me to communicate those kinds of things.

Emily Kircher-Morris 5:46

You know, it's interesting, I know, a lot of adults who come to their ADHD diagnosis when they are adults, look back and think about how impactful it was as a child that maybe they didn't even realize that that was something that was influencing them. How has that impacted you as far as reflecting on your younger years?

Sarah Schneider 6:08

It's such a good question, because at least once a day, at least I, I see my daughter experience something and it's like, wow, that's probably why I struggled with that when I was younger. I was very emotional, I had a lot of instability, and I had a lot of eagerness to please. I really, really craved the teacher's approval, I really felt like an outsider, and I felt like this carried on all throughout grade school, middle school. I mean, it just followed me my whole life, and I'm still learning about that, and I'm learning a lot of it through my daughter. And so yeah, it just, it's amazing how pervasive all this stuff is.

Emily Kircher-Morris 6:51

It's interesting, even though I was diagnosed when I was young, having kids going through it, it's a different lens to see it from kind of the outside and watching what that looks like, like, oh, is that what that appeared to be to my teachers? Or my parents? Or what are my friends? It is a lot to kind of, I don't know, wrap your head around it. I feel like in some ways, well, it can be healing.

Sarah Schneider 7:15

Yes. 100%. So healing, like, just as an example, my daughter, years three and four were very difficult. No doubt, the pandemic made it worse, because it was just anxiety, and it was our time to socialize her as schools were shutting down and so, you know, it was going to be hard no matter what, but that's how she was diagnosed through difficulties

in her preschool program. And this year, she's in kindergarten, and I was just, I'm so in this constant state of bracing, and just wait, you know, even when there's periods of good it's like, oh, just holding on for not the other shoe to drop but just the ebbs and flows, because there's ups and downs, right, there's not this magical moment where it's like, we're cured and everything, just, you know. So it's been an amazing, we've had the best fall so far the best back to school, she's thriving, she's living her best life, I tell everyone I can like she's living her best life. And it's so healing, like, I just makes me feel so good to see her thrive like that.

Emily Kircher-Morris 8:26

Well, and you're in a position now where you're able to provide some different supports that you probably didn't have when when you were her age.

Sarah Schneider 8:34

Absolutely, and that's something that's really good to remember, when you are going through those hard times is, you know, I have resources I didn't have before so I can do this.

Emily Kircher-Morris 8:43

I know a lot of people seem to think that ADHD is something that really only affects kids when they're young, or while they're in school, and some people might even think that you can outgrow ADHD. What do you think those perceptions persist?

Sarah Schneider 8:56

It's a good question, because that's something I'm getting a lot actually at the parent orientation, I got, oh, I guess she outgrew whatever was going on, and, you know, I know that's not the case. But I think there's overlap, I think some of it is development, right, and so there might be a lessening of symptoms as her brain goes through development, she may have ebbs and flows of activity in progress, and then she'll she'll be static for a while, so it could have the illusion of her growing out of something, but maybe she's just rearranging herself. Not really a doctor, but that would be my best guess is it is a little of both, but it's not so simple as they'll outgrow it, which I heard a lot the last two or three years I've been hearing that a lot.

Emily Kircher-Morris 9:42

That's even one of the things that prevents adults from going and seeking an assessment is they think it's only related to kids, and one of the other factors that goes along with that is the stigma of an ADHD diagnosis, and also you mentioned how your daughter is kind of adjusting herself I think a lot of times, maybe adults don't realize, if they already have that diagnosis of ADHD, maybe as they get through adulthood, they

might think they've outgrown it. But probably it's because maybe they found a career that's really a good fit for them, or they're no longer put in these situations where they're forced to sustain their attention or have those different types of executive functioning skills, and they're able to play more to their strengths. So I feel like that might influence it a little bit to.

Sarah Schneider 10:25

100%, for me, especially because my first career was as a journalist, and I was a reporter, I was chasing ambulances, it was a huge adrenaline rush. And so it was so compatible with the way I was that I felt like a fish in water, and so it never occurred to me that there could be any sort of differences in the way my brain was wired. And then the other thing is, you develop all these coping mechanisms on the way as a matter of survival, and to you they're not ADHD interventions to you, you're just trying to get through your day. And so yeah, you could get used to it over decades of that kind of work and, and, and feel like you outgrew it.

Emily Kircher-Morris 11:08

I think another one of the confusing things, at least for parents, is when they realize it's not just about being able to focus at all, it's about being able to focus on non preferred activities. Because parents will go well, my, my kid can't be ADHD, they can play Legos for hours or video games, or they can read for out, you know, whatever their passion might be. It's like, yes, but can they?

Sarah Schneider 11:34

Can they sit at the table? And finish a meal?

Emily Kircher-Morris 11:37

Yes, yes. Exactly. All of those little things.

Sarah Schneider 11:42

And if you do you have to serve the exact food they're in the mood for with a variety of options, or will they eat most food that you give them? And it can be confusing, because you could say, well all kids are picky eaters, or that's just most kids, but it's true, because I noticed it in myself, like, if I'm not excited about what I'm going to eat, I don't want to bother. Like, if I'm going to put all the effort in, and all the work and then locating my meal, it's so hard to feed yourself with ADHD, then I better like it, I better enjoy it, you know, and she's the same way which I love, we get to have our, we have little samplers that we make that are just a little of everything, and it works out very fine. But you have to know that, and if you don't know that you're thinking, my child's being

oppositional, or maybe she has gastrointestinal issues, and it's like, no, she just needs to be excited about what she's eating.

Emily Kircher-Morris 12:35

I feel like there are a lot of those little things that influence how the ADHD diagnosis impacts them, maybe in ways that they wouldn't understand or expect. Can you think of some other examples of that other than, like, for example, the food either for kids or adults that that maybe people wouldn't realize otherwise?

Sarah Schneider 12:54

Well, the the passion, my daughter, for example, very passionate about dancing and playing tag, and it goes back to what you're saying when they're interested, they're super into it, you know. I've had the same reaction, like how could your kid have ADHD? Look at her, she's running around with all the kids, and she's fine, I said, yeah, she's in movement, she's moving. And I think a lot of parents miss that, and I think what you see isn't always what you get, you're not seeing them after school, you're not seeing the routines, and all the work it takes to make that happen. And I think that's often misconceived situation where you, you know, oh, I have my diagnosis, I got my medicine, okay, we're fine, you know, and it's just it's not the straight linear path. It's very wiggly with ups and downs, and complicated.

Emily Kircher-Morris 13:44

Do you find that you end up following your passions as well?

Sarah Schneider 13:46

Yeah, and that's a whole other thing in itself, because you get passionate, and then you're too passionate, but then you have these other things like this, you know, like what we're doing right now, you know, that, that's my, that's where I play, that's my passion. But then it's like, oh, but you have your day job, and, and you're passionate about that, too. It's so confusing to be passionate about so many things, and you only have 24 hours in a day, and so for me as an adult, having that freedom and not having structure, it really forces you to get real, why are you doing this? How much can you give to this compared to your other things, you still want to be a good parent, you still want to participate in your family systems and feed yourself and all these other things you have to do, so how do we make all that work together? And I feel like most of my effort is into that right now, it's it's a huge challenge getting all that it's not even balanced, it's just like blended and you know, having an equilibrium.

Emily Kircher-Morris 14:47

Probably some of the best advice that an adult with ADHD could get is to find ways to lean into that passion. To me, that's a very strengths based approach and we talked about a lot when we're talking about kids. But I think adults feel like they have to do certain things or pursue certain tasks, and I feel for adult ADHDers, if they try to fit into a certain box that they feel will make them quote unquote successful or I don't know, whatever it might be

Sarah Schneider 15:21

Adult. Enough.

Emily Kircher-Morris 15:24

Yeah, and that just ends up not to be overdramatic, but kind of breaking their spirit.

Sarah Schneider 15:30

You grow resentful, you grow, you get this pit in your stomach, when you're when you're working on something you're not really excited about, and we all have things we have to do and that's not what this is, this is like, you're forcing your your shoehorning yourself into a job, for example. There's a difference between that and deciding this isn't for me, I'm going to look for something else while keeping what I have, it's a whole dance that you have to learn. And, and I remember, I remember being told because I would change jobs quite a bit every two to three years, which is now the norm, but I remember getting a lot of criticism for that, and now I have the hindsight of knowing I was taking care of myself in a way I wasn't aware of at the time, I was moving on to things that were better fits for me.

Emily Kircher-Morris 16:17

I actually had a friend at one point in time who I don't know that he'll ever hear this. I don't care, I'll call him I'm gonna call him up. But he had been he had been a police officer, and then his next career was he was a chef and a cook, and then the next thing we knew he was going back to school to do nursing, and it was all of these different things, but the problem with that was they were so separate from each other he was starting over every single time. When I would talk to him, and we would talk about the parallels, I would say, yeah, I was a teacher, but then I moved to a different type of teaching, but then I was a counselor, and then now I've you know, do the podcasts and the books and the speaking, so I kind of stayed in the same lane, which has been helpful for me professionally. And so I think finding ways to just tweak it a little bit, you know, find something that you're really interested in, but then then lean into wherever those interests are pulling you can be can be useful.

Sarah Schneider 17:10

Yeah, or a word I like, it's a concept I like the word is intrapreneurship I think, it's creating the situation you want where you're at, which I think gets overlooked a lot, and I overlooked it I you know, always had this idea of I'm not getting what I need, I just need to leave. But you might, I mean, you may or may not be in a situation where you can kind of negotiate what you want, where you're at, and of course not everybody is that fortunate. But I've seen people do that, and that's a strategy that's not often talked about with with ADHD, it's always the focus of oh, there are job hopping, oh, they failed at this so now they're going to do this, and it's always the eye roll of oh, look, now she's going to be doing this, and you know, what is she up to now? But like you said, it should be more strict space like, oh, but look at that passion, look how she can just pick up anything and run with it. That is so cool.

Emily Kircher-Morris 18:06

Like you kind of mentioned in your own story, women especially are often people who either have a missed diagnosis or or a misdiagnosis, what are some of the reasons that you're aware of that women might have a hard time getting that accurate diagnosis?

Sarah Schneider 18:21

I think a lot of it is awareness, even though there are decades of research, with ADHD in women, a lot of that hasn't really trickled down to the practitioners. And we talk about that a lot on my show, and a lot of guests have come on and explain how they've needed to hunt down that research and bring it to their doctors, and there's a lot of self advocacy you have to do, and in order to do that you already have to feel empowered enough to advocate for yourself in a doctor's office, which can be really intimidating. And as a caregiver, you're you're looking after your children, you're looking after your spouse possibly and so it can be easy to you know, kind of put yourself last and then if you're not going to stand up and do that someone else is probably not going to do that for you.

Emily Kircher-Morris 19:14

I think also the way people either internalize or externalize the behaviors that go along with ADHD can influence it. And so for example, my daughter has has a lot of the externalizing behaviors and he's very, a lot of hyperactivity, a lot of outward stuff, a lot of impulsiveness. It would be hard to miss it if you try, you know, it's very out there, but but that's just kind of her personality, but I think a lot of women especially have learned to mask so much of that. I'm not going to interrupt or I'm not going to hide or I'm not going to put myself out there too much. Then it comes across as the anxiety or the depression or whatever else might be going on.

Sarah Schneider 19:52

Yeah, and it's also a very practical reason. When when you're in grade school, it's the noisy ones who get the attention, because for practical reasons, you need them to stop disrupting the class. So if you're a daydreamer, and you're not bugging anyone, there might be a possibility you might get overlooked.

Emily Kircher-Morris 20:13

Yeah. Then the next part of that is, if it is overlooked, how much are you spending time compensating and trying to keep everything together, which again, then builds that anxiety, it all kind of goes in circles there. I know one of the things I share about my my experience was that even though I was diagnosed as a kid, I stopped taking medication when I was in high school, and I wanted to quote unquote, do it on my own. And then I spent more than a decade treating anxiety and depression, and finally, once I went back and started treating ADHD, my anxiety like mostly went away.

Sarah Schneider 20:49

That's one of the things like you asked me earlier, what's one of the surprising things about this whole thing is addressing your ADHD, with or without meds, addressing that can have such a huge impact on your anxiety, which is something I'm still learning about I, I still have it ingrained in my head, oh, I'm having a panic attack, it's my anxiety, it's kind of have identified myself like I've identified as an anxious person. Well, I mean, you'd be anxious to if you were trying so hard, it's the people pleasing, it's the masking, it's the overcompensating working twice as hard just to be, you know, average, it's a lot of work just to be average. And then that whole way you talk to yourself, are you average? Or are you just not in your lane, and there's a lane for you where you're phenomenal?

Emily Kircher-Morris 21:40

Yeah, you can be successful. You mentioned a little bit about self advocating, for example, at the at the doctor's office, and I think self advocacy is just a really important piece of anyone who's neurodivergent being able to speak up for themselves and recognize what their needs are. And obviously, one of the places where many people need to self advocate is in the workplace. How do you feel like that conversation is changing? Do you feel like people are starting to advocate more? Do you think workplaces are starting to be more receptive to that? What are some of your observations there?

Sarah Schneider 22:11

I should hope so. It has been a minute I've been doing a lot of freelance work, and the one thing about freelancing is you get to pick who you work with if you've done it long

enough. So I'm gravitating to people who are just great and they they do work with people's different schedules and differences. So I don't know how much of it's driven by awareness of neurodiversity, but you know, quite possibly, the whole COVID thing is opening up more avenues of like flexible scheduling, or working from or where you want to, and I think that's sort of that's being duped out right now we don't know how that's going to end up, I feel like it's all in flux right now, but I think that helps give me more options is always helpful and more awareness is always helpful. So hopefully, the optimist in me would think it's headed in that direction. But I don't have a lot of first hand experience with, quote unquote, normal jobs.

Emily Kircher-Morris 23:14

But I think that's true for a lot of ADHD years, right, it's like you end up gravitating to where you have the freedom and the flexibility to do what works for you. What about self advocacy, even just within relationships?

Sarah Schneider 23:26

That is a huge one. Yeah, that's a really good question, and that's something that has also taken me years and years and years, because, as I'm learning, I'm reading "The Dance of Anger," right now, as I'm learning, your first family system has a lot to do with how you carry on in your future relationships. And so if you weren't taught to advocate for yourself, or if it wasn't, well tolerated, and you never learned how you could be in relationships, where you're repeating those patterns, and then you have to learn. And it's really hard to deal with that until you know yourself enough to know what do I need, because you can't advocate for yourself until you know what your needs are, and so then you get into, you know, learning to be more intuitive, and learning how to trust yourself and listen to yourself. That's heavy work, but it's very important work and well worth it if you can find those needs and communicate them, to your partners, to your co workers to your bosses any way you can. And that's not always going to be great, you're going to have people who don't get it and you're going to receive rejections and you're gonna have to find a way to cope with those too. It's It's hard work.

Emily Kircher-Morris 24:38

Yeah, it's a lot. Well, Sarah, this has been such a great conversation, but as soon as we wrap up, though, I have one last question for you. If you were talking to a friend who is questioning whether or not they are neurodivergent or ADHD or just trying to kind of figure that out, what advice would you want to give them about traveling down that path, what would you want them to hear?

Sarah Schneider 25:02

So I would encourage them to go down the diagnosis path, but I would I would give them the caveat of it may not be a clean, direct journey, it may be the start of something where you may not get the answers you need immediately. It's kind of a lifelong learning and but, but you can pick up tools along the way that can help in the short term. So not all hope is lost, but it's also not going to be a cure all just to go into the doctor and get checked out, like, like a car, you know, it's not, unfortunately, you can't just go in and get fixed.

Emily Kircher-Morris 25:41

Yeah, yeah, it's just the first step and perhaps a long journey. Sarah Schneider, host of the "Adulthood With ADHD" podcast, thank you so much for your time today.

Sarah Schneider 25:53

Thank you.

Emily Kircher-Morris 25:58

ADHD kids grow into ADHD adults, and ADHD adults end up raising ADHD kids. We have a lot of ADHD in our household of five, and it isn't always easy. Things that some of us find calming or useful to help focus, others find extremely distracting. And asking adults with executive functioning difficulties to manage the homework and other responsibilities of their neurodivergent kids seems like double jeopardy. I already barely survived school, and now you want me to be the life raft for my kids. The best part about being an adult with ADHD, though, is the ability to make some of our own choices, we can choose a career that fits our personality and strengths, and we generally have the independence to recognize when we need support, so we can access or advocate for accommodations that will help. Hopefully, we can find a partner who also can understand and accept our neuro divergence. And hopefully, we can learn to understand and accept our own neuro divergence, too. I'm Emily Kircher-Morris. I'll see you next time on the Neurodiversity Podcast.

Dave Morris 27:35

Thank you to Sarah Schneider, the host of the "Adulthood With ADHD" podcast, we invite you to check it out, there are links in the show notes. Also, thank you to the members of our Facebook group who participated in several really lively discussions this week, you can find a link to the group in the show notes as well. It's a great way to meet and talk with people just like you and get some advice, or maybe just a little empathy. Our host is Emily Kircher-Morris, our production assistant and social media expert is Krista Brown. I'm Dave Morris, the executive producer and studio engineer. For all of us here, thanks

for listening, tell a friend and we'll see you next time. This is a service of the Neurodiversity Alliance.