

Linda Roggli:

It's October, 2020, and even in the midst of a crazy year, it's still ADHD awareness month. And we're still here with TADD talks from ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, nine minutes short, pithy soundbites on living with adult ADHD. Stay tuned here it comes.

Sari Solden:

This is Sari Solden. I'm a psychotherapist in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I've been working with women with ADHD for over 30 years. This year at the international conference, I'll be co-hosting the "Unity Lunch for Women." That's an opportunity for women to connect and ask questions. So I thought today I would just leave you with some of the important messages that I've been trying to convey to women for all these years. And I'm gonna read and reflect on some of the "Closing Letter" to women that Dr. Michelle Frank and I wrote in our book, *A Radical Guide for Women with ADHD*, that we published in 2019. Because we tried to sum up a message that we hope will be empowering for all of you women when you start to think of yourself as whole people, instead of just a collection of difficulties and even just strengths. To see yourself whole means to be able to hold on to all of that at the same time, and to get to the radical idea that instead of trying to fix yourself, you could just simply learn to be yourself.

Sari Solden:

Our book at the end sums up with this idea, the big idea we call it, that you can begin to show the world who you truly are instead of spending your life hiding. And part of that comes from acceptance that you will always have your brain differences and you can still enjoy your life. That it doesn't define you as simply a description, ADD or ADHD is of how your brain is wired. So just as you must radically accept and acknowledge the basic facts of your ADHD life, you also have a chance to choose to embrace a new perspective. And some of these are included in these points in the back of our book, where we talk about, and these are important words that I emphasize to women every day, that ADHD struggles will continue to manifest in your life. That's important to accept so you aren't so upset about it every time you have an ADHD day, but just like those ADHD struggles will continue to manifest, so, don't forget, will all your strengths, character and determination.

Sari Solden:

Next thing I want you to remember is your brain requires more support and preventative care than those of others. And this is difficult and takes time, but it also presents opportunities to invest energy and attention into caring for yourself the way you would care for others. This just means that as women with ADHD, you have to be more deliberate and everybody would be better off taking care of themselves and being aware of how they operate well, but for you, it's absolutely essential. Next point is that you aren't neurotypical and never will be, because ADHD isn't curable. And we don't want you to get cured from who you are. We want you to be who you are, make it easier for you to be who you are and move toward more of who you are. You're the only one who's you.

Sari Solden:

And you're the only one who has this unique thing to contribute to the world that no one else can, no matter how large or small you think that something may be. That's another good thing, even though it's difficult to not be neurotypical, many times, it's also a way for you to have to develop your uniqueness in the world. The next point is that you might need therapy or other kinds of professional help. Again, something hard sometimes to accept, but this also, the other side of that is that it provides you with a rare opportunity for personal exploration and the chance to destigmatize the process of embracing your mental health needs. Again, a lot of people might need this kind of help, but you definitely need some support, and that's good, cause you have to embrace that. You might need medication. And that has nothing to do with who you are as a person, just like you might need insulin or you may need something to help your thyroid. This is just something to help your brain, you know, stabilize, or provide more of what it needs. This has nothing to do with your character.

Sari Solden:

You will inevitably confront judgment and stigma. And this is a doorway to rediscovering yourself, reinventing your life and helping others sometimes with ADHD or others with other kinds of diversity or issues that they try to hide or that they confront barriers because of. So again, a lot of these things are accepting the inevitability and some of the difficulty, but that it has this other side to it, all the time of pushing you, really toward new growth, you know, cause sometimes you might feel like you got the short end of the stick with ADHD, but this will help you understand this acceptance. First of all, ironically, that if you accept these difficulties and the need to find different ways to approach your life, you'll be able to maybe make a unique contribution. I always say that ADHD saved me from a life of artificiality, superficiality, and conformity that I wanted. So in a way, it prevents you from trying to fit in cause you can't.

Sari Solden:

So, in a way we talk about in the book, how it's not fair for you, really, if you think about giving to other people, you have gifts to give and you don't want to hold that back. We need you. You have things to contribute, you think differently, you have an unique perspective. We say share it. You have a need for mental health care, advocate for it. You think outside the box, encourage it in others. You have intensity, light your fire and spread the light. Because ADHD requires doing life differently, it can be a pathway to transformation if you show up and gently, but persistently push the limits of your comfort zone. We encourage women just to not take too big of leaps, but just to slowly and steadily with support, move toward stretching yourself and your comfort zone. As you add avoidance to your ADHD, that's usually what gets you stuck or this self berating or this negative self talk about yourself. You have to start slowly moving to our new experiences for yourself, where you can see your value and be around people who value you.

Sari Solden:

You don't have to just live with this pain that's entangled you, untruths about yourself and tethered you to a smaller life. Even want you to encourage you lead a bolder, brighter, bigger life. And it's a step by step process. Every day is a chance to live into yourself and your bright, bold life. A little bit more and a little bit more after that. Start where you are. Start with who you are. It's the only version of you out there after all. So stop waiting and go ahead, dive fully into your completely utterly wondrously imperfect ADHD life. We dare you to be proud of it. We ended our book with this quote that I think can be very helpful that really spoke to us. It's by Rilke. And he wrote this quote that I think can help comfort you when you start to be afraid of not knowing what to do, which sometimes happens to us with ADHD as women.

Sari Solden:

My quote says, "Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer." The point is that we can't know everything right now. We just have to get some support, see ourselves whole, notice the strengths as well as the challenges, validate all of them, move slowly every day toward doing something and noticing something that you're good at. Maybe it's something you give to someone else. Maybe it's your core traits, your inner qualities. It's not just about your achievements or your accomplishments.

Sari Solden:

It's not a matter of saying, oh, this is a good day cause I did something successfully, or I organized something, or a bad day because I didn't or I forgot something. There you have these core traits who you are, ask yourself how to account for the fact of when things go well, how did that happen? It's usually because of something inside of you, regardless of the difficulties with your brain, your determination, your resilience, your humor, your sensitivity, ask yourself. And remember that you are more than your differences with your brain and that you can persevere, ask for help, show your vulnerability to somebody

you trust and feel safe with, and surround yourself with even one person to start with, who can value you so that you can start to internalize that yourself.

Sari Solden:

This is Sari Solden and I'll see you at the ADHD international conference, "Unity Lunch for Women."

Linda Roggli:

Okay. That's today's ADHD wisdom. Much more to come. And why not join us for the virtual 2020 international ADHD conference coming up in November? Details at add.org. And while you're at it, why not join ADDA? It's a great investment in your ADHD life.