

A Blog About How Understand Your Adult Family Members and Friends Who Have ADHD, Sensory Processing Disorders and Chronic Pain (Or a Combination of All Three Like Me)

Thanks to vaccines, boosters and anti-viral medications, we are now in the midst of a major transition from the lockdowns imposed on us during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. While I understand what a relief it is going back to traveling, seeing friends and family and participating in social, political and cultural events, I think it might be helpful to explain why I am hesitant to completely return to normal. I have a combination of ADHD, sensory processing disorders, a communication disorder and chronic pain. Because of these conditions, even pre-pandemic, I have rarely enjoyed large gatherings, and struggle to find a graceful way to excuse myself when being pressured to attend. I sometimes try to make polite excuses to get out of many social gatherings, but even people who are close to me may not understand why I don't want to accept their invitation.

Let me explain myself further. My sensory processing disorder makes me sensitive to touch, so much so that even from the time I was a child, I have had to cut the tags off my tee shirts because they would bother me. I need to wear soft, loose fabrics.¹ While I understand that you may enjoy greeting people by hugging and shaking hands, I am not a hugger or a handshaker. I have always been this way because I am uncomfortable with people being in my personal space. Some people like to engulf me in a bear hug squeezing me in close. However, since I have chronic low back problems, this triggers pain for me. Therefore I appreciate when people ask if I want a hug or want to shake hands. A pleasant "hi" and "nice to meet you" or "good to see you" or a gentle's elbow bump serve as better alternatives for me.

While large social gatherings such holiday parties, birthday parties, weddings and even dining with friends and family in a crowded indoor restaurant might be fun experiences for you, they are stressful and overwhelming experiences for me because of my ADHD, sensory processing disorders and chronic pain. Often these events can be hours long, especially when waiting for an event to begin such as a sit-down dinner, or during an "intermission" between events. Since I don't drink alcohol, the cocktail receptions before or in between events aren't exactly that fun for me. Because I am on the introverted/shy side, I don't do well in situations where I don't know anybody else or where I feel I don't have much in common with anybody else besides the host/hostess who are understandably busy, so much so that I barely get to see them or talk to them. Outside of most professional events, I am not good at going around the room and mingling with the other guests. Overstimulation is another major problem for me. A large crowd, cramped spaces, lots of background noise, being seated at a table with strangers and bombarded with small talk and personal questions can create very unpleasant experiences for me.²

¹ [https:// www.additudemag.com/sensory-processing-disorder-in-adults/](https://www.additudemag.com/sensory-processing-disorder-in-adults/)

² <https://www.healthcentral.com/article/managing-social-gatherings-with-adult-adhd>

These events also require a lot of sitting and standing, which I find difficult because I can't remain in one position for extended periods of time without triggering more pain. This effect can be compounded when the design of chairs provided at these events are uncomfortable, as is often the case, for someone like me with physical disabilities.

Also, please understand that because of my communication disorder, I dislike last minute changes in plans, last minute cancellations in plans and last-minute invitations. I don't like it when people stop by unannounced. I am the kind of person who likes to plan things weeks or months ahead of time, so these types of unanticipated disruptions in my schedule cause a lot of anxiety and frustration for me.

Though I now take calculated risks when traveling, participating in events for professional reasons or swimming at the Y, I follow my doctor's orders to assess each situation that I am going to be in. I continue to mask, even in large, outdoor settings, wash my hands frequently and socially distance if possible. On September 12th I got my second booster shot. I stay within my social bubble for at least two weeks before I travel or participate in a large event in order not to possibly be exposed to COVID. I get tested four or five days after a possible exposure, like when I return from a trip, especially now that masks are no longer required in airports or on planes. However, if I politely decline your invitation, please don't take it personally. Because I have struggled with being in large social situations all of my life, I try and offer other solutions to connect with people. I really enjoy one-on-one get-togethers in a quiet outdoor setting, taking walks, going on outings to see and photograph animal and plant wildlife, and attending museum exhibitions.³ And of course Zoom, FaceTime or WhatsApp are always useful alternatives.

³ <https://www.additudemag.com/hypersensitivity-disorder-with-adhd/#:~:text=Symptoms%20of%20hypersensitivity%20include%20being,asthma%2C%20eczema%2C%20and%20allergies.>