WHAT IS ADHD COACHING?

Dolly Parton once said; 'Find out who you are and do it on purpose.' We think this is the essence of ADHD coaching. We are learning who we are to gain certainty and clarity so that we can be us from a place of choice and purpose.

Clearly, 'finding out who you are' is ongoing, intersectional, and complex. Depending on the individual, some of 'finding out who you are' may be or may become the remit of therapy rather than coaching. However, we believe that therapeutic, trauma-informed coaching is most appropriate when working with ADHD, where people have not understood their differences for large parts of their lives.

The Professional Association for ADHD Coaches (PAAC) (n.d.), defines ADHD coaching as 'a specialty skill set that empowers clients to manage their attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity'.

While we agree that ADHD coaching leads to skills which help you better manage your ADHD, we believe that this form of coaching is about deep-seated personal development. It's about learning to define and experience what thriving with ADHD looks like for you, and figuring out how you can thrive more often in different situations. After decades in 'survival' you may be unclear about your feelings and needs and cut off from your body and what it is trying to tell you. A way of understanding this is through Ditzler's Model of Self (2003); you may have been caught in layers of pretending and who you are scared you are and unclear on who you really are. For the purposes of ADHD coaching, who we really are is our strengths and challenges and our unique intersecting identities and experiences.
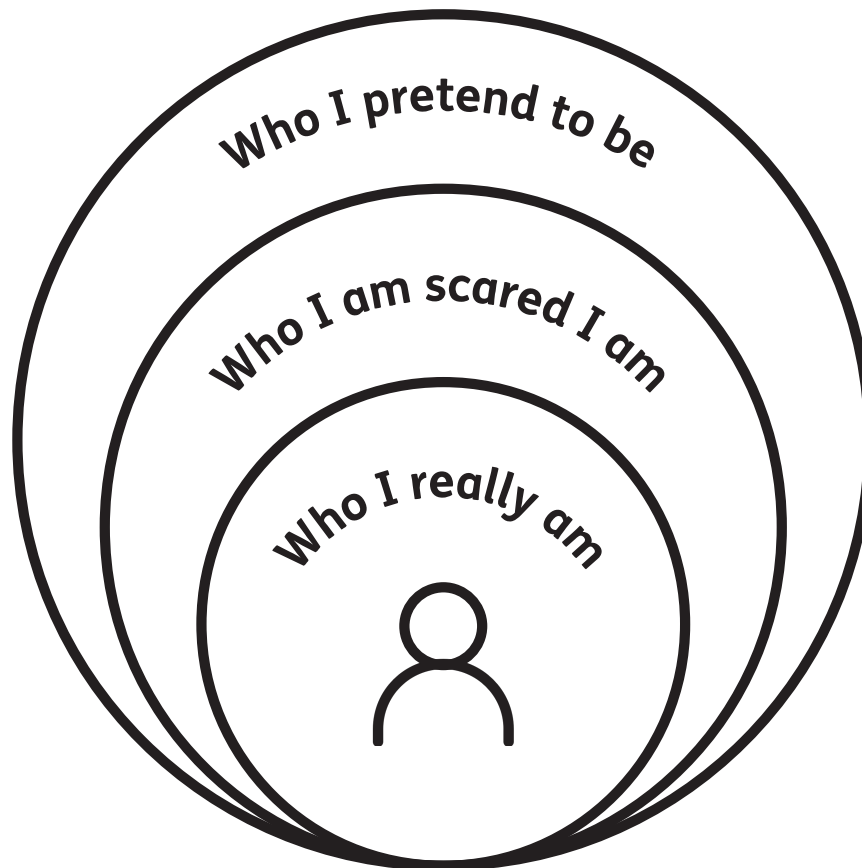
Figure 2.1: Ditzler's Model of Self
*Source: Jinny Ditzler's Model of Self (2020)[**AQ**]*

ADHD coaching will involve learning to come back to who we really are as well as making systemic challenges explicit. When we train coaches, we adhere to both these two sets of competencies in order to guide the structure of a coaching session:

As well as supporting the structures above (which are a feature of every session), it is important to visualize the potential trajectory of ADHD coaching so that you can have some much-needed certainty about what to expect and what the 'end' looks like.

It's equally important to underscore that coaching – particularly ADHD coaching – is not about imparting tips and tricks from some 'wise' ADHDer who happens to call themselves a coach. If coaches do not define the potential trajectory and purpose of

ADHD coaching, we are likely to ask for advice, tools, tips, and tricks to manage our ADHD.

This is because we have been conditioned to think we need fixing – as well as having a dopamine-driven brain that's looking for quick-fix solutions. Rather than resist or frustrate you, we think painting the bigger picture of ADHD coaching helps you to get interested in the process, connect to your why, and reconfigure expectations with something tangible. This in itself creates safety and collaboration. Knowing how coaching works and what to expect over time can create firm containers for our speedy brains that want to race to the end before they have begun!

In order to aid the understanding of the work that can be done in ADHD coaching, we show this ADHD Needs Pyramid, originally adapted by Robbins' '6 Human Needs' in 2021 from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), and which we have adapted further to suit the ADHD discovery journey.

International Coaching Federation **COACHING COMPETENCIES**	Professional Association for ADHD Coaches **FIVE ESSENTIALS**
1. Demonstrates ethical practice **2.** Embodies a coaching mindset **3.** Establishes and maintains an agreement **4.** Cultivates trust and safety **5.** Maintains presence **6.** Listens actively **7.** Evokes awareness **8.** Facilitates client growth	**1.** Safety **2.** Collaboration **3.** ADHD lens **4.** Wonder **5.** Actioning

Sources: © International Coaching Federation (2021) & © Professional Association for ADHD Coaches (2020).[AQ]
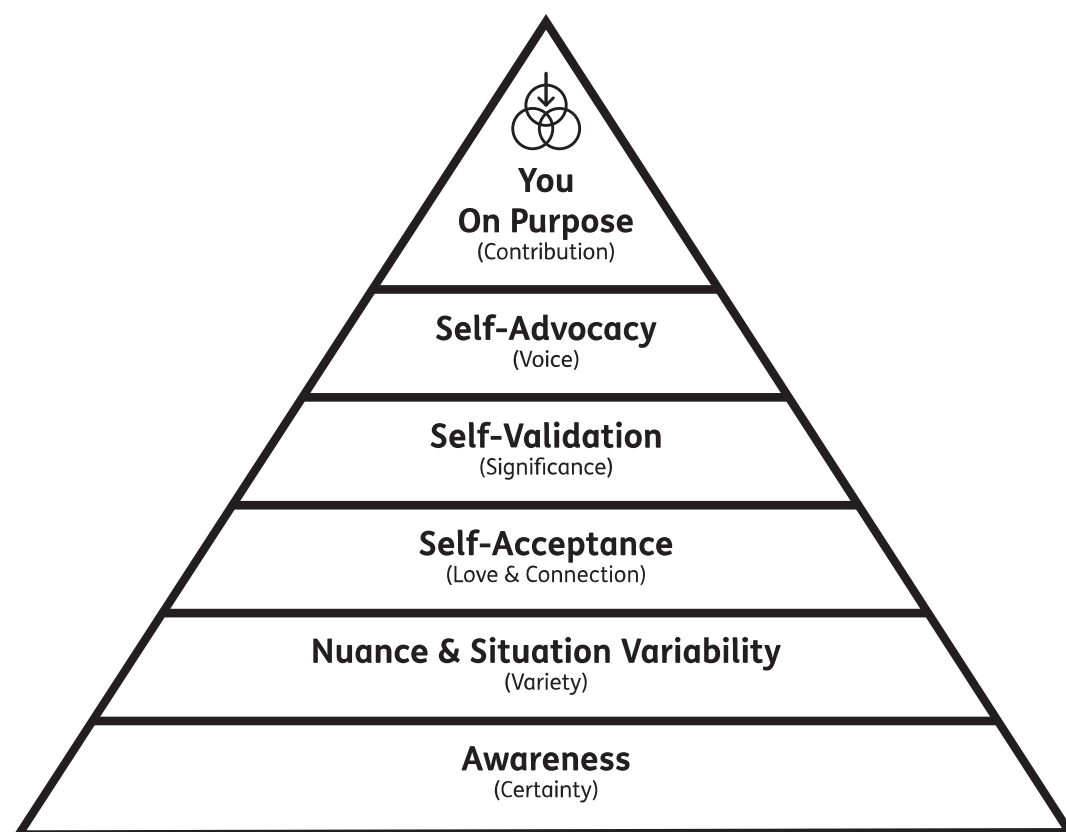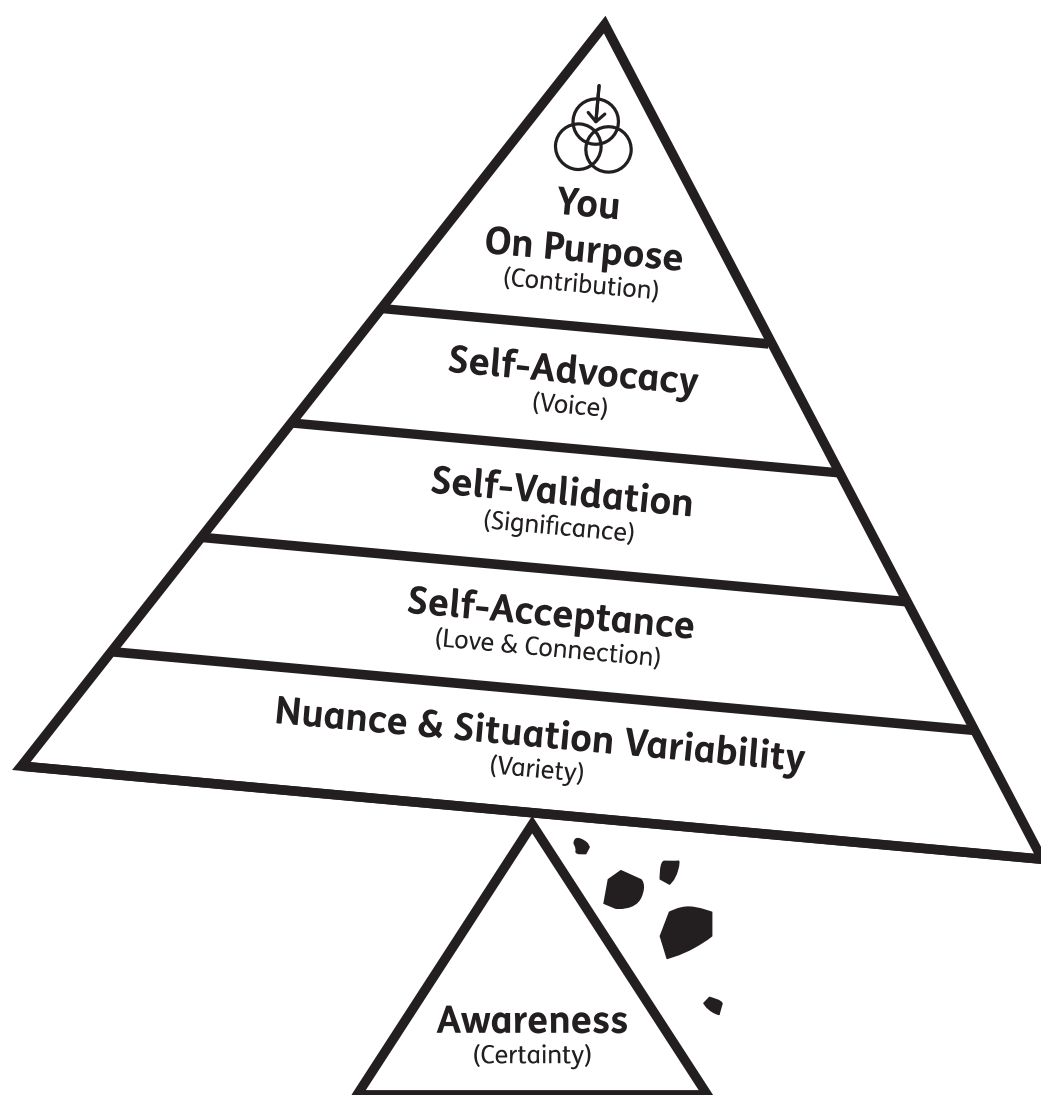
Figure 2.2: The ADHD Needs Pyramid

Source: Adapted from Tony Robbins' 6 Human Needs (2006), based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). © 2024 by Gold Mind Academy.

Often when we use this pyramid with clients, they reflect on having spent much of their lives trying to contribute without a stable base of certainty. If we have not known who we are and how we are different, the experience can feel more like this inverted pyramid;

Inevitably, limited certainty and safety regarding how we are different and why will have made our experience of our variability feel like a rollercoaster of ups and downs with no rhyme or reason. This often leads us to doubt ourselves. Love and connection are hampered by not being able to connect with, understand, and rely on ourselves. Without this, we seek validation from others rather than validating ourselves, so other people's opinions become all powerful and rejection can destroy us.

Without certainty of our differences, growth can feel like a never-ending endeavour to 'be better' in order to be more 'normal'. Contribution often involves cycles of burnout, or never reaching the contribution we feel we are capable of, or a feeling of never fulfilling our potential and being 'lazy'.

Figure 2.3: The ADHD Needs Wobbly Pyramid

Source: Adapted from Tony Robbins' 6 Human Needs (2006), based on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). © 2024 by Gold Mind Academy.

In ADHD coaching, coaches are aiming to help you build back a wide base of certainty while accommodating and accounting for complex variability. The aim of ADHD coaching is to move

away from survival by loving and connecting to ourselves, our emotions and our needs. ADHD coaching can help us to validate ourselves by starting to see ourselves through our strengths – both when we are thriving and when we are in difficulty. Once this is under way, growth in the form of self-advocacy gets easier because we can let go of the fear of rejection from others (or a need for their validation) enough to speak up and express our truths and we start to realize a world of possibility where we can contribute and reach our full potential.

Another way of imagining the work of ADHD coaching is to use Atif Choudhury (2021)'s model of Anticipatory Inclusion:

Figure 2.4: The Anticipatory Inclusion model

Source: Atif Choudhury's Anticipatory Inclusion model (2021).

When we build certainty and safety, we become empowered to try things out, to choose how we want to be, and to figure out what we need to support this. Once we have tried and tested what works for us, communication can be much more effective and we can be clear on when it is not where we need it to be from ourselves and others.

The problem with all models is that they imply that change – or indeed the ADHD process – is linear or sequential. In reality, models and visuals are just templates and everyone's process will diverge. The needs described in these models will be governed

by what you bring to each session. This could be determined by what you are noticing and reflecting on between one session and the next. It will also come from whatever is happening in your life and what is holding your interest. Visuals and models provide templates of the path ahead but everyone's change process is messy and individual. A client once commented in a final session that they saw their change journey in loops, that they would have never had the confidence to share how they saw it prior to coaching, and that drawing things had been really freeing in finding ways to express themselves.

Regardless of what you bring to each session or how you prefer to process information, there are a number of elements in ADHD coaching which help to bring about change.

Different coach training providers may emphasize different things. We think that it is important to align with the appropriate best practice (such as the ICF and PAAC) while innovating as you go. The key, we feel is to have a clear 'why' for each element:

1. ADHD lens and narrative work.
2. Nuance, intersectionality, and situational variability.
3. Love and connection to self – self-regulation through systematic pausing and emotional granularity.
4. Self-validation through strengths work.
5. Self-advocacy – being assertive as well as nurturing and vulnerable.
6. Putting it all together – you on purpose.

Over the following sections, we'll explore how these tools and core concepts can contribute to your empowerment process.