

# **The HR Mixtape: Hosted by Shari Simpson with Guest Dr. Jennifer Dall, Grief-Informed Neurodivergent Specialist and Founder of ADHD Holistically**

## **Announcer:**

You're listening to the HR Mixtape. Your podcast with the perfect mix of practical advice, thought-provoking interviews, and stories that just hit different so that work doesn't have to feel, well, like work. Now, your host, Shari Simpson.

## **Shari Simpson:**

Joining me today is Dr. Jennifer Dall, a grief-informed neurodivergent specialist and the founder of ADHD Holistically, where she empowers individuals with ADHD to transform daily struggles into opportunities for growth and self-discovery. Dr. Dall, thank you so much for sitting down on the podcast with me today.

## **Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

Of course. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited about this.

## **Shari Simpson:**

You have a really interesting background. You sit in this space of neurodivergence specialty and the founder of ADHD holistically. And, you know, as somebody who has ADHD, I'm always curious to talk to people who specialize in this and can help us in the HR space really understand this population differently. So I'm going to start with what I think is probably not an easy question, but what is one myth about ADHD in adults that you would love this audience to just stop thinking about? Let's retire it today.

## **Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

Well, one of them is that it's bigger than the eight-year-old boy that you're all

picturing who cannot control himself, his impulses and all of that. ADHD, a big myth is that if you know one person with ADHD, you know all people with ADHD. It is very varied, just like we are and our experiences are.

**Shari Simpson:**

That is such a good starting point because I think about the people that I know in my life that have that and it all shows up very differently. You know, one of the things that I think shows up in the workplace a lot that we talk about a lot is executive function challenges. So before we kind of get into how that looks, maybe you could, for the audience, describe what executive function is and what that means from the perspective of those with ADHD.

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

The short story is that it's the way that your brain and your mind function and, obviously, manage and work all the things that we are going on, you know, organization, emotional regulation, decision-making, task starting, memory, all of those kinds of things. And so, and there's different charts. So there's everything I think from like eight to 12 different executive functions, depending how different specialists have identified them and all of that. But the basic idea is that. And that's sort of how it's one of the ways that it shows up differently in everybody, because we all have our strengths and our areas that we need to work on. And so within you, within me, you may have a greater strength in starting tasks, but a harder problem with organizing or remembering things. And so everybody looks at those things differently.

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

The other thing that I realized that really impacts it is that we have this story where we got from, especially so many of us, especially those so many of us who are females, we are just finding out. We are just learning. The research world is just learning more about us or it's taking time for the research to get out there and we're learning things. So we've had this path where maybe we were diagnosed with depression or anxiety or a learning disability or an attitude or defiance or difficulty. We may have grown up in a household that was undiagnosed ADHD and not known. We may have had teachers or other adults who were, whether they understood really what was going on or just

that we were a little bit different, helpless or not. We may have self-medicated along the way. All kinds of things led you to this path. So when you're from HR, from us just as people, you've got what executive functions are impacted and what got us here and what have we done and how much do we know? So that's like a lot of information to just to say it depends and it's complicated.

**Shari Simpson:**

As most things with people are, it depends and it's complicated. You know, how do you see this showing up, though, in the workplace? And I will caveat that question with what you just described, is that there's probably a lot of people out there who don't have an official diagnosis, are listening to your description and go, huh. Those are some things that I know that I struggled with and that has an impact on work. What are the things that you, I guess, consistently hear about in the workplace that kind of rise to the top?

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

Some common things that may trigger something in your mind are you may have a hard time with prioritizing tasks, figuring out what to do. Sometimes we go and we make our list of what we have to do and it's three pages long, which is not going to happen. And we have a really hard time identifying what the priority is. And then along with that, we can have a really hard time really understanding how much time it's going to take. You know, it's the idea of time blindness, but it's. It's so hard to explain if you don't know what it is, but I can believe that I can do all 15 things today in my heart of hearts. I believe I can do this list. And then I can't. And even if I'm working solid, I have a very hard understanding of how long something actually takes, which for somebody who doesn't have that, it makes no sense. So prioritizing tasks, figuring out time, time management can be difficult. Emotional regulation can show up. So that can be that sometimes people with ADHD have a hard time regulating things emotionally. So they take things harder. It can really be like a stab in the heart hearing something. And so somebody who isn't aware of that and maybe somebody who may be a little more abrupt anyway, it can come across the wrong way. And it might seem like the person with ADHD is overly emotional, blowing it out of proportion. And then when they hear these things, they may stop listening. But in a shut down kind of way, not in a defiant kind

of way, but in just like an overwhelmed kind of way. So that's another way that it can really show up. I would say also showing up to things on time, because back to that time idea, you may think of people with ADHD as always being late, but they can also be really early all the time. And that's kind of the category I fit into, because it's so hard to figure out, like anyways, it's so hard to explain how to get there right on time. that I would get there early, like really early, because I didn't know how to get there right on time. And if I'm not there really early, then I am late because you just kind of it's this this time thing that is very hard to explain. It's this whole alternate universe. And so some of those, I think some of those are some of the big ways, just managing tasks, managing emotions, managing time that probably really show up most in work and can be the most frustrating for everybody involved.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah. You know, I think a lot of conversations that we've had over the last couple of years, as we've been talking about leadership development is really leaning into some people call them soft skills. I think they're super skills. I think those skills of empathy and listening and, and really creating psychologically safe spaces are super skills when it comes to our leadership teams and, and our leaders. That being said, there is ownership on both sides, right? There's ownership in the organization where we have to be aware of these things and provide resources and support. But there's also ownership on those that have ADHD and understanding what they need. So I want to start first with the employer. Let's start there. What is our responsibility or what should we think our responsibility is in supporting employees with ADHD?

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

The first part of the answer, I think, is a legal answer that I am not going to give. I think being aware of what you need to be doing legally is probably the first place you need to start. And then I would suggest really learning a little bit because there's a pretty good chance that you, someone in your family or someone in your immediate circle also has ADHD. And so you're dealing with it and this can help you out. You know, we're learning so much more about ADHD for so long. We didn't know much about women. We thought it was the eight-year-old boy, all of that kind of stuff. And so I think learning about ADHD,

how it comes up differently for everyone, can also then just bring an openness to learning that everyone's different and trying to have more of an open mind about how maybe things could work. Just because things have always been a certain way, doesn't mean maybe there's not a way to make them a little bit better for some people.

**Shari Simpson:**

I love that example. You know, I had a friend who, who I had on the podcast, you know, a while back and she was talking about her experience and she has a lot of executive function challenges and she has had to learn how to advocate for the things that she knows she's going to do really well at. and the things she knows she's going to fail at. And so she's had to go into conversations with her manager and say, Hey, listen, you know, if this thing right here is how my performance is going to be measured, I'm going to fail every time. And that's okay if that's what it is. And maybe this isn't the right fit for me. This job isn't the right fit for me. That's a person who has gone through a lot of work to understand where they sit. So let's say you're not her, right? Where do you start? Let's take something as simple as like, hey, I don't know. I get stuck. I don't know the first step on a task to take. Where do I even start? How do we help ourselves who are sitting in this space of having ADHD, know where to begin that process, either internally or with the conversation we have to have with our leader.

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

So I would start internally. And I think that a great way to start that would be to take some time and really look at yourself. It's great that you recognize that you have a hard time knowing where to start. So think back to times when maybe it was easier to start. Did someone help you with something specific set up? What was the magic sauce that made you be able to get started that time? And then even think about times when it's not been successful. What happened that made it even more difficult? And take that information and see which parts you can do yourself and which you might want to ask for, which seem reasonable, and take that to your supervisor, your boss, your, you know, this applies to families too, you know, your partner, whatever. I have a really hard time getting started. this sort of thing kind of helps me more,

whereas this doesn't tell me. Just turning me loose, saying, here, I need you to do these 10 things. Go get it. I don't know where to start, but sitting down here and maybe giving me the whole roadmap, making some initial decisions, like these are the first three things you need to do, or this is when they're due, can help me. So, you know, your friend's great. She's got so much together, but sitting back and like, okay, this is where I struggle. And that takes some looking at, because it's easier just to say, I can't do this task. Instead of saying, I can't do this task, this whole job, this project, I struggle with getting started, or I struggle with following through. and really thinking what has helped me and what hasn't helped me with no blame on anybody. And then distilling the essential parts of that and being able to go and take that and say, this would help me be more successful. And this does not help me be more successful.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah, and just being practical. I love that, you know, having a practical conversation. You brought up rejection sensitivity earlier, and I think that is very real. I think about the anxiety that we in HR can create when we send that email. It's like, hey, can you stop by our office later today, right? And for us, we might be thinking, like, not even thinking about how we sent that. Maybe we have some complete benign conversation we need to have about something silly, but that creates obviously a narrative for somebody else. That's a silly example, but often, you know, leaders find themselves in places where they might need to give tough feedback. And so what does that look like? How have you coached leaders to give that feedback without triggering that shutdown or that spiral in the employee?

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

So some of the things I talk about, first, the more you know the employee and how they respond to things is always going to help you and help inform what you're doing. And then I think also being very like specific and task oriented about what the feedback's about. Keeping the personal issues out of it, you know, really trying to find like, this was the task, this is the job, and this is what was done incorrectly, or this is where the problem is. And then giving them very specific steps to fix it, right? Because just saying, you did this report

wrong has judgment and it isn't helpful. but then being able to talk to them and say, this is how I would have liked it to be, or here's an example, or I would like you to go back in and make this graph different, like whatever it is. I think the more specific and check-ins and then trying to do it not in a condescending way, but instead of saying, oh, just like with teaching, you know, oh, do you understand? And then they're all gonna sit there and say, yeah, I understand, when like they don't understand. So trying to then have that conversation. Okay, so what are you going to do first? And what are you going to do next? And walking that line so it doesn't sound like you're insulting them or treating them like a child. But just let's be really clear so that you can be successful because I want you to be successful.

**Shari Simpson:**

I love that you made the effort to say not being treated like a child because as you were describing it, I was thinking, you know, man, I bet there are employees who could take it that way. And I also believe that there's probably leaders who potentially are listening and could say, yeah, well, that sounds like so much more work for me. And maybe that is true. Maybe there is some more work up front, but I think that's where we have to change our mindset as leaders for when we work with people who have ADHD, because we can't focus on that, Hey, I have to spend a little bit more time here because inevitably there is a superpower that that person is bringing to the table. That's, that's bringing something else they can do quicker, better, or, you know, more efficient than a different employee. So it's not about a deficit. It's about just like you look at every other performance thing. It's about how do we enable you and empower you to have the tools and resources and clear expectations on what success looks like.

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

Exactly. And, and I guess that's, that's the line. So it's going to take this much effort to get this, this final product that I want, but how much effort is it going to take if you don't get what you want? You know, are you going to have to fire that person and hire somebody else and train somebody else? Are you going to put out something that you're not proud of? So there's that line. I mean, if good enough is good enough and good enough can be good enough, you

know, with just a little tweak or somebody else goes in and fixes whatever the issue was, then fine. But if, you know, if this is causing this much of a problem, then you should want to fix it. And then hopefully it won't have to many times after that be fixed again.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah. Creating those good routines. Can I talk about sensory issues for just a second? I think there is an opportunity for us in, in the workspace to think about being sensory smart. So what are some of maybe the tweaks that you've recommended to take in maybe meetings or the way we design our offices to, to think more neuro-inclusive?

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

I think being more aware of what the whole situation is like, it can be really hard to be in a big open space. and be interrupted. So with ADHD often, not with everyone, but I know this is for me, if I am interrupted in the middle of something, it's not just like, oh, you asked me a question and it took me 30 seconds and then I'm right back working on it. I'm then taking steps back because now you distracted me. my brain went somewhere else and now I have to figure out where I was, what I was doing and get back into the vibe and doing it again. So allowing to what it can, can, can work to have employees be able to, especially if they're really trying to focus on something, be able to go somewhere quiet and maybe having procedures or unofficial rules about how you interrupt people. You know, when you talk, that kind of thing can help. And then other things that may be distracting, you know, you can look at the lights. I know there's been lots of research on different kinds of lights, different kinds of noise. And as we know, like everyone with ADHD is a little bit different. So to the extent that you can kind of get a feel for what actually different people like. And so for ADHD, going into meetings, the more you know about what's going to happen, the better. Just like with, you know, you talked about HR giving you an email saying we need to talk, you know, if you go into, if you can set up your meeting structure so that people go into meetings knowing what to expect, or at least the format or how it's going to be, and if, their role in it, then that kind of lowers some of the anxiety and can help people perform better and focus better.



**Shari Simpson:**

Well, and focus is so important for everybody. I don't know if you've seen this, but I've definitely seen, you know, over the last probably year and a half, you know, some pretty funny Instagram reels around different tactics that people take not to be interrupted. Everything from as silly as, you know, wearing a sign on their back that says, like, I get distracted easily. Don't don't interrupt me too. I'm going very tech focused. I've seen these little USB literally looking flags that turn red or green. You can manually turn them red or green. And it's just a visual for, for those in the office, like, Hey, I'm red right now, which means please do not like, unless there's something on fire, don't interrupt me because. You're going to lose my, I'm going to lose my productivity. I'm in a flow. You know, I know, especially once I'm in that flow state, if something pulls me out of it, it takes me a long time to get back to it. And I, and I'll honestly, I might not get back to it all that day. I might be like, well, it's done. Like I can't, my brain's not going to do that today anymore.

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

Yeah, yeah, you're done. And that I'm done thing is something that neurotypicals don't really understand. I think how hard it is to then get back into that group. I love the idea of some sort of little sign, some sort of little flag or stick or something that's like, I'm working right now. And just giving them the ability to say that and to do that. And even then, if it's set up, One thing that's good for many people with ADHD is if we get into something, then you have a hard time breaking up. So it's like, you know, even like, okay, I'm working until I finish this or I'm working until 11 and then at 11 we can talk. You know, situations like that, or if it's blocking it off of the calendar, it depends what your job is, what your situation is, but definitely a climate that respects that. And that, you know, that that's good. Like it's almost like now it's quiet time. It's quiet time, everyone.

**Shari Simpson:**

Yeah. Well, you know, this has been a great conversation. And I think hopefully it's given our audience some things to think about. You know, one thing we didn't spend a lot of time talking about, which That is the encourage our audience to kind of go down this rabbit hole with is, is around time blocking

and how that, you know, how people with ADHD kind of look at that. You know, for me, when I look at my calendar and I have 10 meetings today and there's 30 minutes between each meeting, that is the most stressful thing. I'd rather have the meetings be back to back because when I look at that 30 minutes for me personally, it's like, I really got to focus on what am I going to do in that 30 minutes? Because to me, that's like lost time. Like. What am I gonna do in 30 minutes, you know? But not everybody looks at it that way. Somebody who doesn't have the same brain as me might look at it, oh, I got 30 minutes to really dive deep into this one thing. And so really understanding how time works for people, I think, you know, we could probably spend a whole episode on that. So I would just leave that with our audience with that one. So as we wrap up, what is maybe one thing that HR can start doing to create some better policies or pilot programs to really start to think about neuro-inclusive environments for their organizations?

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

I'd say spend some time learning some things, listening to some podcasts where people talk about it, reading some articles, some books, really learning more about what it actually is and not what you think it is from what other people talk about. You know, back to that eight year old boy. And this is what ADHD is. And like you said, I'm not big on the superpowers word, but, you know, you have strengths. Our minds can be very adept and very flexible. And there's ways that you can really work with that, you know. And like you said with your friend, figuring out what you're judging, not judging, but evaluating somebody on. And if this is what this task is to be evaluated on, I'm going to fail versus this is a task that I can do well, given my strengths.

**Shari Simpson:**

I love that. Well, Dr. Dall, thank you so much for taking time of your day to sit with me.

**Dr. Jennifer Dall:**

Thank you so much.

**Shari Simpson:**

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. You can find show notes and links at [TheHRMixtape.com](http://TheHRMixtape.com) Come back often and please subscribe, rate, and review.