

FROM THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHORS OF  
*DIRTY LAUNDRY*

# SMALL TALK

10 ADHD lies and how to stop believing them

RICHARD & ROXANNE PINK



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**10 ADHD lies and how to  
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# Contents

## INTRODUCTION

The Book That Almost Didn't Exist	1
Writing a Book With My ADHD Wife	7
Small Talk: 10 ADHD Lies	15

## CHAPTERS

ADHD Lie #1: I Am Lazy	19
ADHD Lie #2: I'm Not Trying Hard Enough	35
ADHD Lie #3: I Quit Everything I Start	53
ADHD Lie #4: I Am Stupid	71
ADHD Lie #5: ADHD Isn't Real, I'm Just a Bad Person	87
ADHD Lie #6: Everybody Secretly Hates Me	107
ADHD Lie #7: I Am Useless	127
ADHD Lie #8: I Am a Burden	149
ADHD Lie #9: I Am a Failure	167
ADHD Lie #10: The World Would Be Better Off Without Me	183
One Last Thing: The Truth About ADHD	199

## APPENDIX

Big Talk Manifesto	201
Thank You	203
ADHD Dictionary	205
References and Notes	209

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# The Book That Almost Didn't Exist

*Written by Rox*

Hi, I'm Rox. The majority of the internet now knows me as the 'ADHD Wife'.

But, long before this, I had another name—a not-very-nice one I gave myself somewhere between almost getting kicked out of university and quitting my first job as a trainee accountant. The use of *first* here is very important. You see, I have bailed on *lots* of jobs. And some half-decent relationships. And some potentially money-making business ideas. And some life-changing wellness journeys. And in fact, the first draft of this book . . .

It was a rather lovely manuscript, full of advice about how to thrive with ADHD. We were fifty research hours, three chapters and a million cover design ideas deep when I decided to start over. Explaining to Rich (my partner and co-author of this book!) that six months' worth of work was being thrown away on what looked like a whim was an interesting conversation . . . I was met with his usual brand of quiet contemplation, curiosity and advice. But after he listened to why I felt we needed to change direction, he agreed.

Let me back up for a moment. The reason why we originally decided to write this book was quite simply . . . you. The people who we are lucky enough to be connected to via social media. In a world where such platforms are often used to divide, we found a community of people

who just wanted to feel like they weren't alone in their struggles. Who could for the first time say, "Wait, so it isn't just me who always forgets the laundry in the dryer?" People who were eager to learn that perhaps they weren't terrible humans, but rather people with a neurodevelopmental condition . . .

Halfway through our second book idea (RIP), I asked a question to our @ADHD\_Love followers: "What are some core beliefs that you hold about yourself?" I was hoping to gather some information for an uplifting chapter on neurodivergent identity. But as I began reading the replies, my heart sank:

*I am lazy.*  
*I'm not trying hard enough.*  
*I quit everything I start.*  
*I am stupid.*  
*ADHD isn't real.*  
*Everybody secretly hates me.*  
*I am useless.*  
*I am a burden.*  
*I am a failure.*  
*The world would be better off without me.*

There were over 5,000 replies. Every single one was as gut-wrenching as the last. I realised that our community has a huge and deep-seated problem: a shocking level of self-hatred. Suddenly our book on neurodivergent self-discipline (featuring tips like 'using scented candles to stay focused') felt like a bandage on a bullet hole.

What the hell, I asked myself, is the point of telling people how to be more productive when they ABSOLUTELY HATE THEMSELVES? What does success even mean if people are walking around believing

they are utterly unlovable? What point is there to organisation if you don't even feel worthy of being alive?

There are so many books, podcasts and articles out there advising people with ADHD on how to be more productive. Some of them are incredibly helpful. But my God . . . There is a bigger problem we have to talk about. And that is that many neurodivergent people are living with crippling, toxic core beliefs. Beliefs that they have internalised so deeply that they override every good thing about them. Beliefs put there by a world that is not built for them. Beliefs put there by the harsh words of critics, teachers, and perhaps more painfully, parents and loved ones. Beliefs that, if not weeded out and replaced, will inform the rest of their lives.

Perhaps this is a good time for me to actually get to the point, and tell you about my former name. The one I used to call myself for many years. It was:

LAZY. USELESS. LOSER.

Okay, so it's three names. Or perhaps a first name and a double-barrel surname.

*Hi, I'm Lazy Useless-Loser. Nice to meet you.*

I haven't called myself this in quite some time . . . but reading your replies brought it all flooding right back. For a very long time, I believed so many toxic things—lies—about myself. My inner narrative used to sound like this:

- When I lost something: “*You are disgusting and careless.*”
- When I was late to something: “*You disrespectful mess.*”

- When I was melting down: “*You attention-seeking child.*”
- When I quit something: “*You fucking failure.*”

I now call this ‘small talk’. Talking down to yourself. Speaking to yourself as if you are worthless, ensuring you continue to play small. Of course, we neurodivergents know the other kind of small talk . . . the insufferable conversation starters we are meant to have with everybody that we meet—which can feel boring to downright terrifying. Just another skill we failed to learn, along with how to keep on top of the cleaning or how to stop getting bored of a new hobby. Fear not . . . this book is literally the total opposite of *that* type of small talk. It’s deep, heavy, and in fact should probably come with a trigger warning or two. So here it is. Consider yourself warned. Big Talk only in these pages, which will include looking at addiction, trauma, self-harm and family relationships. (All much better than talking about the weather, if you ask me . . .)

Back to the horrible inner narrative that I used to live with. As I explained in our first book, *Dirty Laundry*, until my mid-thirties, I had been living with a lot of unprocessed trauma and undiagnosed ADHD—a recipe for disaster. And without the language to understand what was happening, the only thing I could do was blame myself. I was my own personal fear-leading squad, spewing negativity over every inch of my life on a continuous loop.

I was an alcoholic, a relationship addict, £40,000 in debt and living in spare rooms. My only certainty was the belief I would never amount to anything in life. It was too late for me; I was a lazy, useless loser. I was destined to sit in a pub, bitterly lamenting my wasted potential over a pint for years to come.

But then I did a 180. At the age of 34, I got sober. I’d absolutely love to tell you that one day I woke up and decided it was time to get better.

As with most addicts though . . . the decision to turn things around was not that easy. I had to hit rock bottom. The absolute worst moment in my life. A three-day bender. A relationship breakdown. A shit ton of debt. And even more self-hatred. I walked into my first recovery meeting, and within an hour, my time as the 'life and soul' of the party was over. And thank God for that.

That first year sober was brutal. All of the emotions I had been numbing my whole life came back with a vengeance. I confronted the grief of losing my mum, the fact that I was in so much debt, and that I had never been able to maintain a relationship, or a job. I was deeply ashamed of the life I had lived up until then, and couldn't see a way out of. Life without red wine was so intolerable to me, that it sent me into therapy, where I have been for the last four years. It's then I made the discovery that I have ADHD (more on that later). That self-knowledge changed EVERYTHING.

Because, you see, even sober, I *still* suffered with 'small talk'—*still* thought I was a useless piece of shit. But being diagnosed with ADHD meant I had to force myself to see my life and my struggles differently. The four years since my diagnosis have been a journey to change my core beliefs and stop believing awful lies about myself. To find my truth—which is that perhaps I wasn't and am not the worst person alive, but someone in desperate need of more support. When I started changing the way I spoke to myself, my life began to change dramatically.

I learned that you can't build a life you love when you hate yourself. Our inner talk is like a compass, determining whether or not we'll find happiness, or at least acceptance. If our inner-talk is toxic, if it's all fearleader and no cheerleader, it will drag us down, take us to dark places, and sabotage our best efforts to find joy. That core belief is like

True North. And we will always find it. So . . . how can we change that compass setting from pointing out our failures, and direct ourselves to somewhere better? How do we stop believing all these horrible things about ourselves?

Often, the missing setting on that compass is not willpower, or trying harder: it's understanding. Acceptance. Support. And love. I wonder how many of you are blaming yourselves for things that are not within your control, willing yourselves to change, when what you really need is a cup of tea, a warm hug and someone to tell you that you matter deeply. That your past does not define your future. And that you deserve to be treated with respect and kindness. By others, *and* by yourself.

I hope this book can be that.\* A cup of tea. A warm hug. And a road map out of self-hatred. I know it's possible. And I know it can change your life.

\* (P.S. I also truly hope you don't think this book is shit, because it would be really awkward after we threw the other one away.)

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# Writing a Book With My ADHD Wife

*Written by Rich*

Writing a book is hard. Writing a book with someone who has ADHD is . . . umm . . . *interesting*.

For me, writing is simply about finding the time to do it. My process is as follows:

1. Pick a date we're both free.
2. Block it out in the diary.
3. Make sure we have a constant flow of caffeine.
4. Brainstorm a chapter.
5. Write the chapter.

Efficient. And extremely unlikely for us to be able to achieve.

You see, Rox's method for writing goes something like this:

1. Wait for a random burst of energy and inspiration.
2. Start writing even if it's 11.30 p.m. or we are meant to be going out in ten minutes.

My desire for order was constantly bumping into her desire for freedom and creativity. I'd block out a day in both of our diaries for us to write, only to find out on the day itself that Rox had agreed to meet a

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friend in London, and that she'd only added our writing date to her 'mind calendar' rather than our shared digital one.

Or we'd drive to a lovely location so we could focus on typing up chapter notes, only for Rox to say she didn't have the energy to work. We made many a trip to Homebase for whiteboards so we could lay out chapter titles, only for Rox to fill them with ideas for Etsy businesses and random doodles.

But we eventually found a way to make it work. I ploughed through my research and writing on a strict schedule. Rox wrote when she felt inspired. And we pieced it together, giving each other feedback and encouragement along the way. We had a deadline to meet with our publisher for the first few chapters of our book, and I was delighted (and perhaps a little surprised) that we actually made it. First chapters were sent off, and the book cover was being designed. Lovely. We were on the way to finishing our second book!

The day after delivering our first few chapters, however, Rox walked into our bedroom looking upset.

"Babe," she said, "I need to speak to you about the book."

I resisted the urge to pull out my hair as she proceeded to tell me that she no longer wanted to write this book and, in fact, wanted to start again on a totally different idea.

Internally, my initial response was, "You must be joking. It's taken six months to write three chapters. We haven't got time." But instead, I said, "Tell me more."

I have learned to be "open to a different experience" (to borrow from

our therapist) and hear Rox out when she is very passionate about something, because there can often be genius in her ideas. Sometimes, as with any of us, there's total nonsense. But occasionally there are nuggets of pure gold. So, I nervously asked her why the change of heart.

Arms waving around like a mad scientist, pyjama-clad and passionate, she proceeded to pitch me the new idea. Something about social media. Something about core beliefs. Something about ADHD people hating themselves. Something about rewriting the entire thing.

“The worst symptom of ADHD isn't what we all think it is! It's not the losing things, memory issues, hobby swapping, or overwhelm . . . it's actually the horrible beliefs we have developed about ourselves from living with these symptoms in a world that doesn't accommodate us. We need to write a book about the core beliefs holding our community back. Not a productivity book. Please.”

Of course, it crossed my mind to say no. To heavily encourage that we stick to our original idea. To make a list about why this didn't make sense. But I decided against it for two reasons. Firstly, getting Rox to do something she isn't emotionally invested in anymore would be like dragging her through tar. And secondly, I could see the *magic* in her. (That's 'magic', not 'manic'. Although maybe there is a fine line between the two!) That magic is the glint in her eye and the crazy hand movements that tell me she believes this idea is heaven-sent. It was the side quest of all side quests. And hey, who am I to disagree with that oh-so-convincing ADHD intuition?

After a night's sleep and some time to digest the possibility of throwing our productivity book away and starting again, something hit me. A memory of Rox in our first year together. She was getting ready for a

music video shoot I was driving her to. She'd decided not to get ready the night before (absolutely not a shock), so the morning was a bit of a mad rush.

She was trying on clothes and nothing seemed to be going right. The pile of discarded outfits on the floor was growing, and her face was getting redder and redder.

"Babe, are you okay?" I asked her.

"No . . ." I could hear the mixture of panic and pain in her shaking voice. "I'm a stupid fucking idiot. Why have I left it so late? I cannot be trusted to get anything right." And then she broke down in tears.

The next hour was a rescue mission of repairing tear-smudged mascara and finding a good-enough outfit. We got everything together and made it to the video on time. Rox's neurotypical mask went on, well practised over years of having to pretend she was okay when she wasn't, and the shoot went very well. But I was still very shaken by the heaviness of her words and her perceived "failure" as a human—simply for not having picked out her clothes the night before.

After the video I decided to raise it with her.

"Babe," I began, "I know you were super frustrated, but the way you spoke to yourself this morning was really nasty."

"What do you mean?" She looked genuinely confused.

"Calling yourself stupid, and swearing at yourself."

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“Oh . . . that!” She laughed. “That is pretty much what it sounds like in my head all the time. I just said it out loud today.”

It was the first time she had ever shared with me—or anyone else—the constant bullying that she was living with, the cruel voice inside her head. To her, it was normal. To me, it was horrendous. I felt almost ill to think that the person that I love, a person I know to be kind, caring and empathetic, was living with a constant loop of self-abuse in her own head. We had to put a stop to it.

Over the next few years, we began to work together on her self-talk, with regular reminders from me of when she was being mean and needed to apologise to herself. I am well aware this sounds a bit crazy, but put it this way: if anyone spoke to you that way, you would expect an apology, right?

We now refer to this kind of language as ‘small talk’.

A combination of therapy and a very attuned home environment meant things started to get better for Rox. Her inner narrative began to change from one of personal failure and ‘not-good-enough-ness’ to one of kindness and compassion. Now, a lost wallet still stings a bit, but she can say, “Ahhh, that’s so frustrating. Guess the ADHD is ADHD-ing,” rather than “I am a horrible person and I never do anything right.”

Overall, the lens of ADHD has allowed Rox to crawl out from under the rock of self-hatred. It’s given her language and explanations for some of her biggest struggles. She has also gone on to do some pretty amazing things in life and work, things I know she previously believed to be impossible.

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Every person deserves this: the freedom to understand that their struggles mean they deserve support, *not* shame and judgement. The good news is that partners, parents and friends can be a vital part of helping someone with ADHD achieve that freedom.

This is the idea that resonated with Rox.

She has walked in these shoes. She has hated herself for years. She knows where this kind of thinking leads.

And this is why we had to write this book. A book that isn't about changing you. But rather making you realise you are pretty awesome just as you are. The biggest change I ever saw in Rox was when she learned to change her core beliefs. So that's what we want to help you to do as well. Goodbye productivity book. Hello let's kick those nasty negative core beliefs in the ass book.

If you are lucky enough to love someone with ADHD, you will no doubt have heard them speak horribly to themselves. You'll know how easily shame overcomes them, and that believing they are broken, disliked or at fault is their natural setting. It is our job, as people who love them, to reflect back their value, call out the self-bullying, and help them to rebuild their lost self-esteem.

Throughout this book, we will tackle the most toxic core beliefs of people with ADHD. We call them the ADHD Lies. As with our previous book, we'll do it through two lenses: from Rox's perspective, as someone who has lived with these beliefs for many years and finally found a way to change them. And from my perspective, as someone who has supported her, helped her, and encouraged her every step of the way. We will share (well, perhaps overshare!) how each one of the ADHD Lies has affected us, and how we have worked to stop believing them.

Thank you so much for choosing to spend this time with us. It truly is a pleasure to get to speak directly to you, and I really hope that you find support in these pages.\*

\* Of course, there's a chance this book ends up in a to-be-read pile that you never actually get to, but if that's NOT the case, and if you are holding it right now, know that it was the product of an ADHD-inspired change in direction, many late nights of hyperfocus, and a deep desire to help folks with ADHD to become all that they truly can be.

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## Small Talk: 10 ADHD Lies

*Written by Rich and Rox*

In popular psychology, a core belief is a deeply held, unshakeable conviction about how we understand ourselves and the world around us. Core beliefs drive our behaviour, thoughts and emotions. Core beliefs can also become self-fulfilling prophecies: often, we hold onto them so tightly that our actions, often subconsciously, bring about evidence that our beliefs are true.

Imagine someone who holds the core belief, “I am deserving of love and respect.” This person is likelier to meet others with confidence and know how to set boundaries. This person has an internal compass that will alert them to exploitative or emotionally unsafe situations. They are likelier to sense if something is off about a prospective partner, and view disrespect as an immediate red flag. They are likelier to take action to get away from whatever is causing deep unease.

Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. If someone holds the core belief, “I am unworthy of love and respect,” they will view themselves as less than others, and may spend a lot of time and energy trying to prove their worth. They are likely more susceptible to being in abusive relationships, be easily taken advantage of at work, and find it difficult to see red flags. Being treated poorly may actually feel familiar, if not correct, to them—like something they deserve.

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