

Education on ADHD

What does it mean and how does it really effect a person?

- Better labeled as executive function disorder. Typically causes impairment across domains, not just one area of life. Even when it comes to attention, having attention is not the issue, it's more a difficulty in directing where your own attention goes and stays.
- Adults are 5x more likely to die by age 46 with untreated ADHD
- Top 3rd genetically predisposed disorder. ADHD is a genetic disorder, not caused by environment or experiences.
- Neurodevelopment disorder. Typical 2-3 year lag in brain development. (Doesn't mean you can't be highly intelligent. Just means certain parts of your brain develop differently or slower.)
- Individuals with zero hyperactivity symptoms are better categorized as "SCT" sluggish cognitive tempo.

Symptoms

Symptoms are split into two main categories.

Hyperactive (hyperactive symptoms tend to decrease with age)

- Executive inhibition
 - Deficient motor inhibition/ motor restlessness
 - Verbal inhibition. Thinking before speaking, waiting your turn to speak, not saying things that are inappropriate.
 - impulsive cognition. Disorganized racing thoughts. Rapid decision making.
 - Impulsive motivation. Preference toward immediate gratification, vs. better choices that will pay off later. Doing what feels good in the moment vs. what might be the more appropriate or important thing to do.
 - Emotional impulsivity. Show emotions quickly when provoked and to stronger degree. Less ability to use cognitive intervention to moderate emotion expression. Difficulty recovering emotional regulation once activated.

Inattention

- Executive attention
 - Difficulty with attention toward the future and goal. Difficulty sustaining persistent attention toward future goals over immediate stimuli.
 - Easily distractible. Difficulty maintaining focus on priority task.
 - Difficulty returning to tasks after attention interruption.
 - Poor working memory. Remembering what needs to be done and steps involved. "What was I doing?"
 - Diminished self monitoring, awareness about own thought and behavioral patterns.
 - Poor planning and problem solving. Mental organization of needs, priorities, steps involved in solving a problem, and linear understanding. Planning is more like a chaotic consultation than a straight line.
 - Difficulty understanding the nature of time. Difficulty monitoring time and understanding how much time things take and how long a sequence of things will take. Often getting caught up doing something due to not feeling how much time has passed.
 - Motivation. Difficulty motivating self for tasks and sustaining attention on tasks that are not intrinsically motivating.

How does this look in real life?

- Difficulty maintaining schedules and order due to:
 - Short term gratification overriding long term goal or need pursuit
 - Difficulty tracking/understanding/planning for time appropriately
- Difficulty making positive life choices and overriding immediate choices based on what feels good in the moment
- Difficulty managing and maintaining consistency around work, life tasks, and sometimes the meeting of basic needs.
 - Poor working memory and difficulty organizing and prioritizing interferes with ability to remember what needs to be done, maintain systems for doing those things regularly.
 - Difficulty with being able to direct own motivation (starting tasks and continuing tasks to completion) interferes with doing the things you need to even when you can remember them
 - Can making life feel chaotic, disorganized, and out of control. Can feel very shameful and leave you feeling incompetent.
 - Difficulty shifting gears when you are doing something and feeling focused, even if something else is higher priority at that time.
- Difficulty in relationships
 - Difficulty intervening with own emotional spikes to moderate what you say in conflict
 - Intense emotions that disrupt relationship harmony and feelings of satisfaction
 - Difficulty speaking impulsively, having “no filter”. Withholding what emotional urges encourage you to say in conflict vs. what is positive or healthy for the relationship.
 - Rejection sensitivity (see below)
 - Frustration from partners about all other symptoms.
 - Difficulty paying attention in conversations with others, sending a signal of lack of care.
 - Irritability and sometimes explosiveness when asked to shift tasks when experiencing focus.
- Difficulty regulating own emotions
 - Big emotions
 - Difficulty intervening with self or pausing self to react appropriately when experiencing strong emotions
 - Difficulty calming down after emotional spike.
- Rejection sensitivity. Frequent rejection or correction throughout life increases sensitivity and intense feelings of shame, guilt, sadness, or anger when given criticism (or something that looks or feels like criticism).
 - Also seeing criticism when it’s not what someone else meant due to anticipating it based on years of past experience.
 - Combined with general difficulty regulating emotions and calming down after emotional spikes.
- Forgetfulness
 - Due to poor working memory, forgetting things, times, tasks. Forgetting what you’re doing in the middle of it. Forgetting all the things you need before leaving the house or leaving things places.
- Sensory issues
 - Often experiencing overstimulation which often feels like a combination of irritability and confusion/disorientation. Particularly in response to sensory stimuli such as texture of food/clothing, sounds, lights, movement, or crowds.

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- Hyperactive thought patterns
 - Busy racing thoughts which you feel unable to control or silence. Leading to feelings of frustration, exhaustion, anxiety, overstimulation, and increased difficulty focusing or directing focus.
- Increased accidents and injuries of all natures due to:
 - Difficulty directing focus/paying attention to what you're doing in the moment.
 - Increased impulsivity and making more risky/dangerous choice
 - Increased potential for exposure to violence in relationships and with strangers due to impulsivity and difficulty regulating emotions
- Health issues due to:
 - Genetic overlap with autoimmune issues
 - Decreased engagement in positive health practices such as exercise, cooking healthy foods, brushing teeth, drinking water, etc. because of delayed gratification, planning, impulsivity, and working memory issues.
 - Decreased followup with medical needs and setting/keeping appointments.

If this all sounds familiar and you'd like help learning how to manage/understand your ADHD better, please email kaila@boudewyncounseling.com for more information or to schedule a free 15 minute therapy consultation.

