

ADHD101

Student Handout



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ADHD 101 HANDOUT

What is ADHD & Misconceptions of ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a brain-based, biological disorder that impacts 11% of children, 5% of diagnosed adults, and an estimated 5 million undiagnosed adults in the U.S. According to researchers ADHD is likely genetic, but more research is examining what else impacts the development (e.g., environmental factors and brain changes). ADHD is categorized and diagnosed into three subtypes: (1) inattentive type, (2) hyperactive or impulsive type, and (3) combined type. The symptoms are said to represent the broad range of traits associated with each subtype; however, every person with ADHD experiences the symptoms differently.

ADHD Myths

Myth # 1 – People with ADHD just need to try harder.

- people with ADHD are often trying VERY hard – just with fewer results to show for their efforts.

Myth # 2 - ADHD only impacts children / Children with ADHD eventually outgrow ADHD.

- Research shows that as many as two-thirds of children with ADHD will continue to struggle with symptoms into adulthood.
- 4.4% of the adult population has diagnosed ADHD
- Experts estimate that about 80-84% of adults with ADHD (roughly 5 million) haven't been officially diagnosed.

Myth # 3 – ADHD is result of bad parenting.

- Symptoms of ADHD – like blurting out or fidgeting are rooted in brain chemistry, not discipline. Research shows that overly strict parenting practices can worsen ADHD symptoms.

Myth # 4 – People with ADHD are lazy and unmotivated.

Myth # 5 – People with ADHD are less intelligent.

- People with ADHD often perform at a lower level than their peers at school. This is because they have trouble staying organized, paying attention to detail, and completing tasks. However, their academic performance wasn't due to their lack of intelligence. One study found that those with ADHD who scored lower on intelligence tests had other preexisting conditions (e.g., learning disability). These conditions include a learning disability or other cognitive impairment.

Myth # 6 – ADHD is a “made-up” disorder.

- ADHD is an “invisible” disorder because it has no physical symptoms that you can see on the body. Because of this, some people believe it isn't a real condition. Others believe that the pharmaceutical industry invented it to generate more profit. The medical community first identified ADHD in 1980. They used the term to describe inattentive individuals. Many doctors believe the disorder has been around for much longer.

What are the Symptoms of ADHD?

Symptoms of ADHD fall into three categories:

1. Inattention

- a. Short attention span
- b. Frequent careless mistakes
- c. Trouble listening or following instructions
- d. Trouble organizing activities/tasks
- e. Losing or forgetting things repeatedly and often

- f. Easily distracted
- g. Forgetfulness and poor study skills

2. Impulsivity

- a. Tendency to interrupt others
- b. Difficulty waiting for their turn
- c. Tendency to blurt out answers instead of waiting to be called on
- d. Inclination to risk behaviors, often without thinking first

3. Hyperactivity

- a. Constant need to get up, move, run, often with no apparent destination
- b. Fidgeting or squirming when forced to sit still
- c. Excessive talking
- d. Difficulty engaging in quiet activities
- e. Shifting from one task to another without finishing any of them
- f. Hyperactivity can also be mental, like having hundreds of new ideas or a million anxious thoughts

Common Symptoms of ADHD in Adults- withdrawn, impatience, impulsiveness, trying hard to conform, over-thinker, forgetfulness, talking excessively, binge-eating, fidgety, difficulty with chores, unpaid bills, running late, friendship issues, workplace struggles, interrupts others, fatigued, addictive personality, low self-esteem, burnt-out, hyperfocus, losses belongings, depression, messy, emotional outbursts, disorganization, anxiety, mood swings, procrastination, daydreaming, risk driving, hypersensitivity, difficulty prioritizing, money management struggles/ impulsive spending, aggression, irritability, emotional dysregulation, rejection sensitivity, reckless behaviors, distractibility, really organized (overcompensating), time blindness.

Redefining ADHD: *“a highly creative person who struggles to focus their attention conventionally. A person with ADHD may process information differently because they are visionaries who can see unique patterns in the world that no ordinary human being can. A person with ADHD can hyperfocus on the activity of interest. They can be stuck in a vortex of extreme attention that can range anywhere between 2-24 hours without noticing time has elapsed. A person with ADHD can be seen as highly vibrant and inspiring. They are often charming individuals who are well-liked by others.”*

ADHD & Psychological Distress

- 55% of first-year college students with ADHD showed at least one mental health diagnosis in 2018.
- Roughly 60-70% of adults with ADHD have a co-occurring disorder, such as anxiety, depression, or a substance abuse disorder.

Learning Disabilities

- 50% of children and adolescents with ADHD also have some type of learning disability.

Examples ADHD can increase Anxiety & How Anxiety “Masks” ADHD?

1. You were constantly late thanks to time blindness, so now you can't relax before appointments and arrive way too early.
2. You always forgot what you wanted to say and kept switching topics, so you never talked about yourself anymore.
3. You were always told you're too loud and interrupting people, so you try to be quiet and not say anything out of place.

What can you do on your own to improve your ADHD and depression if that is something you experience?

1. Building awareness of the connection between your ADHD and depression
2. Be gentle with yourself - Both ADHD & depression rob you of the will, energy, and organization to try to get better. Even after understanding the connection, you will still have many days where you simply don't have it in you to "do it all."
3. Eating healthy meals, exercising regularly (aerobic exercise is important if you have ADHD), and practicing good sleep hygiene.
4. Prevent yourself from becoming bored if you have ADHD, which can make your mood worse.
 - a. Have an "interest closet" - store activities that you can do when you feel bored (e.g., books you want to read, that guitar you always said you would learn to play, crafts you want to do, etc.), so that there's never a time that you're at a loss.

Shame & Negative Thinking Strategies

1. Choose Your Battles- taking on too much at once causes feelings of overwhelm and stress leading to shame. Say “no” to a time commitment so you can focus on other life demands rather than “failing” at all of them.
2. Just Get it Done- completing a project is better than trying to perfect one that is late.
3. Do it Now- When you see something that you need to do, address it right then, or create a reminder to be sure to come back to it later.
4. Expect Difficulties- Like everyone else, you will have setbacks, and you will fail. Use them as an excuse to keep trying.

The Impact of ADHD on Relationships, School & Quality of Life

Ways ADHD symptoms can often sabotage relationships:

- The ADHD brain mostly hears criticism.
- ADHD brains conjure exaggerated thinking and imagine scenarios.
- ADHD causes hyperfocus on the negatives.
- Criticism overwhelms the ADHD brain.
- ADHD impulsivity causes irrational behavior.

Those with Hyperactive/Impulsive ADHD friendship type:

- interrupt conversations
- become easily bored
- dominate the conversation
- disregard social rules
- blurt out negative comments
- talk about themselves too much
- use alcohol to enhance their stimulation level
- sever relationships that feel frustrating

Those with Inattentive ADHD friendship type:

- feel overwhelmed by emotional demands
- experience anxiety in unfamiliar social situations
- censor themselves when they perceive conflict
- avoid unstructured group socializing

- withdraw when they feel overstimulated
- use obsessive behaviors to create a flawless façade
- attribute their missteps to character flaws
- anticipate criticism or rejection

Strategies for Relationships:

- Tell your friends and family about your preferred preferences of communicating and explain the reasons for them. They might be able to make a quick call and get right back to work, but you can't. The interruption takes you off task.
- When you are working, it is okay to turn off your phone. Let friends know that you “unplug” when you are busy and that you will text them when you take a break.
- If you want to be more outgoing but don't have time for it, try partnering with someone for an activity that you are already planning to do, like going to the gym or grocery shopping.
- When you enter a situation, set a goal of talking to three new people. It will make you more open to strangers and prompt you to make an effort past saying "hello."
- One way to make socializing more enjoyable is to create friendships with people who share common interests and are ok with making tentative plans or doing something on the spur of the moment.

Strategies for School:

1. Go to class –Resist the urge to skip class, even if you think the class is easy or boring. You increase your chances of success by showing up.
2. Be realistic –Many students with ADHD struggle with waking up in the morning. Don't sign up for that 8:00am course even if it sounds interesting.
3. Work first, play later – Campus is full of distractions, and students with ADHD often must work especially hard to get results.
4. Read the syllabus – It seems like an obvious step, but I know from working with many college students (many of whom have ADHD) that there's a tendency to skim through course syllabi.
5. Use a calendar – Keeping track of class times, assignments, tests, and social activities isn't easy and doesn't happen automatically. ADHD makes this even more difficult. Avoid missing important dates and deadlines by using a calendar.
6. Check-in with yourself –how motivated do you feel for each course? It will be easier to stay engaged in the courses that interest you. For the ones you are less excited about, create a safety net for yourself:
 - a. Remind yourself what's important about taking this class. Is it required for your major? Does it fill an elective? What topics or skills will you learn that you can apply to other courses or future work?
 - b. Set a weekly time in your calendar to review Canvas and make sure you know what's due and what's coming up.
 - c. Connect with a classmate and schedule regular sessions where you can work on assignments, study, and review together.

ADHD Self-Acceptance

1. Strengths & Challenges Inventory: who you are and aren't, what you are likely to do or not, how you work vs. *how you wish you worked*.
2. Practice ADHD self-acceptance. Remember what we discussed earlier – separate yourself from your ADHD.

3. accepting your challenges doesn't mean you can't change things. Your problems may be compounded by biology, history, environment, experiences, or other people in your life. But you get to choose how to respond to a situation. It is not simply what happens to you that causes your reactors. Instead, the meaning attached to an experience leads you to feel and behave in specific ways. Instead of focusing on what you can't do, look toward what you can. Something that the ADHD brain excels at is working around a problem.
4. Trust in your ability to do things differently. Do you have beliefs that limit you? Are you realistic in assessing situations or your abilities? Don't trust your first impulse to react in a situation. The ADHD brain loves drama. To people with ADHD, it's all or nothing, black or white, perfect, or useless. But that is not the reality. There is so much grey area, so push beyond that and see the alternatives.
5. Give your brain a roadmap. Set specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART goals).
6. Reflect on what might get in the way of reaching your goals. This might include external events or internal concerns like negative self-talk, avoidance, doubt, or fatigue

Affirmations for ADHD

"I am not stupid. I just process information differently to others."

"If I tune into my energy and direct it towards what I love, I can create something magical!"

"Self-care is important. I don't have to feel guilt resting. But I also need to make sure I have a plan of action."

"Somethings bore me because something is boring. I'm allowed to be bored, but I need to focus on why this task is important."

"Don't put it off, do it now, little by little. I don't have to do it all. I just need to get started!"