

THE SCHOOL PSYCH.



THE SCHOOL PSYCH.

Infosheets

NO. 1

FEB, 2022



ADHD

BY REBECCA PETRIE

PREVIOUS SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHER, PRIVATE PRACTICE & SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST WITH A PASSION FOR HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES, ACHIEVE THEIR BEST, ENGAGE IN LIFE AND RECEIVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED.

A common and frequently misunderstood disorder, ADHD or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a topic I am particularly passionate about. Young people with ADHD have often been labeled the 'naughty' kids, or the ones who just don't listen. Let me take you through some facts about the super-brain that exists in a person with ADHD and how to help people with the condition.

Technical bits...

ADHD is classified in the DSM-5 as a neurodevelopmental disorder, which has 3 different varieties: Inattentive Type, Hyperactive Type and Combined Type. Each has different criteria for diagnosis. Diagnosis is typically made by a medical doctor, commonly a paediatrician or a psychiatrist and support can be provided by a variety of mental health professionals trained in the area of ADHD.

The ADHD brain has been termed as a "Ferrari engine with bicycle brakes" (Dr Hallowell, ADHD 2.0, 2021).

What does this mean?

A person with ADHD can become super engaged in and excited about: things that are new and novel, things of personal interest, coming up with new & creative ideas, trying new things and pleasant sensations. But, the brakes don't go on easily, which means they can: find it hard to stop an activity they like, find it hard to slow their thoughts and speech, become easily overwhelmed by internal and external stimuli (information inside their mind and outside their bodies) and find it really hard to pay attention to things they find boring/ follow instructions they find boring.

Young people with ADHD often have trouble at school. Not all subjects are interesting to them, so they often struggle to pay attention and remember and sometimes do things impulsively to amuse their active brains. It is common for people with ADHD to have other conditions such as anxiety and learning disorders, which makes it even more difficult to do certain things. Most adults with ADHD have learnt coping strategies to hide their difficulties, but are often working very hard to keep all the balls in the air. New challenges can mean their strategies are pushed to the limit and they can become easily overwhelmed.



EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING CHALLENGES

Executive functioning is commonly described as the 'boss' of the brain. It ensures that everything is well organised, planned and filed in the right place. Think of an ADHD brain as one where the boss takes really long lunch breaks and doesn't spend much time at his desk. The filing is all piled up, organisation is not very good, they get all wound up about things. For this boss, getting started on projects is tricky without a plan, and they find it really hard to stop scrolling the net and remember what they were meant to be doing.

In contrast, there are times where this boss is 100% ON! Suit and tie, briefcase, the whole deal. If they are in a moment of inspiration or doing something they love, this boss has checklists, immaculate filing & colour coded stationery.

If you want a technical guide to executive functioning, see the resources below.



HELP THEM APPLY THE BRAKES

The best ways to assist someone with ADHD:

- **Love them for who they are: non-judgmentally & unconditionally.** When people feel safe and connected, it improves self-esteem and lessens anxiety, improving overall functioning and confidence. They are much more likely to share issues and engage in problem-solving if they feel accepted and connected. Celebrate individual strengths.
- **Encourage movement.** Exercise is a must for the ADHD brain
- **Set boundaries and structure.** Instead of punishment, use praise, coaching & encouragement for attempts. Consequences are ok, but punitive methods are ineffective. Make sure your expectations match the person's skills and capacity ("Kids do well if they can" Ross Greene). Please set screen-time boundaries! (See 'The Tech Diet' for help with this).
- **Support executive functioning.** Through charts, planners, visual reminders, alarms, lists, coaching and break tasks down, encouraging one step at a time.
- **Help them to regulate their emotions.** 'Time in' rather than time out. Coach them in breathing and mindfulness skills, calm their storm, don't participate. Model your own emotion regulation skills.
- **Medication can be highly effective.** Open discussions with doctors regarding medication is important in making informed decisions.



THE SUPER BRAIN

Some of the most creative minds in the world have ADHD. A simple google search will open you up to a world of inventors, actors and artists with ADHD whose talents have changed the world. It is a gift to have a mind that can think so far outside the square and not always be confined by what is considered practical. Once someone with ADHD finds something they love and are good at, they can be unstoppable. They often strive to be the best at their chosen talent. People with ADHD are often extremely hard-working, funny, charismatic and excellent leaders. They are usually honest, energetic and responsible.

People with ADHD can be highly successful with the right support and self-understanding. Because of the misunderstandings about ADHD, people with the condition can often have low self-esteem and suffer from anxiety because of the messages they have received about themselves at school, from their parents or peers.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

ADHD

<https://drhallowell.com/2019/04/05/your-adhd-brain-is-a-ferrari/>

Driven To Distraction: Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder from Childhood Through Adulthood (Edward M Hallowell, 2011)

ADHD 2.0: New Science and Essential Strategies for Thriving with Distraction—From Childhood Through Adulthood (Edward M Hallowell & John J Ratley, 2021)

Executive Functioning:

<https://www.understood.org/articles/en/what-is-executive-function>

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/what-is-executive-function-and-how-does-it-relate-to-child-development/>

Brain Hacks: Life-Changing Strategies to Improve Executive Functioning (Lara Honos-Webb, 2018)

Behaviour

The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children (Ross Greene, 2014)

Screen Time

The Tech Diet for your Child & Teen: 7-step Plan to Reclaim Your Kid's Childhood (and Your Family's Sanity) (Brad Marshall, 2019)