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Do We All Have ADHD
(Or Does It Just Seem Like It)?

We all have friends or coworkers who just can't seem to sit still or stay focused. "I must have undiagnosed ADHD," they joke. When you get right down to it, we've all felt restless, disorganized, or distracted at one time or another. So then, do we all just have ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)—once referred to as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)—is one of the most common disorders in childhood, affecting about 7.5 percent of children, according to the Mayo Clinic. But many adults with ADHD don't even realize they have the disorder. They do know that everyday tasks—from keeping appointments and getting up in the morning, to staying focused and being productive—are a real challenge.

Adults who have ADHD have had it since childhood. The Mayo clinic states that out of every three people with ADHD, one grows out of the symptoms, one has symptoms that are less severe than when he or she was younger, and one has persistent and significant symptoms as an adult.

In children, the symptoms of ADHD fall into three broad categories: trouble paying attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity. While it's normal for all children to be inattentive, overactive and impulsive at times, these behaviors in kids with ADHD are more severe and frequent.

Symptoms

While everyone likely experiences a couple of the below symptoms from time to time, for people with ADHD, the symptoms have caused a long history of problems in their schooling and work.

According to the Mayo Clinic, adult ADHD symptoms can include:

- Trouble focusing or concentrating
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Disorganization
- Frequent mood swings
- Hot temper
- Trouble coping with stress
- Unstable relationships

When it comes to diagnosing ADHD, the notion of "significant impairment" is key. Impairment refers to the ways in which symptoms disrupt a person's life. For example, people with ADHD may have trouble staying employed because of their inability to meet deadlines or stay focused, or they might have whopping credit card bills because of impulsive spending. Others might be failing college because of their symptoms, or have an unusually high amount of stress and conflict in their relationships.

ADHD is diagnosed only when a person's symptoms have significantly impaired at least two major settings in their life, such as work and family.

And since people with ADHD have had trouble ever since they were kids, if it's gone undiagnosed, many also develop low self-esteem.

Managing the Disorder

While there is no cure for ADHD, there are ways to manage it. Treatment focuses on reducing symptoms and improving quality of life. While there is still some debate about the best treatment, combining medication and counseling seems to be the most effective. Counseling for adults often includes psychotherapy and education about the disorder, as well as developing the skills to successfully manage daily tasks and responsibilities.

So while blurting out an expletive every once in a while or having a tough time organizing your schedule is certainly troublesome, it does not justify an ADHD diagnosis. ✻

TOP 5 Issues that Therapy Can Help Heal

Therapy can help you get through tough times now or understand difficult life experiences from the past. It can help you understand yourself better and grow as a person. Below are five issues with which a skilled therapist can help you.

1. Abuse. Healing wounds from past abuse—rape, molestation, physical, verbal—helps you resolve hurts and stuck feelings that may be keeping you from living a meaningful life. Working with a therapist can also help you leave or avoid current abusive situations.

2. Stress / anxiety. Prolonged, severe stress or anxiety may be indications of deeper issues that require the safety and skill of a therapist to resolve.

3. Relationship strife. Any significant relationship has periods of strife. Anger flares, communication breaks down. But if battles keep erupting and going nowhere, an objective third person can help you sort through the struggles and learn new ways to be with others.

4. Addiction / depression. Beneath these two states lie issues that therapy can help resolve, heal or improve so that they don't continue to rule your life. When you address the underlying issues, you're much less likely to repeat these unhealthy patterns.

5. Low self-worth / self-esteem. These two debilitating conditions are at the root of many personal issues, such as unhealthy promiscuity or low earnings. Therapy can help you break free of the cycle in which low self-worth fosters challenging situations that result in "less than" feelings. ✻

A Letter From The Associates

Many of us have experienced a few of the symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Because those symptoms of restlessness, difficulty concentrating and disorganization are common experiences, there can be a fair amount of confusion about the disorder. Many people wonder whether they or their children may have it, while others go undiagnosed. The cover story explores the symptoms of ADHD, what the diagnosis really means and how it can be managed.

The role or roles we played as children in our family of origin usually reach into adulthood, shaping our choices for better or worse. The article on page 3 explores several common roles, including the hero, the scapegoat and the people pleaser, and how they impact our work, relationships and self-esteem.

We're all likely familiar with the pain of breaking up—whether from a spouse, partner or romantic friend. While the strategies offered on page 4 won't take away your pain, they can help you cope and move on.

Disappointment is another situation we all have experienced. In this issue a quiz asks how well you take care of yourself after you've been disappointed. And finally, the Top 10 includes life situations for which therapy can offer hope and healing.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

May this season bring you greater clarity, improved self-care and healthy choices.

How Well Do You Cope with Disappointment?

Disappointment is that feeling of being let down by a person, an expectation or a hope. It is a normal response that everyone experiences. But all too often, when we're disappointed and especially need caring attention, we beat ourselves up instead. Take this quiz to see how well you take care of yourself after a disappointment.

True False

❍ ❍ 1. I recognize that disappointment is a part of life. When I experience a disappointment, it doesn't mean I'm a bad person or that I deserved it.

❍ ❍ 2. When I have suffered a disappointment, I let myself have my feelings. I realize that when you give feelings the time and attention they need and deserve, they tend to fade on their own.

❍ ❍ 3. With a therapist or in another safe setting, I work through other feelings that disappointment brings to the surface. These feelings often include shock, hurt and anger.

❍ ❍ 4. While the feelings of disappointment are fresh, I avoid any conclusions about my behavior or role in the situation. Self-analysis has its place, but in the early stage it's more likely to be destructive self-recrimination.

❍ ❍ 5. I take steps to prevent disappointment from turning into depression or bitterness. These include eating healthfully, getting plenty of sleep, exercising and seeking support from family, friends and my therapist.

❍ ❍ 6. I don't make major life decisions until my strong feelings subside and I begin to feel some enthusiasm or hope again.

❍ ❍ 7. If I am disappointed by a person, I don't reflexively end the relationship. When I feel more centered, and if the situation is safe, I enter into a dialogue with the person.

❍ ❍ 8. When the intensity of the feeling has faded, I ask myself if there's anything that I can salvage or learn from the situation.

❍ ❍ 9. Also, when I am feeling more hopeful, in order to gain insight, I ask myself, "What if this is not a setback, but actually what I want?" Among other things, my response will reveal any ambivalence I may have had and may help make future endeavors more successful.

❍ ❍ 10. If I am repeatedly disappointed by life or other people, I am willing to consider what actions or beliefs of mine might be contributing to those experiences.

Disappointment doesn't have to stop you from getting what you want in life. If you answered false to several of these, you may want to explore ways to better cope with disappointment. Please don't hesitate to call. ❊

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The Effect of Family Roles on Life's Choices

With hardly any thought at all, you can probably say whether, in your family of origin, you played the role of the responsible one or the rebel, the people pleaser or the mascot. Roles serve an organizing function. In a family, roles sort out each person's relationship to the group. While there's nothing inherently wrong with roles, they become a problem when they're rigid and shape poor choices as a teenager or adult.

Roles are especially harmful in families where abuse and/or addiction occurs. They become a vain attempt to control a situation that is chaotic and frightening. Also, as John Bradshaw explains in *On the Family*, roles function to project the image of the happy family, preserving denial that anything is wrong.

Based on the work of Virginia Satir, Claudia Black and Sharon Wegscheider, below are the common roles that children play in the family, as well as that role's impact on adult life.

The Hero

The hero is the responsible one. She gets good grades in school, is goal oriented and self-disciplined. From the outside, she appears on top of her game. Internally, however, she bears the burden of making the family look good. She also believes that if she is perfect enough, the family problems will go away.

Work: As an adult, she is often successful, reaching for excellence in her occupation. The trouble is, "excellent" is never good enough. If she's not at the top, she's nowhere.

Relationships: Whether as breadwinner or head of the household, the hero will take charge, needing to lead and be in control. This can create discord or inequality in relationship.

Self-esteem: Although she's a leader, she still relies upon the approval of others for her own self-worth. To be healthy, she needs to realize that she doesn't have to prove her worthiness and that life can be joyful regardless of achievement.

The Placater or People Pleaser

The placater tries to ease and prevent any trouble in the family. He is caring, compassionate and sensitive. He also denies his own needs, is anxious and hypervigilant.

Work: The placater will find himself caretaking and facilitating in his work environment. He may be drawn to service occupations; however, in order to truly help others, he must face his need to please.

Relationships: The placater believes that if he takes care of his partner that person will never leave. He may lose himself in his partner's needs, becoming more caregiver than equal.

Self-esteem: The people pleaser often feels that he has no value except for what he can do or be for another person. To be healthy, he needs to find his own value within.

The Scapegoat or Rebel

The scapegoat is the family member who is blamed for the trouble in the family. She acts out her anger at any family dysfunction and rebels by drawing negative attention to herself. While she is more in touch with her feelings than the other roles and is often creative, in school she gets poor grades and is often in trouble.

Work: No one expects much of the scapegoat and, too often, she agrees, choosing jobs that are beneath her abilities.

Relationships: The scapegoat will be drawn to friends and relationships who are certain to meet with parental disapproval. This will please her, despite the fact that her family may be right.

Self-esteem: While the scapegoat rebels against the family, she also internalizes their poor opinion of her and thus fails to acknowledge her talents. She's a screw-up, she'll say, proudly. To be healthy, she needs to realize that she's much more than that.

OTHER ROLES

The Mascot is the class clown with the uncanny ability to relieve stress and pain for others. But there's something missing that he won't find until he looks beneath the humor façade and faces his own pain.

The Lost Child is quiet, withdrawn, lonely and depressed. She doesn't draw attention to herself because she doesn't want to be a burden. But what she wants most is to be seen and loved, and to be healthy, she must allow herself to be visible.

Roles may have shaped our childhood but they need not keep us in chains. Acknowledging the gifts and detriments of the role or roles that you played as a child can help you honor yourself, as well as help you make wise choices as an adult. ❊

Breaking Up Is Hard to Do (But You Can Lessen Its Distress)

Whether children are involved or not, ending a marriage or partnership challenges us like nothing else. The term "good divorce" can seem a contradiction in terms. And yet, there are things we can do that can help us navigate the big waves and the roiling waters.

Taking care of yourself by attending to your physical and emotional needs is one of the most important things you should do during this or any other stressful period. Give yourself the time, space and permission to rest and heal.

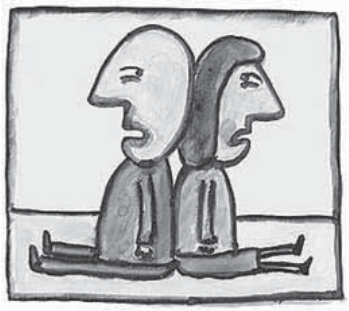
Here are some other practices that can help:

Minimize change for yourself and your children. Whether or not you have custody, whenever possible, keep your routines, rhythms and habits the same. Discipline the children and maintain the rules that always have been in force.

Express your feelings, but not necessarily to the other person. Vent your anger by journaling, painting furious red canvases or by talking to your therapist. Do not share those feelings with your children.

Seek support. Ask for help from friends and family, a clergy member or counselor. We've all been there. You, too, can get through it.

Don't try to physically, financially or emotionally hurt your spouse or partner. A good outcome in a divorce or break-up is something that both parties can live with; it's not about winning but being able to move on independently.



Communicate. When talking isn't working, use email or mail. Keep your exchanges out of work time and remember that the goal is not to zing the other but to gain clarity.

Avoid speaking negatively about your ex in front of your children or mutual friends. Such talk has a negative impact on your children and their self-esteem, and will polarize friends who want to remain in relationship with both your former partner and you. Also, don't encourage others to take sides against your ex. You put them in an awkward position and it could backfire on you.

Practice the golden rule. As you part ways, treat your ex as you would want to be treated.

Take stock of the relationship. Spend time—perhaps months—acknowledging the lessons you've learned from this relationship. Do this on your own, in your journal, or with the help of a therapist.

Perform a closing ritual or ceremony. If possible, do this with your former partner; if not, then with loved ones or by yourself. In your ceremony, you might acknowledge the good things about the relationship, the ways you grew, even what you will miss. Spend time with your feelings, do something nurturing, and then imagine your next step. Finally, say goodbye. ✻

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