

Adult AD/HD in the Workplace

What is AD/HD?

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) is a common neurobiological condition affecting 5-8 percent of school age children with symptoms persisting into adulthood in as many as 60 percent of cases (i.e. approximately 4% of adults).

In most cases, AD/HD is thought to be inherited, and tends to run in some families more than others. AD/HD is a lifespan condition that affects children, adolescents, and adults of all ages. It affects both males and females, and people of all races and cultural backgrounds.

Some common symptoms and problems of living with AD/HD include:

- Poor attention; excessive distractibility
- Physical restlessness or hyperactivity
- Excessive impulsivity; saying or doing things without thinking
- Excessive and chronic procrastination
- Difficulty getting starting with tasks
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Frequently losing things
- Poor organization, planning, and time management
- Excessive forgetfulness

Not every person with AD/HD displays all of the symptoms, nor does every person with AD/HD experience the symptoms of AD/HD to the same level of severity or impairment. Some people have mild AD/HD, while others have severe AD/HD, resulting in significant impairments. AD/HD can cause problems in school, in jobs and careers, at home, in family and other relationships, and with tasks of daily living.

AD/HD is thought to be a biological condition, most often inherited, that affects certain types of brain functioning. There is no cure for AD/HD. When properly diagnosed and treated, AD/HD can be well managed, leading to increased satisfaction in life and significant improvements in daily functioning. Many individuals with AD/HD lead highly successful and happy lives. An accurate diagnosis is the first step in learning to effectively manage AD/HD.

Employees

How to reduce AD/DH interfering with your job and working environment

Get organized at the office

- Set aside daily time for organization.
- Use colors and lists.
- Prioritize.
- Get and **stay** organized
- Save time by organizing your belongings more efficiently
- Create a schedule and stick to it
- set up a system for paperwork, filing etc

Reduce distractions

- Ask for flex-time in order to have some less-distracting time at work.
- Ask for permission to work at home part of the time.
- Use head phones or a white noise machine to muffle sounds.
- Face your desk away from corridors etc.
- Ask to use private offices or conference rooms for periods of time.
- Work at a particular task for briefer intervals, and shift to a new task when you find your attention wandering. This technique may work best at tasks which you find boring and repetitive

Reduce hyperactivity affecting your work

- Engage in "intentional fidgeting" – e.g. taking notes during meetings
- Plan your day to include productive movement—picking up the mail, talking to a colleague, walking to a meeting the long way.
- Exercise during your lunch break.
- Look for work which requires movement—from one job site to another, multiple contract jobs, or work which is outdoors or on your feet

Improve memory and time management skills

- Always writing things down
- Do not write on scraps of paper but in a book.
- Set reminders on your computer or phone if you have to be somewhere
- Keep a diary of tasks and appointments

Procrastination

- Look for work that requires more immediate responses
- Build in rewards for completing undesirable or seemingly boring tasks
- Request close supervision and monitoring

Difficulty with Long-term Projects

- Team up with others people at work and ask for weekly or even daily meetings to help you stay on-track
- Break the project down into stages, estimate the time required by each stage.
- In planning, start at the due-date and then work backwards in your calendar, setting dates for the completion of each part of the project.
- Review your progress regularly with your supervisor

Employers

How to help and support your AD/HD employees

Adjustments in the workplace

From 1 October 2004, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 was extended to include employers of any size (except the armed forces) and all employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities. However, managers may not realise how readily and economically reasonable adjustments can be made which would accommodate a person with ADD/ADHD among their workforce.

Key ideas: -

1. Provide written instructions and information
2. Provide continued monitoring
3. Arrange regular meetings
4. Give constructive feedback
5. Help structure tasks
6. Set deadlines for all tasks
7. Subdivide larger projects with deadlines
8. Providing clear and structured training
9. Being flexible with work times.
10. Allow short breaks to increase focus and concentration
11. Reduce distractions in the office
12. Provide quiet separate room to reduce distractions

The ability to flexible work hours is also something to be considered - as if the person with ADD/ADHD is on medication then they will be able to give there best when this is working so a flexible start time to give time for this to start working in the morning and then the ability to continue later can sometimes be helpful.

All accommodations depend on the individual and the work place but most things can be worked through and accommodations implemented if a bit of time is taken to discuss things in a bit more detail before problems arise.

Provision of a mentor to discuss problems or a job coach for support in the workplace can help. The Government's Access to Work scheme could make job coach help available. A mentor or manager could give guidance on the social or unwritten issues/rules in the workplace, as these could cause much confusion to someone who does not pick these up intuitively. In some people ADD/ADHD can be a hidden disability, and the difficulties in communication and social interaction they have could result in others misunderstanding them, so training in disability awareness for colleagues is a good idea.

Benefits to the employer

Employers can benefit from the skills and qualities a person with ADD/ADHD might bring to a job in their company. Especially if they are willing to invest a bit of time and effort into getting to know the person and can build up their trust.

People with ADD/ADHD need high levels of stimulation so often find working in an ever moving environment such as sales really good and they can become top sales people. Other employment where stimulation levels are kept high are also very good. People with ADD/ADHD are hard working especially when properly motivated. Their attention to detail can be very good, if they are working on something which is of particular interest or if the work is stimulating; they can maintain a high level of accuracy. Their approach is generally straightforward and honest. They may have technical skills of a high order and a good knowledge of facts and figures.

A sound business case can be made for employing more people with ADD/ADHD. The firm gains reliable and effective employees, progresses towards meeting its commitment to diversity and raises awareness of diversity among its staff. Managers who have gained an understanding of the communication difficulties people with ADD/ADHD experience have commented that they have learned to communicate with their whole team more effectively. By becoming a socially responsible employer good internal and external PR is also achieved.