

Focus and Memory Group

Understanding and living with ADHD

Focus and Memory Group (every other Friday)

- Discuss, share, support, and learn about topics related to focus and memory, (e.g., ADHD, temporary, mood-related changes in focus and memory, cognitive impairment, dementia).
- Discuss issues that you or someone you care for may be experiencing, have experienced, or are concerned about.
- May include a short introductory education piece on a topic of interest, but majority of time left for discussion and support.

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

- ADHD is a diagnosis that describes a pattern of differences including how people focus, level of impulsivity, and level of activity/restlessness.
- Causes are not well understood. It is highly hereditary (40-60% of children of adults with ADHD are diagnosed with ADHD), and seems to be related to neurotransmitter activity and how brain is activated and transmits information across Default Mode Network.
- Typically, a diagnosis included subtypes, primarily inattentive, primarily hyperactive/impulsive, combined type.
- Diagnosis is traditionally done by trained healthcare providers using symptoms/attributes in the DSM-5, as well as surveys of the client and people who provide care in different .
- Need to rule out other causes, such as depression/anxiety, sleep problems, other learning differences, PTSD responses, substance use.
- Between 2016-2018, 16% of US children between 3 and 17 were diagnosed with ADHD.
- Slightly higher diagnosis among Black and Latino youth, and cis males (was once considered a “boy” issue). There are also gender differences in diagnosis of subtypes and in how parents discuss ADHD.
- Approximately 5% of adults in US (~11 million adults) have a diagnosis of ADHD. Less than 20% of adults diagnosed with ADHD receive any type of treatment.

ADHD can (imo should) be understood as a different constellation of strengths and challenges.

Challenges

- Impatience, and trouble waiting for things
- Difficulty performing tasks quietly, or alone
- Difficulty following instructions
- Losing things frequently
- Often seeming as if they aren't paying attention – or don't care
- Talking seemingly nonstop, making space for others

Strengths

- High energy, enthusiasm
- Spontaneous, open to novel situations and challenges
- Creative and inventive
- Often highly intuitive
- Ability to hyper-focus (or laser focus)
- Grace and focus under pressure, in a crisis.
- MBTI “N” and “P” styles

Another ADHD “Superpower” – Scanning for opportunity, danger, and where to focus.



ADHD and work/occupation

- The traditional school environment (passive learning, rote learning, sit still, pay attention for hours each day) is particularly ill suited for how individuals with ADHD learn, perform, and thrive.
- These same individuals often thrive as individual contributors and leaders in higher education and work settings, where their strengths are more valued, and there is more (potential) flexibility.
- People with ADHD are successful across all fields. It does not, and should not, prevent you from pursuing a career or passion.
- Just ask Albert Einstein, Presidents Abraham Lincoln and George Bush, Simone Biles, General Norman Schwarzkopf, Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, Richard Bramson, Katherine Ellison, Audra McDonald.
- However....

Your work setting and what is valued should match your personal styles and strengths.

- Many people with ADHD like careers that are higher-intensity, connect to passions, leverage creative, allow for independent risk taking, flexibility.
- Some people with ADHD perform better in highly-structured settings. Others hate this.
- It is important to make sure that the work hours, structure, expectations match how your body and energy cycles work.
- You have the right to reasonable accommodations under the ADA. You may want to think carefully about how to discuss your needs – this is not required.

ADHD Treatment and Medication

- There are many non-medical treatments for ADHD that are helpful for many, e.g., behavioral strategies, additional sleep and sleep hygiene, mindfulness and meditation, exercise, structure and routine, diet – whole foods with Omega-3, less sugar/simple carbs/caffeine.
- Medication is usually recommended as a highly-effective, important part of holistic treatment for ADHD.
- ADHD medications work by helping to rebalance the key neurotransmitter dopamine within the synapses to allow signals to traverse the neural pathways. They are often classified as controlled stimulants, but used as prescribed, create a sense of greater calm, rather than activation.
- “Pill shaming” from self or others is a real problem, and often comes from ignorance and misunderstanding (“Adderal is just another form of meth.”)

Accommodations for people with ADHD

From others/work/school

- Non-distracting environment
- Additional time or time flexibility where necessary or appropriate.
- Reasonable expectations for tasks with significant multi-tasking.
- Time and space for movement and activity.
- Comfortable ergonomics that accommodate macro and micro movement.
- Patience and understanding- not assuming laziness, lack of care.

Your accommodations matter

- Self awareness, self education
- Systems and discipline for tracking objects, time, commitments. Tech helps!
- Accommodating other's needs to see progress, work in a more steady pace.
- Chairs, bouncy balls, fidget objects – be aware of impact on others.
- Making time and space to listen to others.
- Communications: letting others know more about you and your style, especially if it is causing conflict, frustration.
- Not using ADHD as an excuse for things under your control.