

AD(H)D

by Lynne Smith

ATTENTION DEFICIT (HYPERACTIVITY) DISORDER

Most people have heard of ADHD. It is constantly on the television and in the newspapers - articles and stories written about children and families and schools coping with ADHD children. But how many people know and understand what ADHD actually is?

This condition has been recognised for a long time - since the beginning of the twentieth century, and became known as ADHD in the 1980s. But there is still a lack of understanding about ADHD. This is partly because it is difficult to diagnose and the signs are mostly behavioural and can vary with different situations. Behaviours can range from hyperactive to withdrawn and from forgetful to obsessively hyper focused. It is also difficult to distinguish ADHD behaviours from other behavioural disorders.

Diagnosis of ADHD is based on the symptoms. These are:

- Impulsivity shown usually by acting before thinking; difficulty in taking turns; problems with organisation; constantly changing from one activity to another; and impulsive responses.
- Inattention as shown by not being able to finish tasks started; easily distracted; seeming lack of attention; and difficulty concentrating on tasks requiring sustained attention.
- Hyperactivity shown by the inability to stay seated and to sit still and by running and climbing onto things excessively.

These symptoms are outlined in Ron Davis' book 'The Gift of Learning'. People

with ADHD can also show obsessive behaviours, can be perfectionists, feel very insecure with change and are very fast thinkers. Ron Davis also refers to the ability of people with ADHD to 'spontaneously disorientate' which is usually caused by boredom, curiosity, confusion, fear, etc. When a person is disorientated, their perception of time is different, either by speeding up or slowing down. Disorientation also reverses the senses of balance and movement so that the person can sense movement when sitting still and create the sensation of sitting still when moving slightly (hence the fidgety child!)

It is very difficult for people without ADHD to understand people with ADHD, which affects people throughout their entire lives. In modern society individuals with ADHD often put themselves into risky situations (extreme sports such as sky diving, high risk business ventures, etc.) so that they can get the adrenaline rush they need. Thom Hartmann, in his book 'ADD Success Stories', refers to people with ADHD symptoms as being the 'hunter/gatherers' as opposed to the 'farmers' in our society. Hunter/gatherers in primitive society would need to be very alert and attentive and impulsive

which would enable them to make instant decisions and have the willingness to explore new and untested areas as opposed to the farmers who would have needed to be very patient and methodical and cherish stability. Thom Hartmann argues that today, most of society rewards 'farmer-like' behaviour which cherishes stability, but it is often the hunters who cause social change and are leaders, inventors, entrepreneurs etc, in our society, but who also become a liability in our modern, agriculture-derived industrial society. The education system is designed for the 'farmers' to flourish and do well!

In the term ADHD are the words 'deficit' and 'disorder'. This immediately disempowers the individual implying that they will never succeed without help and are flawed in some way. This causes people to become victims, making them unable to develop their internal strengths. People with ADHD should be seen as different to people without ADHD (the hunter/gatherers rather than the farmers) instead of labelling one group of people as having a disability.

How do children and adults with ADHD succeed in modern society? Firstly by recognising and understanding their individual learning style and by taking responsibility for themselves. Schools should be high stimulation places where high-energy children will thrive and not places where they have to sit in the same room all day every day doing the same thing. With their need for high stimulation, ADHD children

will easily become labelled as troublemakers, hyperactive etc. They are often given medication (such as Ritalin) which will help them comply with the system. Medication for ADHD isn't a cure, but treats the symptoms by modifying a person's behaviour to conform to their environment and takes away their need for stimulation, thus reducing hyperactivity and impulsiveness.

There is no cure for ADHD and it would not be appropriate if there were one. ADHD children and adults are very special, talented people, playing an important role in our society. They need to be nurtured and understood and be shown techniques to develop self-control and improve self-esteem. In other words, to empower them by developing their strengths, instead of focusing on negative behaviours. Another way of helping some of the negative symptoms of ADHD is through diet, either by cutting out certain foods (often foods with chemical additives or sugary foods) or by taking supplements.

Children with ADHD often feel different from other children and can feel frustrated, misunderstood and 'picked on'. This can all lead to low self-esteem which again can lead to aggressive behaviour. Children and adults with ADHD can be highly intelligent, imaginative, creative, perceptive and talented people who are great fun to be with. There is a lot of hysteria and hype surrounding ADHD. But perhaps it is the system that is failing this type of person rather than the person with ADHD needing to fit into the system.