

Interacting with Adults Who Have Adult Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

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You've suspected it; others have commented about it, but what do you do with an adult learner who is hyperactive when you are working with him or her in class or on a project?



ADD is a complicated neurological condition that for years went undiagnosed, especially in adults. In many children it is treated with stimulant drugs (e.g. Ritalin, Adderall, Dexedrine, and Cylert), behavior modification, and emotional counseling that are designed to help the person focus attention. In 1998 the U.S. government recognized ADD/ADHD as a legitimate medical condition covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Estimates by the National Institute of Health are that between 3-5 percent of children and 2-4 percent of adults have ADD in the United States.

In the ADD mind, thought organization favors multilevel activity in which the brain processes information simultaneously rather than in the linear fashion that most trainers use to organize material. ADD is a genetic trait inherited from one or both parents.

Many adults display symptoms without realizing it or without realizing that their behavior may really be associated with a medical condition that keeps them from reaching maximum effectiveness and efficiency. Some common behaviors for participants and workers with ADD are that they:

- Have trouble completing assignments in time because they lose focus;
- Have difficulty sustaining attention during activities;
- Make seemingly careless mistakes;
- Have difficulty organizing information during activities that require prioritizing or problem-solving;
- Procrastinate getting started on projects that require a lot of detail or complex thinking;
- Squirm in their seat, move frequently, or fidget (e.g. their crossed legs bounce continually and quickly);
- Have trouble recalling earlier information provided;
- Experience difficulty maintaining attention when spoken to directly or during presentations;
- Have trouble following through on instructions given;
- Have trouble getting started on an activity or project requiring a lot of thought;

The following are some strategies that can potentially assist learners with ADD/ADHD. Keep in mind that if someone identifies to you that they have the condition, the law requires accommodation for their condition. Under any other circumstance, if you are aware of the condition and its symptoms, you can plan in advance to create materials and plan activities or meetings in a manner that will address the needs of ADD/ADHD learners and others in the room without drawing undue attention or requiring additional effort.

Strategy #1 Educate Yourself on ADD/ADHD

Many school systems provide information and training to teachers on ADD/ADHD so that they are aware of the condition and how it manifests itself. As an adult trainer or supervisor, it is important that you have similar knowledge so that you can better meet the needs of all or your learners or employees. The Internet has volumes of articles and information on the topic. Just type in Adult ADD or ADHD and begin learning about the condition.

Strategy #2 Deliver information in multiple formats

Because people gain information through one or more of the three learning modalities (auditory, visual or kinesthetic), and you may have some with ADD/ADHD, it is important that you provide information in a variety of formats. You should plan some verbal delivery (e.g. lecture format or discussion), some visual delivery (visual aids and handouts) and some kinesthetic delivery (e.g. participant activities). By providing handouts or posted guidelines on a flip chart, slide or transparency with instructions for an activity or assignment, you give people a reference point to go back to if they have questions, missed a step or just want to verify that they are on track for completion of the activity.

Strategy #3 Provide manipulatives on tables

By placing small manipulative toys (e.g. soft balls, flexible/bendable items, or Silly Putty®) (see www.presentationresources.net) on tables, you provide a kinesthetic outlet for energy. Attendees can pick up the items and casually manipulate them throughout the program. Such items also send you nonverbal messages since you might note a lot of activity which can indicate time for break or change of pace in the program. You can even do this by leaving such items on the front edge of your desk for visitors to “play” with while meeting with you.

Strategy #4 Involve people

By changing the program or meeting pace with periodic activities or other involvement techniques every 8-10 minutes, you can help people stay mentally alert. This can be done with simple question and answer periods, asking people to provide examples of how they would apply what was said in their workplace or life, interim reviews of

program or meeting content covered up until that point in order to reinforce what was learned, or small group activities.

Strategy #5 Adjust your presentation or speaking style

Most people are products of their environments. This is especially true of learners and employees with ADD/ADHD. If you are the type of high energy person who continually speaks in a loud voice, paces back and forth, or gestures wildly throughout your session or meeting, you may cause similar reactions from your ADD participants. You might even have undiagnosed ADD yourself.

To compensate and pace your verbal presentation, videotape your session rehearsal or meeting to see what you are doing in front of a group. Make modifications that you might think appropriate so that you learn to speak in a more calming tone periodically. Move only with purpose in order to make a point, emphasize some element of the material or to take a position at a different location during the program or meeting.

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