

# Why People with ADHD Act The Way They Do

"The ADHD world is curvilinear. Past, present, and future are never separate and distinct. Everything is now." And that can complicate everyday life, work, and relationships. Here, Dr. William Dodson explains the neurological workings of the ADHD mind.

by *William Dodson, M.D.*

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## Your ADHD Life

Most people with ADHD have always known they are different. They were told by parents, teachers, employers, and friends that they did not fit the common mold. They were told to assimilate and become like everyone else.

The main obstacle to understanding ADHD has been the incorrect assumption adults with ADD *could and should* be like the rest of us. For neurotypicals and anyone with ADHD, here's a detailed portrait of why those with one of the 7 types of ADD do what they do.

## Why We Don't Do Well in a Linear World

The ADHD world is curvilinear. Past, present, and future are never separate and distinct. Everything is now. People with ADHD live in a permanent present and have a hard time learning from the past or looking into the future to see the consequences of their actions. "Acting without thinking" is the definition of impulsivity, and one of the reasons that individuals with ADHD have trouble learning from experience.

## Troubles Getting from A-Z

People with ADHD aren't good at ordination — planning and doing parts of a task in order. Tasks in the neurotypical world have a beginning, a middle, and an end. ADDers don't know where and how to start, since they can't find the beginning. They jump into the middle of a task and work in all directions at once. Organization becomes an unsustainable task because organizational systems work on linearity, importance, and time.

## Why We're Overwhelmed

ADHDers experience life more intensely than neurotypicals. The ADHD nervous system wants to be engaged in something interesting and challenging. Attention is never "deficit." It's always excessive, constantly occupied with internal engagements. When ADDers aren't in The Zone, in hyperfocus, they have many things rattling around in their minds, all at once and for no obvious reason, like five people talking to them simultaneously. Nothing gets sustained, undivided attention. Nothing gets done well.

## Why We Let the Whole World In

Many ADDers can't screen out sensory input. Sometimes this is related to only one sensory realm, such as hearing. In fact, the phenomenon is called hyperacusis (amplified hearing), even when the disruption comes from another of the five senses. For example, the slightest sound in the house prevents falling asleep. ADDers have their worlds constantly disrupted by experiences of which the neurotypical is unaware.

## Why We Love a Crisis

Sometimes, an ADHDer can hit the do-or-die deadline and produce lots of work in a short time. The "masters of disasters" handle crises with ease, only to fall apart when things become routine again. Lurching from crisis to crisis, however, is a tough way to live life. Some ADDers use anger to get the adrenaline rush they need to get to be productive. The price they pay for their productivity is so high that they may be seen as having personality disorders.

## Why We Don't Always Get Things Done

ADHDers are both mystified and frustrated by the intermittent ability to be super-human when interested, and challenged and unable to start and sustain projects that are boring to them. They are never certain that they can engage when needed, when they are expected to, when others depend on them to. When ADDers see themselves as undependable, they begin to doubt their talents and feel the shame of being unreliable.

## Why Our Motors Are Always Running

By the time most ADHDers are adolescents, their physical hyperactivity is hidden. But it's there and it still impairs the ability to engage in the moment, listen to other people, and relax enough to fall asleep. Even when an ADDer takes meds, he may not be able to make use of his becalmed state. He's still driven forward. By adolescence, most ADDers have acquired the social skills necessary to cover up that they're not present.

## Why Organization Eludes Us

The ADHD mind is a vast and unorganized library. It contains masses of info. in snippets, but not whole books. The info. exists in many forms — as articles, videos, audio clips, Internet pages. But there's no card catalog.

Each ADDer has his or her own way of storing that huge amount of material. Important items (God help us, important to someone else) have no fixed place, and might as well be invisible or missing entirely.

## Why We May Forget

For the ADDer, information and memories that are out of sight are out of mind. Her mind is a computer in RAM, with no reliable access to info. on the hard drive.

The ADDer's mind is full of the minutiae of life ("Where are my keys?"), so there's little room left for new thoughts and memories. Something has to be discarded or forgotten to make room for new information. Often the information ADDers need is in their memory, but it's not available on demand.

## Why We Don't See Ourselves Clearly

ADDers have little self-awareness. While they can often read other people well, it's hard for the average ADDer to know, from moment to moment, how they themselves are doing. Neurotypicals misinterpret this as being callous, narcissistic, uncaring, or socially inept. The ADDer's vulnerability to the negative feedback of others, and the lack of ability to observe oneself in the moment, make a witch's brew.

## Why We're Time Challenged

Because ADDers don't have a reliable sense of time, everything happens right now or not at all. Along with the concept of ordination (what must be done first; what must come second) there must also be the concept of time.

85% of my ADHD patients don't wear or own a watch. For ADDers, time is a meaningless abstraction. It seems important to other people, but ADDers have never gotten the hang of it.

## Further Information

For more resources on understanding ADD Behavior, read the following:

- [Accepting Being Wired Differently](#)
- [Standing Up to ADHD Symptoms](#)
- [Next Steps After an Adult Diagnosis](#)
- [Try Natural Treatments](#)
- [Keep Your Career On Track](#)

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