

Gifted, and more



Giftedness can sometimes be linked to characteristics of ADHD, autism, depression and/or personality disorders. These diagnoses may be correct, but can sometimes also miss the mark. The possibility of an incorrect diagnosis is greatest in people with a broad range in capabilities in various areas of life (sometimes called asynchrony) and in people whose giftedness hasn't been discovered yet, or relatively late in life and/or handled incorrectly. There is little to no scientific research on this subject. However, all the more distressing experiences. Knowing your own characteristics and challenges can help you to function better and become a happier person, with or without a diagnosis. The advice given in this leaflet is based on the available scientific literature and interviews with people who questioned their diagnosis.

Double diagnoses and misdiagnoses

Among gifted people we hear many stories about misdiagnoses and double diagnoses. This mostly concerns ADHD or ADD, autism, depression and personality disorders. However, there is nobody who understands the connection between these symptoms. On the one hand this is caused by the fact that there are a large number of definitions for giftedness, and on the other hand because determining ADHD or autism isn't easy, especially for adults. Furthermore we find that there are few health professionals who are sufficiently knowledgeable in both areas.

Descriptions of ADHD and some forms of autism overlap greatly with the description of giftedness. ADHD is not a 'hard' diagnosis, but a complex of symptoms. For many gifted people that seem to possess characteristics of ADHD, a large portion of their complaints or symptoms will disappear when receiving coaching aimed only at the giftedness aspect. The difference between ADHD and giftedness is relevant when medication is considered, which should always only be done by a medical doctor specialised in this subject.

The 'autism spectrum disorder' diagnosis should only ever be considered for gifted adults when coaching aimed at giftedness has limited effect on them. A large number of gifted adults get this label incorrectly because they have felt different from others around them from a young age and have started acting differently as well.

Not every problem is a disorder

Sometimes gifted people get a different psychiatric diagnosis like depression or narcissistic (or another) personality disorder. Gloominess and disappointment are common in gifted people without any form of depression in the psychiatric sense. Attention to the specific needs of the gifted (from a young age if possible) can work miracles. Depression in gifted people can often be linked to the greater questions of life and questions concerning his or her sense of purpose. This person would benefit more from counselling or coaching than he or she would from therapy. Incorrectly attributing life purpose issues to a personality disorder can put someone on the wrong track and be very damaging to them.

When a personality disorder and/or depression is present it is very important to give attention to the giftedness and its impact on the person in question when diagnosing and

treating them. A correct diagnosis can be a calming influence that leads to acceptance and be the start of a well aimed treatment programme. Also a clear and correct diagnosis for determining the ability to work or not, keeping in mind possible giftedness, is extremely important.

Recommendations

- It is often the case that deep down, you know already that you're gifted, but you've never made the connection between your giftedness and your complaints and/or limitations. Realise that you've been able to compensate and camouflage them very adequately because of your giftedness.
- Keep searching and asking until things are clear enough for you. Find out more about any possible extra diagnoses and check if you agree with them or not. Insight into your own unique combination of giftedness and any possible other diagnoses will give you a cool head and confidence.
- Be aware that in the mental health system the focus is mainly on the disorder. Knowledge about giftedness is usually limited. It's important that you feel safe and understood by your care provider.
- Your giftedness may confuse the person diagnosing you. For example you could be so smart that you take over the conversation (people will say that you manipulate). And at the same time you can be (too) honest and don't hold back anything. This will lead to misunderstandings.
- Become aware of your own limitations and make clear descriptions of your behaviour. Think about solutions to your limitations yourself. These can be very practical, for example getting help cleaning your house.
- If you can, be as open about yourself as possible; for example, explain to colleagues, managers, family and friends what you need.
- To others you can discuss what is difficult for you, but don't make yourself too vulnerable. You will be judged too easily; people will often use an extra diagnosis to blame you if something goes wrong.