



Giftedness and ADHD

Giftedness and ADHD can look alike and coexist. However, because ADHD is more well-known, it will often occur that a person is first diagnosed with ADHD, therefore all attention becomes focused on it, and it is disregarded that an initial diagnosis of giftedness could have been more beneficiary for that individual.

ADHD

Inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity often appear together and can be the cause of different life problems, such as an increased chance of school failure, being accident prone, drug & alcohol abuse, and work and relationship problems. ADHD has a strong genetic component and appears in both men and women of all ages.

ADHD can only be diagnosed by a licensed clinician with expertise in ADHD, who makes use of the DSM ADHD checklists and who rules out the other potential causes of those symptoms. Other diagnoses such as autism, motor dysfunction, anxiety and learning problems can coexist with ADHD. These are all so called 'dimensional' diagnoses; you can suffer more or less from it.

In ADHD, the so-called executive functioning skills which help people function smoothly in society, are not optimally developed. Planning, organizing and sticking with the plan are a few of those skills. People with ADHD often have both trouble starting and finishing with activities and emotions. Being fast associative and original thinkers, hard workers, having a sense of humor and being creative are mentioned as some positive aspects of ADHD. It is not clear if those skills are part of the ADHD or if they are more present in people who are gifted.

Giftedness

Giftedness is more than having a high intelligence, which is always part of the many definitions and models of giftedness. At the Gifted Adults Foundation we use the broad description that was drafted by a panel of twenty Dutch experts in 2008:

A quick and clever thinker, who likes to deal with complex matters. Autonomous, passionate and inquisitive. A sensitive and emotionally rich individual, living intensely. He or she enjoys being creative.

Kooijman-van Thiel, M. (red.), 2008

Giftedness and/or ADHD

Giftedness and ADHD share some of the same features. It is hard to draw a line; most gifted people show some ADHD symptoms and people with ADHD can appear very clever because of reaction speed. Neurophysiological research shows a difference in processing of stimuli in gifted people and people with ADHD, compared to the general population. However, there appears to be differences between the two. Gifted people with ADHD seem to have more problems with too much concentration according to Dr. Deirdre Lovecky. They have the tendency to hyper-focus and appear to have difficulty letting go of their activities.

ADHD and giftedness can mask each other. A concentration problem can cause achievement problems, and over-stimulation can lead to working memory problems. For example, your attention has wandered off again before you were able to record the information. On the contrary, your intelligence can help prevent or compensate your ADHD.

Is it Possible to Cure ADHD?

ADHD can not be cured, but symptom therapy can be provided. Work and communication skill training should be part of each therapy.

Some advise memory training or Neurofeedback (NFB).

Both are not scientifically proven to work. Stimulant medication, such as Methylfenidaat increases concentration and happiness in about 80% of the people with ADHD. Normally, this medication does not influence normal development or change your character, nor is it addicting.

Recommendations

- Consider your ADHD and Giftedness; which are your strongest and weakest areas?
- There is no reason to limit yourself to one diagnosis, a symptom can be part of either one. In fact a label is only useful when it helps you live a better life!
- Stay fit and have a healthy daily routine
- Prevent overstimulation. Protect yourself against harmful stimuli. Provide a calm work environment, and use other tools to cope such as ear plugs. Know your own limits.
- Try to find work that provides enough variety and enough challenge for you. When there is more room for your positive qualities, the negative ones will bother you less.
- Discuss your qualities with your partner and at work, and give clear directions on what you need in order to function well.
- Consider professional support if it causes a lot of trouble in your daily life.
- Be well informed about the advantages and disadvantages of your medication and discuss the correct dose with your practitioner.

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