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ADHD --- An Invisible Mental Health Reality

What is it like when someone is dealing with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder? Many metaphors come to mind to describe it. It is like watching 10 television monitors at one time and trying to focus on all of them. Or it's like listening to a radio station with a lot of static and you have to strain to hear what's going on. It can even be like trying to build a house of cards in a dust storm.

In other ways, it's like being super-charged all the time. You get one idea and you have to act on it, and then you've got another idea before you've finished up with the first one. So you go for that one, but of course a third idea intercepts the second, and you just have to follow that one, and pretty soon people are calling you disorganized and impulsive and all sorts of impolite and hurtful words that miss the point completely. You're trying really hard --- it's just that you have all these distractions pulling you this way and that, which makes it really hard to stay on task. Energy overflows --- you're drumming your fingers, tapping your feet, humming a song, looking here, looking there, scratching, stretching, doodling, and people think you are not paying attention or not interested, but what you're really doing is helping your very active brain get focused.

Whether an adult or child, there is good news to all of this. Learning differences like ADHD are often positive indicators of creativity and intelligence. ADDers, as they are affectionately called, tend to be some of the most creative people and the greatest problem solvers in the world. They are the visionaries, leaders, entrepreneurs; the movers and the shakers who find ways to do things others said couldn't be done. They often "have a special 'feel' for life, a way of seeing right into the heart of matters, while others have to reason their way along methodically. This is the person who can't tell you how he thought of the solution, or where the idea for the invention came from, or why suddenly he produced such a painting never having painted before, (they) just saw it, (they) could feel it," says Dr. Ned Hallowell, psychiatrist and leading expert on ADHD.

According to the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) it is estimated that ADHD affects 3-5% of all children, perhaps as many as 2 million American children. Until the 1970's, mental health professionals believed the signs and symptoms of ADHD disappeared by the time a child became a teenager. Now we know, however, that two out

three children will continue to struggle with this disorder into adulthood. In addition, they are finding that an increasing number of adults who were misdiagnosed with other psychiatric conditions (such as learning disability, depression or attitude problems), or who went undiagnosed through childhood and adolescence, actually have ADHD. Only gradually was it realized that while the hyperactivity component may diminish, the inattention and impulsive aspects can persist well into adulthood. For these individuals, ADHD can wreak havoc with personal relationships, parenting, friendships, finances, and pose problems at work. They may also be prone to substance abuse and depression. But, with proper treatment, adults can learn to harness and capitalize on that extra energy and ingenuity to lead very successful and happy lives.

There are now more than 10 million people who have been diagnosed with ADHD, and many more gone undiagnosed. It is this invisible reality of ADHD that makes it so difficult to understand and sometimes diagnose --- especially when there no sign of hyperactivity. NIMH reports ongoing studies the research scientists are doing on the various parts of the brain --- *frontal lobes of the cerebrum*, which allows us to solve problems, plan ahead, understand the behavior of others, and restrain our impulses; the *cerebellum*, responsible for motor coordination; and the *basal ganglia*, the interconnected gray masses that serve as the connection between the cerebrum and cerebellum --- to better understand the physical basis for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Read more at **www.nimh.nih.gov**

If you have, or think you or child have AD/HD, consult with your physician or mental health professional to get a proper assessment or diagnosis. Learn how your child can receive special services through the school system. Tap into the ever growing list of resources about Adult ADHD. Enlist the aid of support groups, and AD/HD Coaches who offer a tremendous amount of information and education in learning how to turn these challenges into a very positive and successful experience.

There is much you can do to understand how to tap into the unique and amazing mind of the child or adult ---- find the buried strengths --- and soar!

*For more information about ADHD, contact The Learning Connections,
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Written for the "Healthwise" section of the Star Democrat, December, 2008