

# APPENDIX D: ADHD QUESTIONNAIRE

by Catherine Nehring Massie

It was in 1898 that the first Italian Pedagogical Congress was held in Turin, and was attended by about three thousand educators....I was at that time an interloper, because the subsequent felicitous union between medicine and pedagogy still remained a thing undreamed of, in the thoughts of that period.

This is precisely the new development of pedagogy that goes under the name of scientific: in order to educate, it is essential to know those who are to be educated. (Maria Montessori. "Introduction." *Pedagogical Anthropology*. New York, NY: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1913)

Dr. Montessori, the physician, the educator, and the scientist, integrated the three practices into one in service of the development of children. She scientifically integrated medical science and education/pedagogy, and it was called *scientific pedagogy*. Scientific pedagogy involved first getting to know a child in order to know how to educate that child. Therefore, in order to aid the development of a child with ADHD, it is essential to get to know him/her.

Unlike physical disabilities, ADHD is an invisible disability; it is only observed as atypical, disordered behaviors. It is difficult to fully understand the impairment of ability to function in daily life which people with ADHD struggle. It is easy to assume that the disordered behaviors are under the control of the child, or can be willed away or motivated (bribed, punished) away. It is easy to think that this child is lazy or generally inept, or to think the child has been ruined by poor parenting, or to think she or he is just being willfully disobedient. Their condition is even more confusing when these children are seen to momentarily appear to be in control, or when these children are observed concentrating on a preferred activity (such as videos, computer games, athletics, arts, music, etc.)—"Aha! Their secret is out, they *can* do it if they choose to!" It is easy to draw the conclusion that it is simply a behavior issue and to dismiss their inner neurological dysfunction and the

hurdles this can place in completing the simplest of tasks. This has been the approach of traditional schools, where these children are rewarded and punished until they sit still in the desk and pay attention (or look as if they are paying attention) to the teacher. This approach does not enlighten us to what it is like to be on the inside of these attention-challenged children. How are they experiencing the world? What are they thinking about? Why aren't they doing what they are supposed to be doing, like everyone else?

I urge all Montessori teachers with attention-challenged students to read the ADHD survey responses below and to carry out surveys of their own of people they know with ADHD. What I found out through first-hand accounts of people with ADHD was both impressive and distressing. Their innate talents, drive to succeed, and successes were impressive; but their daily life challenges with the simplest tasks, struggles to succeed, and failures were distressful. The four individuals that I interviewed are not a representative sample of persons with ADHD. First of all, they are all female, and secondly, they all fall within the best-case scenario for a person with their level of disability with ADHD. All four had extremely supportive families that worked really hard to ensure the development of their child's talents and provide opportunities for success. Without this support and positive encouragement to counter-balance the negative feedback they received from traditional school environments, the outcome is often far worse. Many children with ADHD do not succeed in school or nonacademic life, escape through substance abuse, and/or do not survive.

Of these four female interviewees, two are in their fifties, one is mid-twenties, and one is an adolescent. Pseudonyms are used to protect their privacy. While they all have ADHD, some have coexisting conditions, and all of them have struggled with anxiety. Surprisingly, three out of four have a very positive attitude about their ADHD and believe that the benefits they derive from having ADHD outweigh the challenges it presents.

## ADHD Questionnaire

Getting to know you thoroughly:

1. When did you first realize you had ADHD? Did you notice being different yourself, or did other people (parent, teacher, other) point it out to you?
2. What is life like with ADHD?
3. What is your biggest challenge in daily life with ADHD?
4. What have been long-term life-planning challenges given your ADHD? What limitations have you felt on succeeding in what you wish to do?
5. What kinds of strategies, routines, or supports have you tried to use to help yourself function more successfully?
6. Have you been able to self-advocate to get your needs met or help you be more successful? How old were you before you started advocating for yourself? Why did you feel reluctant to ask for help or accommodations?
7. Have you tried any medications to manage your ADHD symptoms? How old were you when you first tried medications? Were they helpful? Were there any side-effects or downsides for you?
8. How does ADHD impact:
  - (a) your personal relationships,
  - (b) your school life, and
  - (c) your work, employment and career?
9. Do you think you derive any benefits from being ADHD?
10. If you could create a school that would suit your learning style, what would it be like? Describe teaching/learning modes and learning environment. What advice do you have for teachers with students with ADHD?

## 1. WHEN DID YOU FIRST REALIZE YOU HAD ADHD?

**Mary:** I realized I had ADHD when my kids were first diagnosed with it. (All four of her kids have been diagnosed.) When I looked at questionnaire list, I said “Oh, that’s me!” However, when I think back about my childhood, I got in trouble at the dentist because I wouldn’t stop talking long enough for him to get the instruments in my mouth.

**Tiffany:** I really did not know about ADHD until I was a young adult. Early on, I knew my mind was constantly racing and my feet were constantly going. I found it was a relief when I learned what it was. People get frustrated with me. I am kinder to myself now when I forget things. I accept that I am going to go in and out of the house at least three times each morning before I leave.

**Sylvia:** I didn’t actually think I had ADHD, even though my mom pointed it out in relation to school work, and I was diagnosed with ADHD by a psychiatrist and after a two-day assessment at a cognitive neuroscience clinic. I did not believe what they were saying was true. I had a lot of emotional turbulence in high school, I was extremely prideful and extremely sensitive and extremely rebellious. Also, extremely insecure—due to being prideful and sensitive. I was emotionally erratic.

**Claire:** I first knew in middle school, sometime, from talking to a friend and looking it up online and I thought “Yeah, this is me.” But I didn’t get an official diagnosis or talk to my mom about it until high school. I think I noticed it first.

## 2. WHAT IS LIFE LIKE WITH ADHD?

**Mary:** Don’t know what it is like without it, and everyone else in the house has it as well! It is full of possibilities, I do not have any learning difficulties. I can always go into many different careers, or trainings—nursing, special education, Montessori. I can always see fifty-five solutions to any one problem. I had about sixteen broken bones and other sprains and injuries by the time I left school (sixteen years old)—both wrists, skull, etc. I was a bit of a climber, I would get up on the roof. I was a real risk-taker, big risk-taker (no frontal lobe activity there!). I always found myself out with kids

who were doing the wrong thing. I do not sleep very much, only 4-5 hours a night.

**Tiffany:** I don't stop. I bounce from one thing to the next, sometimes I don't even realize that I have bounced. I was doing this, how did I get here? My life on a daily basis: start one thing and then start another, then another. I start the bathtub, I can't bear waiting so I go on to something else, and then I find that the tub has overflowed.

**Sylvia:** I felt that I could succeed better than I was doing, but I had a lot of specific issues in my life that were preventing me from succeeding. I felt that I was smarter than the other students, and I had some teachers who indicated that they believed I was extremely bright. But I could not perform to these expectations. None of the usual incentives to do well in school had any effect on me—I didn't care about my grades, I didn't care about going to college. I had this feeling that people wanted me to care about these things because I was "supposed to," which made me not want to do it. I always had a natural impulse to do what I was *not* supposed to do (ever since middle school).

I was just emotionally thrill-seeking during those years. I was hanging out with a group of people who were trouble-making, but because I was so sensitive, I would get into conflict with them too. I had a lot of energy and I felt rebellious. My group of friends gave me an outlet for these feelings, but they also liked to pick on other people's sensitivities. If a sensitivity was revealed, they would poke at it.

I had a lack of meaningful relationships, so I felt that I was completely alone and had feelings that I was different than everyone else. I could not identify with other people. I could not identify with the classroom setting. I did not want to identify myself in the way school wanted me to or my family wanted to. But then I would feel terrible for not succeeding.

Starting at about eight or nine years old, I woke up every day saying that I am going to be the best at this or that activity today. I would set goals daily. To do well in these things was easy for me, so I would then feel like a failure for not completing them.

There is an emotional component to attention. My emotional lows and emotional highs both keep me from getting mundane things done. The times that I feel most intelligent and feel most capable, were times that I would be reading and researching and having an emotional high about my life—I can understand anything, I can tackle any problem—I feel like I can concentrate to a high degree, better than other people can concentrate. When I was reading Einstein's theory of relativity, I stayed up all night and began drawing out his thought experiments, I felt very empowered. But then to do just little things, I could never complete them.

When I am feeling low, I am not capable of doing mundane things (like doing a small assignment, or turning library books in on time), I view these as trivial. I cannot do anything unless I feel like it has a grand importance to humanity. I have to relate mundane things to huge life goals, or I cannot do anything.

Just recently, I have come to accept that I have ADHD, because I continually failed to do what I wanted to do. There is an enormous gap, a divergence, between what I could do and what I actually ended up doing. I felt that I could just finish things if I wasn't so lazy. But then I knew that when I was interested in something, I could stay focused on it. Every day I stay busy all day, so I knew I wasn't lazy. Only recently have I started to become introspective and think about myself and my functioning. I started reading books on ADHD, the science behind ADHD. Little tiny facts here and there that explained my experience in the world.

I realized that little things, like caffeine, can impact my brain, my feeling sleepy or alert. I also realized that there were huge differences in how I felt emotionally, depending on how much exercise I was getting. How emotionally stable I felt, high or low, could be controlled by how much exercise I was getting. So I realized that I had a cycle of highs and lows, and I go through them faster by running. I feel centered and stable when I get back from running. I realized that I used exercise as an emotional regulator.

I am in a restless state during the day, could be a high or a low—I get frustrated all day long because I cannot get anything

done. As soon as I feel restless, either high or low, I go running. I think about the restless thoughts while I am running and if the run was long enough, I feel calmer when I am done. Sometimes I come back from running and am still restless, then I have to go out running again. It's like running changes the chemistry of how I am feeling.

I read in a book that if you try to concentrate, just because you are told to concentrate, you can't. When you have ADHD, your brain does not have the chemical environment to pay attention. The key is to figure out what stimulates your brain, working yourself to an emotional high, like running, but this is exhausting, so by the time you are ready to attend you are burnt out.

At all times, I am craving extreme stimulation. My understanding at this point is that because my brain does not naturally make enough stimulation, my body craves stimulation. So I seek to stimulate my brain by creating an emotional high or by intense physical activity. Just sitting down and doing a task feels literally impossible.

**Claire:** It kind of affects everything. Doing homework is very difficult and tends to monopolize my life; it's a bajillion times more difficult than for other people, but I still have to do it. I get a whole bunch of complex ideas and there is a bottle-neck effect (that's what my mom and I call it) where the "hole" is too small and nothing comes out. Homework takes a really, really long time. I can get hyperfocused on things I enjoy and it's difficult to tear myself away. Sometimes I get that way with practicing the violin, which is really nice because I get a lot done. Executive dysfunction is a big thing; it looks like being lazy but you actually want to be doing things and are stressed about it. Socially, it sometimes makes keeping track of conversations harder. I make connections quickly and I have to suppress the urge to point out off-topic things, like "Oh your shirt matches the soles of your shoes." Sensory focus is hard; I notice everything in the environment, like I can find buttons on the ground no one else sees. So I have a tough time tuning things out, including noises. Focus is hard, staying on topic is a challenge and I can accidentally make other people feel interrupted.

### 3. WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN DAILY LIFE WITH ADHD?

**Mary:** Maybe I am constantly looking for new stimulation because I cannot sit still. I can never sit and do one thing. I think I am always doing so many things because you always think you are not good enough. School life gives you messages that you are not very good.

School was awful, I hated every minute of it. It was horrible and restrictive. You always wanted to ask questions, but you were not allowed to. You always wanted to know why, and what are you going to use it for, which is not received well by teachers. Teachers go to the staff room and talk about how difficult it is to deal with you, and so all the other staff in the school have this idea about you, and you never really have a chance.

I think what saved me was sports and girl scouts. I was captain of the basketball team, captain of the softball team, state champion swimmer, regional champion cross country runner—it's what kept me sane and my parents sane.

It's like you have all the stations on at once, you are watching all the programs at once. Organization, organizing my day, too much stuff—materials, as well as time management. In the classroom, sometimes I get distracted and feel compelled to finish a task when I should be doing something else. Prioritization of tasks through the day—especially when I am tired. If I do not eat or sleep properly, then I have more trouble prioritizing tasks.

Following through with plans and managing time so that I can complete something. I tend to be late a lot, I forget about travel time, I don't plan my time properly. I get everything done, eventually, but tend to be late a lot.

**Tiffany:** Staying on a single task. I have so much going on in my mind that I jump to another thing and never finish it. I struggle with impulsivity.

**Sylvia:** I live in this state of fear of being stuck doing meaningless tasks—fear of mundane tasks. I think this has a physiological basis. I have a sensation of wanting to be able to sit down and do



things, but then I can't. So then I feel incompetent and frustrated. So I try to find ways to stimulate myself. Working at a service station, I would write poetry on scraps of paper about how horrific it was being there. It was like being a body that wants to use my mind for menial tasks. Intensely frustrating feeling! You have a narrative about why you feel this way, I felt that the job was meaningless. It was like being in hell at work. I would sit there in bed before going to work, having intense thoughts of dread of going to work and being in a position of not being able to stimulate myself.

Cognitive dissonance—difference between the way you think, the way you feel, and the way you act. When you tell yourself to attend to something, you start thinking of something else, you get distracted, then you keep trying to do it over and over again, and you cannot get it done—even though it is very simple. I literally cannot do it. I feel stupid because I cannot do it—especially if it is a homework task from school. If every time you have to concentrate you are unsuccessful, then you do feel stupid. Other people I know with ADHD, believe themselves to be stupid and lazy. If you have an intention to complete a school assignment and you cannot, then you feel stupid. If you have an intention to complete a job task and you cannot, then you feel lazy.

I rationalize well why I fail. But because of the years of homeschooling, where I had many successes in learning, I had enough successes there to keep me from feeling stupid during the years I went to school.

The laziness feeling does persist, because I cannot get simple mundane tasks completed. Every time I write a list, I am 100% certain that I can finish everything—even though I never do. I have a hundred little boxes that I know I will eventually be able to complete. Then I work myself up emotionally to be able to concentrate, but the tasks I need to do are never stimulating enough for me to do them. So these emotional highs are spent doing preferred activities—exercise, listening to lectures, drawing, reading unrelated texts (physics)—not school work.

When I am frustrated being in an emotional high, and I cannot complete what needs to be done, then this cycles into an emotional

low and I become incapacitated. My perfectionism interferes with completing, because when I know that I cannot get something done to the perfect level that I want it, then I become incapacitated. I often (more than half the time) fail on huge assignments because of these emotional turbulations.

I know that I am very intelligent, but then I feel like a complete failure because I cannot get anything done that I need to do each day. I feel extremely capable, and at the same time I cannot do anything. I go out to do errands, and I forget what I need in order to do the errands—I forget my driver’s license, I forget my purse, I lose everything everywhere (I just lost my new winter coat and gloves!). Then I just give up and don’t do the errands—like I never return my library books.

I am a meticulous neat person, at the same time I am a daily mess. It is very confusing being me!

After the emotional high of going out running, I have energy but I do not feel out of control anymore, I feel like I can concentrate and sit down and do something. At these times, I feel like someone who can make good decisions and be empathetic and do great things.

At other times, I feel deviant because I can never just sit down and do what I am supposed to do. Everyone else just does what they are supposed to do throughout the day, and I cannot. So I think that I am a bad person, that other people don’t like me because I don’t do what I am supposed to do like they do. I come up with a narrative about why I don’t do what I am supposed to do. This makes me feel intensely isolated from other people. It is not rational—you do things that you shouldn’t, say things that you shouldn’t.

I can put tons of effort and time into my classes, but it does not matter, I still fail. I am dysfunctional whether I am in an emotional high or low. If I stay in the emotional high, then I burn out and don’t get anything done. I feel like I have only a couple of hours in each day—sometimes no hours—where I can tell myself I want to do something and then do it.

**Claire:** The hardest thing is homework: time management, focus and executive function more broadly.

#### 4. WHAT LIMITATIONS HAVE YOU FELT ON SUCCEEDING IN WHAT YOU WISH TO DO?

**Mary:** Other people say, “Oh, you are amazing! You get all this stuff done.” But I don’t feel like I am doing things the way I should be. Sometimes you think people are going to find out that you are really not good. I don’t think that as much now, but when I was younger I did.

I have great ideas, big ideas, but I don’t know how to get there and plan it out long-term. You think you can do everything, but now I have learned that I can’t. I have found that when you work as a team, the others can fill in the parts that you can’t manage well—organization and follow-through.

**Tiffany:** I started my own first business at twenty-one, became a contractor for the county, taught and organized classes. I have opened three different types of dance studios and a children’s fitness center.

My limit is about three years on anything. Then I want to go on to something else. I worked for the government about 7-8 years in order to get health insurance. It drove me crazy when I had to be in one place, but when I traveled to do training around the U.S. and was meeting people, then I could handle that. Then I opened a children’s tumbling business.

**Sylvia:** I have always felt like I can’t do school, I don’t want to do school. Competing for a grade on a piece of paper had no value for me. I just wanted to run off on adventures.

Limitations are sensations that I can be fifty times more intelligent, but if the other person is calm and stable, they will succeed in anything they want—college, graduate school. It does not matter how well I do something, I feel that I will fail anything I try to do. I feel like to do well in life means that I cannot try to do things “well.” Whenever I obsess over things and try to make them perfect, I inevitably run out of time.

**Claire:** I don't know? I'm planning on going into music. Motivation to practice is hard, it's difficult to get started, but when I am playing it's stimulating. Music is something I care a lot about.

**5. WHAT KINDS OF STRATEGIES, ROUTINES, OR SUPPORTS HAVE YOU TRIED TO USE TO HELP YOURSELF FUNCTION MORE SUCCESSFULLY?**

**Mary:** Sitting and doing paperwork is very difficult, so now I hire someone to help organize me. Coping mechanisms:

- Working with team members
- Hiring an assistant to keep you organized
- Writing lists
- Writing a calendar for the year with key dates of things that have to be done, and deadlines.
- Makes many copies of the calendar
- Lists are good; you have three lists going at the same time.

I'm a Pollyanna, I always look for something good when something bad happens. I try not to let people down. I tend to say yes to fifteen people, when I cannot possibly do it all. So I have had to learn to say, "No." I also ask another rational person about my plans to see if they think it is doable, but I don't always listen!

**Tiffany:** I try to surround myself with organized people. I used to do lists, but they would get so long and I would just make more lists. I had a business coach help me, so each day I list three tasks that I need to complete. I have a calendar, but sometimes I forget to look at it and I miss appointments. I look at what is coming up the next day the night before so I know what is going on the next day.

I have a cell phone and I set up alarms to remind me of meetings. I set up three warnings before the event so I have time to get myself together to leave on time.

**Sylvia:** I feel like I am stuck, I don't have a strategy. I can't do school and that is what I need to do to succeed in anything. The classes I do the best in are the ones that have the least homework. I don't feel like I can improve myself when I am stressed out by school. I need to be able to read and research and learn on my own. I can't do school and yet I cannot do anything professionally without more school. I'm stuck.

In art school, I could not just steadily work along on a project, so in order to increase my time on an art project, I listened to lectures (Oxford, Cambridge, Cornell Universities post free podcasts). I listened to 10-12 lectures/day. I had very high quality work, but I never finished the work—but this was not a problem in art school. It was just chance that I was able to be successful in art school, because it came naturally so easy for me.

In the middle of the night, I found that I could be very productive taking notes listening to a lecture and drawing. I have tried to use lists, massive lists, my whole life, but this does not work for me because I never complete the lists and then feel like a failure.

**Claire:** My mom, my planner, making lists, phone reminders, have to write things down right when I remember or I will forget. My mom has been especially helpful.

## **6. HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO SELF-ADVOCATE TO GET WHAT YOU NEED TO BE MORE SUCCESSFUL?**

**Mary:** I just thought everybody was like this. I thought everyone was dealing with these issues. I think I could have been a doctor, if I had had help. I am a good diagnostician.

I had a photographic memory, until I had a head injury from horse riding at sixteen. I could see anything on any page, I could see the writing and read the quote from my memory, but that was impaired by injury. Having a photographic memory helped me; when I did nursing, I topped my state in the exam. I used to think everyone could do that. I just always thought I was average. I knew that some people were quieter.

I did not try to do anything for myself until I found out that I had something (ADHD).

**Tiffany:** As an adult, I realized how crazy my brain was, so I started having a business coach. I meet with him, once month and we set monthly goals and strategies. It's an accountability process. He gives me advice and strategies to make things happen.

**Sylvia:** I have never asked for help and I will never ask for help. Asking for help is perceived as being weak or lazy. This is how teachers respond to students who ask for help. The teachers say, "You just need to go home and learn it on your own." The teachers at Community College think that all the students are needy and lazy. Any requested help is interpreted as laziness; they tell you that "real" college students do thus and so, so you need to just go figure it out on your own.

**Claire:** Yeah, I went to meetings to get accommodations at school where I had to talk about what I needed. I think I officially got accommodations in my sophomore year of high school. My accommodations include a 504 plan with extended time on tests and in-class writing assignments. In third grade, I had had a difficult year academically and my mom and I were told by a doctor that if I went for testing they would likely identify a diagnosis. At the time, my mom said she didn't want that. Back then I felt like "I wanna be a normal kid." I didn't want to be singled out.

## 7. HAVE YOU TRIED ANY MEDICATIONS TO MANAGE YOUR ADHD SYMPTOMS?

**Mary:** I have not taken medication for 10-15 years, I am worried about the health impact. When my kids were diagnosed, I was about thirty-two years old. I was put on Ritalin. It made me quiet, I could stay on track with thoughts all the way through. I could get an essay written much quicker. But, I was not able to multitask anymore. So I became depressed about the fact that I wished I had been diagnosed at an earlier age. I began ruminating about how I would have done different things in my life, made different choices. I felt worse overall, so I stopped taking it. I only took it as needed—for performance in school or giving public speaking presentations.

**Tiffany:** As an adult, I have talked about medication, but at my age it is not necessarily good for your heart. How to calm the ADHD mind? A medication that helped a lot to calm my mind was anxiety medication. I have learned how to manage it now, and I am much calmer now.

**Sylvia:** I was prescribed medication as a freshman in high school. Most of the time, I just pretended to take the medication. I did not think I had ADHD, I did not want to take something just because someone told me to. I just stashed all the medications.

Once I came to the realization that I could affect my state of mind by doing things, like running, then I tried taking the medication. I then found that I could not take it in the evening or I would not sleep all night. During the day time, I found that whatever I was doing I could finish. I would start a task, then time would pass and I would finish. I could never do this before. Then I would find that after a few days, I would get depressed—a feeling that I hated—and I would go off the medication for a few days. Without medication, during the lows I would go running, read, or contemplate my mood; but with medication, the depression made me feel empty. While the medication does help me, when I run out of it, I cannot get organized enough to pick up the medication from the pharmacy. I have been out of it for two months now. I can't remember to take it. I take it in the middle of the night to get stuff done, then stay up all night and don't get any sleep. Then I take two of the pills because I want to get stuff done. Then I begin to feel psychotic the next day from sleep deprivation. There is a temptation to abuse the medication, because I want to stay up all night and get stuff done. Caffeine does not prevent me from sleeping.

I am always feeling like I am running out of time, then I get frustrated with myself and stay up all night to get stuff done. Then I become emotionally out of control and completely irritable—fight with my boyfriend, don't go to school, don't go to work. It requires day-to-day life skills in order to take the medication in a way that will help me. The skills I need to do this are precisely the skills that I do not have.

Or I take the medication on a day that I do not get enough sleep or eat anything [the medication suppresses her appetite—medication makes you less likely to eat, sleep, and exercise—which causes her to become depressed]. And I hate that feeling so much that I stop taking my medication. When I go off and on the medication repeatedly, I get terrible headaches.

I need to take the medication under the guidance of a psychiatrist, but I do not have the patience to schedule an appointment and follow through. I need a little ADHD-helper robot to dispense my medication, so I remember to take it and don't abuse it.

**Claire:** I'm not on medications now. I tried Vyvanse and Focalin, started in my sophomore year of high school. I stopped because of side effects. The medications restricted my emotional range and made my experience of life all "grayed out." I felt anxious and I had a tightness in my chest all the time. I was also more irritable with my younger sister, which she had to point out to me. I was able to be more productive, but I would rather have my full range of emotions than full productivity.

#### **8. HOW DOES ADHD IMPACT YOUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, YOUR SCHOOL LIFE, AND YOUR WORK/CAREER?**

**Mary:** As an adult, you have to think all the time about what you are saying, because you have no filters on what you say. You constantly say things that you shouldn't, gossip, etc. You tend to over disclose. I used to swear a lot.

I tend to talk to lecturers (e.g., professors) like friends, which often offends people. I forget to call people, forget to meet people when I have set up a meeting, forget to send birthday cards.

As for husbands, I married someone else with ADHD. We tend to live our own lives, we both work long hours, don't have time to drive each other crazy. It impacts our time together, busyness gets in the way. The house tends to get messy, we don't like to clean up. He cannot organize his environment at all! House gets messy, so I don't invite people over.



Part of ADHD is that you make a mess, then move on and never go back and clean up. So when I was growing up, I was very restricted by people who did not want the messes. “You can’t do this because you will make a mess!”

**Tiffany:** School—in high school, trying to keep my attention in class was difficult, unless I loved the subject, like math. Every day, I carried all my books home and I never looked at any of them, but I always intended to look at all of them. I did not struggle in school, but I could have done a lot better.

My poor husband has gotten used to me. The hardest part is getting someone to understand that you are not forgetting to do things *on purpose*. My husband gives me reminders, he tracks me and the things I need to remember. It is helpful to have supports through other people.

I always have lots of ideas, my mind is constantly coming up with ideas. My husband is my brakes sometime, because I always think I can do another thing: new ideas for businesses, new ways to do things, new inventions.

**Sylvia:** I cannot just do something because someone tells me to. In a job situation, I just cannot be a body filling a position. Just the thought of having to work a shift at a job would be incredibly anxiety producing. I would set up a whole list of things to do to prepare myself for this terrible dearth, I would try to stimulate myself before I went to work in order to prepare. I was often incapacitated by the thought of doing long shifts of menial tasks. I used to have anxiety attacks about going to work.

At art school, there was physical movement in drawing, as well as the intellectual stimulation of listening to the lectures. [At the Montessori school, she can also have multiple tasks with multiple kids at the same time. She is physically working with the children, lessons, and activities, as well as taking care of the environment (cleaning and organizing) and it is also intellectually stimulating thinking about the teaching moments with the kids and planning lessons. She has to keep cleaning the environment around her, while doing other tasks.]

After the emotional high of going out running, I have energy but I do not feel out of control anymore, I feel like I can concentrate and sit down and do something. At these times, I feel like someone who can make good decisions and be empathetic and do great things.

At other times, I feel deviant because I can never just sit down and do what I am supposed to do. Everyone else just does what they are supposed to do throughout the day, and I cannot. So I think that I am a bad person, that other people don't like me because I don't do what I am supposed to do like they do. I come up with a narrative about why I don't do what I am supposed to do. This makes me feel intensely isolated from other people. It is not rational—you do things that you shouldn't, say things that you shouldn't.

I can put tons of effort and time into my classes, but it does not matter, I still fail. I am dysfunctional whether I am in an emotional high or low. If I stay in the emotional high, then I burn out and don't get anything done. I feel like I have only a couple of hours in each day—sometimes no hours—where I can tell myself I want to do something and then do it.

**Claire:** I think I answered this question above. [See question #2.]

#### **9. DO YOU THINK YOU DERIVE ANY BENEFITS FROM BEING ADHD?**

**Mary:** You get a lot done powered by ADHD. Working in the recovery unit (post-op), emergency, intensive care, there is a lot going on and you can focus on many things at once. It's a real advantage in being a nurse with ADHD, because you can focus on a lot of different things at once.

**Tiffany:** Yes, absolutely. The fact that I have high energy, I think out of the box, I have many ideas. I think I have tried so many things, and made a lot of mistakes, that I am not afraid of making mistakes.

**Sylvia:** There are very few environments where my restlessness is useful. Every activity started stimulates a new activity, so multiple activities are going at the same time.

**Claire:** Totally. I love it, actually. I would not give it up if I had the option. It's part of my brain, who I am as a person. I understand person-first language, but I also wish ADHD were more of an adjective. As someone with ADHD, I'm more creative, I think out of the box, I can make novel connections, I'm very observant and analytic.

**10. IF YOU COULD CREATE A SCHOOL THAT WOULD SUIT YOUR LEARNING STYLE, WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE?**

**Mary:** I disliked my educational experience so much, I chose Montessori for my kids. I saw a picture of Montessori kids cooking, and I knew this was it. Montessori is, of course, very hands-on. The farm school would have been great as an adolescent.

A lot of music, art, and gardening, sport, practical things, holistic subjects—integrated subjects (science and math together), a lot of practical components and things to do, like dramatic history reenactments.

Advice to Montessori teachers:

- Do not abandon the child. When they are wandering around the classroom, the child may be lost and needing some help to focus on what they want to do. Do not abandon them in the classroom.
- They may not be able to choose what they want to do. Making a choice can be very anxiety producing. My kids used to be very stressed by being ordered to make a choice, "Make a choice, now, or I will make it for you." They should have asked "Can I help you?"
- My son learned to make himself look busy. They can be overwhelmed by the array of choices.
- Do not give too many instructions at once. Break the instructions down.

**Tiffany:** I think it would be a school where I did not have to be still all the time, I could move and get up and down, where I could

experiment with things—not always just a right and wrong way. Maybe different teaching styles, learning through experience rather than just through reading the book.

When I think about school, I think of the desks and all the kids lined up. I still have the hardest time sitting in the pews during church.

Teachers need to know about children with ADHD, that they really need to move. All kids benefit from learning through movement and experimentation. These kids may make you crazy now, but they will grow up to do something productive some day.

**Sylvia:** In the Montessori classroom, this environment has the potential to satisfy the learning needs of children with attention challenges. It needs to be a large environment with both group spaces and individual spaces (work rugs), and a variety of different activities so that you can choose from a variety of stimulating activities. You need to be able to follow your impulses. But you also need opportunities for group discussions, where talking and interacting are valued—not just lectures, where I zone out and don't listen.

In homeschooling, I was able to do whatever I was interested in doing for as long as I liked. I was able to study what I wanted and was just steered in certain directions by my mom. I liked learning while making something with my hands—for example, 3D models of animal and plant cells. I was challenged in many areas—art, dance, singing in a chorus, playing instruments, 4-H projects. I learned only in organized activities—I never practiced at home—but due to natural talent (it was easier for me than the others), I was able to perform at least as well or better than the others.

[Sylvia was an extremely bright and talented child despite her ADHD. She won a Junior State Championship in a 4-H academic bowl competition in elementary school and had exceptional natural talents in music and art.]

**Claire:** Less homework, more in-class productivity. A school that understands that children need a life outside of school. More self-direction, with students choosing from a variety of topics ap-

appropriate for learning the concept to be taught. More freedom to choose among topics will allow students to use their natural motivation. A selection of diverse options for a learning objective can help move students beyond “I don’t want to do the thing so now it’s going to take ten hours to accomplish” to “I’m interested in the thing, and I want to do the thing.” Deadline flexibility would also be an option.



