

## Living and Succeeding with Attention-Deficit Disorder By Jonathan Sewell Finkel

I left the clinic in the beginning of my fifth grade year, just like I had left many times before. The doctor, like other doctors, told me that I had a learning disability. The difference this time was that he said I had Attention-Deficit Disorder and would start taking medication. This would make my current struggles easier to manage. My life would never be the same.

For the last 12 years, I have lived and been medicated for Attention-Deficit Disorder. During that period I changed from a struggling B and C student into the successful student I am today. This has not been an easy life, but as I know, life is rarely easy for anyone. I have many factors which have led up to my success. My family has always supported and helped me. My mother (who also has AD/HD) knew from her own experiences that things were not right with me. She saw my attention fade at the smallest distraction, leaving a lot of my work unfinished. She refused to accept that nothing was wrong. Even after I was diagnosed, my parents continued to aid me by making sure I had the tools to succeed. With their help, support and love, I have. Unfortunately, this is not all that it takes, because if anyone is to succeed they must want to and do what it takes to do so. I have developed several principles and strategies for living AD/HD which I found have helped me to succeed.

Before one can deal with AD/HD it is important to know about the disorder. AD/HD is a genetically inherited disorder and nothing that my parents, society or anyone else did caused me to develop this disorder. I was born with it and I will die with it. Having AD/HD is like being the person who has to wear glasses or the diabetic who needs to take insulin. It causes those afflicted with it to be easily distracted from important tasks, to daydream and miss important instructions. It makes us more active than most or to have little patience for things at bad times. It allows us to have a creative outlook in things others can not see. It allows us to do things differently. It is also important to know what AD/HD is not. AD/HD is a disorder, not an excuse. It is very important to differentiate between the two. Never blame poor work or poor character on the fact that you have AD/HD.

There are some basic principles that need to be established. Life is never easy for anyone; it is how you choose to live with those difficulties that determines your success or failure. Even with all the benefits and privileges, no one succeeds if they do not want to. Success does not fall from the sky, it takes work and utilizing the resources available to you. After living with AD/HD and seeing others like me, I understand the irritations that can arise from taking medication on a regular basis. It is very annoying and bothersome, but I also realize that it is a very important reminder. I would not have accomplished as much without my medication. It helps my productivity and concentration, improving the quality of my work. I also know the side effects that can discourage you from taking the medication. No one likes the anxiousness, zoning, insomnia, or the curious and sometime negative response from peers. Sometimes I feel like a different person, but these side effects are worth the advantages the medications

give me. I can think clearly, concentrate, bite my tongue to avoid embarrassing remarks, complete work on a level which I can be proud of, have the motivation to complete things and I rarely miss a meeting or an event. Without it I struggle with all of these. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages so much that all I have to do is think of them and I instantly remember why I need it. Medication isn't right for everyone, however, and depends on your circumstances and the advice of your medical professionals.

Now for the bigger picture. When developing a workable situation in your school, it is important to find out the resources available to you and then use them to your advantage. At my school there is an academic support center for all students and I was able to find out what was available to me. Try asking your doctor or school counselor what is available and what you are legally guaranteed. By knowing what you are entitled to, you are better prepared to move on.

It is important to inform your teachers that you have a disability. This will allow both of you to develop a strategy for dealing with your AD/HD in the classroom. I have compiled the top five steps I have found most helpful in this process.

1. Inform the professor or teacher of a course about your disorder, without this knowledge he/she will be unable to help you. Every time I take a new class, I let the professor know I have AD/HD and make sure that they know what it is. If they are unfamiliar with it, I give them a description and bring in some documentation on it. If they do know about AD/HD, I tell them what I foresee as possible problems and discuss ways to avoid them. For instance, for classes requiring hand written work, I immediately inform the professor about my poor handwriting and ways that I have dealt with it in the past such as typing it, or having the professor look over it to make sure that everything is legible.

2. Next I find out times that I can meet with the professor if I have trouble.

3. When I am rushed or pressured by time, I perform poorly. This is why I make sure to tell the professor that I may need extra time, and in most cases, professors are very helpful. However, it is important to plan this arrangement before it is needed.

4. Ask your professors for test and project due dates. It may also help to ask where others have struggled and to write all of this down.

5. Always remember that your teacher or professor is working with you and not against you.

The next task involves the actual work. I have made a list of the top 10 things I have found helpful when it comes to doing homework and other projects properly.

1. Organization is a must and entails more than just organizing everything in your head. People with AD/HD are notorious for forgetting events, so I suggest buying a calendar that fits into either your pocket or your school bag. This calendar should contain as

many of your plans as possible. I suggest putting all test dates and deadlines for big projects. Keep this book with you at all times and use it as a daily reference. The calendar can help with current and future planning, so you're not caught unprepared for big projects and tests. When you sit down to work, make a list of what must get done, what needs to get done and what you would like to accomplish. This will allow you to stay on track with the important items.

2. Try to find a quiet, enclosed place to study, free of distractions such as traffic noise or conversation. (This is not your room, which for most will offer too many distractions.) Try to make it a place with a big desk, a window and good lighting. Do not make it near something that you would prefer to work on over your homework, like a computer. Once you have found this place, make it a routine to always study there. Picking different places each time you study will cause distractions and make you less efficient. For most people music will provide an extra unneeded distraction.

3. Try to find the most effective way to use your medication. For instance, I know that my current dosage lasts for three hours, but takes 30 minutes to kick in. With this knowledge, I take my medications to coincide with the ending of a previous dosage. This allows me to avoid the period which is wasted when one runs out and the other is beginning to kick in. I also make sure not to take my medication too late, as some are known to cause insomnia.

4. Always try to do as much as possible, but if you need a break take one, then return to studying after it. A break should not last more than 30 minutes, and make sure never to quit for the day instead of taking a break.

5. If you find that you are finished early, don't stop, just work ahead. This allows you to remain caught up so when difficult material comes up, you will not get behind. It also allows you to foresee possible problems and to take steps dealing with them. Even if you're ahead, you still need to pay attention in class, since the professor may go over something you missed or misunderstood.

6. There is no such thing as an easy class. It may take less time than others, but it still demands the same effort and work as the others. By doing well in such classes, however, you may help your grade point average.

7. Sleep is an important and necessary thing. Make sure that you get enough, since lack of sleep leads to poor performance. Also remember that ALL NITERS NEVER WORK!

8. Accidents and bad things happen to everyone. It is important not to dwell on them or let them destroy you. Look at the mistake, fix it and move on with life.

9. Procrastination is your worst enemy. Do not become its victim.

10. Always remember that the only thing that really matters is that you tried your hardest.

Grades are not important if you know you've done your best.

I have succeeded with hard work. It is hard for me to see friends with similar classes do less work than me and make the same grades. I have spent many long nights studying while my friends were engaged in other activities. But I have accepted this, because it is who I am. I have a disability and part of this disability means working harder to succeed. Just like the diabetic who can not eat candy, I make sacrifices. Sitting and crying or complaining about it does not help or solve my disorder. I have learned to deal with it in a way that allows me to be active with more than just my studies. By organizing my time effectively, I've converted wasted time to good time. For instance, instead of watching TV before dinner, I go to the library and study. This allows me to be able to eat with my friends. Sometimes, I will do my studies and catch up with them later, which still allows me to participate in their activities.

As the saying goes - "Where there is a will, there is a way." The bottom line is that to succeed takes work, no matter who you are.

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