Mourn the Past, Create the Future: Adjusting to the Diagnosis

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA
West Chester, PA
Ari@TuckmanPsych.com
adultADHDbook.com
Your Life Has Been Harder

- ADHD creates additional struggles in every major realm of functioning

- These struggles are especially problematic before a diagnosis is made

- No wonder self-esteem suffers...
  - Including in parents and romantic partners
Both Invisible & Unmissable

- ADHD can be an invisible disability
  - Especially when someone isn’t hyperactive

- Yet the symptoms or fallout can be painfully obvious
  - To oneself and others

- We look at what people do and assume why—and then judge their character
  - And we feel others’ assumptions about our actions
The Double-Edged Sword of Diagnosis

- Diagnosis can offer a better explanation for past struggles
  - “Finally it all makes sense!”

- Diagnosis can also confirm dysfunction and make a problem official
  - “I always knew I/she/he was screwed up!”

- A diagnosis doesn’t change what is
  - But it does change how we understand it and perhaps what we do about it
Anger About Lost Opportunities

- A diagnosis, especially later in life, can lead to anger over potentially preventable struggles
  - “If only I had known earlier!”

- Sometimes ADHD couldn’t have been identified

- Sometimes ADHD really should have been diagnosed earlier

- Either way, anger, sadness, frustration, and blame may be totally appropriate
What Does the Future Hold?

- A diagnosis can also lead to fear over what will be possible
  - “What kind of life can I expect for her?”

- A new diagnosis can change what someone expects for the future
  - May need to mourn the life that won’t exist and focus instead on the options that are likely
  - While this is universal, it may be more poignant for some
Create that Better Future
1. Dump the Concept of Normal
Normal Doesn’t Exist

- Normal is a statistical term

- We all have strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures
  - ADHD brings particular struggles, but isn’t unique

- We all have the same goal—to live a meaningful life by using our strengths resiliently to compensate for our weaknesses
  - But there are many ways to live a meaningful life
Interpretations Matter More

- How we feel about something is only partially affected by what happened
  - How we interpret what happened and its implications can have as big an effect

- Half of therapy is about changing interpretations without necessarily changing the reality
  - The other half is about using that different understanding to see new possibilities for what to do
Uncertainty is Uncomfortable

- A new wrinkle can increase uncertainty about what to expect
  - But a diagnosis may also increase certainty

- It’s really easy to project fears onto uncertainty
  - Diving into education mode can decrease that uncertainty (to a point)
  - Over-controlling may be an attempt to reduce uncertainty

- But treatment response may narrow the range of possible outcomes
Nuanced Greys

- Black and white ideas about success and failure may limit your acceptable options
  - So does difficulty tolerating difference

- Rigidly sticking to a goal:
  - Breeds anger if falling short is seen as intentional or preventable
  - Saps motivation if success is seen as impossible

- Flexible thinking about a meaningful life offers more acceptable options
2. Take Active Steps
Remember, ADHD Is Manageable

- ADHD tends to respond well to treatment and strategies
  - Learn as much as you can (then ease off)
  - Find good clinicians
  - Work hard at it
  - Remember that success isn’t linear
  - Get back on the horse

- We don’t treat ADHD; we help people with ADHD live better lives
What Can I Influence Now?

- Life brings all sorts of challenges

- What can I do something about now?

- Don’t waste time and energy fretting over what you can’t influence:
  - Currently unknowable, but may be revealed later
  - Can’t influence right now, but possibly later
  - Won’t ever be able to influence
Find the Limits

- Need to work hard at improving so you know the limits of what is possible
  - And therefore what needs to be accepted instead

- Growth through adversity:
  - What did these struggles teach you?
  - How did they benefit you?
  - What do you now appreciate more?
3. Know When to Move On
Stubborn Isn’t Impressive

- Hard work and persistence are impressive
  - But stubborn isn’t

- Hard work will show us what is possible—then we need to decide what is worth it
  - Value = benefit versus cost

- Satisfaction = experience versus expectations
  - If you can’t change the experience, then perhaps you need to reconsider the expectation
Never Stop Believin’

- Holding fervently on to hope may be a way to avoid mourning
- What is the fear that is keeping you from acceptance?
- What dream are you struggling to let go of?
- What would it mean if you did?
- What would help you be more comfortable about accepting this new reality?
Natural vs Enforced Consequences

- Natural consequences are great—except for ADHD
  - Natural consequences don’t cure ADHD, but they may reinforce the need for certain strategies.
  - . . . Or the belief of being incapable

- ADHD impacts:
  - Forethought: considering future consequences
  - Hindsight: applying past consequences

- Therefore, those with ADHD benefit from cueing in the moment and externally imposed, shorter consequences
Whose Problem Is This?

- Sometimes we need to let others make their own choices
- And suffer the (natural) consequences—if acceptable
- Parenting is fundamentally about balancing doing for vs giving space

- Who is having a harder time tolerating those consequences?
- Is it a problem for them or for you?
- Fear of someone else’s reaction is really about managing our own reaction to their emotions
4. Learn the Lessons of the Past
Mourn the Past

- The past is a rich source of life lessons
  - What can you learn from both successes and failures?
  - What would you do differently or the same?

- You’ve already suffered, so you might as well get the benefit

- How can you apply those lessons now to create a better future?
  - Sometimes the details really matter
Feel It, Honor It, Then Move Forward

- Work on understanding and then accepting your own and others’ imperfect choices
  - Woulda, coulda, shoulda. . .
  - Context matters: If I had known then. . .

- Get angry, sad, resentful, whatever, then focus on mourning it and moving on
  - Maybe have a ritual to let go of past disappointments and future dreams that won’t happen
5. Stay Connected to Others
Seek Good Company

- You aren’t alone in this, so you shouldn’t be alone in this
- Find people who get it
  - Family, friends, support groups, clinicians, teachers...
- Find people who have been there and can offer hope
  - And push you when you need it
- Find people who can normalize anger, guilt, shame, powerlessness, not liking oneself/family member, etc.
Dump Bad Company

- Simple solutions are easy—but often not helpful

- Minimize contact with people who just make you feel worse about yourself/your family
  - Maybe educate first, but change the topic or distance if they are insensitive/clueless
  - Or recognize that their response says more about them than you
  - They don’t get to vote on what you’re doing
Stay Strong for the Long Haul

- ADHD is (mostly) lifelong, so conserve your energy
- Pick your battles
- Recharge your batteries
- Delegate when you can
- Seek kindred spirits
Accepting what is, fully and honestly, gives us more power to create the future we want for ourselves and our loved ones.
The Books

INTEGRATIVE TREATMENT for ADULT ADHD

A four-part, comprehensive treatment model that includes:
• Family education as a clinical intervention
• Effective medication options
• Coaching for better time management, organization & more
• CBT for depression, anxiety & self-esteem issues

ARI TUCKMAN, PSY.D., MBA

FOREWORD BY KEVIN R. MURPHY, PH.D.,
Director of The Adult ADHD Clinic of Central Massachusetts

More Attention, Less Deficit
Success Strategies for Adults with ADHD

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA
Workbook & Podcast

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