

Ready or Not: Transitioning to Adulthood with ADHD

Ruth Hughes, PhD
ruthhughes8849@gmail.com

are you
ready?

Ready for Adulthood?

- ▶ 18 is the magic threshold of adulthood in our society
- ▶ But not all of our young people are ready.

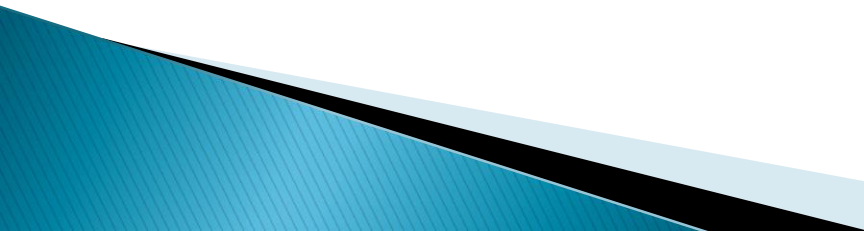


What Are Our Expectations for 18 year olds?

- ▶ Ready to be independent
- ▶ Able to be a self starter
- ▶ Manage own schedule
- ▶ Competent in daily life skills
- ▶ Effective social relationships with others
- ▶ Develop and work towards long term goals
- ▶ Make own decisions
- ▶ Career aspirations
- ▶ Financial contributor or independence

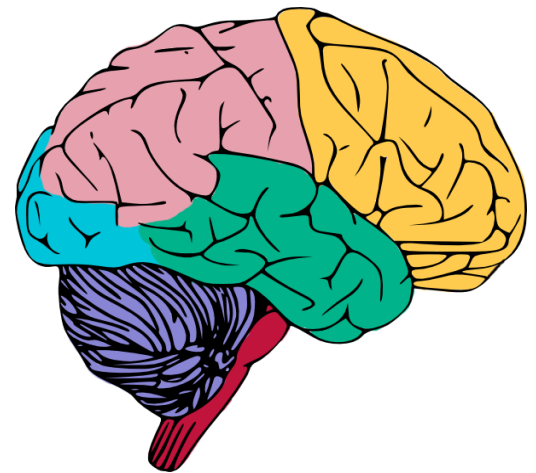


Are Expectations Realistic?

- ▶ For some young people, the answer is no.
 - ▶ And for many young people with ADHD or learning disabilities, the answer is no.
 - ▶ Our parental and cultural expectations can create a damaging and challenging environment for our young adults
 - ▶ But with realistic expectations, the passage to adulthood can be far more productive, though some times less traditional.
- 

Brain Development of Late Teens

- ▶ Brains are both more powerful and more vulnerable during teens.
 - Poor coordination between reward/risk areas of the brain and anticipation of consequences.
 - Inhibition is often delayed – hard to not “do it”
 - Stunning lack of insight and accurate self awareness
 - Immediate gratification rules
 - Crave stimulation and novelty
 - Difficulty learning from mistakes



Teen Plus ADHD!



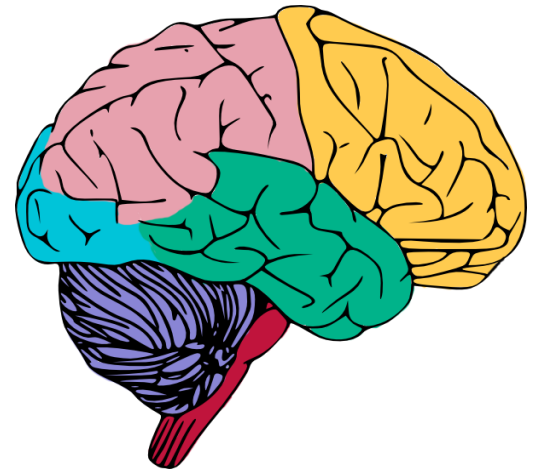
- ▶ Adolescence on steroids!
- ▶ Symptoms of ADHD are exacerbated with normal teen behavior
- ▶ Adolescent behavior and difficulty with making common sense decisions lasts much longer – up to 5 years longer.
- ▶ Emotional roller coaster of teen years is both intensified and lasts longer.
- ▶ Lack of connection between common sense and risk taking continues.

Challenges Increase Significantly

- ▶ Supports (financial, educational, social) are decreasing significantly
- ▶ While expectations of performance are increasing significantly

Major Considerations in Readiness

- ▶ 30% Developmental Lag in Brain Maturation
- ▶ Co-occurring Disorders
- ▶ Lack of treatment



Maturation Delays in ADHD

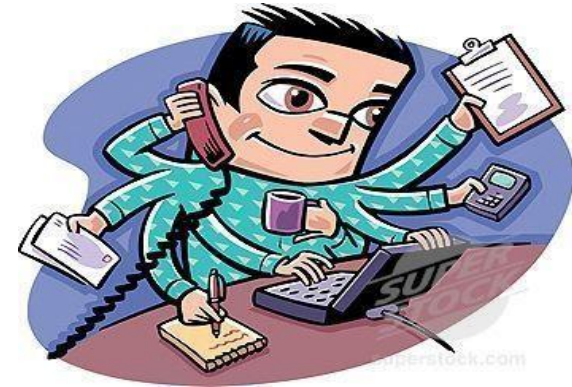
- ▶ NIMH study of brain maturation with and without ADHD
- ▶ Peak thickness of the prefrontal cortex, lagged **five years** in those with ADHD (planning, organization, anticipation of consequences)
- ▶ Temporal lobe maturation was also significantly delayed (verbal and nonverbal memory)
- ▶ Motor cortex emerged as the only area that matured faster than normal in the youth with ADHD, in contrast to the late-maturing frontal cortex areas that direct it.

30% delay in maturation

Shaw, 2007

Executive Function Deficits

- ▶ Inhibition
- ▶ Verbal working memory
- ▶ Emotional regulation
- ▶ Nonverbal working memory
- ▶ Planning, organization and problem solving



■
Barkley, 2010

Co-Occurring Disorders

- ▶ **ADHD is one the most common co-occurring disorders with other disabilities**
 - Learning disabilities
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Autism
 - Oppositional Defiant Disorder
 - And many medical disorders

Essential to identify all disorders, not just ADHD



Young Adults and ADHD

Young adults with ADHD are frequently at risk:

- Noncompliance with treatment
- School failure
- Substance abuse
- Social problems particularly with relationships
- Poor impulse control
- Maturity delay
- Risk taking behavior
- Accidents

**We Have to Remember
3 to 5 year Maturational Delay**

Gender Differences

- ▶ Women in college who have ADHD experience higher levels of impairment than men with ADHD:
 - home life
 - social life
 - education
 - money management
 - daily life activities

Fedele et al (2012)



ADHD's Effect on Performance

- ▶ Sleep problems
 - Difficulty getting up and to work on time
 - Poor sleep resulting in tiredness
- ▶ Impaired sense of time
 - Poor estimation of time needed for work projects
 - Difficulty in transitions from one project to another
 - Difficulty starting new projects
 - Difficulty completing projects
 - Get distracted with another task



ADHD's Effect on Performance

- ▶ Poor execution of long term projects, organization, planning
 - Problems setting priorities
 - Difficulty in scheduling multiple tasks
 - Forgetting to follow up on details and assignments
 - Lose materials needed for project
- ▶ Impulsiveness/High risk behavior
 - Substance abuse
 - Drinking to excess
 - Smoking

ADHD's Effect on Performance

▶ Impaired Social Skills

- More emotional
- Angers easily
- Difficulty reading social cues of others
- May talk too much and interrupt others
- Doesn't anticipate consequences of actions
- Lives in the moment



ADHD's Effect on Performance

- ▶ Slow Processing Speed
 - Slower reading
 - Slower writing
 - Slow response time verbally and nonverbally
- ▶ Writing Skills May be Poor
 - Difficulty writing reports
 - Difficulty organizing and processing in a logical, clear manner



Do You Have a Late Bloomer?

- ▶ If you force the bloom – may result in failure
- ▶ Give your young adult time to thrive
- ▶ Failure is costly financially
- ▶ But most importantly,
a young person can end up
being depressed and
convinced he or she is a failure

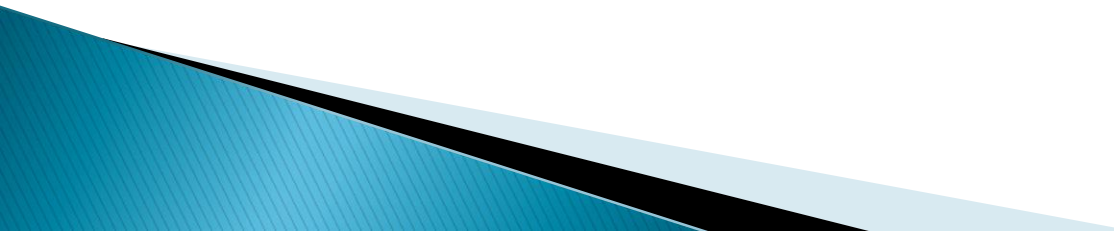


Assessing Readiness – Life Skills

- ▶ Cleanliness and hygiene
- ▶ Self care skills (health, sleep, nutrition, etc.)
- ▶ Laundry
- ▶ Finances
- ▶ Managing day to day schedule
- ▶ Organization skills
- ▶ Time management



Assessing Readiness – Executive Functioning

- ▶ Are there deficits in Working Memory (verbal and nonverbal)?
 - ▶ Does he/she have good problem solving skills?
 - ▶ Can your young adult plan and implement the plan?
 - ▶ What about appropriate emotional control?
 - ▶ Does your young adult use external supports well to address executive functioning deficits?
- 

Assessing Readiness – Social Skills

- ▶ Communicate clearly
- ▶ Ask for help when needed
- ▶ Interact with others appropriately
- ▶ Make friends and maintain existing friendships
- ▶ Manage emotional reactions appropriately
- ▶ Safe sexual behavior
- ▶ Ability to say no and stick to it



Assessing Readiness – Problem Solving Skills

- ▶ Define the problem
- ▶ Consider possible interventions
- ▶ Choose the most effective intervention
- ▶ Implement the plan
- ▶ Evaluate the results
- ▶ Begin the process again if necessary for a better outcome



Assessing Vocational Readiness

Find the Passion

- ▶ Has your young person identified a passion that can lead to a career? How can you support their interest?
- ▶ Not a clue? There is help available
- ▶ Consider vocational testing
- ▶ Time for exploration before committing \$\$ and time



Assessing Readiness – Vocational Interests

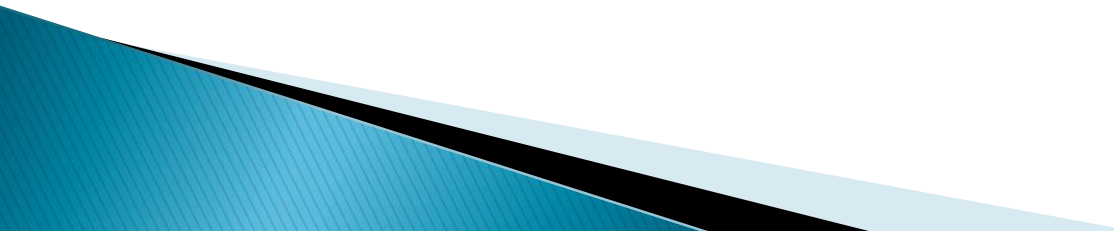
- ▶ Vocational tests can help identify areas of strength and interests
 - **Strong Vocational Inventory** – report, consultation
 - **Myers Briggs** – includes online assessment, one hour phone appointment, and reading materials
 - **Motivational Appraisal of Personal Potential (MAPP)** – includes test, list of 20 careers that fit your skills, and a narrative explaining the results
 - **Careerkey** – includes online quiz and assessment
 - **Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery** – Military assessment of vocational interest

Assessing Readiness – Managing ADHD and Co-Occurring Disorders

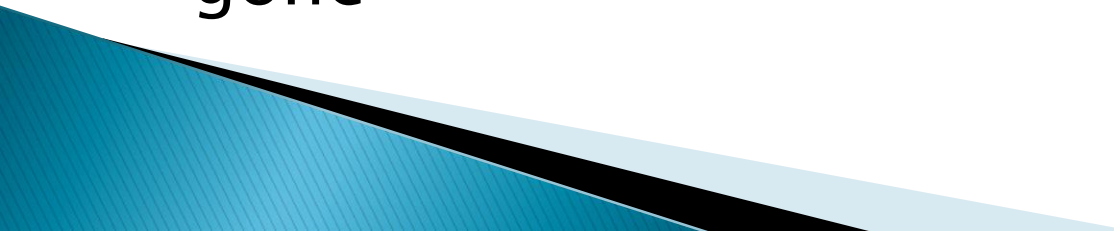
➤ Is your young adult managing their own treatment?

- Taking medication
- Scheduling and attending doc appts
- Refilling medication
- Knowing how to ask for help when needed
- Using of college support services
- Using external supports
- Saying no when asked to share medication

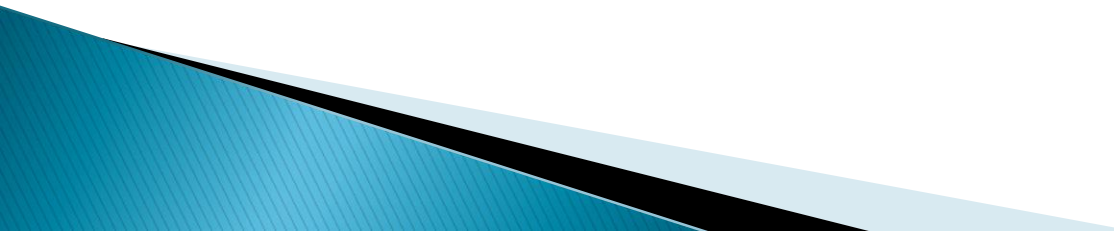
➤ How about managing other related disorders?

- Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Substance Abuse
 - Learning Disabilities
 - Autism Spectrum
- 

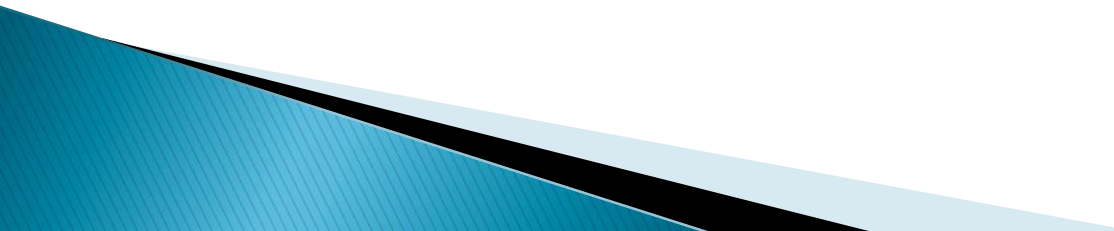
Treatment Challenges for Young Adults with ADHD

- ▶ Transition from pediatrician to a new primary care physician
 - ▶ Finding physician with ADHD experience with adults
 - ▶ Lack of treatment at university and college health centers
 - ▶ Difficulty filling prescriptions
 - ▶ Assumptions of faking to get drugs
 - ▶ External structure provided by family now gone
- 

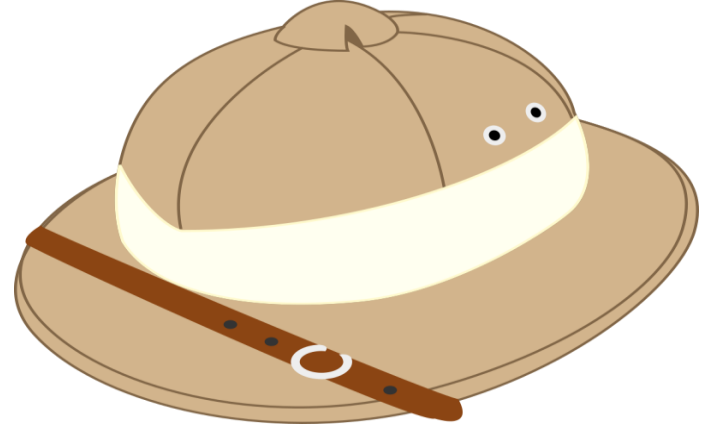
Building External Supports

- ▶ Identify areas of weakness and help your young person build external supports and strategies
 - ▶ Anticipate problems before they occur.
 - ▶ These supports and strategies make all the difference between success and failure
- 

External Supports

- ▶ Treatment
 - ▶ Job coach
 - ▶ Apps
 - ▶ Management strategies
 - ▶ People support system
- 

What Next?



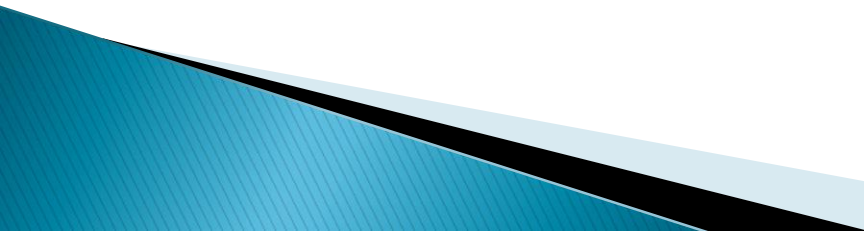
- ▶ This is a time of exploration and discovery
- ▶ Develop a plan and make it happen
- ▶ There are many options:
 - Work experience in area of interest
 - Volunteer experience
 - Gap year – travel/volunteering
 - Apprenticeship
 - Military
 - Community College
 - 4 year school while living at home
 - 4 year school away from home

Work Experience

- ▶ Any job will give real life experience
- ▶ Take the time to find out what are the potential interests of your teen and explore jobs that might be related.
- ▶ Find an entry level position in the field of interest.
- ▶ If it is a bad fit, don't hesitate to move on to something else.
- ▶ There are many jobs that don't require a college degree.



Jobs that Work with ADHD

- ▶ Hands on work
 - ▶ Intellectually or physically active
 - ▶ NOT detail oriented
 - ▶ Structured work expectations and supports
 - ▶ Changing and open environment
 - ▶ Area of passion or high interest for client
 - ▶ Supervisor willing to make some small adjustments to support client
 - ▶ Builds on strengths and interests
- 

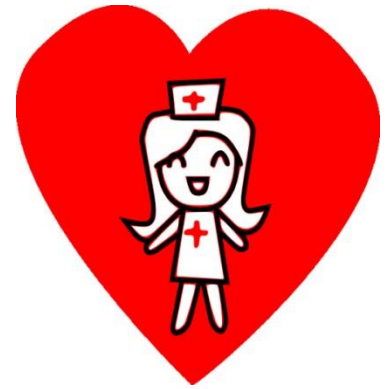
Jobs that are ADHD Friendly

- ▶ Military
- ▶ Sales
- ▶ Construction trades
- ▶ Policeman, fireman, emergency medical technician
- ▶ Entrepreneur or business owner
- ▶ Coach or sports related career
- ▶ Cook, Chef
- ▶ Arts



Jobs that are ADHD Friendly

- ▶ Park Ranger/naturalist/wild life rescue
- ▶ Teacher
- ▶ Journalist/Social Media/Blogger
- ▶ Childcare Worker
- ▶ Beautician/Hairstylist/Barber
- ▶ Nurse/ER Doctor/Physicians Assistant
- ▶ Software Developer/IT Innovator
- ▶ Actor/Stage Manager



Volunteering



- ▶ Volunteering can be a try out for real work
- ▶ Be assertive in asking for volunteer experiences in areas of interests – your teen may have to sell the employer on letting he/she volunteer
- ▶ Prepare like a real job interview.
- ▶ If at first your teen doesn't succeed – keep on trying.
- ▶ It is hard for employers to turn down free workers.

Gap Year/Bridge Year

- ▶ This is **NOT** a time to stay at home and play computer games
- ▶ Planned program of volunteering and/or travel to help expand the life experience and maturity of your young adult
- ▶ Internship in area of interest
- ▶ Important to be challenging and stimulating
- ▶ Check out gap year fairs (usagapyearfairs.org)



Apprenticeships



- Apprenticeships
 - Healthcare
 - Construction/carpentry
 - Information technology
 - Distribution/transportation/logistics
 - Advanced manufacturing/industrial maintenance
- Many other fields have apprenticeships. 59,000 apprentice ship jobs are currently available in the US. (<https://www.dol.gov/featured/apprenticeship/find-opportunities>)

Military



- ▶ Many people with ADHD thrive in the military's structured environment
- ▶ ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) is the military version of a vocational test to help identify best fit in military occupations.
- ▶ Physically demanding
- ▶ But there are issues around diagnosis and medication which may be barriers.
- ▶ Talk with a local recruiter but be wary of any hard sell.

College and Universities

- ▶ Be sure your student has the skills to cope with life away from home.
- ▶ Parents and teen need to anticipate problems together. Mom and Dad are always here to help when you hit a difficult time.
- ▶ Consider a reduced class schedule for first semester
- ▶ Utilize the services of the college office of disability services
- ▶ Communicate frequently



504 Accommodations in College

- ▶ Must document disability and submit to disability office on campus
- ▶ Accommodations may include:
 - Testing in another location
 - Test read to student
 - Note taking
 - Audio books
 - Extra time for tests, assignments
 - Assistive technology
- ▶ Check out <http://askjan.org> (Job Accommodation Network)

Preparing for the Next Step



- ▶ Involve your young adult every step of the way – this is his or her life
- ▶ Identify areas of weakness and external structures that your young person can maintain – keep it simple!
- ▶ Make sure your teen understands that life is full of problems and they will encounter them frequently
- ▶ And you are there to support and help them when the problems occur.

When He/She Hits the Wall

- ▶ Don't panic and don't define as failure.
- ▶ Your young adult is telling you he was not ready or the path was not right.
- ▶ Provide support and a place to heal
- ▶ But also set expectations for next steps
- ▶ You want to always be the safe person that your young adult can bring problems to.



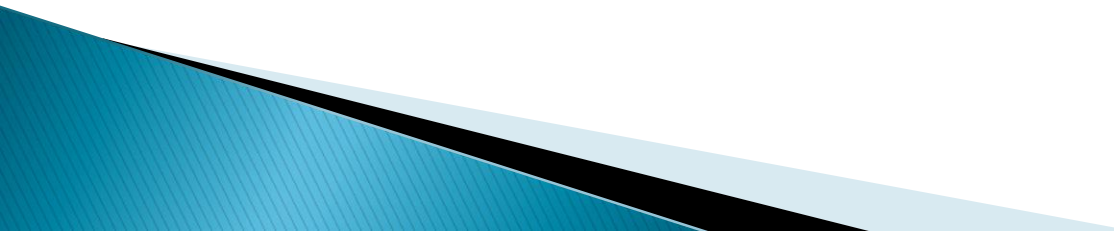
Redirect and Support



- ▶ Assist your young adult in developing a plan for next steps.
- ▶ Reconsider all the options discussed today
- ▶ Implement plan immediately
- ▶ Get help in any areas of poor functioning
- ▶ Deal with the emotional fall out
- ▶ Identify and reinforce successes
- ▶ Reinstate treatment for ADHD and any co-occurring disorders if necessary

Remember:

You Can Succeed with ADHD

- ▶ Treatment makes a major difference in likelihood of success
 - ▶ Build an external support structure is essential
 - ▶ May be more creative and innovative
 - ▶ Lots of energy for active positions
 - ▶ Work in area of passion and high interest
 - ▶ Freedom to do things differently
 - ▶ Continually changing environment
 - ▶ Finding the right job fit is essential
- 

Questions?

Ruth Hughes, PhD

ruthhughes8849@gmail.com

(410) 599-7695

