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# Your Strengths Are

**O**UR STRENGTHS are often more obvious to people around us than they are to ourselves. We tend to give little credit to ourselves for things that are easy, enjoyable, or second nature. We also overlook talents that have drawn criticism in the wrong setting.

People with ADHD often have difficulty identifying their strengths and talents as their “superpowers” because they got into trouble for them when they were young. Having unbounded energy, a gift for gab, and a tendency to make intuitive leaps without documenting precise steps can cause a child to be reprimanded in school. These same talents can be the source of great success in the right social and occupational settings.

It’s easy for most people to identify the challenges they have as a result of having an ADHD brain: impulsivity,

distractibility, a poor memory, and a tendency to procrastinate. Ask them to name some of their strengths and they might look at you in bewilderment, like Superman looked at me during our interview (see the sidebar, page 32).

But stop and think a moment about how those ADHD challenges can also be superpowers.

## **Reframe your thinking about your challenges**

Impulsivity lends itself to bravery in the face of dangers that would keep others immobile. Being impulsive also means you tend to be a great brainstormer. You might blurt things out without filtering them, and thus give more potentially awesome ideas than anyone else in the room. You also show others how to be brave. Your speaking up might inspire more people to do the same!

People who are highly distractible tend to pay attention



# Your Superpowers

to many things in a short period of time. Distractions tend to be internal (in your mind) as well as external (in the world). Imagination can be a great source of distraction. It can also be a great source of creativity and problem solving. People with ADHD tend to be great at being aware of a lot of information and then making connections and arriving at unique and insightful solutions.

A poor working memory can cause struggles in academic and interpersonal settings. But someone who has poor working memory also tends to be more present-oriented and may have strong intuitive skills.

I don't care how many articles are written about overcoming procrastination. This is absolutely a superpower. Anyone who can mentally figure out exactly the right moment to start a task so they have "just enough" time to complete it by a deadline, has a gift!

Procrastinators are great "sprinters" and they can act in a focused and effective manner in a crisis.

There are a lot of articles written about the "superpowers" of people with ADHD. But how do these translate into being your own version of a superhero?

What is it about you that other people are attracted to?

What makes you great at your job? As a spouse? As a parent? Or as a friend?

As a person living with ADHD, it can be far easier to identify our "mortal weaknesses." Our human brains remember the criticism and struggles we face far more easily than our successes. Identifying our strengths and what other people appreciate about us can be difficult and uncomfortable. But doing this can also help you to focus on developing and showcasing what you are good at so you feel confident and bring value to any situation.



## An Interview with Superman about Superpowers

As an ace reporter, I was recently given the prime assignment to interview Superman about his superpowers. This did not go as expected.

**INTERVIEWER (I):** *Superman, what superpowers would you say you possess?*

**SUPERMAN (S):** Um, I'm not sure.

**I:** *What talents or strengths do you have?*

**S:** Geez, I never really thought about it.

**I:** *Some people say you have super strength. Can you tell me about this?*

**S:** I guess compared to other people I am strong. But I've always been that way. So I don't think of it as "super strength."

**I:** *You also seem to have an uncanny ability to know when someone needs your help. Wouldn't you call that a superpower?*

**S:** I think if you asked my teachers when I was in school, they would say that I had the tendency to be easily distracted and fidgety in class. And that I had a really weak bladder and asked to use the bathroom a lot. I don't think they considered my behavior a superpower.

**I:** *Okay, but you're not a kid anymore. That tendency to pay attention to everything around you (even hundreds of miles away), gives you the ability to save people's lives. That certainly sounds like a superpower to me!*

**S:** Wow! I never thought of it like that. Flying, hearing people in distress, leaping tall buildings in a single bound.... those are all just things I do. They come easily to me. I enjoy doing them. It makes me feel good to help people. But I guess I can see how to ordinary mortals those skills would be looked at as superpowers.

## So, how do you find your "superpowers"?

Be brave! Ask people from different areas of your life what three things they appreciate most about you. Consider asking a partner, mentor, close friend, coworker, or boss. If you're encouraging a young person to find their superpowers, suggest they ask a favorite teacher, a coach, their best friend, or a teammate. The more people you ask, the more information you get. This will help you to see patterns in the skills and strengths other people see in you.

Be playful! Think about times that you feel totally focused, motivated, interested, and energized. Likely these are activities where you are using your strengths and talents—your superpowers. You might be surprised to find some of these activities are inherently fun to everyone while others may be thought of as "hard" or "work" by people in your circle. For instance, some people love to write. Other people find this to be a chore. While some people with ADHD struggle with anything related to tracking money, some are extraordinary financial planners—money management is their superpower!

Think back: As an adult, we have the opportunity to choose our occupations and where and how we work so we can have success. As kids, we have to sit in seats and learn how our teachers wanted to teach us. This is not typically a great fit for students with ADHD brains.

Think about what you got in trouble for! Did you talk too much? Were you doodling instead of doing your math work? Did you challenge the validity of what you were told or do things differently than you were instructed to do them? All of these may be clues to your "super skills." Once you remember these challenges, you can consider how you use these proclivities to your advantage now.

If you are a parent, this last suggestion can be a great exercise to share with your child. You can point out that not every talent will be valuable in every setting. Something that is creating a challenge for them now may end up being one of their greatest assets later. Even Einstein was considered a "reluctant student," and look how he turned out!

Take a lesson from my interview with Superman: Everyone has exceptional powers. Recognizing them sometimes means you have to look from a different angle or in a different setting. Once you find yours, you might just save the world—or at least the day! 🦹



A clinical psychologist and ADHD coach, **Kirsten Milliken, PhD, PCC**, is the author of *PlayDHD*:

*Permission to Play, A Prescription for Adults with ADHD (BookBaby, 2016). Her clinical practice has focused on working with kids, teens, and adults with*

*learning disabilities, including ADHD. Dr. Milliken and Kris Mitchel are on a mission to showcase all the amazing ways people with ADHD contribute to make the world a better place. Check out their campaign at [WorldofADHD.com](http://WorldofADHD.com) and consider showing off your or your child's superpowers by submitting a piece of written or artistic work.*