

ADHD: Integrating Sensory and Mental Health Supports

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Objectives

Understand

- how ADHD impacts the brain & body
- what an integrated model of care looks like
- how to combine sensory & mental health tools
- what role relationships play in ADHD support
- how to build your toolbox

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Introduction to the ADHD Brain, Mental Health, & Sensory Processing

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Adult ADHD

Evolutionary Psychology: Wired to thrive in crisis, as hunters & innovators.



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ADHD Brain Differences

1. Brain Differences
2. Neurotransmitters
3. Default Mode Network (DMN)
4. Genes
5. Sensory Processing Systems



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Brain & Body Differences

Brain differences- ADHD brains tend to have smaller frontal lobe, which controls executive function skills like organization, self-control and attention. **Atypical white matter** development in ADHD children impacts executive functioning.

Neurotransmitters- ADHD brains produce less dopamine and norepinephrine, which are connected to the brain's reward center. Dopamine helps the brain determine if a task is worth the effort.



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Genes & Default Mode Network



Genes- There is a strong genetic component for ADHD. If a child has ADHD, a parent will also have it (often undiagnosed).

Default Mode Network (DMN) - The DMN is made up of parts of the brain that shut down when the brain is focused on a task in a neurotypical individual. This allows another network to turn on to help focus on the task at hand. The DMN does not shut off in ADHD brains, unless there is a high reward. Turns off in crisis.

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Executive Functions

- Cognitive abilities to complete tasks
- Imagine them as a control center
- Weak executive functions can create challenges if there is not a 'backup' system



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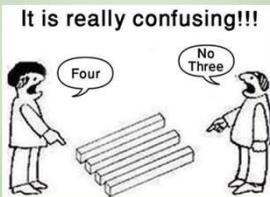
Executive Functions : The Big Five

Attention	➔	Never finishes a task, distracted during quality time
Organization & Planning	➔	Never starts a task, runs late, struggles to prioritize responsibilities
Working Memory	➔	Forgetful, time-blindness, word-finding
Emotional Regulation	➔	Emotional outbursts, fixates on the negative, intense emotions
Self-Control	➔	Impulsivity, blurts things out

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Why Executive Functioning & ADHD Aren't Intuitive

Can do complex tasks that might be harder for others



Can't do easy tasks around the house

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Gender Norms: Females

- Masking
- Inattentive
- People Pleasing
- Perfectionism
- Comorbidities with disordered eating and anxiety
- Less likely to be diagnosed as a child

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Social Differences

- Non-Linear/Divergent Thinking
- Parallel Play
- Special Interests
- Connection: Share personal stories
- Time perception
- Excitement
- Big Feelings
- Miss social cues/small doesn't register
- Urgent or non-urgent
- Rejection Sensitivity Dysphoria (RSD)

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Executive Function & Clinical Implications

- ADHD brains will function well in high stakes, high reward circumstances. This is why they might be successful at work but not at home. Causing conflicts with family & friends.
- ADHD brains function better with rewards, due to brain differences. Most struggles that clinicians will work with will be around boring/mundane tasks.
- Client can struggle with being ontime, doing "homework," scheduling appointments, missing appointments.
- Client is always in crisis or chaos.
- Non-linear storytelling and can fill up time talking easily (but not in a way that is beneficial to their overall goals)- need external structure in therapy.
- RSD can stop treatment if it isn't worked on.

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