

## **Nine Things You Might Not Know About ADHD**

**by Thomas E. Brown, Ph. D.**

Despite decades of research into the condition known as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, many myths and misunderstandings still persist. One of those misunderstandings is the assumption that ADHD does not involve problems with emotion, that this disorder consists only of problems with focusing attention and with behavior.

In my recent book, "*Smart but Stuck*," I share stories of past clients who were extremely intelligent, yet got "stuck" at school, work, or in personal relationships because of their ADHD. These stories illustrate how emotions--both positive and negative--impact individuals with ADHD, and the steps those with ADHD can take to get "unstuck." Here are some of the facts and problems described in this new book

- Emotions like anger, fear, shame, or hopelessness can take over the mind of a person with ADHD, much like a computer virus takes over a hard drive. This flooding of emotion makes it difficult for the person to keep any other feelings in mind--feelings that would help them to deal with the situation at hand, such as remembering that the person they are so frustrated with and confronting with strong anger is also someone they love and don't really want to hurt.
- ADHD often looks like a simple lack of willpower because those with the disorder can focus and work very well on a few specific activities that strongly interest them, yet have chronic difficulty focusing on other important tasks and activities. Evidence shows clearly that ADHD is not due to a lack of willpower--it's a problem in the dynamics of brain chemistry.
- Persons with ADHD not only have problems managing negative emotions like anger; they also struggle to manage positive emotions like excitement and intense interest. An inability to manage positive emotions can be just as problematic if it leads the person to remain too focused and stuck on one thing when they really need to move on to pay more attention to something else.
- Some extremely bright students with ADHD fail in high school or college not due to a lack of intelligence, but because unrecognized emotional problems with fear, shame, or depression lead them to avoid going to classes, getting their work done, and sustaining friendships.
- Parents of a child with ADHD are often extremely stressed and may become polarized against each other. Typically one parent assumes the role of "butt kicker," confronting the child each time he or she isn't doing what is expected, while the other parent acts as the "marshmallow," repeatedly making excuses for inappropriate behavior. They may end up repeatedly arguing or

fighting with each other rather than working together to tackle the difficult decisions about when to give in and when to confront or hold the line in dealing with their son or daughter.

- As some women approach menopause they develop ADHD-like symptoms of inattention and memory problems, even though they have never had ADHD problems before. These symptoms--which often cause fears of Alzheimer's--are sometimes improved with ADHD medications.
- Emotional problems of those with ADHD involve not only "putting the brakes on" emotions like anger or frustration. They also involve problems with "stepping on the gas" or ignition--the ability to overcome lethargy and procrastination to get started on necessary tasks.
- It's often difficult for teens and adults with ADHD to feel strong enough motivation and feel it consistently enough to start and complete tasks where the payoff is further down the road (i. e., where gratification is delayed), even if the ultimate reward is much more substantial than whatever reward they can get more immediately.
- Recent research shows that a sizeable percentage of people with ADHD also suffer from significant problems in social relationships that are associated with Asperger's syndrome or other autism spectrum disorders. Often they simply don't realize how they are ignoring the concerns of other persons and inadvertently frustrating or hurting others.

If you would like to see examples of how these problems can occur, why they occur, and how individuals with ADHD can get "unstuck" from such difficulties, look for my new book, *Smart but Stuck: Emotions in Teens and Adults with ADHD* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2014).