

# Understanding ADHD Strengths and Impairments in the Workplace

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# ADHD in the Workplace

**Intro**

**Symptoms/Impairments?**

**Assessing Strengths and Weaknesses**

**Disclosing**

**Employers' Responsibilities**

**Strategies and Accommodations**



# ADHD is Not Always a Deficit

## Some ADHD Traits Can Be Benefits:

- High energy
- Able to think out of the box / problem solving
- Creative
- Able to hyper focus
- Function well in a crisis
- Persistent



# Impact on Job Performance

**For most at least some of their ADHD symptoms result in impairments in the workplace.**

**How and if ADHD impacts job performance depends on several factors:**

- The type and severity of symptoms
- The suitability of the job to an individual's strengths
- How successfully strategies are being used to offset any weaknesses



# ADHD at Work

Since ADHD is a disorder that varies greatly between individuals, adults with ADHD can experience a few minor symptoms, many symptoms or most of the symptoms listed.

However:

- ADHD is a very treatable disorder.
- A variety or both medication and non-medication treatments for those with adult ADHD now exist.
- There is no magic cure or solution for those experiencing difficulties in the workplace.
- Taking time to assess impairments, implementing strategies and asking for accommodations when appropriate can be a significant part of becoming successful in a chosen career.



# ADHD Symptoms

## How They Impact Job Performance



# Attention Dysregulation

## Attention Dysregulation

- Under and over focusing, prioritizing and switching focus

Presents as:

- Inability to stay focused during tasks or meetings
- Becoming bored quickly – increasing inattention
- Difficulty switching focus – missed instructions
- Hyper-focussing – forgetting tasks or appointments
- Difficulty following lengthy direction and instructions – only partial instruction processed
- Poor listening skills – coworkers feeling ignored
- Inattention to detail – missing content and errors in reports





# Distractibility and Forgetfulness

## Distractibility

- External distractions – open office environments – unable to block out extraneous noise
- Internal distractions – own mind wandering

## Forgetfulness

- Forgetting schedules, routines, due dates, or tasks
- Unable to remember commitments to supervisor or coworkers – employee seen as untrustworthy



# Hyperactivity & Time Management

## Hyperactivity

- Unable to sit in meetings for extended periods
- Constant movement, pacing, tapping, leg movement
- Unable to remain seated at desk for extended periods – wandering hallways

## Time Management Impairments

- Under estimating time required to complete tasks
- Missing deadlines
- Getting to work on time



# Organization and Procrastination

## Organization Difficulties

- Difficulty staying on track of larger projects
- Easily overwhelmed with larger assignments
- Misplacing work related documents and materials
- Maintaining an organized work space

## Procrastination

- Putting off unpleasant tasks until the last minute
- Late or rushed completion of assignments
- Delayed long term projects or excessive overtime to meet deadlines



# Impulsivity

## Impulsivity

- Committing to tasks and projects impossible to complete – unwanted as a team member
- Blurting out inappropriate or regrettable thoughts and comments – viewed as thoughtless
- Jumping into projects without a plan – loss of productivity
- Impulsively jumping from job to job – blaming employer and coworkers – lack of insight into own behaviours and impairments



# Mood Dysregulation and Relationships

## Emotional Dysregulation and Relationships with Coworkers

- Overly emotional to criticism
- Dwelling on perceived slights
- Easily angered and expressing anger inappropriately
- Unable to view situations as anything other than black and white
- Difficulty reading social cues
- Monopolizing discussions, interrupting or being overly blunt
- Making excuses for impairments – blaming others



# Steps to Success

**Assess Strengths and Weaknesses**  
**Disclosing a Diagnosis**  
**Requesting Accommodations**



# Assessing Strengths and Weakness

**Those with ADHD are not best at assessing their own strengths, or impairments and resulting issues & situations.**

## Strategies that may help:

- Feedback from a co-worker
- Review copies of past job performance reviews
- Feedback from significant others or family members
- A professional evaluation from a career counsellor, therapist specializing in ADHD or an ADHD coach
- Assess strengths – which parts of the job do you excel at? What skills are others in awe of?



# Questions to Ask

- What parts of your job are easy to accomplish?
- What parts of your job are a constant struggle?
- What issues have resulted in reprimands?
- What changes in environment could help with performance?
- Would more detailed instructions or supervision be of benefit?
- Are certain times of the day more difficult?
- Do certain leadership styles make a difference?





# Disclosing a Diagnosis of ADHD

## Pros

- Employer may gain more understanding of workplace behaviours – discourage mislabelling of employee as being lazy, irresponsible or uncaring
- Most employment situations require a disability to be reported before accommodations can be put in place

## Cons

- May cause employee to be viewed negatively and increase stigma and misunderstanding



# Disclosing the ADHD Diagnosis

- Remains a controversial topic and personal decision
- Many employees fear being seen as incompetent, making excuses or asking for preferential treatment
- Employer will need to be educated about ADHD as a medical disability to understand duty to accommodate
- A personal perspective on the benefits or impairments of ADHD will assist the employer's understanding
- Viewing accommodations as a means to greater productivity and a win to both employee and employer is the goal of disclosing



# Alternative to Full Disclosure

- Meeting with supervisor to request minor changes in work environment to increase productivity
- Employee should start from a position of strength
- Use the term “I work best when...”
- Use specific examples of how changes will increase productivity – taping meetings will allow minutes to be more accurate and completed faster
- Do not refer to changes as accommodations unless the aim is disclosure



# Before Requesting Accommodations

## Employees should take time to consider:

- Specific strategies that could increase productivity
- Accommodations that could prove beneficial
- If the accommodations are reasonable – will they negatively impact other employees or the employer
- How accommodations will help to solve past issues with performance or discord with coworkers
- How to word the request from a position of strength



## Conducting a Meeting with HR

- Consider if you wish to disclose
- Assess the situation /access CADDAC's employer info
- Discuss how increased productivity can be a win/win
- Review symptoms and how they impact job performance – if disclosing
- Discuss which strategies might be most beneficial to implement immediately
- Discuss the possibility that several strategies and accommodations may need to be tried before the right accommodations or perfect mix is found
- Schedule a follow-up meeting to assess process



# Employers' Responsibilities



# ADHD in the Workplace and Human Rights

## ADHD and the Ontario Human Rights Commission

- The accommodation process usually begins when someone identifies they need accommodation due to a disability-related need<sup>1</sup>.
- It is the responsibility of the person with the disability is to "inform their employers of their needs<sup>2</sup>

1. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/minds-matter-report-consultation-human-rights-mental-health-and-addictions/10-duty-accommodate>,
2. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/disability-workplace-roles-and-responsibilities-fact-sheet>



# OHRC's List of Employer's Responsibilities

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/disability-workplace-roles-and-responsibilities-fact-sheet>

## Their responsibilities are to:

- Accept requests for accommodation in good faith;
- Request only information that is required to make the accommodation;
- Obtain expert advice or opinion where necessary;
- Take an active role in ensuring that possible solutions are examined;
- Maintain the confidentiality of persons with disabilities;
- Deal with accommodation requests in a timely way, and
- Bear the cost of any required medical information documentation





# Tips for Employers

- Understand your legal responsibilities around accommodating disabilities in the workplace
- Educate your self about the disorder
- You may need to initiate the discussion of potential strategies to improve productivity
- Understand that disclosing their ADHD may make the employee feel very nervous, vulnerable and defensive
- If the employee discloses discuss their feelings about co-workers being informed
- Discuss which leadership styles the employee finds best
- Assess whether your own traits are a part of the dynamic



# Workplace Accommodations

## For Specific Impairments



# CADDAC Chart

## ADHD Symptoms, Impairments and Accommodations in the Work Environment

- This chart is to be used as a reference for adults with ADHD and their employers.
- Possible strategies and accommodations are meant to address specific ADHD impairments caused by a disability.
- The impairments listed are directly linked to DSM 5 and ASRS symptoms and appropriate work-place accommodations (employer approved) and strategies (self initiated). This list is a summary and not meant to be exhaustive.
- Adults with ADHD will differ in the type and quantity of accommodations required. A process of trial and error may be required to discover the best possible options since ADHD symptoms as well as successful accommodations and strategies are very individual
- It is important to note that in some cases Just a few simple strategies and accommodations may significantly increase both job performance and job satisfaction.

<https://caddac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Workplace-accomodations-Chart-FINAL.pdf>

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DSM-5 Symptom [ASRS-6 Q#]	DSM-5 Symptom	Possible Resulting Impairments in the Work Environment	Possible Accommodations
<b>INATTENTION</b>			
1a ASRS-6 Q1 Trouble wrapping up details	Fails to give close attention to details OR makes careless mistakes creating inaccurate work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Inattention to detail – leaves part of task undone or misses crucial steps</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor quality of work – inaccurate, careless mistakes, rushed work</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor time management – doesn't leave time to complete details, check for mistakes or ensure quality of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review of work by co-worker, team lead or supervisor prior to due-dates or completing task to add details, make corrections, or improve quality of finished task or product</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> More frequent check-ins with supervisor, manager, team lead or co-worker to review project, check details, assist with time management and due dates</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow for more clarification</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check off sheet with steps or list of required details for completeness and best quality</li> </ul>
1b No ASRS-6 item	Difficulty sustaining attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties remaining focused during meetings and reading or writing lengthy amounts of material</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Day-dreaming or mind-wandering</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty staying focused on boring or mundane activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty switching focus or prioritizing focus on important rather than interesting duties</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hyper-focusing on interesting or creative tasks and unable to disengage resulting in missed work, deadlines and meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Organize day so work requiring most focus is done during times of highest alertness</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule blocks of uninterrupted time</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cuing to bring person back to discussion or when giving instructions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow audiotaping or note taking during meetings or lengthy instructions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Supply hard copy of instructions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 minute warning when switch in focus is required</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure attention prior to giving instructions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Switch out mundane and interesting tasks</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of intrusive reminders and warnings prior to meetings or when tasks need to be completed – electronic reminders</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of timer for concentrated times of focus or completion of tasks</li> </ul>



## Accommodations/Strategies for Attention Dysregulation

- Time of day when most alert for difficult tasks
- Reminders (visual or auditory) to draw back "to task"
- Timer to define periods of concentration
- Mundane & boring tasks rotated with stimulating tasks
- Intrusive reminders for meeting and appointments
- Note taking for lengthy list of instructions
- Use of tape recorder during meetings
- Boring tasks delegated to other employees
- Limit continuous e-mail checking unless required



## More Accommodations for Attention Dysregulation

- Scheduled blocks of uninterrupted time during the day where the phone is set on do not disturb and e-mail notification is blocked
- Manager/coworkers to provide a 5 to 10 minute warning when switching of focus required
- Work reviewed for details with manager or co-worker
- Manager and co-workers alerted to difficulties with listening skills – explanation that this is not due to rudeness, but is caused by a medical disorder
- Intrusive thoughts or ideas written down so they do not intrude on attention to task



# Accommodations for Distractibility

- Flex-time to facilitate some less-distracting time at work – arriving an hour early
- Working at home part of the time – reports and detail work may be easier to complete while uninterrupted at home
- Noise cancelling headsets or white noise machines
- Use of private offices or conference rooms for periods for highly focused work
- Closing office doors
- Use of sound absorption panels
- Moving office or cubicle to lower-traffic areas



## More Accommodations for Distractibility

- Moving inboxes outside of desk space
- Asking all employees to wear headsets when on the phone
- Use of space enclosures (cubicle walls) or face desk away from the line of traffic
- Organization and de-cluttering of work environment and/or redesign of employee's office space to minimize visual distractions – may require help of a professional organizer





## 5 ways to Focus at Work, From an Executive Who Struggles with ADHD

- Take the time to look for a job that meshes with the way your mind works
- Whiteboards
  - list everything you need to do that day with timeline, even small tasks
  - small board for immediate responsibilities
  - large for long term responsibilities
  - When other tasks come to mind – add to large board and continue on with current task
- Keep anything that is distractible out of site



## 5 ways to Focus at Work, From an Executive Who Struggles with ADHD Continued

- Structure your days
  - Pick a day or specific time for long term tasks – otherwise stick to immediate tasks
  - Find your optimum schedule and don't allow yourself to alter it except for emergencies
- Never multitask during conversations
  - No e-mails, etc.
  - Video conferencing and face to face discussions best
  - Listen for key points the person is making and write them down for a later summary and review
- Have someone else always holding you accountable

[Jack Kosakowski https://hbr.org/2017/09/5-ways-to-focus-at-work-from-an-executive-whos-struggled-with-adhd](https://hbr.org/2017/09/5-ways-to-focus-at-work-from-an-executive-whos-struggled-with-adhd)



# Accommodations for Impulsivity

- Develop standard statements to fall back on when asked to commit to projects – need to check schedule
- Note taking of thoughts and potential points to make to avoid blurting out inappropriate or off-topic comments during meetings
- Partnership with a co-worker or supervisor to plan and organize larger projects
- Creation of a time line and list of duties to allow for continued reference
- Time to reflect accomplishments and discuss any continued issues will increase job satisfaction and discourage impulsive quitting



# Accommodations for Hyperactivity

- Tasks that encourage movement breaks – walking to meetings / co-workers desk rather than using phone, using stairs rather than the elevator
- Built in structured breaks that allow for movement
- Exercise during lunch
- Taking notes during meetings
- Use of fidget toys, stress balls for intentional fidgeting
- Private workspace where employee will not disturb others by tapping, humming, or fidgeting
- Working from home



# Accommodations for Organization

- Use a professional organizer to assist with desk and workplace environment
- ADHD Coach to assist with organizational strategies
- Color-coded system for files and projects
- List of daily, weekly and monthly routine tasks
- Use of “To do” list that can be checked off
- Mentor or co-worker to assist with organization
- Supervision with prioritization of tasks – scheduled bi-weekly meetings
- Assign new project only when previous project is complete, when possible



## More Accommodations for Organization

- Limited number of projects worked on at one time
- Gantt or flow-chart charts on times lines for larger projects – especially useful for team projects
- Multitasking may be a strength or weakness – individualized specialized training for continuous juggling of repetitive tasks
- Minimize, streamline, automate, colour code, dictate or delegate paperwork whenever possible
- Remove shame for request of assistance with paperwork – this will prevent the situation from becoming overwhelming for everyone



# Accommodations for Forgetfulness

- Immediate action on tasks or immediately written into day timer or on note pad
- Check agenda day timer at routine times a day
- All messages written in a binder and checked at scheduled times of the day
- Use or timers, alerts or beepers
- Follow-up of meetings or verbal instructions with an e-mail or hard copy
- Use of flow charts or cheat sheets for steps of tasks
- Limited use of post-its
- Co-worker as a reference



# Accommodations for Procrastination

- Tasks suited to immediate response
- Closer supervision – biweekly scheduled meeting with supervisor to check on progress
- Built in reward system





## Accommodations for Emotional Dysregulation

- Feedback from a trusted supervisor, co-worker, or friend to build awareness of monologuing, bluntness, interrupting, and other issues with social skills
- Assist co-workers to understand interrupting, social weaknesses and bluntness as a medical impairment rather than rudeness – apologize
- Assistance for employee to view situations as other than black and white
- Breaks to cool down from anger or emotions overwhelming the brain – removal from the situation by going for a walk, coffee or lunch break, working from home for a day or two



## More Accommodations for Emotional Dysregulation

- Preparation for formal meetings with a review of performance or criticism to ease employee into highly charged emotional situation
- ADHD Coach to teach social skills and how to pick up social cues
- Optional attendance at social activities
- Encourage all employees to model appropriate social skills
- Supervisory method to better fit the employee's needs



# The Keys to Great Strategies

By John Tucker ADHD Coach

- They work for YOU
- They are tied to your strengths
- They take advantage of the resources available