



A DISTINCTIVE COLLECTION OF TRAITS

[An Introduction to Attention Deficit Disorder]

Delivered from Distraction

(combined excerpts from Introduction & Chapter 1)

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Attention Deficit Disorder, or ADD¹, is a misleading name for an intriguing kind of mind. The best way to think of ADD is not as a mental disorder but as a collection of traits and tendencies that define a way of being in the world. There is some positive to it and some negative, some glory and some pain. **If the negative becomes disabling; when it impairs the person's life, then this way of being becomes a disorder.**

The world of ADD baffles the uninformed with its complications and contradictions. ... Having ADD makes life paradoxical. You can super-focus sometimes, but also space out when you least mean to. You can radiate confidence and also feel as insecure as a cat in a kennel. You can perform at the highest level, feeling incompetent as you do so. You can be loved by many, but feel as if no one really likes you. You can absolutely, totally, intend to do something, then forget to do it [within seconds!] You can have the greatest ideas in the world, but feel as if you can't accomplish a thing. [You know you are] not performing up to your potential; constantly struggling to get organized; always waiting until the last minute – or later – to get things done; but also blessed with great creativity, originality, energy, wit and drive.

But there is more to this world than frustration... The prisons are full of people with undiagnosed ADD. ...Millions of people, *especially adults*, have ADD but don't know about it and therefore get no help at all. Having ADD is like having a turbocharged race-car brain. If you take certain specific steps, then you can take advantage of the benefits ADD conveys – while avoiding the disasters it can create. With guidance [and proper medication] they could dramatically improve their lives. [ADD] is a potential blessing – with emphasis on the word potential. The goal is to sculpt ADD into a blessing. You can do this by accentuating what's useful and paring back on what's not. Usually, that's not easy to do. The best diagnostic procedures also include a search for talents and strengths, as these are the key to the most successful treatments.

[Improving your life] in your head and in your heart: you need knowledge and you need hope. Most people do not know much about their minds or about ADD. They believe bad report cards from years ago. They believe their past frustrations define who they will continue to be. **They carry jagged bits of broken hopes that shred their confidence.**

The DSM-IV² defines ADD by a set of eighteen symptoms. To qualify for the diagnosis you need six. They describe only the downside of ADD. The more you emphasize the downside, the more you create additional pathology: a nasty set of avoidable, secondary problems, like shame, fear and a sharply diminished sense of what's possible in life.

ADD commonly occurs with other conditions, such as dyslexia and other learning differences, depression, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders and bipolar disorder.

[What is left out by the DSM-IV and other catalogs of pathology] is the zesty side of ADD. People with ADD have special gifts, even if they are hidden. The most common include originality, creativity, charisma, energy, liveliness, an unusual sense of humor, areas of intellectual brilliance, and spunk. Some of our most successful entrepreneurs have ADD, as do some of our most creative actors, writers, doctors, scientists, attorneys, architects, athletes, and dynamic people in all walks of life.

¹ **ADD or ADHD?** Although the term has officially been changed to ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder], many people do not experience hyperactive qualities. The next revision of the Physician's Diagnostic Manual is likely to restore the original ADD term with subcategories for Inattentive-type, Hyperactive-type and mixed characteristics.

² **DSM-IV:** [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(DSM IV\)](#)