Understanding the Link Between ADHD and Depression

by JEFF EMMERSON

The Link Between ADHD and Depression

I was diagnosed with adult ADHD in 2011 after a suicide attempt. My wife rushed me to the hospital, where I came clean with the triage nurse, telling her, “I need help.” It was the best thing I could have done, since it opened my eyes to adult ADHD, as well as depression, and how ADHD and depression can form a vicious one-two punch.

ADHD: Fast, Distracted Minds

By their very nature, ADHD minds are either hyperactive, inattentive, or a mixture of both. This is definitely the case with my own story, so I know exactly how quickly depression can show up as a result of being passionate, driven and unsure of yourself because there are so many different thoughts in your head.

Depending on when you were diagnosed (or even if you haven’t been, officially), people with ADHD often feel like they “don’t belong,” like outsiders in their families, communities, and society in general.

ADHD and Shame

Sadly, children with ADHD are taught shame early on in life, since they typically don’t act like the majority of their classmates. Educators aren’t given the resources or support for helping these students feel included in the class, or for creating a special curriculum for minds like theirs, which are in reality some of our most innovative and creative.

Shaming children early on can pave the way for trouble down the road. Kids don’t know how to tell you their feelings in many cases, and as a result, they withdraw into themselves, feeling more and more depressed about themselves, like something is fundamentally wrong with them. As kids become teenagers, behaviors like drug use , thrill-seeking and anger issues can rear their ugly heads through the damage that was caused early on in life.

It is a logical correlation that depression and behaviors that sabotage our lives go hand in hand, and it often becomes a vicious cycle with ADHD minds. If our sense of self-worth, shame, and healthy relationships are skewed, our worlds can become a prison cell of sorts, keeping us from living happy, fulfilling lives. That’s where depression can really take hold as well – eventually, we get tired of making mistakes, repeating the same old behavior patterns and letting ourselves (as well as those around us) down.

How We Internalize the Label of ADHD

Regardless of when you were diagnosed (or not), depression can either be chronic (long-term) or acute (temporary). Some need medications to be their best with depression, and others are successful through on-going therapy, changed daily routines and new careers that make the most of the strengths they have, which goes a long way toward neutralizing the depression in the first place.

Regardless of a person's type of depression, everyone can make changes to minimize feelings of despair and self-loathing through seeking help in a number of ways. The "quick-fix" idea of counting on a pill to do it all for you isn't the best way to go for anyone. Sure, medication helps many with depression and ADHD, but other options also need to be explored to be sure you cover all the bases and uncover the formula that's best for you, and no one else. After all, we all live different lives and have different brain chemistry.

The label of ADHD is one that many are embarrassed to talk openly about. This is very unfortunate since the only way the world will truly evolve and have empathy for ADHD minds is by getting the word out as leaders toward a mission of awareness. This way, healthcare professionals will be more likely to correctly diagnose ADHD and we can continue to evolve as a global community where research, personal examples of success and supportive communities are concerned.

Depression Can Creep Up Fast

Everyone is different, but depression resulting from an anxious mind can creep up on us very quickly, so we have to be in-tune with our patterns, moods and how we choose to see the world. This is where self-honesty is extremely important, as well as being open to seeking help, even when you might feel exhausted and frustrated to no end.

I actually committed myself to the local hospital psych ward in January of 2013 due to a major depressive episode. Not only was I suicidal for the second time in my life, but I was also actually researching the least painful way to follow through with it. That was a huge red flag inside my head, and though I wanted to just sit and wallow in my own misery, my wife pointed out just how bad I looked, reminding me that I got help before, and I needed it again.

It saved my life, I'm convinced. Getting the help I so desperately needed has set the stage for where I am today – very happy, fulfilled, successful, running my own business with my wife, pursuing a book deal for my memoir as I type this, and reaching hundreds of thousands all over the world, raising adult ADHD awareness.

Obviously, my life is different than yours, but the more honest you are with yourself (as hard and tiring as it can be at times), the more successful you'll be in life! The correlation is there: those who are most open to personal growth through self-honesty and learning new ways to live the life they imagine live the best overall lives. Yes, it's a journey, and I never said it would be easy. If it was, you wouldn't feel nearly as satisfied (a feeling that even money can't truly buy) as you will knowing you have overcome some very tough challenges in your life.

Mark my words – life will always throw us curves. How you respond to them and how you feel about yourself is the entire key to it all. When you learn tools for self-love, forgiveness, compassion toward yourself and choosing to focus on your talents, you are unstoppable. My past is full of "mistakes" which I refer to as learning lessons – they showed me what I had to fix and heal in my own life so that I could change my future.

Now I'm here as living proof that it CAN be done. You can find a solution for your ADHD and depression. You are the master of your life.