ADHD and Shame: A Link That Needs To Be Broken

by JEFF EMMERSON

Adult ADHD and Shame

As a man who was diagnosed at the age of 35, I can tell you all about the shame that comes with having an ADHD mind. I have also heard from hundreds of others who feel the same way when it comes to ADHD and shame, and how adult ADHD is perceived by many in society.

Trust me when I say that this must come to an end, since our minds are some of the most innovative and passionate out there. We simply need to uncover the best ways to harness our challenges while being supported in focusing on our strengths.

Shame Only Makes ADHD Worse!

It’s tough for parents, teachers and others to deal with children with ADHD in many cases. People with ADHD tend to act out in various ways, be really hyper-active in some cases, or withdrawn in others. We can be really exhausting to be around at times, due to our energy, passion and moods. I fully admit that.

However, we are only made to feel worse about ourselves when we are shamed over our behaviors. Patience is the key here, not just putting kids on medications to “calm them down.” These medications are often very dangerous and don't even address the underlying differences in our behaviors! You won’t see big pharmaceutical companies publishing studies on the fragile human brain and how potentially dangerous their prescriptions are – you’ve got to use your common sense here, and look to other interventions before resorting to medications. Do NOT make them the “default” solution!

There is a reason we behave like we do. Do the work to get to the bottom of it and seek out healthy behavior changes, as well as seeing if powerful pharmaceuticals are ultimately needed. Many parents don’t want to hear this, and I understand, but it’s the truth. No one said this would be easy. After all, our society simply isn’t “constructed” for minds like ours. That’s why many with ADHD are in jails, battling drug addictions, while others are very successful. It’s a matter of support, luck of the draw and other factors along the way. I’m one of the lucky ones, even though I tried to kill myself a few years ago.

Proof That ADHD Exists

First of all: ADHD is simply a genetic difference. Don’t expect a standard “double-blind” university research study to prove that ADHD can be tested like diabetes, because it can’t. That said, there are many reports of brain scans of ADHD minds and how they differ in brain activity from non-ADHD minds. This is well-known, and you only need to spend some time with someone like myself to see very clearly that this condition, this “difference,” is real.

Next page: more proof that adhd exists and looking to the future.

Proof That ADHD Exists

It is NOT a disorder, even though insurance companies and schools all over the world say it is. That is because we, as a society haven't yet come up with a better way to address this difference in brain cognition, a way to harness students and adults with it. We have a long way to go with this, but first, we've got to stop arguing over whether ADHD is real in the first place! It is very real, and though there are lots of over and mis-diagnoses currently, there is a "perfect storm" of symptoms and behaviors that cannot be accounted for with any other diagnosis, as much as some suggest (such as Dr. Richard Saul in his book "ADHD Does Not Exist").

They are wrong. Just because you can't test for ADHD like you can with conditions like diabetes does not mean it isn't a very real cluster of symptoms that are NOT simply depression, anxiety, thyroid issues, bipolar disorder, cyclothymia or any other labels. ADHD is ADHD and nothing else, so we must realize and accept that (while research continues, and who knows what the future will tell us) for the sake of everyone who deals with these symptoms, this fast or distracted mind, and this high energy toward enthusiasm and innovation.

Looking to the Future

We can help humanity thrive by realizing that no matter how we each look at ADHD, these symptoms and differences in our brains are very, very real. As a man who has studied this for several years, looking at every possible angle, racking my brain for a new, more empowering way of looking at ADHD, I can tell you with confidence that ADHD is here to stay, and that our minds are incredibly capable, full of potential. The flip-side is that we can also spin out of control through shame, guilt over past mistakes, perfectionism and emotional control issues.

As research continues into these specific symptoms, behaviors and this difference in brain function, society will come to realize the global importance of supporting those with ADHD. Not only do we need support in our institutions, some of us also require medications to calm our minds enough to thrive on a consistent basis. While I'm not pro-medication, I am open to whatever proves to help. If medication helps someone thrive to be able to do the work in therapy, succeed in school and continue to realize their goals and live a better quality of life, then that's excellent.

Medication will never be the answer on its own, however. The shame that many of us have internalized must be healed, it must be replaced with a healthy self-identity that includes self-love, compassion, and forgiveness toward our past and past trauma that has left a damaging scar on our current reality. It is now up to each of us to do the work and take 200% responsibility for our lives.

Sure – life isn't fair, and trauma can leave some vicious scars, but all any of us can do is change our future by facing our past and self-confidence challenges, and continuing to move forward one day at a time.

That saved my life, and has brought me an amazing sense of fulfillment, gratitude and inner peace, I have to say. No drug can ever replace that.