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## Dispelling common ADHD myths and stereotypes

Around 1.5 million adults in the UK live with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, ADHD Action says only 120,000 are formally diagnosed. There are many ADHD myths and misconceptions that often prevent people from seeking help. They also influence the attitudes of others towards those with the condition.

### What is ADHD?

People with [ADHD](#) can often seem restless, may have trouble focusing and may act on impulse. ADHD symptoms tend to be noticed at an early age, particularly when they start school. This means most formal diagnoses take place between the ages of 6 and 12 years.

However, despite the fact that the symptoms of ADHD usually improve with age, many adults who were diagnosed as children continue to experience problems. Some face additional problems, such as [insomnia](#) and [anxiety](#)

### What are the common ADHD myths and stereotypes?

Dr Steven Mahan, clinical psychologist and operational lead at [The Chelsea Psychology Clinic](#), says a very prevalent and damaging ADHD myth is that it isn't a 'real condition'.

"There are those who believe children with ADHD are just 'naughty' or misbehaving. They assume this is the result of 'bad parenting' rather than behaviours manifesting from a neurodevelopmental condition. None of this is true. ADHD is a very real neurodevelopmental condition that greatly affects the lives of children and adults who experience it," he says.

# Other ADHD myths

Other common ADHD myths and stereotypes include:

- **ADHD myth #1: ADHD is overdiagnosed.**

The symptoms of ADHD are very real. Suggesting that the condition is 'overdiagnosed' harms those who haven't been able to get a diagnosis. It would also be refuted by the parents of children who have ADHD.

- **ADHD myth #2: Only kids have ADHD.**

There isn't an age limit on ADHD. Many adults also live with the condition, yet don't feel comfortable seeking a diagnosis. In adults, it often exists alongside other conditions, such as [depression](#) and [bipolar disorder](#).

- **ADHD myth #3: People with ADHD just need to try harder.**

While it's true people with ADHD struggle with concentration, they need support to manage their condition. It isn't a case of them needing to try 'harder' in the same ways as people without ADHD. The key is encouraging them to think differently, and find methods and practices that work specifically for them.

- **ADHD myth #4: ADHD is caused by lack of discipline as a child.**

While ADHD can affect how children behave, it can be caused by a number of factors. It isn't as simple as having a 'bad parent'. Many factors - including problems during [pregnancy](#), and genetics - can contribute to a diagnosis. While parenting isn't the reason that people have ADHD, it can be part of the solution by assisting a child through their diagnosis to make it more manageable. It's also important that, if you are a parent who has a child with ADHD, you don't blame yourself.

- **ADHD myth #5: Only boys have ADHD.**

There's no question that boys are [more likely to be diagnosed](#) with ADHD than girls. However, girls are still as susceptible, but the symptoms may present themselves differently. Symptoms are often more pronounced in boys, yet more subtle in girls.

- **ADHD myth #6: People with ADHD aren't smart/get lower grades at school.**

This is almost entirely false, as a low IQ isn't specifically related to ADHD. Just because people with ADHD work differently, that doesn't mean they lack intelligence. Many people with ADHD are actually extremely creative.

- **ADHD myth #7: ADHD doesn't exist if someone seems 'fine' one minute, then struggles to concentrate the next.**

While it can be challenging to understand the mind of someone with ADHD when you don't live with it personally, you should remember that symptoms fluctuate. There will be inconsistencies in the behaviour of someone with ADHD. This means they might be able to complete tasks quickly and correctly one time, but do so poorly a short while later. The truth is that people with ADHD often use a great amount of energy just trying to keep themselves focused and on track.

- **ADHD myth #8: ADHD is just an excuse for laziness.**

People with ADHD aren't 'just lazy'. People with ADHD exert as much effort into their activities as those without the condition. The difference is it may take them longer to complete a task, or they may not complete it at all, if they get distracted.

## **Why are ADHD myths harmful?**

"These stereotypes are harmful because they can affect how people relate to and treat those with ADHD," says Dr Mahan.

"Having a good understanding surrounding ADHD and its causes can lead to greater compassion and more willingness to support those with a diagnosis of ADHD. It leads to a more understanding, tolerant, accepting network surrounding ADHD and its associated symptoms."

## **How to be ADHD-inclusive**

Developing an understanding of the condition when you don't live with ADHD can make a big difference. Taking time to see things from their perspective and learn more about the complex diagnosis can create safer spaces for people with ADHD. It can make people more willing to seek help and dispel damaging stereotypes.

"ADHD is a complicated condition with many misconceptions about what it is, what causes it, and what it is like to live with ADHD. Therefore, it is helpful to learn as much as possible about the experience of ADHD," says Dr Mahan.

## How to increase your ADHD awareness

"Speaking to those with a lived experience of ADHD can be a powerful way of hearing, first-hand, what the experience is like," suggests Dr Mahan.

He also directs people to [The ADHD Foundation](#), which provides a huge body of research, readily available online, surrounding ADHD. The ADHD Foundation is not only an informative resource for those who live with ADHD, but also for their loved ones, parents, teachers and professionals working with those with ADHD.

## What do we, as a wider society, need to do to be more supportive of those with ADHD?

People with ADHD are a very real part of our society, and the condition is very prevalent. Educating ourselves about what ADHD actually is – not just what we think it is – and how people experience it will help shift harmful ADHD myths..

"Doing this will create a fairer society for people with ADHD and offer a level playing field for them. Greater understanding also means more empathy for people with ADHD, and encouragement to reach out for support," says Dr Mahan.

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<b>Peer reviewed by:</b> Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP 28/10/2021	

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