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Being diagnosed with ADHD can be a blessing in disguise

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is neurological abnormalities in the brain which affect approximately 3 to 7 percent of children worldwide. According to the Hong Kong Association for AD/HD, in Hong Kong around 40,000 children and teenagers are affected by it.

In most articles about ADHD, you can see words like "suffer", "we found a cure", "disorder", etc. Likewise, most parents in Hong Kong view ADHD as their worst enemy. They think that it must be the end of the world if their child has ADHD. But really, is that the case?

Walt Disney, Michael Jordan, Jim Carrey, Will Smith, John F. Kennedy, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Shakespeare. These are some of history's best-known overachievers and believe it or not, they have all been diagnosed with ADHD. How do you like ADHD now?

Thom Hartmann, psychotherapist and once the most popular liberal talk show host in the United States, described people with ADHD as "hunters in a farmer's world". Hunters are always moving, always vigilant, always tuned into their instincts while seeking food and shelter. Farmers plant seeds in the ground and wait. Patience is required. A farmer needs to think about the future and plan ahead. Nowadays we use technology to do everything like shopping, paying bills, or even socializing. The hunter's skills are no longer an advantage as they were in the Stone Age. For example, hunters' increased motor skills (hyperactivity); constant vigilance to possible threats and ability to shift attention rapidly (inattention); and the capacity to respond quickly and instinctively to a surprise attack (impulsivity) are no longer useful in this hi-tech world. Nonetheless, in some cultures, like the Puluwat culture of the South Sea Islands, ADHD characteristics are perceived as highly desirable skills to have, as they hunt and navigate using star constellations. Therefore, being labeled as gifted or "special needs" has more to do with when and where you were born than anything to do with who you are as an individual, because the standard for "normalcy" changes with prevailing circumstances and perceptions.

Bonnie Cramond (director of the Torrance Center for Creative Studies and Talent Development at the University of Georgia) suggested that there is a connection between ADHD and creativity. All we need to do is to put a slight twist on ADHD characteristics. For example, we can see impulsiveness as spontaneity - artist Jackson Pollock is famous for throwing paint wildly onto a canvas; inattention as divergent minds - creative people think "outside the box", and in order to accomplish this, they must follow their ideas, images, or instincts wherever they might lead; and finally hyperactive as the vitality of the artist or scientist - who is constantly on the prowl for the answer to a creative problem. Edison, for example, tested thousands of substances before coming up with a filament that would burn for hours in his electric light bulb. Cramond's argument has shown us how ADHD can be viewed as positive if we channel such hyper energy into useful pursuits.

Studies have shown that a learning environment with music, color, movement and high interaction can help individuals with ADHD to learn more effectively and efficiently. ADHD kids like contexts that involve more physical movement and changes, and which are more challenging. Hands-on and high-stimulation activities are ideal for them. There are also a few organic ways to control ADHD symptoms if you really need your ADHD child to sit down for a couple of hours. For example, "green time" and "rough and tumble play" are good ways to do this. You basically just let your child run free for about 30 minutes to do anything that can drain their energy level. For example, running, jumping, kicking balls, play-fighting, etc. "Say it out loud" is a way to help ADHD kids to focus on their tasks. As ADHD people can be forgetful sometimes, so we should take advantage of technologies like smartphones to set reminders for appointments and taking notes.

Lara Honos-Webb, the author of The Gift of ADHD, states, "While the A students are learning the details of photosynthesis, the ADHD kids are staring out the window and wondering if it still works on a cloudy day." ADHD kids are very good at paying attention to what interests them. ADHD is actually not a disorder. It is just difference in attention, just a difference in cognition. Therefore, we should try our best to facilitate ADHD kids to reach their full potential and not find ways to destroy or numb the many positive aspects of ADHD, especially with medication.

"ADHD people are high-energy and incredibly good brainstormers. They will often happily work 12-15 hours by choice. The business community should not fear ADHD. Instead, they should see that they have a potential gold mine here," psychologist Kathleen Nadeau, another adult with ADHD, told ABC News.

The author is a UK-qualified neuropsychologist with years of experience in identifying special educational needs of patients at an early stage and recommending intervention measures to prevent problems from aggravating.

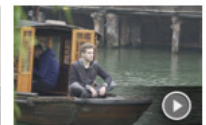
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