



An ADHD Assessment Might Set You Free— **No Matter Your Age**

by Laura MacNiven

NO ONE WANTS TO FEEL LIKE SOMETHING IS WRONG with the way their brain works, or to be labelled or stigmatized due to their mental health symptoms. Fears like these—of being judged or having their lives worsen as a result of speaking up—hold people back from seeking support through mental health assessment and treatment services.

The issue is big. In 2018, one in five Americans experienced mental illness but only 43.3 percent of those individuals sought help.

I get why.

It's normal (and beyond understandable) to **not** want to reach out and talk about it. I mean, who wants to sign up voluntarily to share their darkest secrets and difficulties? You're already having a tough time, and now you have to do the work to navigate the healthcare system?

Not to mention the commitment of time and money involved in getting a formal mental health assessment.

It's a lot to take on. It seems like it would be safer (and easier) to avoid all that and just keep your struggles to yourself. Perhaps they will go away on their own, or maybe if you just tried harder.

Please don't fall into this trap. Instead, consider taking a leap of faith.

Put trust in those who have paved the way in mental health awareness by being brave and following in their footsteps. We have come so far in reducing stigma and advancing treatment methodologies for mental health diagnoses. In the case of ADHD, we know a lot about it. More specifically, we know that it is both real and treatable.

You are not lazy.

You are not crazy.

You are not weak.

You don't need to try harder.

You deserve the help you need.

Bring your experiences into the light, so you no longer have to face them alone.

Here are three ways an ADHD assessment just might change your life:

1. When you understand the way your individual brain works, you can work smarter, rather than harder.

ADHD treatment is not about working harder. You are already trying your best. It is about gaining the perspective, awareness, and space to approach your problems with an individualized lens. It is about working through feelings of fear and frustration that get in the way of making concrete progress. It is about learning how to “float” up above your own experiences and make choices in the moment that fit with your big picture goals and dreams. The exciting thing is that when you understand the root of your issues, you can use this self-knowledge to your advantage.

2. In observing your patterns of attention, you are able to pinpoint how to prioritize your precious focusing energy.

ADHD can feel like a ping pong match in your brain. You can't focus on one thing because you are trying to focus on everything, and vice versa. You find yourself in “thought tornados” with questions like: “*Why do I always do that?*” or “*When will I stop doing this?*” Your intentions are good, but you are being pulled in so many directions that it feels impossible to zero in on what you really need to, at the right time. By doing the work to better understand your micro priorities within a bigger context, you can channel your focusing energy in the area where you can make the greatest impact.

3. By finding the words to explain what ADHD means to you, you are able to tell the whole truth.

ADHD is hard to talk about because it's confusing. Sometimes you hit things out of the park, and sometimes you feel like you are trudging through quicksand. You know you have great abilities, and you know where you are falling short. But, the stuff that is holding you back feels trivial, even silly, sometimes. It doesn't make sense when you try to explain it. You feel like a broken record apologizing again for losing track of time, or for repeating a mistake when you know better. You try to make sense of it on your own, but without a 360-degree view, you fall short, and get frustrated. When you work with a team that understands ADHD, you can figure out the whole story of why things are going the way they are going, start to finish. This will allow you to come to terms with where you are now, so you can decide where you want to go.

THE ADHD ASSESSMENT PROCESS is not about making a list of what you can't do. Quite the opposite, it is about helping you dig into yourself, so that you can take the steps you want to take. It is about having people in your corner that believe in you and what you have to offer.

So, maybe today is the day for you to reach out and get some help. Maybe today is the day for you to nudge someone else forward to getting support.

And if you don't know where to start, start with this: “*I am having a tough time and I need some help.*”

You don't have to suffer alone. 📍

Laura MacNiven is the director of clinical services at Springboard Clinic in Toronto, Canada, and the coauthor of *May We Have Your Attention Please? A Springboard Clinic Workbook for Living—and Thriving—with Adult ADHD*. She is also the facilitator of a new online course for adults with ADHD, open to anyone, anywhere.