

Understanding ADHD from a Strengths-Based Perspective

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS associated with ADHD as perceived by adults with ADHD, as well as children with ADHD and their parents? ADHD symptoms are typically perceived as hindering children and adults from reaching their full potential and negatively impacting their quality of life. The positive psychology perspective emphasizes a strengths-based approach to ADHD, with a focus on identifying and leveraging positive attributes rather than solely concentrating on deficits. This approach may have the potential to increase self-esteem and optimism for the future.

The first study was conducted through interviews and examined self-reported abilities associated with ADHD by adults with ADHD, revealing six core themes: cognitive dynamism, courage, energy, humanity, resilience, and transcendence. The second study used questionnaires to examine the views of children with ADHD and their parents on children's interpersonal strengths, school functioning, affective strengths, intrapersonal strengths, and family involvement. Results from both studies highlight areas of strength associated with ADHD, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the positive attributes of ADHD to support functioning and development.

How do successful adults with ADHD perceive ADHD?

Studies have found that high-functioning ADHD holds positive aspects that may include hyperfocus, memory of images, and increased effort put into tasks that could be used to lessen ADHD-related challenges. This study explored abilities and challenges associated with ADHD from the perspective of adults with ADHD through a positive psychology and strengths-based perspective.

Six adults between the ages of 30 and 65 years old who were identified as demonstrating high functioning ADHD participated in this study, which took place in the United Kingdom. The participants had all been recently diagnosed and prescribed medication, and all were professionally employed. Interviews with open-ended questions that were up to one hour long were conducted with participants, focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of having ADHD, moments of achievement attributed to ADHD, and aspects of ADHD that the participant valued and wished to retain.

The findings are represented through six major themes: cognitive dynamism (high mental activity), courage, energy, human-

ity, resilience, transcendence. Within cognitive dynamism, topics that came from the interviews included divergent thinking (thinking of new and original ideas) and hyperfocus (focusing intensely on a particular task), emphasizing curiosity and creativity as ADHD strengths.

Despite feelings of disconnection associated with ADHD, participants described bravery, adventurousness, and willingness to take risks as commendable attributes. They noted that ADHD was also associated with having high levels of energy, which was connected to willpower and drive. Another theme that was discussed as associated with ADHD was humanity, which highlighted optimistic behavior, a sense of humour, empathy toward others' emotions and self, and acceptance of self and others.

Resilience was a further theme that participants discussed, which involved coping with ADHD in a way that balances emotion, behavior, and cognitive regulation—which participants found led to resilience, adaptability, and effectiveness under stress. Lastly, participants found that transcendence, experienced through admiration of excellence and beauty, was associated with ADHD.

This study recommends understanding ADHD in the context of positive resources and affirming such ADHD-related capacities to facilitate human flourishing.

Sedgwick JA, Merwood A, & Asherson P. (2019). The positive aspects of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder: A qualitative investigation of successful adults with ADHD. *Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders*, 11, 241-253. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12402-018-0277-6>

What can we learn from how parents and children view ADHD strengths?

Previous research indicates that adopting a positive psychology perspective with a strengths-based approach supports both children with neurodevelopmental disorders and their families. Through examining parent- and child-reported strengths of child ADHD, this study investigated perspectives on interpersonal strength (being able to regulate emotions and behaviors socially), school functioning, affective strength (being able to accept and give affection), intrapersonal strength (being able to hold positive views about competence and achievements), and family involvement. The study also examined whether there are any significant differences between the child's and the parent's views of child strengths.



Thirty-five parents as well as thirty-five children with ADHD between the ages of nine and twelve in Canada participated in the study. Parents completed a demographic questionnaire, an ADHD symptom scale, and a behavioral and emotional rating scale that examined child strengths and competencies. Child participants completed an intelligence test to ensure questionnaire comprehension and then filled out the child version of the behavioral and emotional rating scale of competencies.

Findings indicated that children viewed all of their strengths as average, while parents viewed their child's affective, intrapersonal, and interpersonal strengths as average, with below average ratings of family involvement and school functioning. These results suggest that children with ADHD have the ability to maintain a positive attitude toward their competence in multiple areas, and that parents also recognize various areas of capacity in their children that are on par with those of others their age. In particular, children's ability to give and accept affection, their optimistic outlook on accomplishments and life, and their capacity to regulate emotions and behavior in social situations were viewed as comparable to other children.

Overall, changing perceptions of children with ADHD to focus more on their capabilities is an important area to understand in promoting child well-being.

Miller CL, Jelinkova K, Charabin EC, & Climie EA. (2024). Parent and child-reported strengths of children with ADHD. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735231225261>



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