

ADHD Problem and Solution Focus

By Louise Levin

Everyone has his or her own internal conversation. Though we may all talk to ourselves out loud, we nevertheless engage in a steady stream of internal dialogue in direct reaction to external stimuli and accompanying pressures. As we grow older, this conversation becomes less organic and more ingrained. Language is very powerful; it can either control you or you can control it. When we begin to respond viscerally to different situations, we are said to be “set in our ways.” In reality, our seemingly objective approach to life’s difficulties is anything but. If our internal “tapes,” set on replay, constitute a negative language, our understanding of and interaction with our external environment will become negative as well.

In a society where the bar is raised so high, it is no wonder that so many people feel that they fall short of some collective, intangible expectation. Modern culture dictates that we all must look, feel and act in a certain way, without explaining how; when one does not conform to these mysterious rules, the internal conversation will become increasingly negative and “one note.” One will become tormented by his or her perceived shortcomings, until failure appears not a mere possibility but a biological certainty.

Ingrained behavioral patterns begin in adolescence, a trying period for any individual. With newfound independence from watchful parents and guardians, teens are called to explore the boundaries of a new self-identity, liberated from the comforts and constraints of home. They begin to react to peer, rather than parental, expectations, internalizing the constant calls for perfection and assessing personal failures according to the high bar set for them. “I can’t,” “I won’t,” “I’m not,” and “I don’t” dominate the internal conversation, blocking the path to self-fulfillment and success. At this point, one has laid the groundwork for a belief system founded upon negative “Truths.” In the ADHD world, the situation is further exacerbated by the challenges inherent to the disorder. Below are the three major functions affected by ADHD, and the ways that an individual can work to change negative situations to positive experiences, and to affect a positive paradigm shift in the personal belief system, reinforced by language:

Impulse—An ADHD individual cannot manage his or her impulses as effectively as others, leading to erratic and sometimes risky behaviors, disruptive outbursts and inappropriate comments. The feeling of being out of control strikes an ADHD-er more often than his or her peers, and failure to understand *why* can lead to constant streams of shame, guilt and other self-effacing internal dialogue.

To manage impulses, an ADHD individual must adjust their behavior to suit their environment. Through conscious effort and practice—not unlike those used to learn a language, sport or instrument—outbursts can be contained and new, social environments can become less threatening and more inviting.

Executive—ADHD individuals are less capable of managing daily tasks and adhering to rigid schedules and deadlines. Generalization, or the translation of situational similarities from one to the next, is extremely difficult and can lead to repeatedly offending behaviors, including missed meetings, late assignments or other perceived effects of “absentmindedness.”

Many ADHD executives and managers find a personal secretary indispensable; if you are not in the position to hire a 24-hour walking, talking alarm clock, try creating daily, weekly and monthly schedules, placed in prominent areas around the house or office. Do not be afraid to advocate for yourself and to

alert others to your shortcomings. If you don't want to come out and say that you have ADHD, try warning colleagues, friends or family beforehand that you may need some help remembering to pick up the dry cleaning, buy an extra gallon of milk or purchase those hard to get concert tickets before they sell out.

Attention—the most visible symptom of ADHD relates to attention, or lack thereof. Restless movements, wandering eyes and abrupt change of subject matter can be frustrating, and an individual may find it difficult to focus his or her attentions at all for an extended period of time. It is often extremely difficult to focus and retain information in lengthy lectures, meetings or personal conversations.

Though we all experience moments of self-doubt, lack of focus, or plain absentmindedness, ADHD is a real disorder, and its symptoms are real factors that directly affect internal conversation and self-perception. The first step to change is acknowledgement of your disorder, coupled with a good understanding of the neurobiological factors at play in your brain. The second step is to employ the diligent practice of the positive reframe; by changing “can't” to “can,” “won't” to “will,” “don't,” to “do,” and “not” to “am,” an individual is committing him or her self to positive thought. Once you have effectively changed the conversation, when you no longer have to remember to replace negative with positive, you have reached the third and final step—moving forward. When you begin to realize the value of your unique disorder, including unbounded creativity, out-of-the-box thinking and ability to effectively multitask, you will not only manage your life, you will dominate it.