We have all heard of the schoolboy who doesn’t know how to stay in his seat at school; instead he climbs furniture and makes noise during work time. We have also all known a schoolgirl who looks out the window quietly daydreaming instead of paying attention to the teacher. We now know that the hyperactive boy has a neurological disorder called attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) (Hallowell and Ratey 23; Latham 20). Experts recently have agreed that the daydreaming girl also has ADHD-sometimes called ADD because it occurs without hyperactivity (Hallowell and Ratey 24). But what happens when the child with AD(H)D grows up? How can tutors work with college students who have AD(H)D?

What AD(H)D Is

College tutors need to understand what AD(H)D is before learning how to accommodate this condition. The three most important symptoms of AD(H)D are inattentiveness, impulsivity, and hyperactivity (DSM-IV 19; Hallowell and Ratey 29; Latham 42). The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Health (DSM-IV) explains that simply having these symptoms is not enough to diagnose AD(H)D because everyone sometimes has the same
symptoms. These symptoms must be “persistent” and they must be “more frequent and severe” than they are for other people at about the same level of development (DSM-IV 78).

It is possible to diagnose AD(H)D later in life, but only if the symptoms began before age 7 (DSM-IV 78). Also, symptoms should cause problems in two or more settings, for example at both work and home. Furthermore, AD(H)D can only be diagnosed if the symptoms make it hard for the person to learn how to function well socially, academically, and at work. Symptoms might not show up if the person is under “very strict control,” is in a new place, or is doing “especially interesting” activities, or is working with only one other person (79).

AD(H)D is not a single condition; instead, there are three subtypes. People with the predominantly inattentive type have trouble paying attention. Those with the predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type are hyperactive and impulsive. The combined type includes all three major symptoms (DSM-IV 80). Perhaps the most well known symptom of AD(H)D is hyperactivity, but Hallowell and Ratey emphasize that not all people with AD(H)D are hyperactive. Indeed, they say that many people with ADD-mostly girls and women-are quiet daydreamers (153). Robertson notes that children with AD(H)D are “consistently inconsistent.” That means the same student could do very well in school one month then very poorly the next (Hallowell and Ratey 65). Hallowell and Ratey also point out that people with AD(H)D are sometime able to hyper focus. That means they may focus very well on one thing for a long time and will have trouble stopping when it is time to finish (66).

What exactly does it mean to be inattentive, impulsive, or hyperactive? Some specific symptoms of inattentiveness can include overlooking details, making careless mistakes, doing messy work, having trouble paying attention, changing from one activity to another without
finishing anything, and being easily distracted (DSM-IV 78-79). Some examples of impulsivity include impatience, frequently interrupting other people, talking at the wrong time, clowning around, and doing dangerous things without thinking about what will happen (79). Hyperactivity in children can include fidgeting and squirming, leaving one’s seat when one isn’t supposed to, running and climbing at the wrong time, having trouble playing quietly, and talking too much (80).

AD(H)D in Adults

Research into AD(H)D among adults is still new (Hallowell and Ratey 83). People used to believe that AD(H)D was a childhood disorder that could be outgrown. However, researchers now understand that they were wrong—AD(H)D can continue through college age and the rest of one’s life (Latham 32). Up to two-thirds of AD(H)D children become AD(H)D adults (Hallowell and Ratey 6).

College students who have AD(H)D may have trouble organizing, prioritizing, and finishing their work on time, doing long assignments, doing tasks that have many steps, writing papers, handling math requirements, interacting with faculty and students in an appropriate way, meeting expectations, and following rules (Latham 40). AD(H)D adults in general often feel they are underachievers, are disorganized, procrastinate, do many projects at the same time without finishing anything, can’t stand boredom, can’t focus, have low tolerance for frustration, are impulsive, worry a lot, and have mood swings. Hyperactive adults are not as hyper as children, but they are often restless and may pace a lot, drum their fingers, or fidget (Hallowell and Ratey 73).

Tips for Working with AD(H)D Students
There is very little literature on how to tutor college students with AD(H)D. However, many authors have shared ideas on how teachers can help children in their classroom who have AD(H)D. Other authors have shared ideas on how people with AD(H)D can help themselves become more organized. Some of these ideas may be useful for tutors who work with college students.

Booth emphasizes that it is important for teachers (and, one presumes, tutors) to be aware that “no two students with ADD or LD are alike and that there are multiple approaches … that can and will be different from student to student” (“Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs,” par. 79). Accordingly, teachers are encouraged to be flexible. Similarly, one fact sheet suggests that teachers should find out what specific things are hard for each student. For example, one student with AD(H)D might have trouble starting a task, and another student might have trouble finishing one task and starting the next (“General Information,” par. 58). Hallowell and Ratey say that teachers should be open to new ideas because sometimes what helps AD(H)D students may seem “eccentric” (255).

Booth strongly encourages that teachers use accommodations to help students learn to become more independent. Accordingly, teachers should only give students additional interventions or accommodations when the students really need them. The goal should always be to slowly remove accommodations when possible. Teachers can provide support in planning long projects until the student gradually learns how to use better time management skills and how to plan ahead better (Booth 26).

People who work with children or other students with AD(H)D can help them by reminding them about assignments they need to do. Also, teachers should give directions both
face to face and in writing. When a person with ADD is daydreaming, it can help to make eye contact with the person. The eye contact “pulls” them away from their daydream so they can pay attention (Hallowell and Ratey 34). Students with AD(H)D can usually focus better in a quiet, “low distraction” work area (“General Information” 19). One author suggests that college students with AD(H)D use the last 15 minutes of each study period to review their progress on their various projects and to plan what they will need to do the next day (Latham 36).

Structure is important for people with AD(H)D. People with AD(H)D can help themselves by making lists to remind themselves of things they need to do (Hallowell and Ratey 255). They should divide large tasks into small ones and give themselves deadlines for finishing each small part (247). Sometimes it helps to have an ADD coach. An ADD coach asks what tasks the AD(H)D person needs to do and what they’re doing to prepare, and can even help choose, prioritize, and define goals (226-227).

Tutoring College Students with AD(H)D

Perhaps a regular tutor could serve in the role of an ADD coach by helping AD(H)D students divide each big project into many smaller steps and decide when they will complete each step. For example, a student who needs to do a term paper could choose a deadline for each of the following steps: choosing a topic, deciding what information he or she needs to gather, finishing the research, writing a rough draft of the paper and showing it to the tutor, revising the paper and showing it to the tutor again.

When tutors meet with students, they should ask them where they concentrate best. Can they concentrate well if they work at the tutor’s usual table? Or should the tutor and student meet somewhere else? Also, tutors should be ready to repeat or write down their directions. In
addition, tutors can make eye contact more often to help students with AD(H)D stop daydreaming and focus better on their tutoring session. If a tutor meets with an AD(H)D student on a regular basis, then the last five or ten minutes of each session can be used to discuss what homework the student will do before the next session and what things they will work on during the next session. Above all, tutors should be flexible and should not offer more accommodation than the student needs.


Conclusion

Whether a tutor decides to act as an ADD coach or in some other role, it can be a challenge to find the best way to work with college students who have AD(H)D. The more tutors learn about AD(H)D, and the better they understand this condition, the easier it can become to work with students with AD(H)D. It is especially important for tutors to remember that both men and women can have AD(H)D, and also that not all people with AD(H)D are hyperactive. Tutors can do a better job of working with students who have AD(H)D if they learn the many different things that teachers, parents, and professionals do to help them, and if they learn how people with AD(H)D help themselves.
Works Cited


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