

Emotions in ADHD and Asperger Syndrome:

Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D.

Brown Clinic for Attention & Related Disorders,
Manhattan Beach, CA



OUTLINE

- 1. Emotions in ADHD
- 2. Asperger Syndrome and overlap with ADHD
- 3. Case Examples: Justin, Anthony, Loretta and Richard
- 4. Treatment for ADHD with and without Asperger

Story of Danny

- 10 year old slender red head came to our clinic with both parents
- Extremely bright, did well in subjects that interested him (math and reading) but was extremely slow to complete assignments. Very easily distracted.
- Was very shy, easily frustrated, teased and bullied by classmates, often unwilling, unable to go to school

What is ADHD?

- **Old:** behavior problems & not listening
- **New:** developmental impairment of the brain's self- management system: its executive functions
- Aspects of brain's EF don't come online in usual time frame.
- And don't work consistently

ADHD Symptoms Overlap With “Executive Functions”

ADHD = developmentally impaired EF

- Wide range of **central control processes** of the brain
- **Connect, prioritize, and integrate** cognitive functions—moment by moment
- **Like conductor** of a symphony orchestra

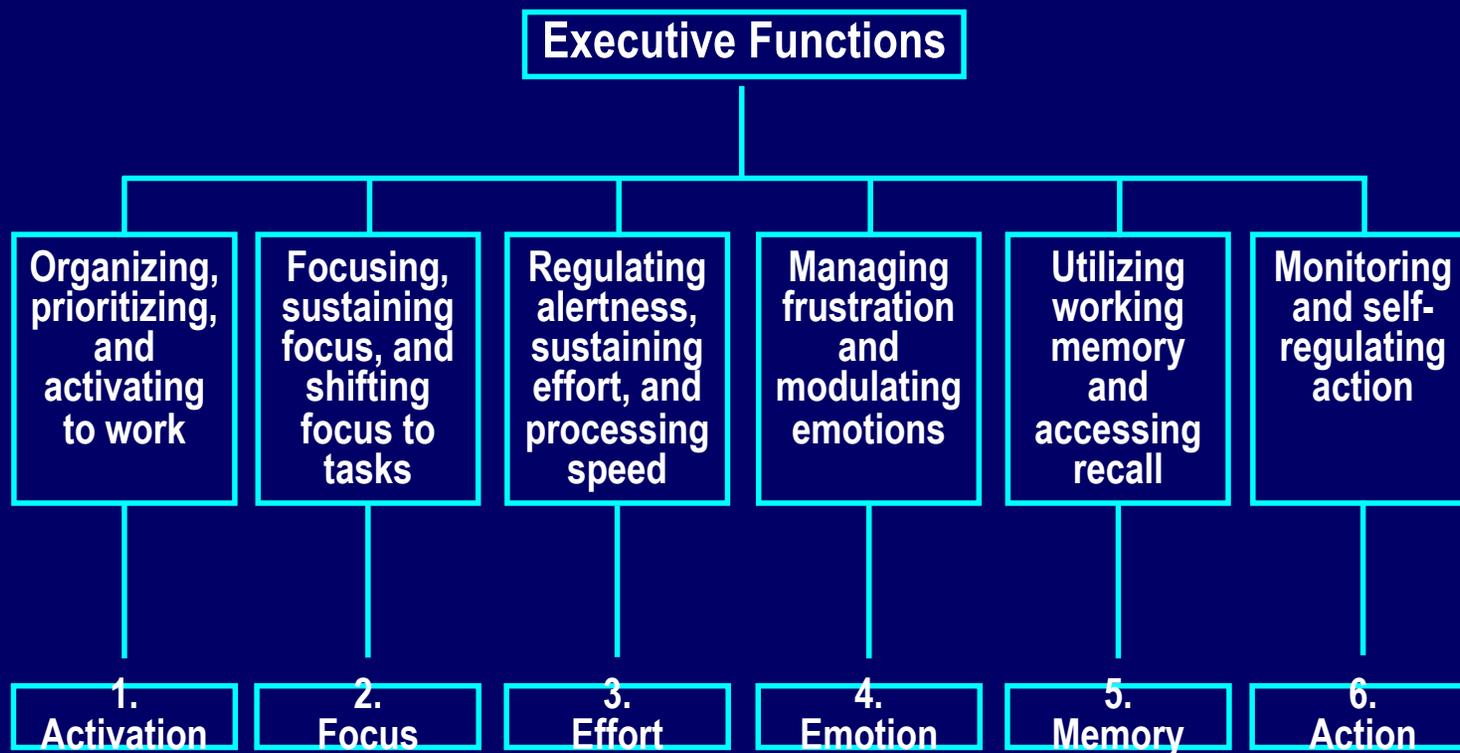
Brown's Model of Executive Functions Impaired in ADHD

Symptom Characteristics

- ◆ **Dimensional, not “all-or-nothing”**
 - Everyone sometimes has some impairments in these functions; in ADHD, it is a chronic, severe impairment
- ◆ **Situational variability: “If I’m interested”**
 - Most persons with ADHD have a few activities where ADHD impairments are absent

ADHD looks like a willpower problem, but it isn't!

Brown's Model of Executive Functions Impaired in ADHD



The Mystery of ADHD: Situational Variability of Symptoms

- ◆ Why focus for this, but not that?
“If it really interests me” (attraction)
- ◆ Why focus then, but not now?
“If I feel the gun to my head” (fear)

Changing Perspectives on Autism with ADHD

- **In DSM–IV (1994)** Diagnosis of ADHD was not allowed for those diagnosed with Autism or Asperger Disorder. It was assumed that ADHD symptoms were one aspect of Pervasive Developmental Disorders.
- **DSM-5 (2013)** Removed diagnosis of Asperger Disorder to subsume into the broad diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder with other disorders quite different.
- **DSM-5 (2013)** Allowed diagnosis of ADHD for individuals on Autism Spectrum if they showed ADHD symptoms and met criteria



Asperger syndrome stereotypes in the media



Jim Parsons as physicist-geek
Sheldon on Big Bang
Theory show on TV

Leonard Nimoy as Vulcan Science
Officer of USS Enterprise



Diversity of Profiles Among Those with Asperger Syndrome

There is considerable diversity among those with Asperger Syndrome
In both their strengths and their difficulties, many combine profiles.

Fearful and avoidant

Overly dependent, clingy

Arrogant, Know-it-All

Isolated Loner

Little Adults, caretakers

Sideline observer

Intrusive and clueless

Spoiled and demanding

Driven, High Achievers

Fragile, over-reactive

Seeking Intimacy at a distance

Perfectionist, rule-enforcer



Looking Through an Asperger Profile Lens: Possible Strengths



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Age of Recognition of ASD

CDC (2018) prevalence estimates are **based solely on children 8 years old** and do not differentiate between various types

Intelligence varies widely among those on the Autism Spectrum

31% IQ= < 70;

25% IQ= 71-85;

44% IQ= 86-130+

→ About 85% of children with ASD are recognized by age 36 months

BUT many of the 44% with higher IQ are not recognized until much later. They are a vulnerable population!



Milder Forms of Autism Spectrum are more common

- The number of children suffering from Asperger Syndrome is double the number of children suffering from Classic Autism.
- Yet, the main thrust of the academic literature has focused on the more severe forms of ASD.
- Comparative little attention has been paid to children and young adults who possess milder forms of the disorder.
 - VanBergeijk, E, Klin, A, Volkmar, F (2008)



Delayed Recognition for those with Higher IQ

- Higher IQ Individuals with Autism Spectrum often are not recognized and diagnosed with ASD until adolescence or adulthood.
- Yet expectations from self and others are elevated

(Brugha, et al., 2011; Cedarlund & Gillberg, 2004; Hofvander, et al, 2009; Lehnhardt et al., 2011; Marriage et al., 2009.)



Reported childhood traits of Asperger adults

...tend to be loners, don't know how to interact with peers on playground, preferred to talk with adults rather than peers, rarely invited to play at classmates' homes or to their birthday parties, did not produce much varied, social pretend play. Far more focused on building things or reading factual books. Typically pursued their own intellectual interests to high levels, learning books of facts...becoming very knowledgeable on those subjects...but often failed to hand in required schoolwork so they were failing in some academic subjects...

Baron-Cohen, 2003, p.144

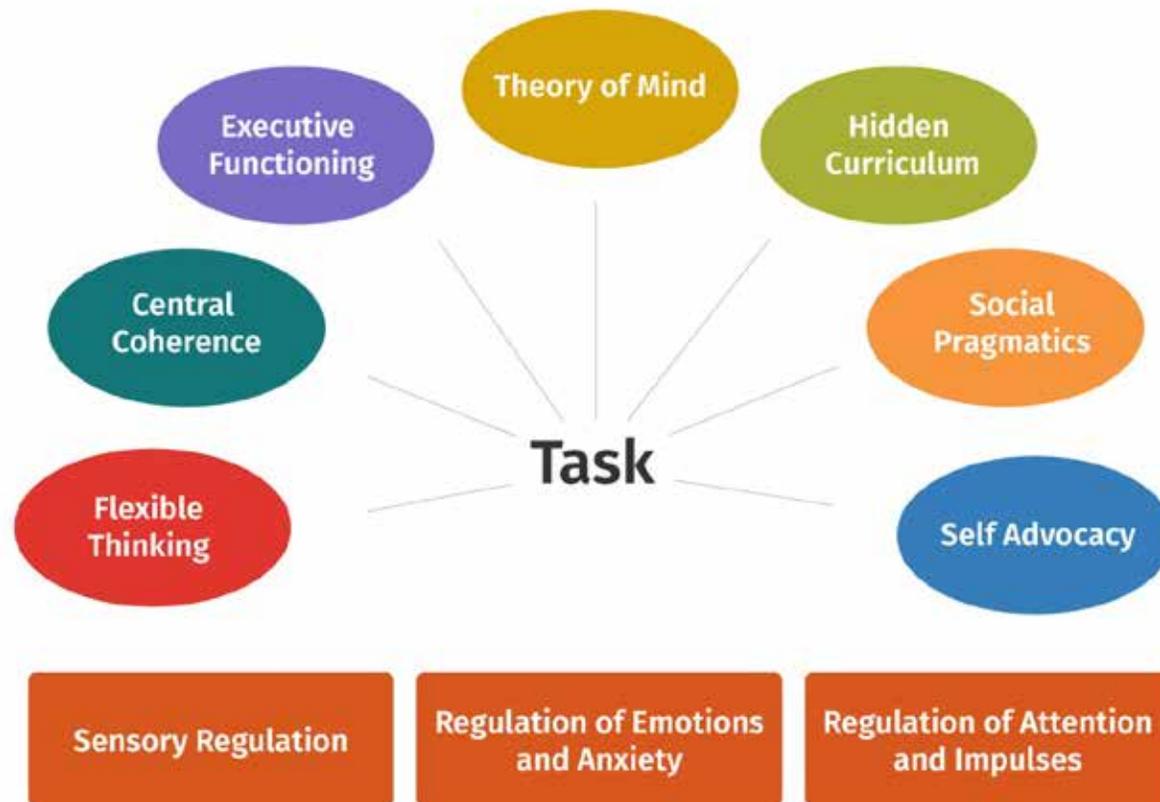


Reported adolescent traits of Asperger adults

- Most did best in factual subjects, e.g. math, science, history, vocab and syntax of foreign language
- Many were weakest at literature where task was to interpret fiction or to enter into a character's emotional life
- Difficulty in making and keeping friends. Had much difficulty in making boyfriend-girlfriend relationships
- Often made critical or hurtful comments to others and were puzzled about why others were offended if the comments were true.
- **Baron-Cohen, 2003, p.144**



Looking Through an Asperger Profile Lens: Common Challenges



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ADHD symptoms in Children with autism spectrum

- Prevalence of ADHD symptoms in individuals on autism spectrum **in community samples ranges between 13% and 50%.**
- **In clinical samples**, those diagnosed with autism spectrum, prevalence of ADHD **ranges from 20% to 85%** depending on study

(Gradzinski, et al 2011)



Overlap Between ADHD and High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder

- 140 children (6 to 17 yo) referred to specialty clinic for Autism Spectrum with IQ >85 and having Autism Spectrum diagnosis were evaluated for ADHD
- 76% of those with Autism Spectrum also fully met ADHD diagnosis
- 41% of those who had both Autism Spectrum and ADHD had received no previous treatment for their ADHD!

Joshi, G, Faraone, S, Wozniak J, et al. 2017



Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D. *Brown ADHD Clinic; Keck School of Medicine -USC*

Importance of recognizing ADHD in people with Asperger Syndrome

- ...**failure to recognize ADHD**—especially in intellectually capable youth with autism spectrum disorder **can seriously undermine educational and social functioning**, worsening already compromised social performance and can predispose these youth to increased risk for disruptive disorders, mood dysregulation and substance use disorder....
- (Biederman, et al., 2009, 2014)

Joshua 11 yrs old

- I'm in school to work ahead and get to college faster where I can be around others who are very smart like I am and who will share my interests in music and theoretical physics. I don't have friends at this school. I'm lonely there; the other kids aren't like me. But at least I'm not getting bullied like I was at my last school. I used to be pretty depressed and had thoughts of suicide, but that's been better recently. I still worry tho.

Anthony

- I was doing pretty well since I came home from that out-of-state college last year. My grades in this local college are not perfect, but they're pretty good. I was feeling proud that I finally found a girlfriend and went out with her a couple of times, then suddenly she broke it off and didn't want to see me. I texted her and tried a bunch of times to see her, but she said no and got a restraining order against me. Then I met her in the parking lot so I could ask her what happened. I had no idea I would get arrested and put in jail for that.

Loretta

I graduated from a very competitive college and a very competitive law school and I passed the bar exam, but I've never had success in social relationships with anyone. I'm always anxious around other people at work or in social situations. I feel other people don't get me and I don't get them. I was engaged to a man for 4 years, but I ended that relationship because he was always so frustrated with me. I'm good at my job and pretty content on my own, though I have been pretty depressed recently.

Richard

- When I graduated at the top of my class and then got hired in a big law firm, I felt good, but they terminated me in less than a year for reasons that were never clear. Then I got a job at another law firm and got fired from there because I was late in completing a couple of projects and didn't communicate enough with my supervising partner. My girlfriend says I'm smart and work hard, but have difficulty reading where others are coming from. Now I'm looking for another job, but it won't be easy.

Treatment for ADHD

- ◆ Reducing situational stressors
- ◆ Providing more adequate scaffolding and personal support
- ◆ Using “fine-tuned” medications to alleviate persistently problematic body chemistry problems impacting EF

A Chemical Problem

- ◆ ADHD is fundamentally a chemical problem
- ◆ Most effective treatment is to change the chemistry with medication
- ◆ Unless the problematic chemistry is changed, other interventions are not likely to be very effective

Medication Treatments

(many have **S.B.C.** *start with small doses!)

For ADHD symptoms:

- stimulants
- combination of stim + atomoxetine
- atomoxetine

For excessive anxiety, OCD, mood

- Fluoxetine,
- Sertraline

For excessive hyperactivity, impulsivity & aggression:

- GuanfacineXR, Abilify



How do ADHD Impairments of EF Usually Respond to Medication?

- ◆ This wide range of cognitive impairments **responds to medication treatment in 70-90%** of cases in children, adolescents and adults
- ◆ Symptom **improvement varies from modest to very dramatic**
- ◆ Adverse effects are usually transient, not significant

TE Brown, Outside the Box: Rethinking ADD/ADHD, 2017

Resources on Asperger Syndrome and ADHD

ADHD and Asperger Syndrome in Smart Kids and Adults T. Brown (2021)

Outside the Box: Rethinking ADD/ADHD T. Brown (2017)

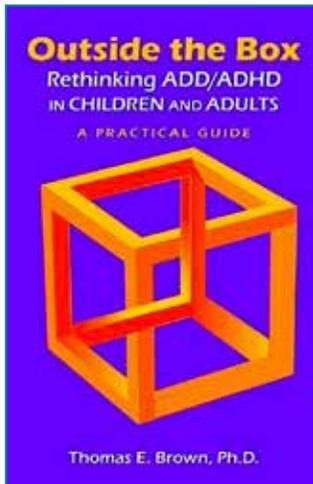
Smart but Stuck: Emotions in Teens and Adults with ADHD T. Brown (2014)

Look Me in the Eye J.E. Robison (2007)

Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome T.Attwood (2007)

Dendy, CAZ. HD





Books by Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D.

@

www.BrownADHDclinic.com

