



# **Embracing Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Understanding ADHD**

By: Dr. Gurdeep Parhar

# Speakers



## Dr. Gurdeep Parhar, MD

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Dr. Parhar has been in family practice for over 30 years and his clinical practice has focused on the health of patients with severe disabilities and ADHD. His teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate programs includes professionalism, equity, cultural safety, psychosocial aspects of healthcare, and medical disability.

Dr. Parhar is certified as an Occupational Medicine Physician and Disability Medicine Physician, focusing on optimizing workers' health/productivity and improving the success of individuals with differing abilities.



# Disclosures

## Presenter Disclosure

Presenter: Dr. Gurdeep Parhar

Relationships with a commercial interest:

- Grants/Research Support: Purdue/Elvium
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Content is entirely that of the presenter



## Mitigating Potential Bias

- Information/recommendations in the program are evidence-and/or guidelines-based, and data have been sourced from the evidence that is clinically accepted; opinions of the Speaker will be identified as such
- This presentation is for educational purposes only and was developed by the speaker
- No treatments-medication or non-medication should be initiated, modified or discontinued without the guidance of a healthcare professional.



## Learning Outcomes

By the end of this workshop, you should be able to:

- Define ADHD and neurodiversity
- Recognize how ADHD may manifest in the workplace
- Identify workplace strategies and approaches to support employees with ADHD
- Define a manager's role in building an inclusive workplace



# Understanding Neurodiversity

- Recognizes and celebrates the diversity of the human brain and mind
  - 1998 Judy Singer, Australian sociologist
- Views differences in behaviour and brain functioning as normal variations in a population
- Relies on a strengths-based concept
- Varying viewpoints within the neurodivergent community
  - Some embrace neurodiversity as a source of strength
  - Others struggle with functional challenges
  - Some who are neurodivergent have medical conditions that need treatment
- Some people who identify as neurodiverse do so as a source of empowerment
- Language related to neurodiversity makes a difference
  - People who learn that it means they are different – not sick or defective, are more likely to be happier and aim higher in their careers



# Keep In Mind

Education for understanding and empathy

- Fosters understanding and empathy among diverse individuals

Respecting individual uniqueness

- Everyone is unique, common threads may exist, assumptions and comparisons should be avoided

Do not make or assume diagnosis or apply labels to others

- Nuance of humans whether neurodiverse or neurotypical
- Some individuals may identify with no formal diagnosis

# **“I practice a lot, but I have to practice twice as much to get half of as much” –Steven Sharp Nelson**

- ADHD inhibited his attention span for long practice sessions
- ADHD inhibited his attention span for long practice sessions
- He also began practicing on other instruments, including drums, guitar, and piano.
- Led to unique ways to play the cello:
  - Strumming, banging and plucking the strings much more aggressively
  - Only cellist who uses a kick drum
  - The Piano Guys on a quest to serenade all Seven Wonders of the World, have filmed 4 of the 7



# Under the Umbrella of Neurodiversity

- ADHD
- Autism
- Down Syndrome
- Dyscalculia (difficulty with math)
- Dysgraphia (difficulty with writing)
- Dyslexia
- Bipolar
- OCD
- Social anxiety
- and more...



## Is neurodiversity a Disability?

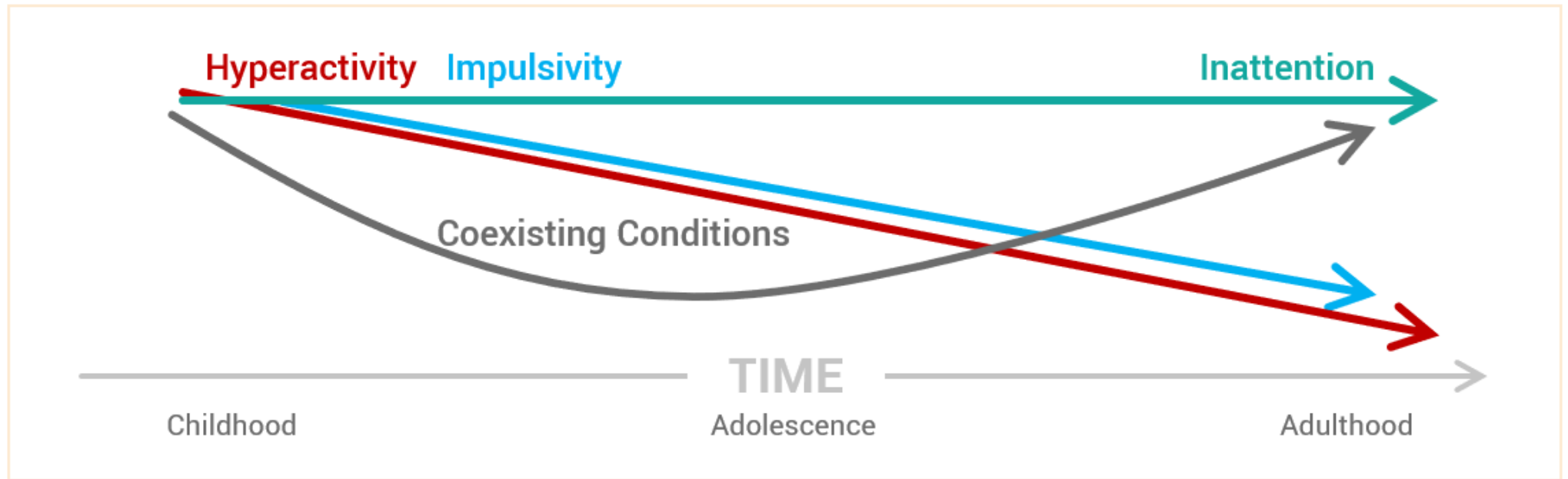
- Many neurodivergent conditions are often classified as disabilities
- The focus on abilities does not negate the recognition of
  - A disability
  - Potential for functional dysfunction



# ADHD Changing Landscape, To Consider

- ADHD, formerly referred to as ADD
- Subcategorized as primarily inattentive, hyperactive, or combined
- Neurodevelopmental disorder that affects both children and adults
- Characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity
- Can impact various aspects of an individual's life
  - Academic
  - Work performance

# ADHD Symptoms Across the Life Span



- As the demands for planning become greater in adulthood, issues associated with inattention became more prominent.
- Common complaints in adults with ADHD include:
  - Forgetfulness
  - Inability to organize or manage time
  - Procrastination
  - Insomnia

# ADHD Prevalence

- Adult ADHD Prevalence worldwide 5%
- As common as mood disorders (5.4%)
- One in 20 people living with ADHD (diagnosed/undiagnosed)
  - In a company with 1000 employees, that is 50 individuals



Biederman J. *J Clin Psychiatry*. 2004;65:3-7; Fayyad J, et al. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2007;190:402-409; Ginsberg Y, et al. *Prim Care Companion CNS Disord*. 2014;16(3).  
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<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness/what-should-know-about-bipolar-disorder-manic-depression.html>  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/autism-spectrum-disorder-canadian-health-survey-children-youth-2019.html#a3.1>  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness/what-depression.html>

# The Historical Continuum of ADHD

- Dispelling Notions of Novelty
- First described as abnormal inattention by Sir Alexander in the 1700s
- Referenced in nursery rhymes, like “Fidgety Phil”
- ADHD was officially identified and described in 1902 as a deficit in moral control
- Diagnostic criteria changed over time:
  - 1980: The condition was named ADD
  - 1987: Renamed ADHD



# The Historical Continuum of ADHD

## Recent Updates:

- ADHD is described as a neurodevelopmental disorder
- Adults and teenagers are included in the diagnosis
- For adults, the onset of symptoms occurs by age 12 (not 7)
- Previously referred to as subtypes, now referred to as presentations



# Faces of ADHD

- You can have several individuals with ADHD stand before you and they will each be unique in their experiences, successes, and challenges.
- No two individuals are alike.

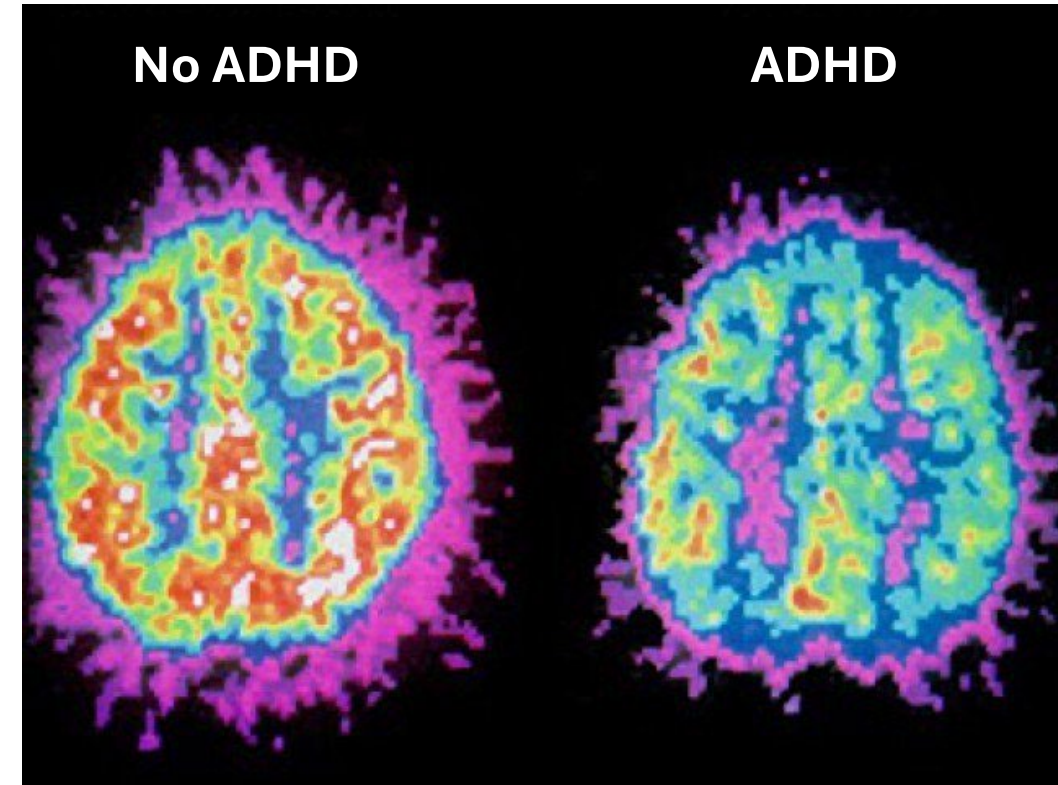
## FACES OF ADHD

ADHD HAS NO  
BOUNDARIES



# ADHD is a Brain Disorder

- **Differences in Brain Structure**
  - Smaller brains; reduced volume in various brain regions
  - Reduced cortical thickness
- **Differences in Brain Function**
  - Under-activation of networks associated with executive function and attention
  - Over-activation of networks associated with hyperactivity and impulsivity
- **Neurotransmitter Alterations**
  - Impairments in some neural pathways (e.g., dopamine and norepinephrine)



# ADHD Manifestations



Does not listen when  
spoken to directly



Distracted by extraneous  
stimuli



Difficulty following through  
on instructions or  
completing tasks



Fidgets



Impatient impulsive  
speeding



Difficulty sustaining  
focus, fails to give  
attention to detail or  
makes careless mistakes



Difficulty organizing  
tasks and activities



Overly active, unable to sit  
still for an extended  
period



Talks a lot, interrupts  
others, takes over

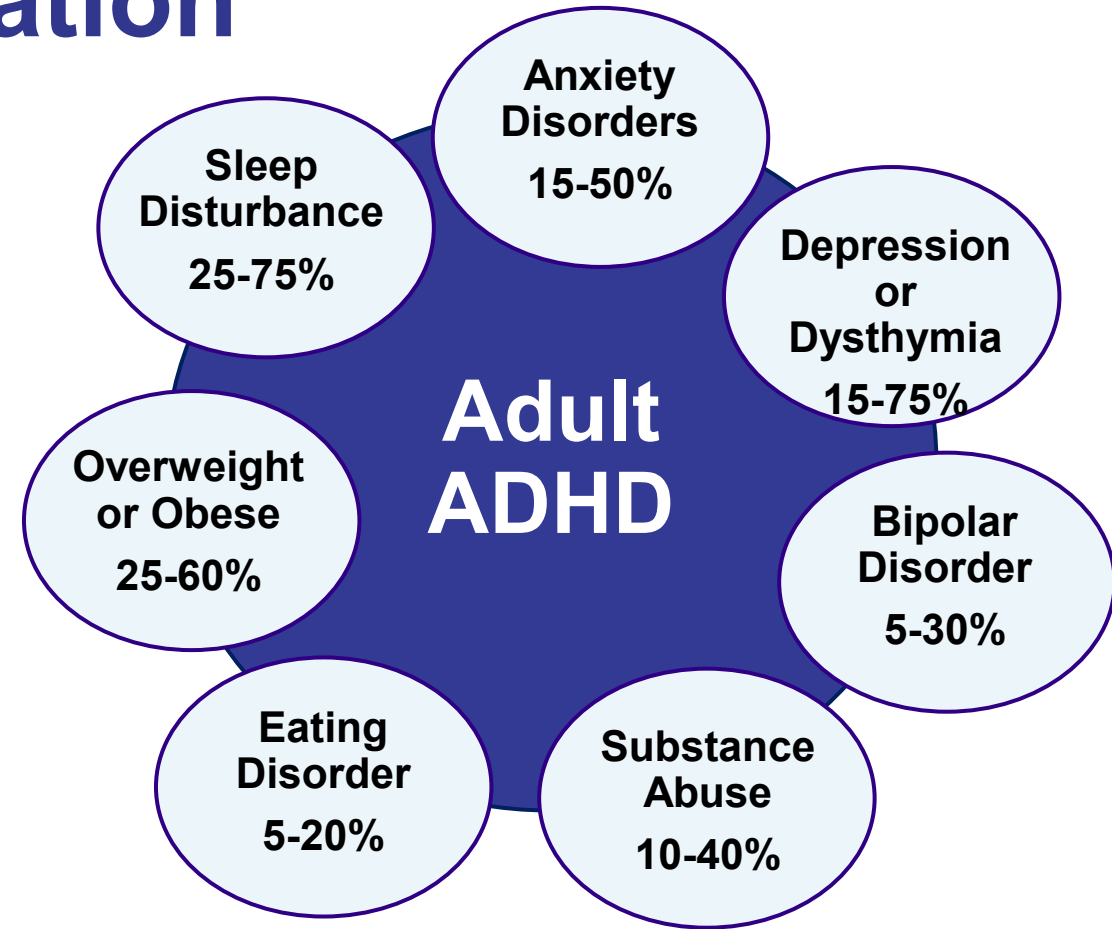


Forgetful in daily activities

# ADHD Rarely Travels Alone: Co-occurring Conditions May Complicate the Clinical Presentation

**Cognitive issues/symptoms** may be attributable to **ADHD alone**, to **another disorder alone** (such as anxiety, stressors, sleep apnea, etc.), or **can have both** (comorbidity)

About **75–85%** of adults with ADHD meet criteria for a comorbid condition



Note that data depict ranges reported in various studies.

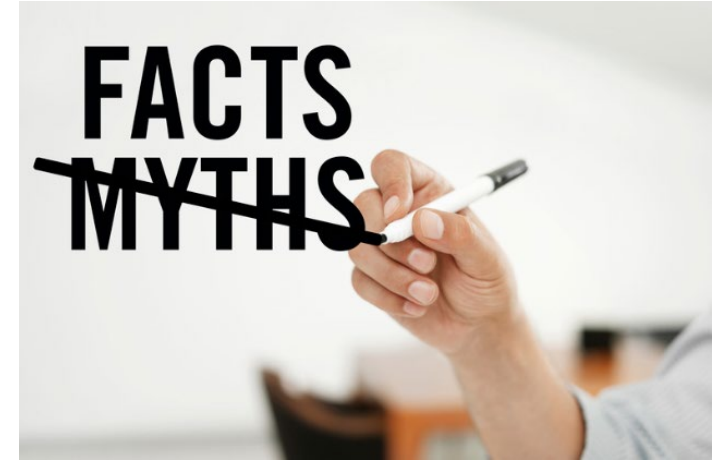
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# Dealing with Misconceptions

- Do not assume people with ADHD are:
  - Unorganized
  - Unintelligent
  - Lazy
- The following remarks are inappropriate:
  - Everyone has a little bit of ADHD
  - I had an “ADHD moment”
  - You are too smart/successful to have ADHD
- Questioning if ADHD is a real diagnosis or over-diagnosed.
- Minimization: Attributing challenges to a lack of effort or a character trait.
- Stereotyping all ADHD individuals as hyperactive, disorganized, or unintelligent
- Expressing impatience with individuals who take longer to complete tasks without recognizing the neurological basis of their challenges.



# Reframing ADHD

- ADHD is more than attention challenges
  - Disorder of self-regulation and executive function
  - Exacerbated by weak memory function
- Not a deficit of attention but an abundance of attention; The challenge is controlling it
  - Variable attention
  - Individuals can hyperfocus or cannot focus
- Ongoing discussions around renaming ADHD to better reflect the nature of the condition and reduce stigma
- Opinions may vary and will likely change in the future



# Varied Expressions of ADHD

- **Executive Function**
  - Ability to organize and retrieve information, ability to look to the past and to the future.
- **Dysregulation**
  - A person works in a fast-paced environment, stress can lead to emotional dysregulation leading to heightened stress, and difficulty concentrating.
- **Self-Regulation**
  - An employee disagrees with their manager and gets inappropriately upset about the situation.
- **Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)**
  - An employee may be distressed or distracted by sound or visual stimuli, such as clicking of shoes walking by or the buzz of neon lights.



# Varied Expressions of ADHD

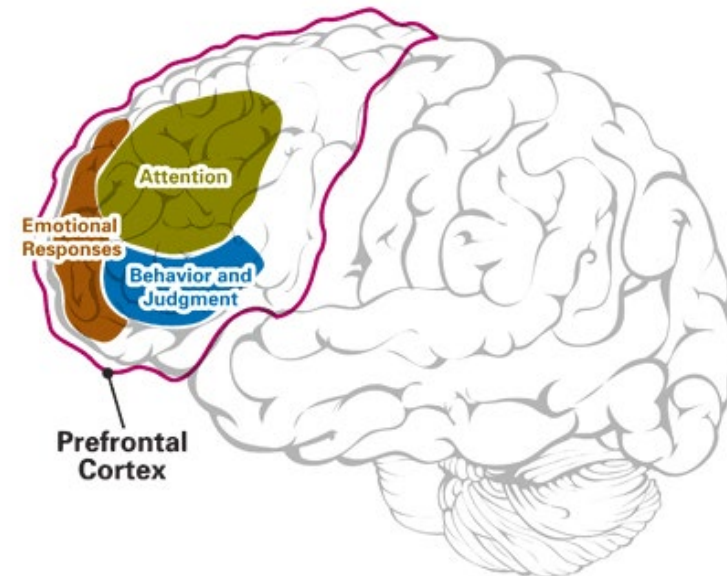
- **Time Blindness**
  - It may cause folks to struggle with such things as poor time estimation, lack of awareness of time passing, overlook time-sensitive emails, and overcommit.
- **Working Memory**
  - Allows for individuals to keep information and manipulate the information in their mind. Someone might struggle taking notes in a meeting.
- **Rejection Sensitivity Disorder (RSD)**
  - An employee might take a performance review or feedback more critically, which can lead to heightened anxiety.
- **Justice Sensitivity**
  - A strong sense of fairness and equity may lead to resistance to change and increased stress.



# Executive Function

ADHD interferes with the development of executive function in the frontal cortex.

- Judgment
- Analysis
- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking
- Forward thinking
- Personality expression
- Correct social behaviour
- Complex cognitive behaviours
- Working memory



Rubia K, et al. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2009;166(1):83-94.

Wolf RC, et al. *Hum Brain Mapp*. 2009;30(7):2252-2266.

GM: grey matter volume; WM: white matter volume; FCN: activity and functional connectivity; ↓: decreased volume (GM and WM columns) or activity (FCN column);

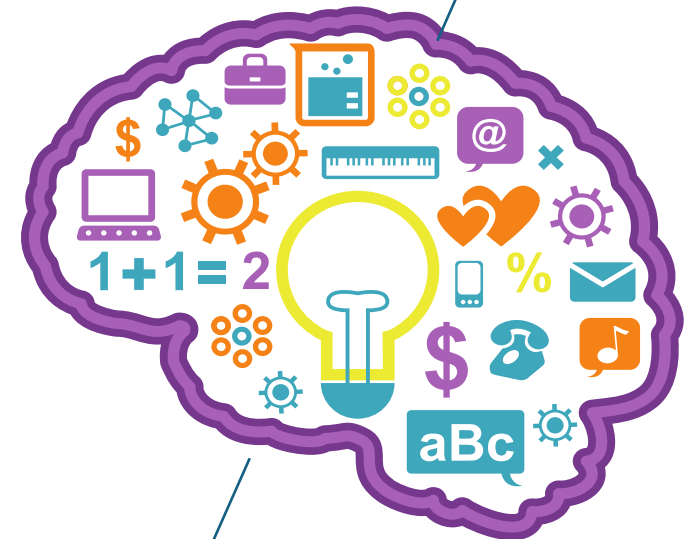
SMA = supplementary motor area.

Kasperek T et al. *J Att Dis*. 2015;19(11):931-43.

# Executive Function: Brain's CEO

- Retrieves information & knowledge
- Analyzes past and predicts future consequences
- Organizes and opens tasks at hand and files others for later
- For people with ADHD, Executive Function can be exhausting. It requires frequent mental pauses and ceaseless self-regulation.
- **Working memory** is part of Executive Function and is the brain's GPS, a system that guides and directs actions. This is commonly weak in people with ADHD.  
– Dr. Russell Barkley

Non ADHD



ADHD

Folks with weak EF can feel depleted: “tank empty at the end of the day”.

# The Impact for Individuals

- ADHD is a risk factor for unemployment and underemployment
- Individuals with ADHD:
  - Are less likely to be employed full-time
  - Earn less than their peers without ADHD
  - Have increased risk of job dismissal
  - Impulsively quit their jobs (frequent job changes)
  - Have poor relationships with employers/colleagues

**\$6–11  
billion**

Estimated annual cost to  
Canadians through loss of  
workplace productivity

# Benefits of Inclusion

- Embrace a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, genders, abilities, etc. among team members.
- Recognize that diversity brings unique perspectives and fosters creativity and innovation in problem-solving.
- Value and respect differences in individuals.
- Equitable opportunities for everyone.

## 1. THE CHALLENGE

### LABOUR SHORTAGE

By 2025,  
BC Employers will need to fill  
an estimated

  
**1 MILLION**  
job openings<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE OPPORTUNITY

### UNTAPPED TALENT POOL



**614,630** working-age  
British Columbians  
(ages 15–64) have a disability<sup>2\*</sup>

## 3. THE BENEFITS

### IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY

Research shows that diverse  
+ inclusive workplaces are<sup>3</sup>:



**2x** more  
likely to  
meet or  
exceed  
financial  
targets



**6x** more  
likely  
to be  
innovative



**6x** more  
likely to  
effectively  
anticipate  
change

### GREAT EMPLOYEES

Among employees  
with disabilities<sup>4</sup>:

**72%**

higher  
staff  
retention

**86%**

average  
**attendance**  
or better

**90%**

equal  
or better  
**performance**  
than  
coworkers  
without  
disabilities

# How ADHD May Present at Work

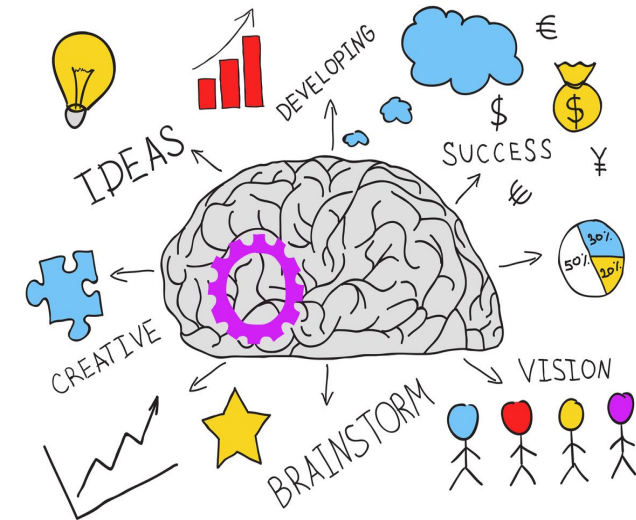


# Workplace Benefits of Neurodiversity & ADHD

- Innovation
- Diversity of thought
- Problem-solving
- Enhanced team dynamics
- Increased productivity
- Market competitiveness
- Corporate Social Responsibility

Neurodiverse individuals are estimated to make up 20% of the global population

ADHD makes up 5%





# Benefits of Making Adjustments & Accommodations

- Innovative best practices for all employees
- Better job retention, lower turnover
- Diversity in thinking
- Enhanced job performance and work quality
- Better safety records
- Broader talent pool

Accommodations tailored to harness the strengths of neurodivergent individuals benefit all individuals within the organization.

# Employee Disclosure

## Influences on employees choosing to disclose

- Is it relevant to what the individual is doing; role change
- Status of condition has changed
- Past experiences
- Environment; corporate culture, leadership
- Identified a need for adjustment/accommodation
- Work goals



## Types of employee disclosure

- **Full voluntary disclosure** reveals health conditions to everyone
- **Selective disclosure** control what, and how much information to share and to limited people
- **Forced disclosure** no choice but to disclose such as flare up, lack of access
- **Concealment** strategies to hide disability

# ADHD at Work - To Disclose or Not to Disclose?

## Reasons Not To:

- Fear of Discrimination
- Privacy Concerns
- Stigma
- Perceived Unimportance
- Past Negative Experience

## Reasons To:

- Setting you up for success
- Accommodations
- Team Collaboration
- Self-Advocacy
- Part of your identity

**The decision is entirely personal.**

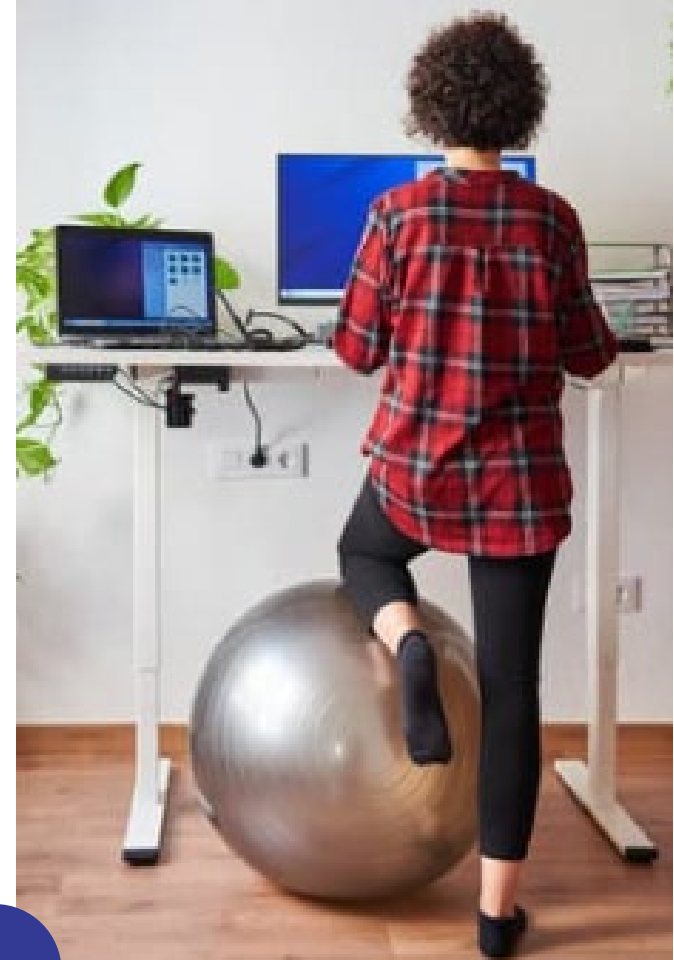
It is a subjective decision that depends on individual circumstances, workplace culture, and the nature of the disability. It is important for the individual to identify why they are considering disclosing, the benefits, and any potential drawbacks.



# Benefits of Accommodating

- Innovative best practices for all employees
- Better job retention, lower turnover
- Diversity in thinking
- Enhanced job performance and work quality
- Better safety records
- Broader talent pool

Accommodations tailored to harness the strengths of neurodivergent individuals **benefit all individuals** within the organization.





# Supporting Individuals

- What are the specific challenges your employee is having?
- Do they have any suggestions for adjustments and/or accommodations?
- Are there any relevant current programs that your employee can access? (Training, minor adjustment implementations, etc.)
- If not, then identify the next steps and process:
  - Do you need to involve the disability management team or another designated department/team member?

# Supporting Individuals

## Self Adjustments

- Employees may do so unknowingly or knowingly (masking)

## Adjustments (informal)

- Should be documented for record of adjustment
- Changes that are within the power of the manager to make
- Examples: Desk location, headphones, light shades, breaks, task allocation

## Accommodations (formal)

- Process through Disability Management Team
- Requires medical documentation





# Effective Adjustment & Accommodation Strategies

Your employees know themselves best and your first step should be opening space so they can share their needs and preferred adjustments. For example:

- Ask about specific challenges:
  - “How are you finding \_\_\_\_\_? Are you running into any challenges or barriers?”
- Ask for their input on adjustments or accommodations:
  - “What support or adjustments can we make \_\_\_\_\_ easier or more accessible for you?”
- Offer to connect with existing programs, services, or adjustments:
  - “Currently, \_\_\_\_\_ offers \_\_\_\_\_ (programs/services). Would this be helpful for you?”
  - “We can make \_\_\_\_\_ (adjustments). Would this be helpful for you?”
- If additional support or accommodations are needed, connect to Disability Management team or escalate as needed:
  - “We will need to loop in \_\_\_\_\_ to explore other options and find something that works better for you. Would you like to connect with them directly or would you prefer if I send an email to introduce you?”

These are general examples. It is important to connect with HR and Disability Management to confirm which strategies are available within the corporate policies/guidelines.

# Navigating Common Challenges

These are general examples of **tools** or **adjustments** that can support employees facing these challenges. It is important to confirm appropriate strategies based on your corporate policies/guidelines.

## Time Management Challenges

- Allow time blocking (set do-not-disturb times)
- Provide tailored visual reminders/alarms/apps
- Supportive goal setting (versus micromanaging)
- Assign a mentor
- Provide body doubling stations

## Organization & Planning Challenges

- Provide organizational tools like planners/digital calendars
- Offer training/coaching/mentorship on effective organizational strategies
- Encourage the use of checklists/visual aids

## Distractibility Challenges

- Provide noise-cancelling headphones
- Designate quiet zones for concentration
- When possible: Offer closed-door offices; desks facing away from busy areas
- Offer flexible work arrangements (dependent on job function and structure)
- Ask how employees best receive information (verbally, written, email, text, voice memo)

# Navigating Common Challenges

These are general examples of **tools** or **adjustments** that can support employees facing these challenges. It is important to confirm appropriate strategies based on your corporate policies/guidelines.

## Meeting Challenges

- Optimize meetings
- Distribute meeting agendas in advance
- Hold shorter, focused meetings
- Build in opportunities for breaks, or to sit/stand during meetings

## Impulsivity Challenges

- Encourage pausing and thinking
- Foster an environment where taking time to consider decisions is valued
- Offer mindfulness or meditation sessions to promote self-awareness
- Frequent breaks

## Task Completion Challenges

- Break down tasks by setting realistic and achievable goals
- Recognize and reward progress

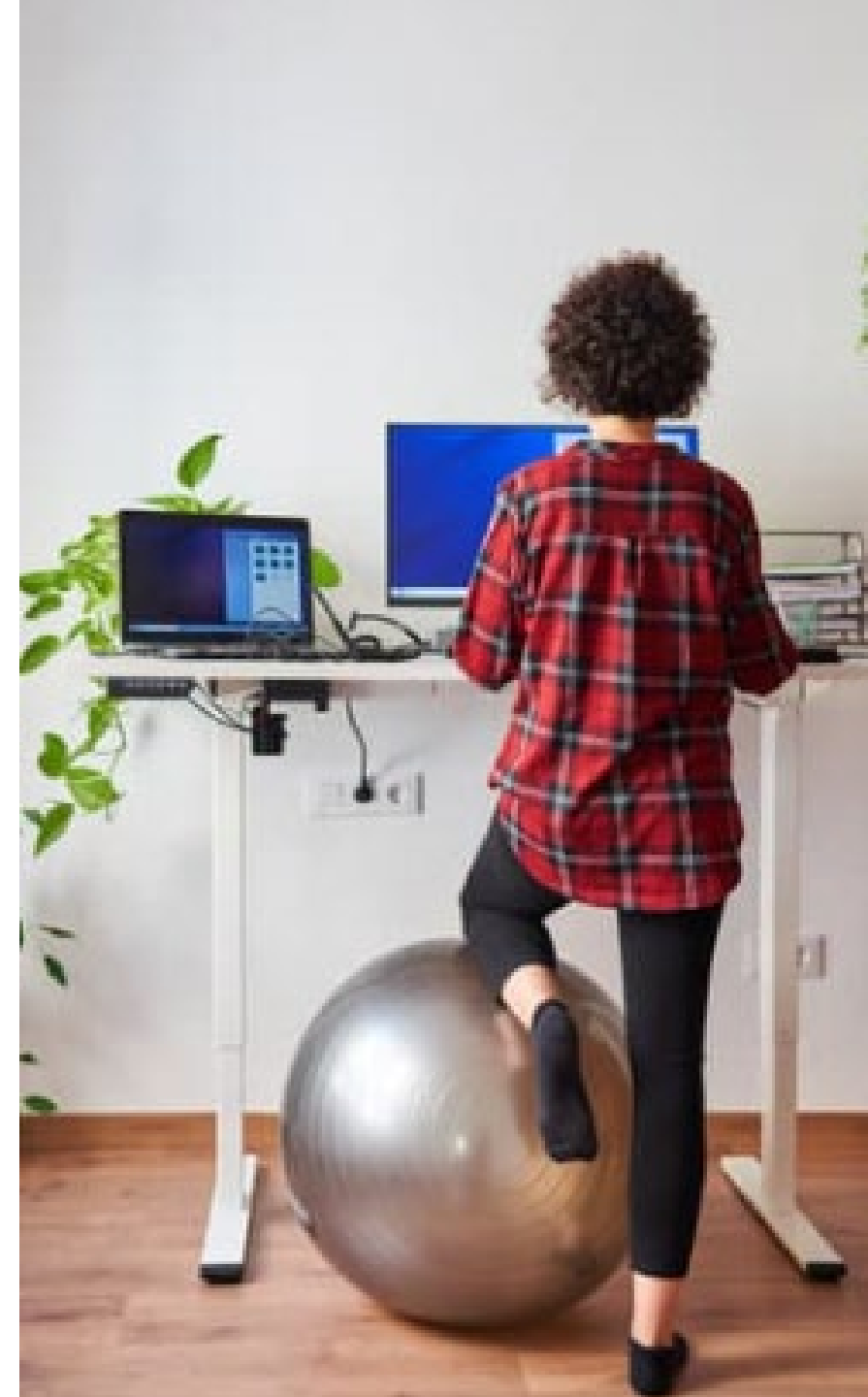


# Inclusive Hiring

- Do not surprise your candidate; Provide a clear description of what the interview will entail
- When possible, provide the candidate with a list of interview questions beforehand
- Clearly outline the structure and the time together for the interviewee
- Be as clear and concise as possible when asking questions
- When possible, provide pressure-free time for the applicant to think of a response
- Consider different ways to interview and assess the candidate's skills:
  - Remote video interview versus in-person
  - Consider asking for samples of their work instead of pressuring them into a timed assessment or examination
  - Offer a working interview: Opportunity to assess what they do, not how they answer interview questions
  - Avoid associating their performance in the interview with skills not necessary for the job

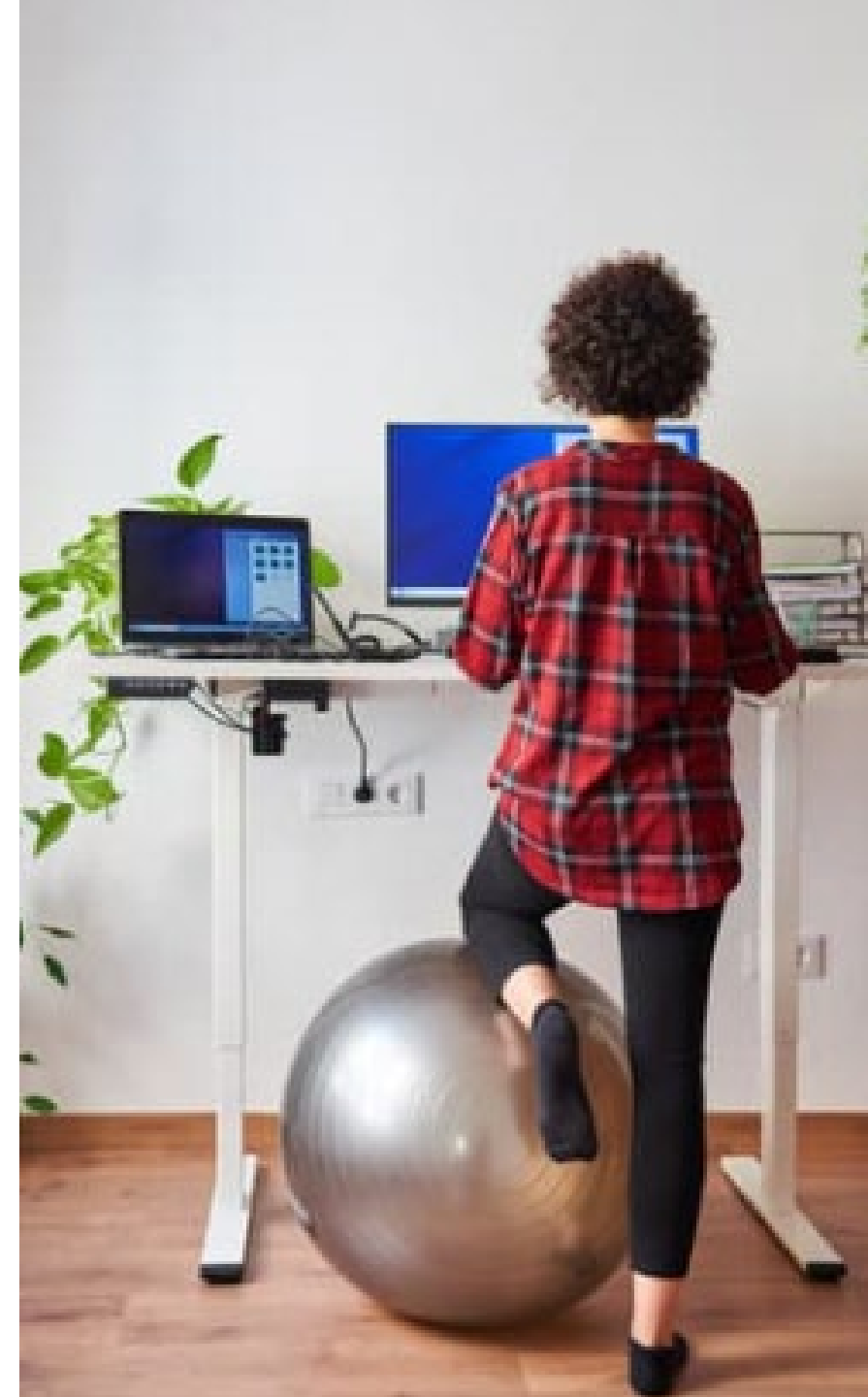
# Implementing Adjustments & Accommodations

- Create a process of structure and flexibility to allow:
  - Personal assessment to identify specific needs
  - Stakeholders to engage in phases of establishing and adapting to accommodations
  - Open communication for need expression and evaluation
- Adjustments can range from simple adjustments to formal process.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the accommodation and make adjustments if needed.
- Schedule a review of the accommodation plan.



# Embracing Neurodiversity in the Workplace

- Explored an understanding of ADHD in the workplace and the broader concept of neurodiversity.
- Uncovered how ADHD challenges may present in the workplace and the underlying causes.
- Dismantled stigmas and fostered understanding.
- Fostered inclusivity & recognized strengths:
  - Creativity, hyperfocus, and innovative thinking
  - Contributing to a dynamic and resilient workforce
- Practiced supporting adjustments and accommodations:
  - Addressing specific needs for equal opportunities
- Building a foundation for individual and organizational success.
- Every employee contributing unique talents for collective achievement.



# Additional Resources

- **Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC):**
  - <https://caddac.ca/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-accommodations-Chart-FINAL.pdf>
- **Job Accommodation Network (JAN):**
  - Searchable online accommodations resource:
  - Accommodation Search (<https://askjan.org/>)
- **ADDitude:**
  - <https://www.additudemag.com/>
- **Adult ADHD Centre**
  - Free Adult ADHD Webinars on various topics
  - <https://adultadhdcentre.com/living-with-adhd/adult-adhd-centre-events/>

|  <b>CADDAC</b><br>CENTRE FOR ADHD AWARENESS CANADA                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| <b>ADHD Symptoms, Impairments and Accommodations in the Work Environment</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| This chart is to be used as a reference for <b>adults with ADHD and their employers</b> . Possible strategies and accommodations are meant to address specific ADHD impairments caused by a disability. The impairments listed are directly linked to DSM 5 and ASRS symptoms and appropriate workplace accommodations (employer approved) and strategies (self initiated). This list is a summary and not meant to be exhaustive. Adults with ADHD will differ in the type and quantity of accommodations required. A process of trial and error may be required to discover the best possible options since ADHD symptoms as well as successful accommodations and strategies are very individual. It is important to note that in some cases just a few simple strategies and accommodations may significantly increase both job performance and job satisfaction. |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| DSM-5 Symptom [ASRS-6 Q#]                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | DSM-5 Symptom                                                                                | Possible Resulting Impairments in the Work Environment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Possible Accommodations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>INATTENTION</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1a<br>ASRS-6 Q1<br>Trouble wrapping up details                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Fails to give close attention to details OR makes careless mistakes creating inaccurate work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Inattention to detail – leaves part of task undone or misses crucial steps</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor quality of work – inaccurate, careless mistakes, rushed work</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor time management – doesn't leave time to complete details, check for mistakes or ensure quality of work</li></ul>                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Review of work by co-worker, team lead or supervisor prior to due-dates or completing task to add details, make corrections, or improve quality of finished task or product</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> More frequent check-ins with supervisor, manager, team lead or co-worker to review project, check details, assist with time management and due dates</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow for more clarification</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Check off sheet with steps or list of required details for completeness and best quality</li></ul> |
| 1b<br>No ASRS-6 item                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Difficulty sustaining attention                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties remaining focused during meetings and reading or writing lengthy amounts of material</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Day-dreaming or mind-wandering</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty staying focused on boring or mundane activities</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty switching focus or prioritizing focus on important rather than interesting duties</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Organize day so work requiring most focus is done during times of highest alertness</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Schedule blocks of uninterrupted time</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Cuing to bring person back to discussion or when giving instructions</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow audiotaping or note taking during meetings or lengthy instructions</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Supply hard copy of instructions</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 10 minute warning when switch in focus is required</li></ul>                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |



👋 Nice to meet you  
Let's keep in touch!



# Thank you!

Scan the QR code for  
resources!