

# BMC JOURNAL

The monthly newsletter of  
Behavior Management Consultants



## 10 Adult ADHD Signs You May Not Realize are Actually Symptoms

*Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder presents differently when you're older. Here are the red flags to look for.*

With everything there is to juggle in life, it's easy to assume that everyone experiences that sinking-in-quicksand feeling as they navigate another busy day.

But if you find this feeling is paired with extreme levels of disorganization, inattention and overwhelm, these might be signs of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Roughly 10 million American adults (and over 365 million globally) are thought to have ADHD – and because symptoms can show up differently in adults, realizing you might have the disorder is typically a slow burn, the overlooked signs of which can cause significant strain on your life and health.

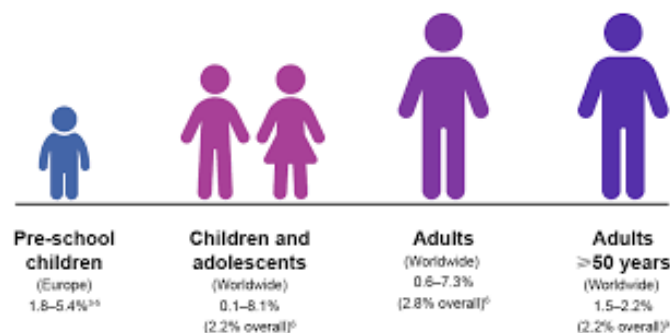
“Adults looking for diagnosis often have many subtle signs rather than completely failing,” Dede O’Shea, a neuropsychologist at Beth Israel Lahey Health in Cambridge, Massachusetts, told HuffPost.

The hallmark symptoms of ADHD – inattention, impulsivity and hyperactivity – typically aren’t as noticeable in adulthood, likely because adults whose ADHD wasn’t diagnosed in childhood have had a lifetime to parse together the skills necessary to compensate for their symptoms.

“Some symptoms of ADHD also mimic those of anxiety or depression,” [Cristina Louk](#), a clinical psychologist based in Washington state, told HuffPost. “Most people will first get diagnosed with these disorders and get frustrated when treatment fails to alleviate their symptoms.”

In the moment, you might find yourself attributing certain feelings and behaviors to other things – blaming feelings of hype on too much coffee or snapping at your frozen computer on sleep deprivation – when really, they’re symptoms of adult ADHD.

Here are some of the sneakier signs you might be overlooking



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## 1. Procrastinating to the extreme

ADHD brains are always on the lookout for activities that will cause a rush of dopamine, a chemical in the brain that leads to feelings of reward and pleasure and that tends to be lower in people with the disorder.

Because people with ADHD have trouble sustaining enough dopamine during routine tasks that aren't as interesting to them, they might find themselves doing everything possible to avoid them.

“The average person might feel bored by a routine task, but with ADHD, the negative feeling is more extreme – and so, too, the avoidance of it,” O’Shea said. “It can be missed as a potential ADHD symptom because it looks like intentional laziness and lack of motivation.”

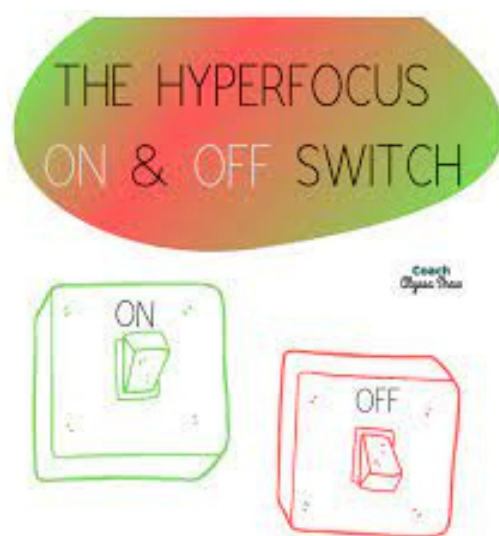
## 2. Hyperfocusing on the same task for hours

If you have ADHD, starting tasks can be a grind – especially tasks you find daunting or believe will be time-consuming – but once you get started, you might find yourself so absorbed by what you’re doing that other important tasks end up neglected as a result.

“Hyperfocus is a symptom that can easily be missed because it looks like the person is only motivated to do certain activities,” O’Shea said. “It’s sometimes mistaken as selfishness and overzealousness.”

Difficulty switching gears is thought to be caused by low dopamine levels in the brain: The more engrossed you are in a task, the greater the dopamine boost. It’s similar to being in the zone, only in this context, it feels like you’re trapped there.

“Hyperfocus at its worst can look like writing and rewriting your response to a simple email and being unable to transition to a new task or missing an important event because you’re unable to pull yourself away from a work project,” Louk said.



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### 3. Spending impulsively

Adults with ADHD are more likely to make poor financial decisions – say, making impulsive purchases for that hit of dopamine, putting off the boredom of paying bills or losing track of when they're due.

Deficiencies in the basal ganglia – a set of structures in the brain that process how you evaluate emotions, motivations, goals and risks – may be a factor.

These structures act as a communication highway for different areas of the brain that need to work together to help you learn and form habits (like following a budget), as well as plan and carry out tasks (like saving for the future).

“In a way, the basal ganglia in a person with ADHD can be found to almost short-circuit when it comes to its ability to manage the signals that are passing through,” [Dr. Zishan Khan](#), a psychiatrist with [Mindpath Health](#), told HuffPost.

### 4. Losing all sense of time

Better known as time blindness, people with ADHD find it tricky to keep track of time or to know how much time they'll need to do an activity.

So far, no single brain region has been identified as the one responsible for time perception, but time estimation seems to be linked to the prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain that assists with executive functioning, focus and attention, as well as organizational skills, Khan said), which relies on signals from dopamine-related pathways to function properly.

“This might translate into always running late – thinking you have enough time and then rushing,” O’Shea said. “You might know the exact time of an appointment, but leave the house at that time rather than in advance to give yourself room to travel there, park and sign yourself in.”



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## 5. Experiencing emotional outbursts

From anxious and edgy to happy and chatty to angry and aggressive, people with ADHD can experience emotional dysregulation that causes them to have strong emotional reactions even they don't see coming.

"This is related to the difficulties that can come with managing attention and directing energy, as well as finding the appropriate level of mental stimulation," O'Shea said. "By only focusing on the result – which looks like an emotional disorder – and not the underlying problem, it's another adult ADHD symptom that's easily overlooked."

## 6. Forgetting to eat

Research suggests a strong link between ADHD and abnormal eating patterns, the more prominent patterns being binge eating and forgetting to eat entirely.

The exact mechanisms have yet to be sussed out by researchers, but there could be a combination of factors at play, including impaired brain activity in the prefrontal cortex and limbic system.

When the prefrontal cortex lacks the dopamine necessary to function properly, this can mess with your ability to organize, plan and execute healthy meals and

maintain consistent eating habits in general. The dopamine drought can also increase the likelihood of your grabbing convenience foods to satisfy the brain's reward centers and give it the stimulation necessary to focus.

Meanwhile, the limbic system is in charge of regulating our emotions, in addition to attention, Khan said. As a result, you might use food as a way to unconsciously cope with boredom and emotional distress – or get sucked into a task to the point where you forget to eat for hours, thanks to feeling disconnected from your body's hunger and fullness cues.



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## 7. Having trouble sleeping

Insomnia doesn't necessarily mean you have ADHD, but research suggests adults with ADHD may be predisposed to sleep issues. It could be a side effect of impaired activity in the reticular activating system (RAS) – a network of nerve pathways in the brainstem that are essential in mediating a person's level of consciousness.

The RAS acts as a screening device that filters through incoming sensory data and sends out signals to the brain as it comes across important sensory stimuli that need to be addressed.

Only, for people with ADHD, RAS dysregulation makes it difficult to distinguish between what's important sensory information and what's just noise. The result? "Difficulty regulating arousal and sleep-wake transitions," Khan said.

Some people with ADHD can also have biological disruptions to their circadian rhythm, O'Shea said. Two such disruptions are delayed sleep phase disorder – where your sleep is persistently delayed by two or more hours past what's considered a standard bedtime – and delayed onset of melatonin production, the sleep hormone that kicks in at night to help you doze off.

## 8. Taking forever to make decisions

"People with ADHD may experience slower processing speeds," Louk said. Processing speed refers to how quickly you can react to a given stimulus (in this case, a set of choices) within a limited time frame.

It's not necessarily a sign you're indecisive – rather, that you need more time to navigate the decision-making process.'

You might have difficulty with things like putting together the details necessary to see the big picture, foreseeing the potential outcomes of each option, or getting stuck on one idea and having trouble weighing all of the options to make a decision.

"This is a result of controlling attention well enough to sort through the pros and cons of a decision and remember what you were thinking," O'Shea said.



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## 9. Feeling perpetually restless

Restlessness tends to be one of the sneakier signs of adult ADHD, largely due to how easily the external behaviors of restlessness can be attributed to other things, like an intense workload or drinking too much coffee.

“Adults are more likely to show restlessness through having to get up and pace around,” O’Shea said. “They might not be able to sit through a movie without talking or getting out their phone.” Some may even avoid more subdued activities like this entirely.

Persistent fidgeting of the hands, legs and feet, as well as picking at your skin, can also be subtle signs of restlessness.

## 10. Rambling and monopolizing conversations

People with ADHD can have trouble tracking a conversation thanks to poor attention control and retaining information in the moment.

“This can lead to frequent interrupting because they might not remember what they want to say or what the other person said,” O’Shea said. “They can also feel restless and have an urge to jump in with a thought that interests them.”

## Here’s when you should get tested for ADHD

You might want to get evaluated for ADHD if you’re experiencing five or more symptoms of ADHD – and these symptoms have been persisting for longer than six months, are present in two or more settings (say, at work and in your relationships) and are reducing the quality of how you function in your life.

“Talking to your primary care doctor is a good place to start with an initial review of your symptoms, followed by connecting with an ADHD specialist in your area,” O’Shea said.

The diagnosis of ADHD is made by taking a proper history and gathering relevant information and data to help not only diagnose ADHD but also rule out other causes for the presenting symptoms.



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Important aspects of the exam include the collection of details regarding the presenting complaint, a complete psychiatric review of symptoms, and both personal and family psychiatric and medical histories.

ADHD rating scales and psychological tests can also be used to further confirm the diagnosis of ADHD.

“Psychological testing is typically used in adults where it’s not clear from the history alone that the symptomatology is indicative of ADHD,” Khan said. “This is because a lot of the rating scales and tests to help diagnose ADHD haven’t been studied in adults and therefore can’t be utilized as sole diagnostic tools or proof an adult has ADHD.”

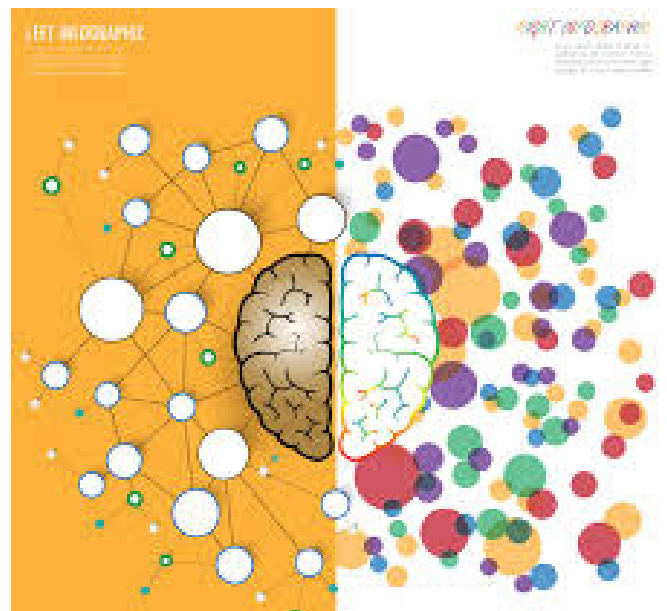
### **Once you’re diagnosed with ADHD, what’s next?**

An official ADHD diagnosis can be a game changer for so many adults who were struggling all their lives. Having a diagnosis starts a journey to build back confidence and motivation.

“You may have been called or thought of yourself as ‘lazy’ or ‘unsuccessful’ and the diagnosis can provide a framework for your lifelong struggles,” Dr. Heather Goodman, a psychiatrist at Weill Cornell Medicine and NewYork-Presbyterian, told HuffPost.

Treatment for adult ADHD is similar to treatment for childhood ADHD and includes medication, psychotherapy focused on improving organization and functioning in your daily life, and treatment for any mental health conditions that you have along with ADHD.

“Gaining clarity as a result of your ADHD diagnosis is the first step on a healing path,” O’Shea said. “Finally, what’s next can feel more in your control.”







As parents, our main focus is the health and happiness of our children. For our children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the list of needs to ensure those things can be a bit longer. Milestones are one aspect of our kids with autism's lives that we are particularly used to monitoring.

The milestone of puberty is one that I would like to discuss today. In this article, I will be exploring autism and puberty, how they affect each other, and how we can best support our children with autism as they traverse this complex time.

### **How does puberty affect people with autism?**

Autistic children have enough going on without having to deal with the perils of puberty. However, it is something that they will have in common with their neurotypical peers. This time, as it is a normal part of growing up, they will be facing the "regular" symptoms, as well as the complications autism can bring to the "party".

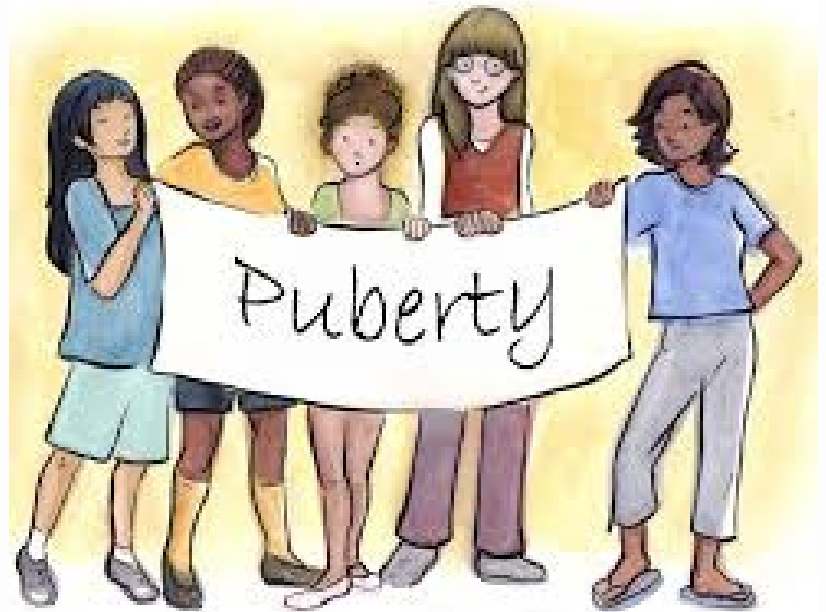
Let's first explore puberty, its markers, and how autism spectrum disorder may or may not affect it. Here is a list of some of the signs and symptoms of puberty in girls and boys.

#### **Girls**

- breasts begin to develop
- growth of hair on body parts
- mood swings
- the beginning of menstruation
- acne

#### **Boys**

- voice changes
- wet dreams
- enlargement of testicles and penis
- acne
- muscle growth
- mood swings



## Do kids with autism go through puberty faster?

Autism research has shown some variation between children with autism going through puberty and their neurotypical counterparts. Is this an indication that puberty will happen sooner for autistic children? Let's find out.

### Precocious puberty

Precocious puberty is when the signs and symptoms appear in early childhood, before age eight in girls and age nine in boys. There is evidence to suggest that precocious puberty can occur more often in girls with autism. The research in the study titled, "Pubertal Timing During Early Adolescence: Advanced Pubertal Onset in Females with Autism Spectrum Disorder," we learn:

"Historically, precocious puberty (onset < 8 years in females and 9 years in males) or early puberty (onset between 8 and 9 years in females and between 9 and 10.5 years in males) can be considered a normal variant (Winter, Durand, & Brauner, 2019). A portion of the females with ASD would likely meet criteria for precocious puberty and an even larger proportion would meet criteria for early puberty. Due to the observed higher percentage of early onset in ASD compared to TD females, the findings would be hard to dismiss as a normal variant."

The same study also states: "For males, there were no differences across the groups in pubertal timing to include genital or pubic stage..."

So, it seems that autism can affect puberty's timing. Delayed puberty can also happen, but it isn't necessarily linked to autism.



## **Does autism get worse during puberty?**

Autism does not “worsen”. However, the changes that can occur can be more challenging for autistic children.

Children with autism often have trouble with social aspects, and these challenges can intensify during what is already a confusing and difficult time for many. Rising and changing hormone levels may also affect comorbid conditions, compounding the difficulty autistic children experience. Things such as:

- anxiety and depression
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms
- seizure activity
- gastrointestinal woes

Social connections are often strained for children who don't usually struggle with social situations during puberty. The onset of acne and mood swings, as well as the comparison with their peers who may be further along in the process, can all take a toll on social function. For children with autism who already have differences in social skills, the time of puberty can pose extra concerns.

Communication can also play a role in how autistic children fare during puberty. Some children with autism spectrum disorders have trouble communicating verbally, have a hard time reading body language, speak in a monotone, or have selective mutism. During puberty, this lack of skills can make everything more difficult for them.

They may struggle to build skills, understand how to interact with their peers, or be isolated from their friends and families at this vulnerable time. This can lead to worsening depression, anxiety, and tummy troubles. The ability to communicate and build trust is one way that can lessen the negative aspects of the transition to adulthood.



## **How to prepare your autistic child for puberty**

In order to prepare our children with autism for puberty, we must first prepare ourselves. This can happen long before the first symptoms appear. In fact, the earlier we begin to prepare, the better.

Though we cannot anticipate every incident that may arise, we can be aware of the common issues, understand what to look for, set up support in advance, and most of all find out the fun things to look forward to. Younger children will need age appropriate preparation, while autistic teenagers who were prepared in advance will be much more ready to face the challenges.

Next, we can be available for open dialogue to be the standard for communications before, during, and after puberty. Our kids need to feel safe, informed, relatable, and celebrated, maybe more than ever during puberty. It is also important to note that we also need to feel that.

Here are some systems that we can set up for ourselves, as well as our children, as we prepare for them to enter puberty.

- therapy (for us, and our children with autism)
- information collection (sources like Autism Parenting Magazine, your child's doctor, other parents, books, and podcasts)
- journaling (reflecting on our own experiences growing up and drawing wisdom from our own needs)
- alternative forms of communication and support (telehealth therapy, written communication, sign language, etc)

Feelings that can come from not being prepared can be negative and difficult to overcome while in the thick of it. We are not alone, our children are not alone.

Preparing our kids with autism for puberty begins with what every informed parent of a neurotypical child needs to prepare their own children. Additionally, it is helpful to understand how autistic children may struggle as their social skills, developmental needs, and comorbid conditions make the transition to becoming young adults more challenging.

Educating our children with autism about this transition is step one. Open, honest, straightforward, and non-emotionally charged exchanges are optimal.

In the aforementioned study we learn, “While the challenges and long-term consequences are understudied, a recent study of autistic females, highlighted that young women would benefit from more education pertaining to menstruation before and during menses to assist with understanding factors related to health, duration, pain, hygiene and changes in mood status (Steward et al., 2018). Additionally, psychological and sexual education training such as the Tackling Teenage program (Dekker et al., 2015; Visser et al., 2017) may be beneficial.

Knowledge can make the differences that help our autistic children feel their most confident, connected, and celebrated selves throughout their lives. Age appropriate enlightenment about the changes coming, the assurance that what they will be experiencing being natural, and a heads up about what their autism may bring to the table can all be helpful.

### **How to help your autistic child during puberty**

Once we have done all we can to prepare for puberty, we can turn our attention to what to do when it actually begins. Adolescence is a complex time, brain development is happening quickly. Parents can do a lot for their children with autism during this time.

Social stories can be a very useful tool starting at a young age and continuing through pre-teen and teen years. They can be an indirect way to address very personal, uncomfortable, or awkward topics. This time of transition can feel like a roller coaster. Understanding it from the perspective of someone else’s experience can take some of the vulnerability out of it.

Most teenagers need more than they let on. They may not want to talk, though they need it. It is important to lay a good foundation, to explain that you are always there for them, and to make an effort to communicate with them.

It is also important to lead by example, modeling healthy emotional, mental, and behavioral coping skills.



## **Physical changes**

The physical changes of puberty can be alarming for some. For other children, they may seem virtually unnoticed. It is important for each child to have an understanding of these changes. They need to know that these changes are natural, healthy, and though they can feel gross or unwanted, they are not bad.

## **Mental health issues**

Children with autism are more prone to anxiety and depression. All children are at a higher risk for mental health issues during puberty, even if they are temporary. Mood swings, social complications, and new body changes can be scary.

If they are not already attending, providing your child with mental health therapy can go a long way during this time. They may need extra support and treatment in the form of medication, telehealth visits, or an increase in session frequency.

## **Sexuality**

Part of growing up is self-exploration. Puberty can bring new self-awareness. An increase in sexual urges, or lack thereof, can suddenly draw the child's attention to others in a way they have never experienced before.

During this time, it is important for our children to understand that we are there for them, that their sexual development is valid, and that we will love them and help them through this time in a nonjudgmental way.

Romantic relationship training is important as it will ensure our children with autism are as equipped as possible to navigate relationships with their chosen partners. The need for privacy, the reality of autonomy over their bodies, and understanding the function of body parts are all crucial bits of information our children need.

Some things are private and should only happen with the door closed. However, things like wet dreams and masturbation should not be taboo.



Wet dreams happen because bodies are working properly. This is a good thing.

Autonomy over the body, education about relationship safety, and the knowledge of when and where it is ok to engage in sexual matters is important for all children. Children with autism may need extra communication as reading body language, missing social cues, and misunderstanding intentions can be areas of struggle.

### **School**

School staff, though they deal with children all day every day, may not realize your specific student needs extra support. When supporting our children with autism through puberty, enlisting the help of school staff can help. Reaching out to them to find out what they offer, teach, and protocols they provide can be a great resource.

School libraries may also provide resources in the form of books, audio books, and other materials that can help your child understand what is going on from a less personal perspective. Many children learn about these sensitive topics through books.

### **Conclusion**

Puberty can be a terrifying time for anyone. There are ways we can make it easier.

Preparing ourselves and our kids beforehand, gaining an understanding of what the needs and challenges might be, and providing helpful resources can all make the transition easier. For our kids, knowing they are loved and understood, not judged, is key. Reaching out to all available aids will meet many needs. From home, to school, to social engagements, our kids can practice what they learn and gain the confidence and love within themselves to take on the world.

The relationship we build with them from babyhood and adolescence will strengthen them. When provided with knowledge and love, they will come through it.

I hope this brief overview has helped. You are doing a great job!







# **Investigators Look at How ADHD, ODD Dimensions Relate to Impulsivity**

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For the first time ever, investigators have begun to untangle the association between attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and the symptoms of impulsivity.

A team based in Australia, led by Rapson Gomez, Federation University, evaluated the inter-relationships of dimensions within ADHD and ODD with components of impulsivity.

#### ADHD and ODD

ADHD and ODD are both high prevalent conditions that frequently co-occur with one another.

“The trait-impulsivity hypothesis model posits that a unidimensional general impulsivity factor underlies the behavioral expression of ADHD and ODD symptom dimensions,” the authors wrote. “However, there is now robust evidence that impulsivity is multidimensional have proposed a multidimensional impulsivity model with dimensions for sensation seeking, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance, negative urgency, and positive urgency.”

Previously, there has not been a study conducted on the different dimensions of impulsivity related to the 2 diseases, using the trait impulsivity hypothesis as the framework.

#### Impulsivity

In the network analysis, the investigators captured the inter-relationships between inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity in patients with ADHD and anger/irritability, vindictiveness, and argumentative/defiant behavior in patients with ODD using the UPPS-P model (negative urgency, lack of premeditation, lack of perseverance, sensation seeking, and positive urgency).

The study included 324 emerging adults from the general community, 246 of which were women. The mean age for the patient population was 23.12 years. In addition, 3.7% (n = 12) reported that they have been diagnosed with either ADHD or ODD.

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Each participant completed questionnaires on demographic information, including age, gender, education, employment and relationship status, and previous diagnosis of ADHD and ODD. They also completed the Current Symptom Scale and the Short-Urgency-Premeditation-Perseverance-Sensation Seeking-Positive Urgency to obtain ratings for the ADHD and ODD symptoms, comparable to diagnostic symptoms for the disorders in the DSM-IV/DSM-IV-TR and DSM-5.

### Results

The results show ADHD and ODD dimensions were associated differently with different types of impulsivity, with unique patterns of network connectivity.

There were noticeable and positive relations for inattention connecting with negative urgency, positive urgency, lack of perseveration, and lack of premeditation, with associations involving a lack of preservation being the strongest with a medium effect size.

“This study is the first to tease out the unique associations of the ADHD and ODD dimensions with different types of impulsivity, and in that way provide new contributions to our understanding of the existing trait impulsivity theory,” the authors wrote. The results likely will have some implications on treatment for the diseases.

“Our edge weight findings linking the ADHD and ODD dimensions with different types of impulsivity have important treatment implications for ADHD, ODD, and comorbid ADHD/ODD,” the authors wrote. “In this respect, the findings raise the possibility that directly focusing on emotionally and cognitively driven impulsivity can be an effective treatment for ADHD and/or ODD.”

The study, “Inter-relationships between ADHD, ODD and impulsivity dimensions in emerging adults revealed by network analysis: extending the ‘trait impulsivity hypothesis’,” was published online in *Heliyon*.

IMPORTANT  
NUMBERS



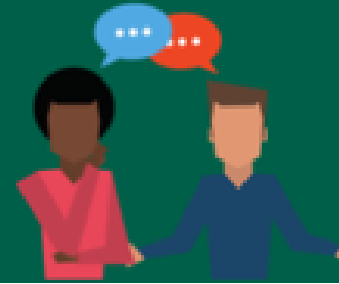
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HELP, PLEASE  
MAKE THE CALL



GET THE SUPPORT  
YOU NEED



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ALONE



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Prevention Hotline:  
1-800-273-8255

National Domestic  
Violence Hotline:  
1-800-799-7233

Runaway and  
Homeless Teen  
Hotline Help:  
1-800-246-4646



Coalition for the  
Homeless:  
212-776-2000

Drug and Alcohol  
Hotline:  
800-622-2255

Food and Hunger  
Hotline:  
866-888-8777

Homeless Services  
Hotline:  
212-533-5151

Rape Crisis Hotline:  
212-227-3000

National Child  
Abuse Hotline:  
1-800-422-4453

National Teen  
Dating Abuse  
Helpline: 1-866-  
331-9474

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LGBTQ Youth:  
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Behavior Management Consultants believes that, "No Child is Born Bad". Our mission is to educate, mentor, and assist parents, caregivers, and professionals to cope with, socialize, and identify values important to today's youth.

The goal is to serve public and private social service organizations including, but not limited to:

- Residential Treatment Facilities (RTFs)
- Juvenile Detention Centers
- Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs)
- Public Schools
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

We are confident that we will meet our goals thereby ensuring that our clients are being kept abreast in the ever-changing landscape of Human/Social Services.

### **Quote of the Month**

"Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: The potential for greatness lives within each of us."

- Wilma Rudolph



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