

ADHD IN THE WORKPLACE

Inability to Focus vs. ADHD

Maintaining focus is a difficulty most individuals will struggle with. With the increasing amount of distractions available at our fingertips maintaining focus at work is something many employees struggle with. Being under constant stimuli adds to the distractions we face as well as other factors such as sleep and stress.



According to a 2007 study, sleep deprivation significantly affects cognitive function. Sleep deprivation not only affects you in the short term, but long-term effects include implications to your memory and decision-making. (Alhola & Polo-Kantola, 2007).

Stress in a healthy dose is helpful, but an overwhelming amount of stress can reduce your performance and productivity.

If you find yourself struggling to maintain focus due to stress or a loss of sleep, you will likely benefit from lifestyle changes, or therapy to adopt ways to better manage stress in a way that doesn't impede on your ability to focus. Although ADHD is a term that is commonly used to describe a difficulty to focus, it is a diagnosable mental health condition. The reality is, a vast majority of people do not have ADHD, but those who do will display varying degrees of severity as well as different symptoms.

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Employees with ADHD will face challenges in the workplace. These individuals will struggle to stay on task, meet deadlines, and may change jobs more frequently. It is common for those who have ADHD, to be easily distracted, and display tardiness and absenteeism. These individuals may also become hyper-fixated on projects that interest them while forgetting to tend to other responsibilities.

Treatment for ADHD symptoms includes changing behaviors to manage focus. Some individuals with ADHD will also take ADHD medication, such as stimulants.

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Behavior changes in the workplace are effective for anyone who struggles with focus, including those with ADHD.

Scheduling your day, including scheduling in breaks and meetings will add structure to your day and will reduce the number of interruptions you will face.

Individuals who experience ADHD benefit from having a quiet place to work. Ensuring that this is available in your workplace is essential for those employees to succeed.

Working with a reward system has also been shown to be effective for individuals with ADHD. Rewards do not have to cost money to be effective and can be big or small.

Additionally, visual reminders, charts, and infographics can provide extra support for those with ADHD.



Finally, use your phone as tool instead of a distraction! Set a timer for blocks of uninterrupted focus time and set alarms for yourself to keep yourself punctual.

If you are a manager or a team member of someone with ADHD, offering more check-ins will help those with the disorder to stay on track, motivated, and focused.

If these behavior changes are not effective in managing your ability to focus, you may benefit from speaking to a mental health professional to explore different avenues of treatment such as medication.

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References:

Alhola P, Polo-Kantola P. Sleep deprivation: Impact on cognitive performance. *Neuropsychiatr Dis Treat.* 2007;3(5):553-67. PMID: 19300585; PMCID: PMC2656292.