

## Web-Based Radio Show


### ADHD Programs for Adults

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Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. Today we are going to continue on the series we have been doing on helping children with ADHD and especially how to help them without using pills or without using medication, although sometimes, medication might be warranted. Today we are going to focus on how the program we have described in prior talks can be applied to adults as well, and I should say, teenagers, transitional youth who are between teenage years and adult years, and adults of any age – 20's, 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's, and, God willing, even older into the 100's.

Basically, the central thesis or idea is that the same program we recommend for children can be applied to adults. Adults, however, can be in a better position because often they can assess their strengths and weaknesses a little better than children can, although they may have the help of their family as well – therapists, spouse, or other family members who can assist. Just as the family and the therapist will profile the child's strengths and weaknesses in the different areas we covered – the basic motor functioning, the sensory processing, levels of thinking, the ability to use what we call making sense out of what you see or visual spatial thinking as part of your thinking, and how strengthening all of these can strengthen your ability to sequence and problem solve and, therefore, pay attention, so two adults can monitor each of these areas. So a 28 year old adult or a 42 year old adult can take stock and look and say, "Gee, I've always been inattentive. Recently I have been told maybe my problem all these years has been ADD or ADHD because I always fidget, I never follow through on my projects as well as I would like to, and I'm always getting distracted. I never thought I had a problem but I have been recommended to try some Ritalin, but I remember when I was a child I was tried on it and (this is what one adult actually told me) I got irritable and so I'm reluctant to try it again. I've been told there are some other medications but I'm reluctant to try those because I tend to be very sensitive to medications and if there is a side effect to be had, I tend to get it."



So this almost middle aged individual wanted to know if there was a program where they could learn to pay attention without medication. They were able to follow the guidelines that we have been talking about and take stock of their own abilities and institute the same program that we do for children. Now the only difference between the adults and the children is trying to make the activities interesting for themselves or those recommended therapists or family members trying to make the activities interesting. So whether you are doing a balance activity – standing on one leg and throwing and catching a ball, or whether you are doing an activity for motor coordination where you are trying to use the left and right parts of the hands together, or whether you are doing a sequencing activity with your legs where you are trying to do something complex where you have to follow five or six steps – try to make it interesting, given your own age and place in the world and mainly what your interests are. So an adult who loves dancing might want to use dance for some of the activities. An adult who loves sports might use different kinds of sports and ask what sport is going to help with balance, what sport is going to help me more with sequencing a number of steps, and so forth.

Now to make this come alive a little bit and come and bring it home, I'm going to share with you a very interesting case that I had the honor of consulting on, of a young lady who is 28 years old whose name is Susanna. She came to see me; actually I had helped her younger brother with "ADHD" years earlier before I had formalized this program that I have been discussing. I was doing many elements of it and she was impressed that he was doing so well now. She had recently been told that she has ADD or ADHD also because, as she describes it, "I'm always fidgeting, I'm very distracted by almost anything that goes on – it gets me off what I'm trying to do, and now it is beginning to interfere with work." She had managed to finish college and she now had a job actually on Capitol Hill in the Washington area working in a senator's office. She was a very creative person and a good writer, but was being criticized increasingly for not following through, not finishing tasks, or going from one thing to another and was told that she may have ADHD and she ought to consider taking medication. Like the other example I gave earlier, she became very concerned because her brother had reacted to medication poorly, i.e. he got irritable and hyper and one time she confessed to me that she took one of his pills to see what it would do when he was little, and she felt lousy with it. She felt kind of irritable and hyper and understood why he didn't react to it well. So she was reluctant to try the medication route and wanted to know if a program could be developed for her like for her younger brother where she could overcome this tendency to become distracted and where she could learn to stay on task and follow through and problem solve. She knew what her strengths were – she was an excellent writer and a very creative person and part of her role in the senator's office was to help




write speeches and also help articulate positions on policies on anything relating from domestic issues to international issues.

So her question was: What could we do for her? As we reviewed her functioning and she viewed her strengths and weaknesses, the following pattern emerged. She identified a number of areas where she felt strong. I could see and she also demonstrated for me right in the office some of her strengths. She was very gifted verbally and had a large vocabulary, and she was actually quite creative and showed me some poems she had written and short stories she had written. I must say, interestingly both her poems and short stories had a scattered quality to it – it went off in all kinds of directions, although she said that was all part of the creative intent, but I think she was justifying a natural tendency that she had. She also revealed that she has always been “clumsy,” had a hard time learning how to ride a bicycle and didn’t ride a two-wheeler until she was 10 years old because balance was always hard for her. Learning sports was very, very difficult for her and even learning to dance was difficult. She also didn’t like high places, didn’t like roller coasters or rides like that, she tended to get overloaded easily at parties and noisy environments, and tended to get easily distracted by a sound that came from anywhere. So she could be working and hear a whisper from across the room and would turn and eavesdrop a little bit to see what was being talked about or a bright light coming through the window would easily distract her. So sights and sounds and almost any sensation – a light touch on her shoulder – and she would startle easily. So she was very hypersensitive to all kinds of sensations.

She had a hard time with math and had a hard time understanding how things operated in space so for example, asking her to describe her house from different angles was hard for her to do. A little task I had in my office with blocks where she had to construct a design that was the mirror image of the one that she was shown was very difficult for her. So she had a hard time working with what we call visual spatial thinking. When she read something and I asked her if she could picture the things she read, that was a very hard thing for her to do – to put it in a visual format. She had a number of areas that were relative areas of weakness and also had some areas of real strength with her verbal ability. Her verbal memory was actually quite good. Her memory of things she saw was good but not for problem solving and making sense out of what she saw. That was a little bit weaker.

When we looked at her thinking level, she was a good thinker and could actually be creative and do logical thinking, easily answer “why” questions and give you many reasons for things, do what we call “comparative thinking” – compare two colleagues at work; do gray area thinking – be able to tell you who was better at what and how much




better they were; and even be reflective on her own weaknesses and strengths for example, as she described the pattern I just described and also as I saw it as we demonstrated some things together.

When it came to apply the same levels of thinking to the things she saw, she couldn't do it. She couldn't do complex visual spatial thinking. So when it came to, for example, looking at different designs and looking at how they were similar or different and explaining why, she just avoided it and gave up. She said she her thoughts were just running all over the place. So she became fragmented – she couldn't even be logical. She couldn't connect her verbal abilities with making sense out of the world that she saw.

We are going to share with you now how we helped Susanna and the kind of program we set up for her. As I mentioned, Susanna was a 28 year old adult and we will show how we applied this program. Again, I want to emphasize that this could be applied to a 42 year old, a 60 year old, or even an 80 year old. The key is finding their interests or them finding their interests themselves as they can implement this program on their own, and then carrying out the activities in a way that is fun.

As I mentioned to you, Susanna had some real difficulties first in some of the basic motor things. So we needed to start with the Evolution Game – crawling, using the left and right sides of the body together, actually starting with slithering, then crawling, some fun wheelbarrow walking, walking in a more coordinated way, swinging her arms, then hopping, skipping, and jumping – all kinds of good things, and doing some trampoline work. To make it fun for her, she made it into a workout with music. She had been doing some music just to move and keep herself nice and thin, and was following one of those TV things and had gotten various types of audio recordings that help you move to music and things and she would do this to get herself going in the mornings sometimes, so this was something she could easily incorporate into her routine, only now she had a different sequence of activities; playing the Evolution Game to music. She found it amusing and fun. That helped get her started every day.

Then gradually we added more complex left/right movements and sequencing. To do the sequencing, she was never a good dancer, but she loved dance. So she tried to master new dance routines and she got DVD's out that had visual and auditory information on how to do the latest dances. That helped her learn to sequence – she could see it and she could hear it. She moved up the ladder into sequencing activities. We didn't do complex obstacle courses. Instead she incorporated it into her basic motor patterns the Evolutionary Game and the Post-Evolutionary Game with more complex activities, little things that made it harder for her like things she had to climb over or




things she had to go through. She had to crawl through hula hoops and she had to crawl through tunnels and she had to go over different barriers and climb and all kinds of interesting things that helped her coordinate her body.

When it came to balancing activities, she liked the idea of standing on Koosh balls and balance boards and moving to the music, then tossing a ball up in the air and then doing that rhythmically with music and then doing that while standing on a Koosh ball and balance board and that was also fun for her and we worked that into her basic motor pattern. To help her further with balance, she also did some yoga work and she had tried yoga once or twice before but without a lot of motivation and found it quite hard to do because the different postures required muscle tone that she really didn't have. She had a little low muscle tone but not severely low and her balance was so weak and her basic coordination was so weak that she found it difficult, but now she approached it with new vigor that was going to help her pay attention. So she did yoga regularly; yoga classes and routines home along with her dancing and did some dance classes too once she felt she wouldn't be "embarrassed" by it and she had gotten to a certain level of competency. So overall, she improved her motor functioning.

She recognized that on the sensory part, she was very over reactive to sounds and touch and had a hard time staying focused and attentive in busy environments, and easy to get overwhelmed and overloaded. So she identified, with my help, the different frequencies of sound, and for her it was low pitched sounds like grumbling sounds of an oil burner going on or a motorized sound that was hardest for her that was the most distracting. The high pitched noises weren't pleasant to her, but weren't as distracting. So she gradually exposed herself to these sounds as she was doing activities that were very calming and regulating for her. For her, rhythmic activities like music were very calming and regulating. She liked more soft, kind of Country & Western type of music with slow movement patterns. She could expose herself to different sounds while in these movements which relaxed her and she kind of got habituated, and by getting habituated, she got used to them a little bit more. Slowly she allowed herself, not completely, to become habituated to these sounds where they still bothered her but they bothered her a little bit less and she was less distracted by them over time.

Another big challenge for her was the visual spatial part of her thinking – making sense out of what she saw. As I mentioned before, it was hard for her to picture her house from different angles or picture things she had read; she couldn't turn it into a visual image. When I asked her to just picture her boyfriend and her best friends as though she had just taken a picture of them, she couldn't picture them. She could describe them; verbally she was quite gifted, but she couldn't picture them. As she was




describing them she couldn't picture her own descriptions. She read a paragraph and I asked her to picture it, and describe what she saw in the picture, she would say always say she saw a blur. So she had a great deal of difficulty with that visual spatial part, and as I mentioned before, asking her to compare different designs or describe the relationship between a 4-block design and its mirror image, she had a hard time describing how these looked different, or constructing one from the other.

So this was a more hard work task for her, but we worked through some of these exercises, building up the visual spatial thinking abilities, working with blocks and working with different block designs, working with quantity concepts because she always had a hard time with math so just picturing "big" and "little" was not easy for her so we had her work with clay in a ball and in a snake shape and seeing that it was the same amount of clay. And, thinking with water; the same basic conservation tasks that kids do in school but she had never quite fully mastered in terms of her mathematical reasoning. So we helped her establish more and more of her ability of making sense of what she was seeing and having a sense of quantity by actually playing with it – playing with the clay and playing with the quantities of water and different shaped glasses until she, as she put it, "got it." That was just basically hard work – we couldn't figure out an activity that would make that fun for her, but she enjoyed where it was leading her.

Some other things that we did on the visual spatial side was, because she got distracted at work and off task and she realized that her visual spatial was weaker, she started doing two things. One, when she wrote short stories or poems like she liked to do as a hobby, she tried to picture as though it were a screenplay or a drama play that she was writing and try to picture how this would play out. Starting out with one or two characters and very simple dramas, she gradually built up over a period of 6-8 months where she could actually picture things that she herself had written, and then she could picture things that she was reading. So that was helping with visualizing.

During this time, we were also having her, each morning, draw with little stick figures what her sequence of her day was going to be; what her activities or plans for the day was going to be in terms of thing she had to accomplish at work, things she was going to do for leisure activities, things she was going to do with her boyfriend, things she was going to do with her girlfriends, and rather than write them out as she had always done, she had put things in her hands – she was one of those people who had pen marks all over her hands because she wrote things down to remember things, we had her draw them with simple stick figures because she wasn't a very good artist, and have a visual road map and a time line of what she needed to accomplish and she would keep checking throughout the day, every half hour she would check her timeline and her visual roadmap




for the day to see where she was and where she had gotten off course. From that, the goal was to help her internalize – to actually create an internal road map that she could picture and check off every few minutes where she was. Over a period of about four months, she gradually was able to do this. She kept working back-and-forth between things she would say to herself and things she would picture. The picturing was the hard part and the saying it was the easy part. The picture actually provided the more cohesive guide for her. Naturally she was very motivated to do all of this but also required a fair amount of encouragement and she slipped and went backwards sometimes and gave up on it, but then came back and returned to it.

As she improved her visual spatial part of her thinking, she found that she was a better abstract thinker in general. She always saw herself as a tree person – someone who would get lost in the trees and she had an eye for detail and she retained that but she also became a better big picture thinker.

Also, I kept asking her when I met with her periodically, but also asked her to ask herself, to always ask the questions, “How does this all fit together? How do we put all of this into one big picture?” Whether it was a policy paper she was working on or a speech she was working on, what was the overall goal? What are the sub goals? Interestingly, even though she was always a good creative writer, she always had trouble with her essays because she had trouble doing that. But now when she had to do a policy paper or a policy piece, she actually created a visual design with boxes and arrows going from the main point to the supporting points and realized how important it was to see things, not just to think things or to think about the words.

Over about a year period of time, gradually her ability to stay on task, to follow through, to problem solve, to be less distracted, and to be more focused improved, as did her overall thinking and the overall quality of her relationships and the overall quality of her life because she was less frazzled and less hassled, less fragmented, and on task a little bit more. Interestingly, her emotional regulation improved too because she could understand her own feelings a little bit better because they are less chaotic and less “all over the place” because she could see the big pattern when she was upset with her boyfriend or upset with her own parents or upset with something at work, she could see how the different feelings she was having might be related to that core issue.

So she showed lots of progress and had really mastered the problems that she came in for after about a year and is a very good example of an adult applying the same approach that we are taking for children. So again in conclusion, adults of any age can do this, they have to identify which areas in the different exercises in areas we have



described in earlier discussions are vulnerable and where shoring up is necessary and then come up with activities that will be fun for them at their particular age and stage of life.

Thank you for joining us today and we will talk more next time.