9 Truths About ADHD & Intense Emotions



You're not imagining things; ADHD really is linked to more powerful, sudden, and unruly emotions. Learn to understand your feelings — and how to get them under control. By Thomas Brown, Ph.D.

TRUTH #1: Intense emotions are a hallmark of ADHD.
Few doctors factor in emotional challenges when making a diagnosis. Yet recent research reveals that individuals with ADHD have above-average difficulty with frustration, impatience, and excitability.

TRUTH #2: Emotional challenges begin in the brain.
Brain connectivity networks carrying emotional information are constrained and congested in individuals with ADHD.

TRUTH #3: Individuals with ADHD can be swept away by a single emotion — fast.
Hearing uncertainty in a friend's reaction, for example, may lead to an outsized display of self-defense — regardless of the words she said.

TRUTH #4: Significant social anxiety is a chronic ADHD difficulty.
More than one third of teens and adults with ADHD live with an exaggerated fear of being perceived as incompetent, unappealing, or uncool.

TRUTH #5: Emotions motivate action.
Brain imaging studies show that people with ADHD are less able to anticipate pleasure or register satisfaction with tasks that promise delayed rewards — meaning you're more likely to favor instant gratification.

TRUTH #6: People with ADHD can suffer from dysthymia, a mild but long-term form of depression.
It is often brought on by living with the frustrations, failures, negative feedback, and stresses of undiagnosed and/or untreated ADHD.

TRUTH #7: The ADHD brain doesn't always distinguish between dangerous threats and minor problems.
As a result, you may struggle to deal rationally and realistically with events that are stressful but not of grave concern.

TRUTH #8: Emotions are tied to memory.
Memory allows us to plan, monitor, and self-regulate. Many individuals with ADHD, though, have weak working memory — and are often disorganized, quick to anger, or prone to procrastinate as a result.

TRUTH #9: Treating the emotional challenges of ADHD requires a multimodal approach.
ADHD medication may improve the emotional networks in the brain, but supplemental talk therapy is also needed to help a person manage their fear or low self-esteem.

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