

ADHD Stuck

By Louise Levin

When you walk into a bookstore, you will notice an entire section dedicated to “self-help.” Though they may each treat a different ailment, either of the mind, the soul or the heart, they all cater to people who feel “stuck,” or at an impasse. It is disheartening to be in a job, relationship or state of mind that continues to degrade or refuses to mature.

A simple solution would be to quit, break up, see a doctor, or move on, from Point A to Point B. But what if you can't see point B? Where from here? This confusion is inevitable, though it has no place in modern society, which values the mover rather than the shaker, stoicism over emotionalism. It is no wonder that so many of us feel guilt, blame and shame when we become “stuck.”

Though everyone experiences confusion during transition, these periods are often few and far between, incidental impasses. Individuals with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), however, are continually in transition, always at an impasse. Prolonged attention to life's most basic commitments will inevitably result in a visceral “need” to flee. Their ADHD will begin to ask those questions that have become all too familiar, and expected in a time of change: What are you doing? What happens when I get bored with all of this? This rapid cycling is exhausting, and both the ADHD individuals and those around them get caught in the vortex.

On a good day, this is wonderful, these individuals are active in their communities, both seeking and finding intellectual stimulation. They are charming, creative thinkers and often provocative speakers that can easily stimulate others to action; they are, in short, individuals with an exceptional capacity for leadership. When it comes to the things that make up the basic framework of life, however—steady jobs and relationships— an ADHD individual will feel forever stuck between social responsibilities and individual desires/impulses.

ADHD individuals often cope with their frustrating cycles by supporting an inordinate amount of guilt, shame and/or impotence. They may feel like they can't ever change for the long-term, so why keep trying? This negative self-talk is one of two forces at work when an ADHD individual becomes stuck. These feelings are further exacerbated by external slights or assaults on the ADHD personality; snarky comments from coworkers, passive aggressive loved ones or critical friends all can contribute to the dirt that continues to cloud one's vision and self-esteem when “stuck” once again.

The second force at play is the emotional and physical paralysis that accompanies an ADHD individual's recurring states of transition. Feelings of “loss” accompany each transitional moment, whether perceived or real. This can be the loss of a lifestyle, personal goal, relationship, job, or any vision that one had of the future. This process

follows a distinctive pattern, not unlike the Kubler-Ross “mourning process,” which outlines 4 emotional states that one must acknowledge and surmount prior to the ultimate acceptance of a loss. The ADHD personality tends to get lost in one or all of these stages at times, never reaching the final stage, “acceptance,” or when you become “unstuck” or “out of the woods, and able to see the forest for the trees.

One can spend a very long time being “stuck” in any one of these steps. An ADHD individual may spend months, years or a lifetime in a negative cycle, fostered by the intense emotions that accompany each basic step. Through knowledge of each stage and the consequent realization that one is not alone in personal upheaval, one can learn ways to effectively “short-circuit,” or truncate the time spent within each step.

There are a few rudimentary ways that can help an ADHD individual to practice good mental hygiene when they are stuck. One must, first and foremost, become informed about his or her condition. Because the state of being stuck is chronic, an ADHD individual must realize that it will inevitably happen again; why work to delay the inevitable? This is simply a drain on one’s energy.

Consider solutions instead of problems, and learn to verbalize “can’s” rather than “cant’s.” Begin to anticipate these moments with calm determination, rather than confronting them with hysterical, and completely misguided, surprise. Rather than succumbing to the chaos and craziness, instead of thinking “I’m going mad,” “I can’t handle it,” “I’ll never survive this,” work at refocusing and regaining control over your internal conversation. The brain tends to believe what our mouths articulate.

The assistance of a therapist or life coach can prove useful to an ADHD individual striving to maintain long-term control over the unique challenges and symptoms associated with ADHD. One also can identify the presence of co-morbidities, or accompanying behavioral disorders, such as anxiety or depression, which may be keeping you “stuck.” Medication may also prove helpful, though the proper course of treatment is ultimately the decision of the ADHD individual alone.