

How are ADHD and executive functioning related?

By: Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D.

Old Idea: ADHD is just inability to pay attention and often being too restless.

New Idea: ADHD involves problems with setting priorities, getting organized and getting started; sustaining attention and effort, managing alertness and emotions; utilizing working memory and other aspects of the brain's self-management system, its "executive functions."

For decades **ADHD was seen as just a problem of little kids** who couldn't sit still, wouldn't shut up, and were driving parents and teachers nuts. Increasingly now ADHD is being understood as a **problem of the brain's self-management system**, its "executive functions" which affects not just little kids, but also many teenagers and adults.

Executive functions involve **getting organized and started** on necessary tasks, **sustaining focus** and effort for work, **managing alertness** and emotional interference, **utilizing short-term working memory**, and **managing one's actions** without excessive impulsivity. These executive functions are most effectively assessed not by neuropsychological tests, but by careful evaluation of how the child or adult self-manages tasks and interactions of everyday life compared to others of similar age.



About the Author

Thomas E. Brown earned his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Yale University and served on the Yale faculty for 25 years. He is now Director of the Brown Clinic for Attention and Related Disorders in Manhattan Beach, CA, is an elected Fellow of the American Psychological Association, and has published numerous articles and six books on ADHD. His website is www.BrownADHDclinic.com

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