

# Congratulations, you have ADD!

By Mike Murray

*The author describes his history after being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), including a brief discussion of what the disorder is, how he came to be diagnosed as having it, and how he has come to live in harmony with, and even embrace, ADD. Murray concludes by offering helpful hints for accommodating the disorder that have helped him lead a fulfilling and successful career in technical communications.*

**Important Disclaimer - Please Read This:** The following information is not intended to provide any type of professional advice nor diagnostic service, but rather describes my personal experiences with ADD, actions that have worked for me in countering its negative affects, some actions that others have taken that are worth trying in my opinion, and how I've used positive affects to my advantage. If you have any concerns about ADD or other health issues, please consult a qualified health care professional in your community.

You say you have Attention Deficit Disorder? Wow, that's great! Congratulations!

No, I haven't lost my mind – at least not yet. A positive attitude is a tool I've learned to use as a coping mechanism for dealing with some of the challenges that life hurls my way. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's back up and establish what Attention Deficit Disorder is from my perspective, how I came to realize I have it, and a little about how I came to deal with it. Having established that foundation for discussion, I'll let you in on ways not only of dealing with the disorder, but capitalizing on its positive traits – and there are several. That's the good news, which is really what this paper is all about.

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*I dwell in possibilities.*

Emily Dickinson (diagnosed with ADD)

## THE DEFINITION

Let's begin by clarifying a question that sometimes confused me in my quest to become educated about my condition, "What's the difference between ADD and ADHD?" The difference is mainly one of terminology, which can be confusing at times. The "official" clinical diagnosis is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or AD/HD (sometimes just ADHD). My understanding is that ADD can (obviously) stay with a person into adulthood. Sometimes the "Hyperactivity" component stays as well, but most often that piece diminishes with

maturity. Whether it's referred to as ADD or AD/HD (or ADHD), it's all basically the same thing.

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*Imagination is more important than knowledge.*

Albert Einstein (diagnosed with ADD)

## THE DIAGNOSIS

### Behaviors

ADD is a complex disorder, the exact nature and severity of which varies from person to person. Some of the characteristics associated with ADD, such as distractibility, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, are things that can happen to anybody at various times. The difference is that people with ADD have consistently displayed these symptoms and others for many years as opposed to occasionally. In addition, these behaviors can create a real handicap in two or more areas of a person's life (e.g., home, work, or social settings). ADD usually persists throughout a person's lifetime.

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*You're only given a little spark of madness. You mustn't lose it.*

Robin Williams (diagnosed with ADD)

### Checklists

A popular method of determining whether ADD may be a factor in your behavior is to examine a general adult ADD checklist to further define your symptoms. In conjunction with other diagnostic techniques, the world-renowned ADD researcher, Daniel G. Amen, MD, uses a checklist that you can find on the "One ADD Place" Web site at [www.oneaddplace.com/addcheck.htm](http://www.oneaddplace.com/addcheck.htm). While this is not a tool you should use to make a final diagnosis, it *can* help you determine whether it is appropriate to follow up with an experienced professional.

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*Obstacles cannot crush me. Every obstacle yields to stern resolve. He who is fixed to a star does not change his mind.*

Leonardo DaVinci, Notebooks (diagnosed with ADD)

### Personal History

According to what I've been told, what I've read, and what I've experienced over the years, there is an

excellent probability that ADD is hereditary. After spending most of my life feeling that something “wasn’t right” with me, a very insightful counselor suddenly said to me after numerous sessions, “You have ADD!” It was a euphoric moment for both of us. At long last, I could put a label on the “something” that had been troubling me my whole life!

I was astonished several years later when I was discussing my father’s Parkinson’s Disease with my stepmother. At one point in the conversation, she casually mentioned something about his ADD. I immediately and rapidly started going through a series of emotions beginning with astonishment, followed by feelings of vindication, and finally by anger that I was not told about it years beforehand. Of course neither my stepmother nor father realized that the condition was hereditary, so I couldn’t stay angry long. If you suspect you might have ADD, the first thing you *must* do is make a beeline for your immediate family and find out if anyone before you has ADD. It could save you a lot of time and frustration and result in a higher quality of life sooner than later.

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*We need men who can dream of things that never were.*  
John F. Kennedy (diagnosed with ADD)

## THE WAYS TO COPE

I’ll address specific circumstances in a moment, but first I’d like to share the more general methods I’ve adopted that have successfully helped me cope with ADD and yes even *embrace it*. Some people have even stated with conviction that, given a choice and knowing what they know now, they would *keep* their ADD! It makes them what they are today.

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*The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.*

Abraham Lincoln (diagnosed with ADD)

### Positive ADD Characteristics

Here is the great news! In addition to characteristics that are generally considered to be “less than positive,” ADD definitely has some *very positive* characteristics. Interestingly, a few of them can also be thought of as being less than positive (e.g., sensitivity, hyperfocus, and spontaneity). Some of the positive characteristics that I *choose* to dwell on include endless energy, great imagination, creativity, humor, ahead of “establishment” thinking, creative thinking and problem solving, and a great passion for interests.

A great resource for identifying and relating to positive ADD characteristics is the “Hunters, Explorers and

Dreamers...Different Ways to View Your ADD Traits” Web site at <http://borntoexplore.org/addexp~1.htm>. The site describes alternative models of ADD (e.g., learner, thinker, and doer) that have been identified by experts and parents who discover they would have been labeled ADD if they were children in the 1990s.

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*Do not follow where the path may lead...Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.*

Robert Frost (diagnosed with ADD)

### Positive Attitude

Thinking positively about having ADD is especially important because ADD is so often a descriptive label that focuses on a narrow set of negative traits. You may have noticed in “Positive ADD Characteristics” that I said I *choose* to dwell on positive things. Know this if you know or believe nothing else – having a positive attitude rather than a negative one is *most definitely* a choice! There was a time in my life not so many years ago that I allowed my emotions to flow wherever they wanted to go. Unfortunately, I found it easier to be negative than positive. One day, I decided I wasn’t going to live that way any more. I was tired of feeling down and depressed. I wanted to feel better about myself and about life. I made a choice to change things.

Now, making a decision to be a positive person and following through on it are two very different things. For me, the journey was at times difficult as I worked every day to see my world and everything in it in a positive light. It wasn’t long, however, before I realized that maintaining my positive attitude was becoming easier and more automatic every day. Today, I’m thrilled to report that I am a positive person – not just in my own opinion, but the opinion of many of my friends and business associates. I sure am glad I made that decision!

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*Imagination rules the world.*

Napoleon I (diagnosed with ADD)

### Humor

One of the techniques I chose to support my developing positive attitude was to establish a humorous outlook on my life in general and my disorder in particular. In my opinion, which some believe is highly suspect in this instance, I think the funniest moments can come from taking literally some of the things people say (e.g., “Call me a taxi.” “Okay, you’re a taxi!”) I also enjoy puns. (“Why did the three little pigs leave home?” “Because their father was such a boar.”) I realize my kind of humor may have a limited audience, so instead I

offer “Funny Stories About Life With ADD” at <http://add.about.com/cs/humor/a/humor.htm>. Following is just one offering from that Web site.

“I was moving, so I was packing my books up (a day’s work in itself). I felt thirsty so I reached in the fridge for a Coke. Then I heard a clink when the Coke I had in my hand hit the one I was reaching for.”

There is a big different between ridiculing yourself and enjoying the humor in life. Choose to enjoy life and take some of the lesser consequences of ADD with a grain of salt. As the expression goes, “There are only two rules. Rule number one is ‘Don’t sweat the small stuff.’ Rule number two is ‘It’s all small stuff.’” I agree.

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*The brain is a wonderful organ. It starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get into the office.*

Robert Frost (diagnosed with ADD)

## THE CLUTTER

For many people with ADD, the biggest challenge is dealing with clutter, both physical and mental. We don’t function well in a cluttered environment. For the longest time, I thought that just meant my physical environment, which had long been obvious to me. What I am only recently realizing is that my *mental* environment can be every bit as difficult to deal with as a physical environment – if not *more* so.

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*If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or faraway.*

Henry David Thoreau (diagnosed with ADD)

## Physical

The only thing worse than living and working in a physically cluttered environment is *cleaning it up*. Talk about procrastination (another ADD characteristic)! I have a book about dealing with clutter somewhere at home, but I can’t find it! Sadly, this isn’t a joke – it’s true! The best recommendation I can make is to dedicate a Saturday or even an entire weekend to nothing but organizing and eliminating the clutter in your office area. Don’t turn on a radio. Don’t check your e-mail. Close the door so nobody will know you are there. If necessary, unplug your phone. But most importantly, *show up!* One of the easiest things I can do is come up with reasons not to begin a difficult or unsavory task. Be strong and firm with yourself, and make the first step by simply showing up. For

additional ideas regarding how to deal with physical clutter, go to the “Clutter and Organizing Links” Web site at

[http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links\\_categories\\_clutter.html#clutter](http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories_clutter.html#clutter).

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*The desk, where is it – it's gotta be near...  
I'll just lift up these papers – I swear it's right here!  
I'm a left-brained person (I tell myself)...  
So organized and neat – no mess on my shelves!  
Take time, don't panic, relax, don't move,  
In no time at all you'll be in the groove.  
Grace West, 1994 (diagnosed with ADD)*

## Mental

After many years of living with my ADD, I am only just recently realizing something very important: Mental clutter can be every bit as debilitating as physical clutter! You’ll recall that early on in this paper (“Positive ADD Characteristics”) I listed “a great passion for interests” as “a positive characteristic that I *choose* to dwell on.” I also said that some positive characteristics can fall into a “not so positive” category depending upon how you handle them. Well, I have numerous interests, and I want to be perfect in all of them.

I remember once talking with the counselor who originally diagnosed my ADD. I was discussing my sleep difficulties (*another* ADD characteristic) and remember stating that I felt sleep was a waste of time and that I wish I never had to. She asked me what I would do if I never had to sleep. After I rattled off my extensive list, she asked me, “Do you realize that *two* people couldn’t do all that in their lifetimes?”

Over time, I’ve adjusted to not being able to do everything I’d like to do, but I *still* do too much. The thing I’ve come to realize is that only three or four “outside” interests can be “too much” when you have “a great passion for your interests.” I’m working now to find a better balance in my life between my outside interests, my career, and my family. I’m presently in my third year as president of the Orlando chapter; I love to announce sports as “The Voice of Youth Basketball of America,” “The Voice of the Panthers” at Dr. Phillips High School in Orlando, and backup announcer at Rollins College in Orlando; love surfing the Internet and reading science magazines; and enjoy documenting boxes full of paperwork in building and researching my family tree. There are other smaller interests too numerous to mention, and I realize they are adding way too much to my mental clutter. It’s time to back off!

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*Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs.*

Henry Ford (diagnosed with ADD)

## THE WORK ACCOMMODATIONS

One of the most difficult questions for a person with ADD to answer is, "Should I tell my boss?" Unfortunately (or fortunately), there is not one "yes" or "no" answer for everyone. The answer has to be "It depends on your boss." I'm in a "good place" right now. I've proven my abilities to my manager, have some successful projects under my belt, and she and my peers and customers respect me. I have taken the calculated risk of telling her about my ADD, and all is well. (She still wants me!) Because I proved myself first, she knows I won't use ADD as an excuse, and she knows it's not a detriment to my work.

If your ADD is severe enough that you absolutely must have special work accommodations, you may have no choice but to reveal yourself sooner. The main thing to know is that it has to be a personal choice on your part. You know yourself, your circumstances, your boss, and your company's culture better than anyone else, so the decision is yours alone. The "ADD/ADHD Categorized Links Pages" Web site, "Workplace" link at [http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links\\_categories.htm#work](http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories.htm#work) contains some marvelous information that could help you deal with workplace issues, including information about the "Americans with Disabilities Act" and your workplace accommodation entitlements under the act.

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*The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.*

Eleanor Roosevelt (diagnosed with ADD)

## THE EDUCATION

The very best thing you can do for yourself once you've been diagnosed as having ADD is to become educated about your lifelong friend. (Note the positive attitude!) In "The References" section, I have included just a few of the terrific resources that I use regularly in my journey with my pal ADD. There is much more I could have discussed in this paper, things like tips for organizing your day and managing your time. I chose to cover the topics that have the most impact for me in my own continuing education, the ones I know the most about because I have lived them. The rest of your education is up to you. Of course, the *good* news is you have ADD!

*Congratulations!*

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*When one door closes another door opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us.*

Alexander Graham Bell (diagnosed with ADD)

### Dedication

I dedicate this paper to Ron Salomon, a friend I've never met. Keep smiling Ron as you embrace your ADD.

## REFERENCES

"ADD 101" Web site ("What Every Beginner in ADD Needs to Know")

[http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/add\\_101.htm](http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/add_101.htm)

"ADD/ADHD Categorized Links Pages" Web site, including:

Law

Marriage and Relationships

Newsgroups

Online Forums

Organizing

Workplace

...and a whole lot more!

[http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links\\_categories.htm#work](http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories.htm#work)

ADDitude magazine, P.O. Box 500, Missouri City, TX 77459-9904

<http://www.additudemag.com>

Attention Deficit Disorder Association, P.O. Box 543, Pottstown, PA 19464

<http://www.add.org>.

"Clutter and Organizing Links" Web site

[http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links\\_categories\\_clutter.html#clutter](http://user.cybrzn.com/~kenyonck/add/Links/links_categories_clutter.html#clutter)

"Hunters, Explorers and Dreamers..."

Different Ways to View Your ADD Traits" Web site

<http://borntoexplore.org/addexp~1.htm>

Meetups (group meetings in your area of the world)

<http://adultadd.meetup.com/>

"Resources for Adults with ADD" Web site

<http://add.about.com/cs/foradults/index.htm>

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