

ADHD
AWARENESS MONTH
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ADHD MYTHS AND FACTS
KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Myth: People with ADHD just can't concentrate

Fact: Individuals with ADHD can concentrate when they are interested in or intrigued by what they are doing.

By ADHD Coaches Organization, Inc.

We're sure you've heard the jokes, or have seen the memes, relating ADHD to a verbal outburst: "Hey, look! A squirrel!" In Disney's 2009 animated movie *Up*, a dog named Dug is an example of high distractibility. So many things vie for this dog's attention, and poor Dug ends up being distracted whenever a new option – or squirrel – crosses his path. This punchline is commonly used as shorthand to illustrate the high level of distractibility in people, which leads many to believe that individuals with ADHD simply cannot concentrate.

While it is true that people with ADHD can be easily distractible and impulsive, someone with ADHD can focus intently on an activity.

People with ADHD can concentrate when they are interested in or intrigued by what they are doing. New, unusual, or exciting things capture their interest, and their attention is directed there. When someone has ADHD, they have a different mental and emotional system of evaluating what to do and when to do it. Mostly, they prioritize tasks according to their emotional importance.¹

Individuals with ADHD more easily concentrate on those things that are challenging, rewarding, and fast-moving.

The interest-based approach to attention allows "Squirrel" moments to happen because a more exciting thing has grabbed their attention. The problem isn't a lack of attention, but instead, difficulty sustaining and regulating attention – especially for tasks that are found to be mundane or boring.

It is common, however, for individuals with ADHD to talk about intense moments of concentration, called **hyperfocus, where they are completely absorbed in activities that interest them.** While in hyperfocus, people may become oblivious to everything around them. This concentration can be so intense that an individual loses track of time, other chores, or the surrounding environment.²

A coaching client once explained, "I don't even know when I'm in hyperfocus. I realize that I have been, though, when I can barely move because my bladder is so full. I was concentrating so hard that I forgot to use the bathroom!"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



ACO is a professional membership organization for ADHD coaches. Because we know that good coaching definitely helps people to improve their personal and professional lives, we are committed to serving as a resource for ADHD coaches, for our members and for the public. If you are looking for an ADHD coach, visit our website at <https://www.adhdcoaches.org/find-a-coach>

RESOURCES

¹Rubia K. (2018). Cognitive Neuroscience of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Its Clinical Translation. *Frontiers in human neuroscience*, 12, 100. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2018.00100

²Ozel-Kizil, E. T., Kokurcan, A., Aksoy, U. M., Biçer-Kanat, B., Sakarya, D., Bastug, G., ... & Oncü, B. (2014). P. 7. b. 005 Hyperfocusing as a dimension of adult ADHD. *European Neuropsychopharmacology*, 24, S707-S708