Another kind of ADD

I was talking with a colleague recently about a person who was very attention seeking. He joked that maybe she has “attention deficit disorder.” It got me thinking about why some people need more attention than others and how we handle people who demand a lot from us. I don’t actually think there is one root cause for why some people are attention seeking. I think a large part of it is simply temperament. Some of us are born entertainers and some of us would prefer to stay out of the limelight. We then have a series of interpersonal experiences that shape us further in one direction or another. Some people were not given a lot of attention from their families and so they had to be dramatic to get any attention at all, while for others, they got lots of positive attention for being entertaining and they thrived on that. For whatever reason, some folks need more attention than others. The real problem lies in how we handle these “ADD” folks. Whether it’s a family member or teacher or other professional caregiver, what I see time and again is an ineffective pattern emerge. The attention seeking person is so demanding that whenever they are not hounding us, we ignore them, thinking that *finally* all is good and we have a break. However, this ultimately makes them feel deprived and, in response, they act out (often in a demanding way) to get our attention. Then we are forced to respond, albeit in an angry way. However, since they do get the attention they crave, they are actually rewarded for being demanding. Eventually they feel “full” and back off a little and, relieved of demands, we back off as well. And…the cycle repeats. I see this especially around the holidays, when we are all exceptionally busy trying to get our own stuff done. I think this is one of the reasons I see so many relationship crises occur during the holidays. So, this season think about how to shift the negative pattern into a more positive one. First, try to slow down and give lots of attention *before* someone has a breakdown. Fill their “attention cup” and, once satisfied, you can move on to do what you need to do and, hopefully, avoid a crisis. Also, try to give lots of attention for behaviors you actually want to encourage, i.e. when they are being calm or working/playing independently, being patient, reasonable or whatever else you want to encourage. Then you are reinforcing the behaviors you want to instill rather than the ones you are trying to discourage and, hopefully, you can avoid the holiday crises that typically occur with ADD folks.



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