

PARENT ADHD UNMASKED

by Dan Shapiro, MD

IT'S BEEN SAID: "Time is what keeps everything from happening all at once." And: "Space is what keeps everything from happening to me!" If that's true, then what if time and space disappear? *Yikes!*

Well, that's what's happening. COVID-19 has caused a secondary pandemic of TSDD; that is, Time and Space Deficit Disorder. Parents are doing too many jobs, all at once and all from home.

Are you working from your bedroom? Functioning as a distance-learning teaching assistant? Taking care of other kids? Managing relationships? Cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and handling other household tasks? Taking care of yourself?

It's hard enough to multitask under ordinary conditions. A pandemic makes everything even harder.

Now, what if, on top of all that, a parent has their own problems with ADHD and executive dysfunction? In my own practice, many parents who had been able to tread water before are drowning now.

Sure, before COVID hit, you might have had a little distractibility, some glitches with time management, and minor issues with planning and organization. But you were able to compensate well enough. Or you got by with some good old-fashioned denial. But now, under these extraordinary circumstances, your ADHD has been unmasked. It matters more.

There's a difference between normal human variation and disorder. Many people have a degree of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and distractibility, but circumstances are such that there's no significant impairment. They don't have ADHD. However, impairment depends upon biology and environment.

For example, when the pollen count is down, an allergic person can have no symptoms at all. But when the pollen count goes up, then it all begins; sneezing and wheezing and itching—even a trip to the emergency room. Would you refuse to consider a diagnosis of allergy or reject an antihistamine just because you had no symptoms in the winter? Of course not.

So, if you are currently struggling with distractibility and impulsivity, consider the possibility that things are harder than they need to be because you have undiagnosed or undertreated ADHD, unmasked by pandemic stress. Think about this, especially if you've had ADHD symptoms before or a strong family history of ADHD. Life is hard enough with a pandemic. A pandemic is hard enough without untreated ADHD. **A**

Dan Shapiro, MD, is a developmental-behavioral pediatrician in Rockville, Maryland. He is the author of *Parent Child Journey: An Individualized Approach to Raising Your Challenging Child* and *Parent Child Excursions: ADHD, Anxiety, and Autism*. He developed the *ParentChildJourney.com* parent group-training program. Watch Dr. Shapiro's video seminar, *Supporting Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond*.

