

ADHD in the Workplace: Time Blindness

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Over recent years, there has been an emerging trend of adults being diagnosed with ADHD. Teachers and specialists are not exempt from this trend, and more and more are referring themselves to the NSTU's Early Intervention Program (EIP) for support with managing their symptoms at work.

There are many symptoms of ADHD which can create challenges for adults in both their personal and professional lives. One such symptom is known as "time blindness". Time blindness refers to difficulty managing time and perceiving the passing of time. In other words, someone who experiences time blindness is more likely to lose track of time, miss deadlines, arrive late to events, or overestimate or underestimate how long it will take to complete a task.

It is important to note that time blindness is not an intentional disregard for time. Research suggests that time blindness is a sensory issue which causes some neurodiverse brains to have difficulty unconsciously measuring the passing of time. It has been theorized that this is caused by difficulty integrating sensory input, such as light levels and pulse rate, to mark the passing of time.

In some contexts, time blindness is a strength. It can allow an individual to hyperfocus on a task, ignoring external stimuli and demonstrating a high level of attention to detail. An hour may pass in what feels like only a few minutes, allowing a person to get a lot of work done in what feels like very little time to them. However, time blindness can also be detrimental in certain contexts. For example, an employee may underestimate how long it will take them to complete a work task, causing them to miss an important deadline. Or they might arrive late to a meeting because they lost track of time working on another task.

For many adults with ADHD, this may sound familiar. Luckily, there are some strategies and accommodations that can address the functional deficits caused by time blindness. Below are a few ideas that may be helpful to try implementing into your workday.

1. Increase dopamine

Research suggests a link between time blindness and dopamine deficits associated with ADHD. While some individuals with diagnosed ADHD may be prescribed stimulant medication which increase dopamine levels, there are also other ways to incorporate dopamine boosts into your workday. Eating foods rich with vitamin B6 (such as bananas, leafy greens, and chickpeas), drinking caffeine (in moderation), exposure to sunlight, and exercising are all ways to increase your dopamine levels. Incorporating these foods into your lunch or recess snack or getting outside to briskly walk a few laps around the school grounds at lunch are quick yet effective ways of boosting your dopamine while at work.

2. Time logging

Do you find yourself frequently underestimating how long it will take you to do your work? Start timing yourself for tasks where having an accurate perception of time is important. Set a timer when you sit down to start the task and stop it when you finish or take a break. Record how long you spend on the task in a note in your phone or in a spreadsheet. Eventually, you will have a reference to guide how long you actually spend on a given task, which can help with realistically scheduling your time in the future.

3. Give yourself buffer time

Even if you think you know how long it will take you to complete a task, adding extra time allows wiggle room for incorrect estimations, distractions, or interruptions. For example, if you think it will take you 20 minutes to catch up on emails at the end of the school day, schedule 30-45 minutes for this task. Buffer time may help prevent you from overscheduling yourself and having to work late or compromise the quality of your work.

4. Use clocks, timers, and alarms

Having a clock or timer directly in your line of vision can help improve your awareness of time. If the clock in your classroom is across the room or otherwise hard to see from your desk, put one on your desk to serve as a visual cue, maybe you would be better served by a visual timer to track how long you've spent on a task and how much time is remaining. If you tend



to lose track of time when teaching from elsewhere in your space, you can pre-set alarms to go off on your computer or smart watch 5-minutes before the end of each class.

5. Listen to music

Music can serve as an external cue for the passing of time, which may help you to more accurately gauge how much time has passed while working on a task. It can also provide a dopamine boost to help compensate for lower dopamine levels in people with ADHD.

Still struggling with time blindness or other symptoms of ADHD? The EIP is here to help! The NSTU's Early Intervention Program is available to members who are working or on medical leave and are experiencing an illness or injury. More info: visit nstuinsurance.ca. To self-refer, please email nurse@nstu.ca or call 1-800-565-6788.

References and further reading

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