

Linda Roggli:

It's October 2020, and even in the midst of a crazy year, it's still ADHD Awareness Month. And we're still here with TADD Talks from ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, nine minute, short, pithy soundbites on living with adult ADHD. Stay tuned, here it comes.

Renee Crook:

Hello and welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. I'm Renee Crook, ADHD coach, speaker, consultant, and facilitator at ADDED Perspective Coaching. I'm also the chair of Virtual Support Programs, a board member, and a support group facilitator for ADDA, the Attention Deficit Disorder Association, who's hosting all of these amazing TADD Talks during ADHD Awareness Month

Renee Crook:

Today I'd like to share my thoughts with you about rejection sensitivity. What is rejection sensitivity and rejection sensitive dysphoria? Rejection sensitive dysphoria is the more extreme manifestation and one of the most disruptive experiences related to emotional dysregulation for those of us with ADHD. Many people describe it as a painful experience, both physically and emotionally. There can be a deep sense of dread, shame, overwhelm, fear, even nausea, and sadness preceding or following a real or perceived rejection, criticism, teasing, or judgment.

Renee Crook:

It's very under-researched and often misunderstood and quite pervasive in adults with ADHD. The most confounding part of this is it's not even in the DSM-5 (Diagnostic & Statistical Manual Version 5) but that's because emotional dysregulation is also not in the DSM, despite emotional dysregulation being one of the most devastating and challenging executive function related symptoms of ADHD.

Renee Crook:

Rejection sensitivity, or the emotional response that feeds the dysphoria, is connected to experiences of rejection where individuals feel as though someone has withdrawn or lessened affection, love, respect, approval, and even can be impacted with strangers that they are perceived as not being liked. You're more prone to quick shifts in mood that are triggered by a specific comment—verbally or in writing—it could be related to the tone of someone's voice, their body language, or even a look may be interpreted as a slight or in some way doesn't match an expectation (that most of us don't even know we had) until we're reacting and don't really understand why.

Renee Crook:

What does it look like when it's happening? Well, it can be manifested externally in outbursts of anger, rage, sometimes it's described as looking like a temper tantrum because its origins or cause are not usually apparent or clear to the person outside, or if the person is not familiar with you or your common pain points, it can just seem like an over-reaction. It could show up as defensiveness in the form of arguing or stating how you've been wronged or why you did what you did or said what you said. We could also say hurtful things because, you know, in this moment, we're feeling threatened, so we may defend or fight back verbally.

Renee Crook:

Another way it can manifest is internally, meaning we turn our hurtful, shame-based self-talk inward on ourselves. Those of us who do this often feel that we are the cause of all the bad things that are happening around us. We are too much, we're too sensitive, too emotional, too needy, not lovable, so we spend so much energy trying to figure out how to avoid this. So we may develop behaviors of people pleasing, for example, to try to mitigate as much possible criticism, judgment, or any challenges that could be associated with that. It can show up as perfectionism for so many of us. If I cover all the possible bases, then maybe there's no way that anything negative can be said about anything I say or do, so we work to perfect—or be perfect. The problem is, we can rarely have an accurate perception of what “perfect” actually is or means. We often have extremely unreasonable expectations of ourselves and others. It's a painful and often unattainable moving target.

Renee Crook:

So many of us deal with this painful experience—or some of us—may deal with this painful experience by shutting down and isolating, turning inward on ourselves, removing ourselves from risk. We may turn down social invitations because the fear of not being included or being laughed at is just not worth the risk. If it's severe enough and pervasive enough it can actually become a social anxiety, so it's important to pay attention to it and figure out how to manage it.

Renee Crook:

The signs and symptoms—or experiences described here with rejection sensitivity are also similar to those found in other diagnoses like PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), social anxiety disorder, depression, and borderline personality disorder, so it's important to know that it might be related to those, but for most ADHDers, it comes with the territory for sure.

Renee Crook:

Well, what can I do about this? The first thing to do is have some compassion for yourself and know that you are really feeling the things you are feeling, as deeply and strongly as you are feeling them. You are likely not exaggerating, even though others may believe you are . . . they just don't understand this aspect of ADHD. Also knowing you're not alone in this challenge can be very helpful in normalizing the difficulties you face in handling it.

Renee Crook:

But when it's happening, you will need to stop . . . You'll need to slow down and stop this runaway train—that's your emotional regulation right now—and you're gonna need to just BREATHE! Really . . . just breathe. Take some slow deep breaths: counting slowly in for the count of 7, holding it for the count of 7, and then breathing out for the count of 11, called 7-11 breathing. Repeat this slowly and carefully until you begin to be able to think again. You have possibly been experiencing an amygdala hijack. That is your fight, flight, or freeze brain. You need to get your thinking, planning, decision-making brain (your prefrontal cortex), and your feeling and empathy brain back online. You were “threatened” (your brain thought so anyway) so now you need it to know that you're safe. You can handle the threat and you will be okay.

Renee Crook:

Paying attention to what you're saying to yourself in the experience—it's feeding this hijack—so once you're calm, hopefully, you can reflect back on what preceded all of this and start to figure out what pushed your buttons. What was said or done by the other individual or individuals? What did you hear in what they said? Meaning: what did you believe they meant by it? Start to pay attention to those statements. We generally have underlying beliefs, fears, and self-talk that cause us to react instead of respond. With support, you can often work to identify, understand, and manage many of these challenges.

Renee Crook:

And that's today's TADD Talk about rejection sensitivity. I'm Renee Crook, owner and principal coach at ADDED Perspective Coaching. It's been great being with you today. There is so much more to this and it's a specialty area of mine. I've worked with many individual clients around this challenge and its impact in their lives. I am now starting a coaching group specifically targeted to emotional dysregulation, self-talk, mindset, and rejection sensitivity because so many people have been deeply impacted by rejection sensitivity.

Renee Crook:

If you want more information about me or my work with ADHD adults, you can find me online at www.ADDEDperspectivecoaching.com. That's A-D-D-E-D perspectivecoaching.com. Or you can email me at renee.crook@outlook.com. Renee: R-E-N-E-E (dot) C-R-O-O-K at outlook.com. Take care and goodbye for now.

Linda Roggli:

Okay, that's today's ADHD wisdom. Much more to come. And why not join us for the Virtual 2020 International ADHD Conference coming up in November? Details at ADD.org. And while you're at it, why not join ADDA? It's a great investment in your ADHD life.