

Intro ([00:00](#)):

If it's October (which it is) then it must be ADHD Awareness Month (which it is) and it's ADHD Awareness Month, it must be time for TADD talks from ADDA. They're kind of like TED talks but shorter, snappier, ADHD-friendly, if you will. And this year they're all about executive function. You know ...that front part of our ADHD brains that helps us plan and prioritize and remember what we're doing and follow through. Or not. So here's your chance to hear from 31 different experts. It's just another way ADDA supports adults with ADHD. Let's listen in..

Dr. Olivardia ([00:38](#)):

Hello and welcome to TADD Talks with ADDA. I'm Dr. Roberto Olivardia, clinical psychologist coming to you from Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts. I am filled with emotion that ADDA invited me to be with you today to talk about ADHD in emotion. You're too sensitive, just get over it. You don't show enough emotion. Calm down phrases that many with ADHD have likely heard many times throughout their emotional lives. As someone with adhd, I can certainly attest to the experience of being an emotional person. It's just part of my dna. It was apparent to me at a young age that I didn't wear emotions on my sleeve. I wore them on my skin. I distinctly remember the first time I saw a homeless person when I was four years old. My mother and I were on the Boston Common and I asked her why this man had all of these belongings in a shopping cart.

Dr. Olivardia ([01:32](#)):

Why he looks like he hadn't showered in a long time. She explained to me he was in a very sad situation. He was homeless, he didn't have a family. Well, this just completely blew my mind. What do you mean he doesn't have a family? What do you mean he doesn't have a home? Where does he sleep? And she explained to me the very true and harsh reality. I just completely broke down. I was inconsolable. The idea that someone wouldn't have a house to live in or have people around him or her to love them just was too much for my four year old brain. I went home and I remember telling my older siblings, Do you know that there are people that don't have homes that that are homeless? And although they were incredibly empathetic about it, they weren't sobbing in the way that I was.

Dr. Olivardia ([02:20](#)):

It was very clear that these emotions were something that really could take over me. It turns out that people with adhd, we have sensitive nervous systems. When things hit that radar, they can take our attention completely. Now, sometimes this could be good things, like if we're seeing a great movie or social event, it can absorb us and we're really in it and feel really present. But sometimes it could also be the vortex of anxiety, sadness, anger, and rejection that gets a little bit sticky. When things stick, they can require the industrial style goo be gone to deal with. It turns out that emotional regulation is an executive function, but was validating to read in the literature is this newer understanding that aside from time management organization and prioritization, it makes sense that regulating our emotions is also something that requires a lot of executive control.

Dr. Olivardia ([03:20](#)):

Dr. Russell Barkley explains this very well in his research and lectures when he talks about that people with adhd, it's not so much that we might feel more, but we might have a harder time either suppressing our emotions or more difficulty with soothing and self-regulating those emotions. We can be impulsive and impatient with our emotions. It may take a little bit more time to sort of let it flow through us. While this is very true, while cotton landow in 2004 conducted a study of 49 boys between

the ages of six to 11 with and without adhd, the goal was to really look at and test their emotion regulation during a peer competition in which they were made to be frustrated. Half of all the boys in each group were instructed to hide their feelings if they became upset during the competition. So they tested for behavioral inhibition both before and after the competitive task.

Dr. Olivardia ([04:19](#)):

Well, not surprisingly, the boys with ADHD displayed greater disinhibition and were less effective at emotion regulation than their comparison subjects. In fact, the ADHD boys were unsuccessful in masking their emotions even when instructed to do so. This was very validating research. Therefore, when we work with people with adhd, we have to understand it can be hard to distract ourselves from a bad mood. Well, great. I mean, a lot of times we have an easy time to distract ourselves and be distracted from things, but here's something that we wish we could be easily distracted from and it could be difficult. The truth is, emotions are stimulating, although they're not always pleasurable, and we know that ADHD brain is drawn towards what is stimulating, even if it's not always so great. One of the reasons that people with ADHD can be at higher risk for mood and anxiety disorders is because of this difficulty with the emotion regulation.

Dr. Olivardia ([05:20](#)):

Now, let me first say that it's not always a bad thing. I mean, I find that having very intense emotions can lead to a higher degree of empathy. I feel I can absorb energy in a room very quickly, which for the most part has done very well for me. Certainly in my career, it makes a lot of sense that I have a high degree of empathy, but I did have to learn at a young age to have some sort of filter because I didn't want to be hit with emotions like a tsunami. We know that lots of people with ADHD are given names like being dramatic and histrionic and overreactive, and we have to be aware of not absorbing the shame of being emotional people. In addition, you might have the opposite. Instead of a hypersensitivity, sometimes a hyposensitivity, sometimes people with ADHD can be accused of not feeling enough when everyone else might be upset around them.

Dr. Olivardia ([06:16](#)):

Maybe they're not feeling that much emotion and accused of being sociopaths or cold or aloof. Keep in mind that sometimes we need a certain threshold of emotion to feel. It's like a goldilock situation. Sometimes the bed is too hard, sometimes it's too soft. We needed to be just right. I certainly was in that situation once where I was involved in a car accident. Luckily, I was okay, but a man was texting and driving, went through a stop sign, bashed into my car. Luckily there was no passenger in the car or they would've been killed, pushed my car into oncoming traffic. I swerved the car, ended up in a parking lot. It was a big scene. My car was completely totaled. Thankfully, I wasn't hurt. Police were called and literally the only thing I was thinking was, Oh my gosh, this is such an inconvenience. I now have to find a new car.

Dr. Olivardia ([07:10](#)):

This is going to get in the way of my Saturday plans. I was just annoyed. Meanwhile, the man who hit me was in the full blown panic attack of which I started to calm him down. The cops came, said to the man, Don't worry, sir, we'll tow your totaled car. And I said, Oh, no, no, no, no. That's my car. He hit me. And granted the policeman was a bit surprised that the person whose car was totaled was comforting. The man who did the totaling, but I really felt nothing. He said, Do you need to go to the hospital? He said, No, I just need to be driven to my office because I have a 9:00 AM patient waiting for me. I was just

annoyed later in the day when I told my family what had happened, They had more of an emotional response than I did.

Dr. Olivardia ([07:54](#)):

But that's kind of how ADHD works. Sometimes it can be a little strange when it comes to emotions. Now, certainly that's not to say that I don't have moments where I emotionally can erupt. Find me on a moment where my computer might be glitching and you'll see a, a berserk Roberto. Well, there are a lot of tips as to what we can do with this. First and foremost, we want to step back and understand that emotions are necessary for survival. We have to lean into them, but we want to be mindful. A lot of mindfulness skills around not judging our emotions, not shaming ourselves for being emotional people and just seeing it for what it is. To me, telling someone to not feel a certain way is just like telling them, Hey, don't like pickles, or, Hey, like Tabasco sauce. Either. Your body's just going to respond how it's going to respond.

Dr. Olivardia ([08:49](#)):

Our goal, though, is to learn how to work with that and how to regulate that. So there are tips we debrief. We can hold ice cubes in our hand, listen to music, write out in a journal, talk out those feelings. Find ways of soothing ourselves. Emotions, sensitivity. They're not bad words. The goal is to honor yourself as an emotional being while at the same time working at experiencing, expressing and managing those emotions in a healthy and productive manner. I'm wishing you a day filled with emotion. I'm glad you could join me today for ADDA's TADD talk about ADHD and Emotion. I'm Dr. Roberto Olivardia, If you want more information about me or my work with ADHD adults, email me at roberto_olivardia@hms.harvard.edu. Thank you for your attention.

Outro ([09:49](#)):

Hey, congrats you did it - listened to the entire TADD talk! And if you think this is great info, there's even more at the 2022 international ADHD conference. It's a hybrid conference that happens November 16th through the 19th live in Dallas, Texas, simulcast on the web as a virtual event. Find out more at ADDA - that's adda.org, where you can catch ADHD webinars, join peer support groups, and get ADHD classes. It's truly priceless, but membership costs less than \$8 a month. Okay. Enough of the chatter... we'll see you tomorrow with more executive function information.