

“I’m Waging a Civil War Inside My Brain”

ADHD is a perplexing, frustrating, and disruptive condition still too often questioned and misunderstood. We are smart, people say. We just need to try harder or stop procrastinating. If only it were that easy. Here’s the truth about why we can’t always do what is good for us.

By [June Silny](#)

1. ADHD Is Real

If you have an ADHD brain, you know ADHD is real. Too real. Inescapable and undeniable, in fact. But to anyone standing outside our brains, ADHD is a confusing, contradictory concept.

My loved ones scratch their heads, trying to reconcile my intelligence with my sometimes careless, [spaced-out](#) behavior. *How can such a smart person make such foolish choices?* “If you wanted to, you could do it,” they say. When I insist that I can’t, the response is something like, “Don’t say you ‘can’t.’ That’s nonsense. You’re just making excuses for something you don’t want to do.”

2. ADHD Is a Paradox

Most [ADHD traits](#) reflect two extremes on a single continuum. For example, it’s impossible for me to focus on something boring or tedious, but I can zone in and lose half a day doing something I love. When I fall into this [hyperfocus](#), I don’t hear phones ringing, I don’t feel hunger pangs, and I don’t make trips to the restroom. My sparked brain is excited and in love with the joy of being in the moment. In a split second, I can jump from restless distraction to extreme hyperfocus. ADHD is a condition of contradictions.

3. ADHD Is a Brain Phenomenon

My [ADHD brain](#) patterns are difficult even for me to fathom at times. And by “at times,” I mean practically constantly.

I am bombarded daily by self-doubt and self-criticism, despite the fact that I know my behavior is not willful. In ADHD brains, [neurotransmitters](#) are sluggish in the areas that control attention, which seems odd because our active minds are constantly in gear. This chemical imbalance confounds researchers, who suspect it’s largely genetic. But since there is no way to prove ADHD beyond a behavior checklist and a handful of rating scales, it is even harder to believe.

If you love someone with ADHD, you will recognize the differences in their brain chemistry. Managing simple tasks is rarely easy for us, and those who love us know we’re not faking our struggle.

[\[Free Download: Secrets of the ADHD Brain\]](#)

4. Every Day Is a Struggle

Most people cannot fathom the number and complexity of daily challenges we fight our way through. The simplest tasks become overwhelming burdens. A [bill payment](#), phone call, or errand can suck out all of our energy.

I am a capable person who functions well in many areas of life, so why in the world can't I pay a bill on time? The answer is rarely hiding in the task itself, but rather in a specific component that triggers a warning light in my ADHD brain telling me to beware of something uncomfortable. That painful encounter might be a decision that I cannot make, a deadline that I cannot foresee, detailed instructions that I won't understand, or something so boring that I just can't bear it.

5. Self-Doubt Is an ADHD By-Product

Most people could not tolerate the voices that echo in my head all day, pointing out every little thing I've done wrong: *Why did I say that? How could I forget to pay the bills? Why didn't I wake up on time? What is the matter with me? I'm dumb. How could I be so forgetful? Why can't I say no? How could I forget to buy eggs when I'm holding the shopping list in my hand?*

This relentless barrage of [self-reproach](#) make us feel unworthy, incapable, and inadequate. We are our own harshest critics.

6. We Are Trying Harder Than You Can Imagine

ADHD is largely invisible. We try very hard, but no one can see our internal struggle or effort. All we're asking for is a little compassion, patience, and non-judgmental love. That means no rolling eyes, no dirty looks, and no scolding us when we're a few minutes late or can't find our keys. If you can do that, we will try harder. We will figure out how to get through our rough spots if you promise to stand by our side, support us, cheer us on, and wait for us at the finish line. That's when we do our best.

7. Tough Love Doesn't Work

This truth may be the hardest for neurotypical spouses, parents, and bosses to accept. [ADHD is biologically](#) woven into our DNA. It never goes away (though it can be managed). Telling us to suck it up and try harder is like telling a visually impaired person to see harder. You can't see what he sees; you trust him when he tells you the world is a blur, and you let his glasses do their job. It's the same with ADHD. Trust us that we would fix our symptoms if we could.

[\[Quiz: ADHD Myth or ADHD Reality? Check the Facts About ADHD.\]](#)

8. We Don't Process Thoughts Like You Do

[ADHD thoughts](#) are like Gorilla Glue — quick to stick and impossible to oust. They rhythmically cycle through our minds like a scratched, broken record. Or they shoot like stones from a cannon, bombarding us until we crash or surrender from overwhelm. Our thoughts are loud. They steal our attention away from jobs and conversations, which makes us seem disinterested or rude. Our attention might briefly drift away, but please be patient. Give us a gentle tap on the shoulder or time to separate our thoughts from your voice, and we will be present again.

9. We Feel Everything Stronger, Louder, More

Whether anger, worry, or betrayal, our emotions are never mild. We feel intensely. Add to that our ADHD impulsivity, and you might understand the [explosions of emotion](#) that show up in a flash. Some experts call this “flooding.” With passionate urgency, words come flying out of our mouths before we can process what it is we want to say. We say words we soon regret, frequently apologizing and requesting forgiveness.

10. Time Feels Like a Foreign Language

People with ADHD live in the here and now. Future dates and times don't compute (another reason tough love and consequences don't work). All that matters is this moment — right here, right now. When thinking of a future date (unless it is something we are hyper-stimulated about, like a wedding), time is not a language we speak. As [Dr. Ned Hallowell](#) explains, “[We have two times: now and not now.](#)” The future disappears.

11. ADHD Is Not an Excuse

“I forgot.” “I'm trying my hardest.” “I'm sorry.” These may sound like excuses or escape routes; they are not. “I messed up because of my ADHD” is not a popular explanation. But, it's true. ADHD is why we do what we do. This is hard to explain — in part because it doesn't even make sense to us. [ADHD isn't real](#), unless you are the one who has it. It's frustrating to have a disorder no one believes. One thing is irrefutable: ADHD is illogical.

12. ADHD Is Not Hopeless

Those free-floating ideas that spring forth from unknown places in our minds can result in incredible [creativity](#). Imagination is the birthplace of symphonies, masterpieces, and revolutionary inventions. When managed properly, through a solid foundation of medical care and self-care, ADHD can propel terrific change in our world.

To quote Steve Jobs, “Here's to the crazy ones, the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers, the round pegs in the square holes... the ones who see things differently; they're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them, but the only thing you can't do is ignore them because they change

things. They push the human race forward, and while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius, because the people who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world, are the ones who do."

[*\[Free Guide: Step Up and Speak Out About ADHD\]*](#)