

The Many Masks of ADD for ADDivas

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Masks can change the appearance of something...also can HIDE something...something that can be taken on and off at will (usually)

Certainly ADD itself hides behind a lot of masks–

It masquerades as:

1. Laziness
2. Slow intellect
3. Sloppiness
4. Lack of initiative
5. Lack of commitment
6. Menopause or aging
7. Being scatterbrained

We (try to) hide our ADD behind many masks

- Sometimes we hid our ADD from others
- Sometimes we hide our ADD from ourselves

Some of us also hide BEHIND our ADD

“Don’t assign me to the budget committee, I have ADD.”

“Aren’t we silly? It’s that ADD again!”

“I can’t be expected to get to appointments on time...”

Why do we wear a mask over our ADD? ASK THE QUESTION:

1. To look good
2. To impress other people
3. To stay married or in relationship
4. To keep a job
5. To pretend we are normal – the BIG answer!

Bottom line is shame

1. Not OK to be late or “lazy” or unfocused or overdrawn
2. We don’t want negative attention drawn to our mistakes, especially if they are ADD-related
3. “Something wrong with my brain” sounds worse than a floppy heart valve or one arm shorter than another – but all genetic and not our fault

What masks do you wear?

1. “The perfectionist”
 - a. Works so hard to control ADD-ish tendencies that they overcompensate
 - b. Borders on Jack Nicholson in “As Good as It Gets.”
 - c. Usually not obsessive hand-washing, step-on-cracks et al. Just a compulsion to keep things neat and straight (the rest of us ADD folks only dream about such order!

2. "The life of the party"
 - a. Laugh with me, not at me
 - b. Especially for "hyperactive" ADD folks
 - c. Work hard to memorize jokes, entertain the audience – at home, work, etc.
 - d. Even joke about ADD – internal discomfort similar to laughing at ethnic jokes at others' expense
 - e. Never let them see you sweat ... take it all back inside where you can protect yourself.

3. "The Intellect"
 - a. Think ahead of everyone all the time
 - b. Dazzle people with your quick wit and creative solutions
 - c. Dancing as fast as you can
 - d. When memory fades, jarring realization that the ADD was the reason for the dance.

4. "The Space Cadet"
 - a. a.k.a. "Airhead" or "There (s) he goes again!"
 - b. Can't keep up, so give up and flop along the sidelines
 - c. Lower expectations from people so you don't fail/disappoint

5. "The Rebel"
 - a. "Don't fence me in"
 - b. Attitude issues – "You don't like it? Tough! "
 - c. Often prone to addiction/escape from the pain
 - d. I want to do it MY way (an ADD compensation strategy!)

6. "The Loser"
 - a. I'll never get it right so why bother?
 - b. Defeatist attitude – it can never be better than this
 - c. Taken to extreme, low self esteem can lead to serious psychological illness or even suicide

Common traits of all the masks

1. We learn to lie about Who We Really Are – our Authentic Self is shoved aside
2. We live in almost constant state of anxiety about being "found out" or unmasked
3. We believe that our Authentic Self is so damaged that it has no place in the world – no one likes us when we are being ourselves
4. We want to seem "normal"
5. We want to Fit In

How to take off your masks (if you dare)

1. Wake up to how you hide
 - a. Often difficult because we have acclimated to the mask – it “feels normal” to us
 - b. Go to support groups and listen to the life stories that can help you notice similar patterns in your own life
 - c. ADD books with anecdotes are good sources of “ah-ha” moments too
 - d. Know that the ah-ha moments will continue to happen for years after diagnosis “Oh, THAT was ADD, too – and I tried so hard to cover it up hoping no one would notice”
 - e. Don’t strip off the mask immediately – just notice and BE with it...
2. Think through how the mask serves you
 - a. Protection from others?
 - b. Safety at work?
 - c. Denial about your own ADD issues?
3. Make a choice about whether you still need this mask
 - a. Take into account your own comfort and safety
 - b. What would happen if you dropped this mask?
 - c. Is it really that important to hide behind the mask?
4. If you choose to stop wearing the mask
 - a. Allow people around you time to adjust to the new Authentic You
 - b. Change makes people uncomfortable
 - c. If you change too quickly, you might wind up being even more vulnerable and then plaster the mask back on permanently
 - d. It’s not all or nothing – you can choose when and where to put on or take off that mask – you are in control – you have the power!
5. Be conscious about your mask
 - a. Whether you choose to continue wearing it or take it off allow yourself to simply notice that you are wearing it.
 - b. Notice when you take it off
 - c. Be at choice about your mask
6. Let Your Authentic Self shine!
 - a. You are a magnificent human being – WITH your ADD!
 - b. Your brain IS “normal” for you!
 - c. Surround yourself with people who accept and love you as you are, not for your mask
 - d. Arrange your life so you need fewer and fewer masks in order to get through the day, the month, the year
 - e. Let people in your life help you (ask for help? Oh NO!)
 - f. Imagine yourself as perfect...because you are!