



ADHD Under Pressure: Resilience and Self-Regulation as a Foundation of ADHD Care

Mark Bertin ([00:00](#)):

Hi, my name's Mark Bertin. I'm a developmental pediatrician and author of several books that integrate mindfulness into pediatric care and also into evidence-based ADHD care. I was asked to really talk about almost anything I wanted for this year's TADD Talk and decided to really focus on something that I think has been integral to a lot of the work I've been doing over the last year or two, and I think is becoming talked about more and more around ADHD care, which is recognizing that the impact of ADHD on stress and emotion and resilience kind of from the start, is an important beginning place for all interventions. Because when we're feeling swamped and overwhelmed and down on ourself in different ways, that really potentially undermines all the rest of everything that has to happen around ADHD care. It undermines persistence and undermines self-esteem and undermines decision making.

Mark Bertin ([00:59](#)):

So it can be quite valuable to seek a objective and clear understanding of what ADHD is and recognize its impact on stress and emotion and, and really start care from that point, or at least integrate that aspect of practice and that aspect of care right from the start. So, to understand why this is so uniquely true of ADHD, like so many things about ADHD requires initially recognizing that ADHD isn't really a disorder of attention. It's one of executive function, which are this very wide ranging set of skills that really relate to all of our self-management abilities, all of our self-regulatory abilities. So it includes attention and behavior, but also organization planning, time management, and inherently includes emotion too. You know, we all experience emotions and we need some ability to notice those emotions and manage them.

Mark Bertin ([01:59](#)):

So when it comes to living with ADHD in this way, we can begin to recognize that ADHD affects our day-to-day stress, emotion and resilience, as I talked about and at least several different ways right from the beginning. The first is that ADHD is inherently a stress producing condition because on the one hand it is directly impacting the skills that allow us to manage our lives easily and manage our lives at least, if not easily, with a sense of effectiveness and a sense of ease. You could also say that it probably increases stress because of Dr. Barkley's famous quote about ADHD, that it's not a disorder of not knowing what to do. It's a disorder of not doing what you know, and there may be this chronic stress actually kind of hitting all the external measures of what you want to be doing in life, but underneath the surface, you



know, your legs, like a friend of mine created this analogy recently. It's like looking at a duck on a lake. You know, your legs are going a

Mark Bertin ([02:59](#)):

Thousand miles an hour, even though it seems calm on the surface. And then stress tends to perpetuate stress. because the more stress we feel changes our emotional state changes how we think, changes how we communicate, and then that circles back and creates more stress. And that cycle can keep going indefinitely if we don't actively try to address it. The second thing to acknowledge from the start is that executive function includes emotional regulation so that by nature, many people with ADHD experience extremes of emotion, quick to get angry, quick to frustrate, quick to shut down, which clearly is going to affect persistence and decision making too. And then ADHD often changes our mindset, changes how we think of ourselves, changes how we approach life because of that ongoing struggle with getting things done, with accomplishing what you want to accomplish with getting in touch with your intentions and goals and then getting there.

Mark Bertin ([03:47](#)):

In fact, I think ADHD is very unique as a condition in life to live with because very uniquely since ADHD impacts executive function, you can set out to address ADHD itself and set goals and intentions to manage ADHD itself. And then that whole pro, that whole plan is gonna get undermined quite often at the start from having ADHD because ADHD makes those types of interventions and supports harder to do. Not that you can't get past them, but there's this big hurdle at the start that really can be quite frustrating and can change your feeling of self-efficacy and self-esteem and and your general relationship with yourself. So I just wanted to bullet point today, obviously there's a really big topic, several different things to think about that can help you organize your thoughts for how are we gonna create this stable base, how are we gonna begin from this aspect of intervention?

Mark Bertin ([04:44](#)):

The first is really just educational. It's really letting go of how you might've thought about ADHD in the past and you know, any fixed views you have about what motivation is or isn't or what productivity is or isn't fixed views you might have of yourself. And really just see ADHD and learn about ADHD as best as you're able through this lens of executive function. It's a skillset that's really challenging that's behind. There are many, many different ways to address it. So the more you can understand executive function kind of in a practical way, see it really realistically kind of like if like understand like, oh, this is what it means to have time blindness or this is what it means to be impulsive. There's a frustration to that, but seeing it a little maybe dispassionately that might, you know, that's a hard word, but to just see it as these are the skills I need to work on.

Mark Bertin ([05:38](#)):

We all are perfect as we are. We all have things to work on in life. And through that same lens, exploring evidence-based ADHD intervention, you know, letting go of what you think, you know it's the word



should is always a red word in life. Something to be really careful because it gets used I think, a lot of time when we're putting things in a box. So it's not about what supports you should or shouldn't need in that sense, it's about what would be helpful and what might not be helpful and what does the evidence say and what doesn't it say. So one part of getting ahead of the stress and emotion about ADHD is managing ADHD comprehensively. And then there's several different things you can practice in day-to-day life that relate to some of the mindfulness based practices that I frequently introduce.

Mark Bertin ([06:24](#)):

Many of us frequently introduce, actually the first is bringing that perspective, just sort of general health and wellbeing that, you know, I think it's one of those things that's simple but not easy. We might recognize that we need to take care of ourselves, but it's so hard to get ahead of it. And yet, healthy sleep, exercise and nutrition is something that is harder to do with ADHD, but can be part of that solid foundation of getting ahead of ADHD to recognize we all have our minimum amount of sleep, exercise, and, and healthy nutrition that's gonna help us feel strong and stable.

Mark Bertin ([06:59](#)):

The next thing though, which may be unique, is just to really reframe mindfulness practice as a whole. Mindfulness is something that anybody can practice if they choose to, but we're not trying to quiet our minds. Meditation does not mean stealing of the mind. We can't totally shut off thoughts and we shouldn't. Thoughts are quite important. We don't even need to have a still body to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness can mean many things, but the initial practice of mindfulness is one, really of developing patience and awareness. We're giving ourselves permission for 10 or 15 minutes or maybe just five minutes to sit and observe what's going on. And unless it's urgent, unless it's emergent, we're dropping any sense of needing to do anything else in that moment about it later in the day, we might. That sense of being able to see things with patients is how we learn how to be proactive and problem solve with skill, in touch with our own best intentions.

Mark Bertin ([07:56](#)):

So mindfulness practice initially is one of expanding our awareness of what's actually going on in our lives, allowing ourselves to feel whatever we happen to be feeling and developing the space to be a little patient with that, a little caring with that. Today's a really rough day, and can I just sit here with a sense of care and recognize, okay, this is anxiety, or this is anger, or actually, or even I'm hungry right now and I'm not gonna, you know, I don't need to eat in this moment. I'm gonna pause for a second and recognize it's okay if I just wait for a few minutes and make a choice. Whatever the trigger, we can develop a sense of patience around it through practice and repetition. And then the last thing I wanted to mention, and then all of these things are linked through my website.

Mark Bertin ([08:39](#)):

You can find the actual practices of it is there's a wonderful practice of self-compassion out there. It also comes out of the mindfulness world. It's most frequently attributed to Kristin Neff, a psychologist at the



University of Austin. And self-compassion practice can be one of those triggers. It can sound like a little odd, like one of those terms that doesn't sound very familiar, but it's really just a recognition that we don't tend to treat ourselves with the same care and grace that we treat other people. You know, if we make a mistake in front of a group of people, our initial inner language is typically one of harshness, like, you did it again and this never goes well, and they're all looking at you and they're all judging me and they think I'm terrible, and whatever stories we make, and if our best friend made the same mistake, what will we do?

Mark Bertin ([09:23](#)):

We'd say, no, no, no, it's okay. Everyone does this sort of thing. Sometime just pause, you know, settle for a second. It's all gonna be fine. And as odd as it may seem, we can learn to work with that really critical voice that's sometimes called the inner critic, and it may never go away fully, but we can learn with practice to relate to it differently, to recognize that we all, as I said a few minutes ago, are, you know, we're wonderful people, all of us doing the best we can, and we're all struggling in different ways. And if we give ourselves that perspective of awareness and kindness and work with emotional regulation through our mindfulness practice, you know, the ability to sit with an emotion and not react to it immediately is mindful. You know, managing our emotions is using mindfulness to manage emotions. And if we can hold all that and practice all that and do the things that help us stay resilient and develop a positive mindset about life that proactive and settled approach to things will help all the rest of ADHD care hold together. So I hope that framework's valuable, and if you're interested in mindfulness practice or self-compassion practice, it is a practice. So I would encourage you to, through my website or through other sources online, seeking out these these different approaches to mindfulness and just trying them for a while and seeing not in the short term what happens, but over a stretch of time, what changes for you. I hope you find this perspective helpful, and I hope to see many of you at the ADHD conference this year in Kansas City. Take care.