

The Uncanny Likeness Between Gifted and ADHD

Internal “Challenges”	Gifted	ADHD
Motivation	Highly motivated for topics of interest and passions. Unmotivated for rote or seemingly meaningless tasks. Self-care and social niceties are often affected.	Difficulty getting motivated for others’ priorities or uninteresting pursuits.
Ability to stay on task (pay attention)	Has difficulty sustaining effort when task is boring, rote, or lacks relevance. Ability to hyperfocus on highly interesting material. May seek out challenges.	Easily bored. May daydream or disrupt when subject is not highly interesting. Avoids activities that require sustained mental effort yet can hyperfocus on activities or subjects of high interest.
Ability to Organize	May think in multi-steps, skip steps, or jump from thought to thought. What may seem disorganized to others is a personalized and organized system. Sometimes thought of as “absent minded professor” when distracted by personal interests.	May lose, misplace, or forget items needed for school, activities, or work.
Self-Control	Excited and enthusiastic about discoveries. Thinks quickly and acts on thoughts before processing consequences.	Impulsive, often seeming to act or react without thinking.
External “Challenges”	Gifted	ADHD
Ability to listen (or appear to be listening)	Often multi-tasks, preoccupied with thoughts and interests.	Doesn’t appear to listen, easily distracted.
Activity level	Often appears to have extra energy. May need to move to learn. Excessive talking and excitement over deep interests. May sleep deeply or need fewer hours of sleep than recommended for age.	Appears “driven by a motor,” may need to move to pay attention. May be described as hyperactive.
Interactions with adults/those “in power”	Seeks adult attention to discuss thoughts and concepts beyond typical peer interest. May question rules if they seem unfair, unnecessary, or arbitrary.	May display difficulty standing still, difficulty conforming to rules and expectations.
Following directions	Often thinks they have a better way or skips steps. May start an assignment before reading directions.	May miss parts of instructions due to attention deficit and impulsivity.
Verbal expression	Uses advanced vocabulary and often an enormous number of words to describe thoughts, observations, and opinions. May talk over people to finish important point.	Often displays excessive talking. Uses a loud and excited voice. May interrupt or blurt out.