

# Ep #17 Confirmation bias and ADHD diagnosis

In this episode we discuss confirmation bias and how it can affect the diagnosis of ADHD and also your perception about how things are going. This is episode 17. Let's get started.

Smarter Parenting welcomes you to our podcast series, the Parenting Coach for ADHD here to heal and elevate lives is your parenting coach, Siope Kinikini.

All right, let's get started. How is every one? I hope everybody is doing well today. Today is a sunny day, and I woke up early this morning, and I was a very motivated to begin this discussion with you about something called confirmation bias. Now, confirmation bias is an amazing thing. Let me describe it first and then give you an example. So confirmation bias, by definition, is our tendency to cherry pick information that confirms our existing beliefs or ideas. Okay, let me read that one more time just to be sure that we understand. Confirmation bias is our tendency to cherry pick information that confirms our existing beliefs or ideas. Confirmation bias also explains why two people with opposing views on a topic can see the exact same evidence and come away feeling like they are validated by it in their individual beliefs. Right? So let me give you an example.

An example of confirmation bias is you can have two people watch the same thing and have the same evidence in a trial, okay? In a court system trial, they have all the evidence in front of them and yet two people may believe completely different things about the evidence, right? You see this a lot actually with political shows when you're watching television. You'll see that sometimes they will put the evidence down, or they'll play a clip from somebody who is saying something or speaking about something, or they will provide, you know, here's the law. And then you'll have two people come and look at it and yet they will interpret it differently. And largely the way they interpreted is based on their own perceptions, and their own views of the way things are, right? Isn't that crazy?

So, for example, if I, a positive person believe that everybody is good and I see somebody doing a good deed for somebody else and yet someone else with a different belief system believes that people are only in it for themselves. And there's a specific amount of manipulation going on when somebody helps somebody, they want something in return. Then we can look at the same person doing that act of kindness and come away with two different beliefs about what just happened. I would see it as, hey, that's a very kind person who just wants to go out of their way and help somebody else. And someone else can see it as that person wants something and so they're being nice in order to get something else, right? It's kind of amazing because we have to actually look back at what we believe, right? What do we believe? Because that shapes our whole perception of the world around us, and we love to find things that confirm what we

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believe. So if we believe certain things, we want to go back, and we want to find evidence to support that. Right?

The difficult part, and this is part of what therapy does is as people go around and start confirming specific beliefs, therapists try and break those so people can have an alternative interpretation of what the belief system is, right? That's a part of therapy. I'm not saying that's all up therapy, but that's a part of therapy where the professional actually provides a different point of view. Which is why often people go to a therapist because the therapist is disconnected from the situation, disconnected from the person, and they can look at things in a different way, right? So confirmation bias is a super important idea specifically for you as a parent of a child with ADHD. Why? Because everything that you do revolving around your child may involve your perception about ADHD and how things are going. Before we talk about the parent aspect of it, I do want to cover the physician, and the diagnoses part of it. All right.

Now, you may run across someone, a teacher, a well-meaning parent, a well-meaning friend or advocate, a grandparent who will come to you and make the suggestion that your child has ADHD. Now it's not officially diagnoses. It's just something that they will say, "I think your child has ADHD," right? And what happens is in their perception, they're going to shape anything that they see around that belief. And in many ways, if you believe it too, you will look at your child through those lenses, right? You will look through the lenses of ADHD and anything that confirms that belief will stick. And anything that kind of doesn't, you're going to let go. That's confirmation bias does, right? It's not objective. It's really focused on your beliefs about a certain topic, which is why it is important to go to a professional to get the diagnoses. It's important to go to them. They're a separate entity and they can evaluate.

Now that being said, there is some dangers, some absolute danger in going to a specialist who is only focused on that item when you are doing initial diagnoses. The recommendation would be to start off with your primary care who sees a lot of different issues with children and then have them work towards moving towards a specialty, right? If that's the case. And they can rule out some additional items perhaps and really come down to what is it specifically that you're dealing with? A lot of times specialists when they specialize in something that's very specific, they see things through those lenses, right? So an ADHD person will see the world through ADHD beliefs and that will shape their overall acceptance of certain belief systems that confirm again that, that's their world.

So take for example, there are some people who in their field, that's just the way they see it and so they can exclude some other things that are going on because that's just the way they see it and they will cherry pick in order to reconfirm those beliefs. I was doing an interview with a dentist, and the dentist is super great friend of mine. And in our conversation we were talking about ADHD and behavioral issues. And how the lack of sleep, because he does breathing dentistry or sleeping dentistry, excuse me. Sleeping dentistry and in helping adjust the jaw line, so you can get a good night's rest. And how the manifestation of some of the ADHD symptoms can be attributed to a lack of sleep, lack of rest. And in our conversation, because I was open to

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challenging my own belief system, it opened up a whole new world of communication and conversation, right? In our ability to look at the world differently.

So, now I have incorporated that belief system that he has in that, hey, we need to be looking for everything when we're dealing with a diagnoses like ADHD. There are just so many different factors and the symptomology is really tricky because, is it exhaustion why you have irritability, you have an attentiveness, what is it exactly? Is it that, is it ADHD specifically? Is it something else? Is it trauma? Is it ... right? Which is why the recommendation actually is to go through somebody who is a primary care initially and then start to weed out things so you can come to a specific diagnoses. Now, confirmation bias also for you as a parent can be a very dangerous thing because once your child is placed with a diagnoses, you can begin to see the world specifically through just that lens, right?

And as children grow and as they change, we want to be able to be flexible enough to adjust to whatever it is that they're dealing with. And also in having more conversations about what will be effective treatment options for your child as they progress and mature. So, the bigger question that I have for you is, what do you believe? You know, you kind of have to go back and think about it and what are the glasses that you're putting on every day that reinforce those beliefs? Because, you want to be able to challenge those in effective ways because when you don't, that's when you get stuck. That's when you get stuck. You get stuck because you get stuck in this mindset and this framework where you're looking at the world in a very specific way. And yet it may not be the way that you perceive it to be, right?

Now, I'm sure there's a lot of parents out there who are thinking, "What, I don't know. Do I have confirmation bias? Maybe I don't." We all have confirmation bias to some extent, all of us do. We have confirmation bias because we have certain beliefs about the world, and the way things work, and the way things should work. So, we want to be able to be flexible enough because children are not ABC, one, two, three. There is a lot of variables going on, especially in the development of a child. And as they change and mature, a lot of hormones going, on brain is still developing. To come to a diagnosis, for example, when you're five and then to see the world only through ADHD it limits what you can do, it limits your ability to move forward and do additional things or to look at other aspects of what can be helpful for your child.

Now, a lot of children will come with a diagnoses of ADHD and then they will tack on something else, or they may suffer from something else like anxiety or depression. And ADHD is very common between the two. Your professional, the professional working with you and your child should be able to help you develop a treatment plan that will be very helpful in that. But when you receive those labels from the medical professional, or you receive an official diagnoses from somebody, I want you to really examine what are your beliefs about that. If your beliefs are in a place where you believe that that child is going to be unable to move forward, unable to be successful, you are going to create a framework for them that may be detrimental. Now, it may be unintentional, but as a parent you really need to step back and examine what are my beliefs

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about ADHD or ADHD and depression or ADHD and anxiety, right? Stepping back allows you to look at what you believe and then you can begin to challenge it.

Because again, if we just go in with our beliefs, we are only going to cherry pick things that will support the belief that we have. And the reality is, is it's not that cut and dry. It's not that black and white, right? That actually is probably one of the most detrimental things parents can do is that they can accept the diagnoses and then they can just form their core beliefs around the diagnoses and not have any room to challenge it or to look for alternative interpretations of what is reality, right? So for parents, this is for parents, I really feel it's so important for you to step back and look at what are your beliefs about this diagnoses? What are your beliefs that surround this idea of my child has ADHD? Because if you can answer those questions, you're going to know if you're working from a place where you are resourceful, and you're able to help your child, or a place where it's, I'm just going to accept it and that's just life, and my child is just doomed, right? Two different mindsets.

And again, you can challenge those things, and you can move between them, but you have to be aware. You have to be aware. Now, I've talked about parents being able to recognize their own confirmation bias. The other thing I want parents to be very cautious about is when you're seeking help from professionals, that you are also cautious about their confirmation bias. Right? Another example, I guess in the medical field, and this is just popping off the top of my head because once you realize everybody has confirmation bias, you just kind of notice that people operate that way, and even medical professionals, and they're well intention. In fact, everybody's well intention. I honestly believe people want to help and people are genuinely good. But by saying that, again, that's my own confirmation bias, right? Ooh, busted. Right?

But in the medical field, you'll find that when you go to somebody who specializes in something, like heart for example, like if you go to your cardiologist, you know, everything's going to be focused around the heart, you know? If you go to somebody who is examining your gut, everything's going to be focused on your wellbeing, and your health is going to be focused on what's happening in your gut, right? If you go to a sleep doctor, everything will be focused on sleep and they will bring in other aspects of health like the heart and the stomach. But most specialists will tell you, well let me send you a specialist to talk about that because again, they realize there's some confirmation bias going on in what they're doing to treat. So I don't want anyone to feel like they can't reach out for help. I want people to reach out for help if they feel like they could use it and especially for a diagnoses. But that's why a team approach to diagnoses is helpful. That's why going with your primary care physician is helpful.

I mean, all these things are ways that you can get to an official diagnoses because once you reach the diagnoses, treatment is created around that diagnosis. And if you get the diagnosis wrong, then the treatment will be wrong. And the outcome is unknown, the outcome is less effective, right? Less effective. Now for those of you who obviously have some perceptions about ADHD and this is what it looks like and this is what it does and this is, you know, step back, step back and look at it and talk with professionals about your own confirmation bias

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about this and whether or not there's some alternative issues that may be going on that you can resolve that will help with some of the symptomology behind ADHD. Confirmation bias isn't a bad thing, and I don't want anyone to feel like it's super bad. But just being aware of it will be very helpful for you as a parent and also for your child who's struggling with ADHD.

Now, you may also want to challenge your child's perception of ADHD because they will have a confirmation bias about it. They will have certain beliefs about it and they may actually fall back on those beliefs to explain away their behavior, right? So we've all heard the kid, it's like, well, you know, I have ADHD, that's why I behave the way I behave. Right? That's a belief, right? That is an absolute belief, and they're reconfirming that belief that it's okay and this explains it away. And the ideas that you say, "Okay, you have ADHD, I understand. However, we're going to challenge the belief that this is the only way you can behave because there are alternatives for you. There are other ways that you can behave even having ADHD," right? So be aware. Confirmation bias exists everywhere in the world. Everybody has them because we all have certain beliefs, and we want to support those beliefs because it's so uncomfortable to challenge those beliefs.

And that actually is a good thing because when we're challenged, that's when we grow, right? Being able to challenge those beliefs are the things that will help you move forward. So don't lose hope. Just be aware. Challenge your own belief systems and evaluate where you're operating from because your belief systems will guide you into what you actually will do. This idea that we think through things and then we behave is absolutely true. And if we are in a state where we are defeated in our belief system, then everything we do will be focused on that approach. If we are proactive and in a resourceful state, we will behave in that space. Right? So going back to the beginning when we talked about two opposing views, although the evidence is the same, the information is neutral, our approach to it that makes all the difference in the world, it really does.

So examine your own beliefs, right? Examine your own beliefs, examine your own confirmation bias and figure out exactly where you want to operate from and challenge yourself to expand and grow. Challenge your child and be aware of the professionals that are working with your child, that they also are operating in a place of resourcefulness so your child can be successful. Now, I could talk about this forever. Seriously, I love confirmation bias because it's not the only bias out there either. But this one in particular is of interest to me because I feel like it's so important for parents to be able to step outside a little bit of the chaos and make some evaluations about how to proceed. Right?

So I would love to hear your thoughts on confirmation bias, and it's a known thing, feel free to Google it. You can see a couple of examples that are online obviously. But yeah, I would love to hear what it is that you, what belief systems you have around ADHD and then ways that you feel like you can challenge those. I think that would be a great discussion to have. Feel free to leave a comment or send us a message and let us know your thoughts and share this podcast with another parent who may be helpful for them who has a child with ADHD. Also subscribe to

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our podcasts. You can find us on all the listening podcast. I don't even know about all that stuff, but you can find us on iTunes and Google Play. We're on Podbean, a bunch of different players out there. Stitcher, yeah, I can't even remember them all.

Anyways, that's where we're at. And feel free to share and please if this has been helpful, give us a good rating and leave us a comment. I look forward to hearing from you and actually discussing some more topics related to ADHD and parenting. That's it for me. I'll talk to you later. Thanks, bye.

### **Resources discussed in this episode**

[Ep #16 ADHD or dental issues with Dr. John Peterson](#)

[The ADHD Smarter Parenting Podcast](#) with Siopé Kiniki ni

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