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## Episode 9 : ADHD and the College Student Experience [Episode Highlights]

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[MANDI] Hey, y'all Mandi here. Welcome to the SAS podcast. It's October and that is ADHD Awareness Month. In acknowledgement of that we wanted to focus on ADHD and how it impacts college students. In Student Accessibility Services we believe that hearing our students and listening to their lived experience is an integral part of our work. While we can put accommodations in place, offers strategies and work with students so they can succeed. Ultimately, it is the student and their own willpower and resilience that gets them across the finish line to graduation. I'm joined today by Mike, a UMaine student with ADHD, who is here to answer questions about his experience living with ADHD and cover some strategies that he uses to help organize his life. Also joining us is Amy Sturgeon, one of the professional staff at Student Accessibility Services. She'll be sharing some additional information about our office, as well as some suggestions that have worked for other students with ADHD. Welcome to you both.

[AMY] Hi there! Hi Mike. Thanks so much for joining us today. And it really means a lot to Mandi and I, that you're willing to share information about your experience with ADHD and just your life experiences in general. And we're just really thrilled and excited to have the opportunity to talk with you today. So when Mandi and I started thinking about what types of questions we wanted to ask you. We thought about how ADHD impacts people, not only in an academic way, but really in their whole life. And that could include socially like building relationships or just everyday stuff. And so really, our first question for you is focused on ADHD and how it may impact you socially.

[MIKE] So with that, that's kind of hard to answer because I've had it for my whole life. So like with ADHD and I'm assuming this is part of ADHD, I've always looked at things more logistically. Like I can't really be like, oh, that's different because of my ADHD. I'd would need to like be like, it would be more of a scientific experiment and be like, oh, this is why I'm acting this way. And it's because of the ADHD, which is really hard to apply to, you know, ADHD or really any mental condition, diagnosis, whatever. So it's kinda it's really hard to answer how it would impact me socially. I mean, when I was younger, I was I was put on medication in second grade. And when I was younger and this is true for me and my cousin who's also has it and also was put on medication at a young age. It would impact our behavior and our personality. Whereas I would be I when I'm on my meds, I eat like nothing. food looks like glass. I can't eat and maybe a bit quieter. My, the type of ADHD I have is PI Primarily Inattentive. It used to be ADD, but they changed that x years ago. I have no idea. My cousin had ADHD or now AD HD, Primarily Hyperactive, I think PH, And so for him, he would just go mellow. And I suppose for him that kind of still persists. Whereas for me, it's less noticeable. So behaviourally, I suppose it varies depending on the severity and the the specific impedance it has on you.

[AMY] Yeah. Great answer. And I think, you know, it's it's true sometimes it's hard to see outside yourself and it's something that you've had for forever. It's hard to see whether it's going to impact you socially or not. But I think it's great feedback to talk to us about medication and how that might change behaviors. And I think for sure it does. What ways does your ADHD affects your ability to organize your life? And examples can be like paying bills are cheaper at keeping doctor's appointments. And a follow-up to that. What types of strategies have you developed over time to keep you on track with that kind of stuff?

[MIKE] So take it for face value. what most people think of when they think organized, my organization abilities are just garbage. My room's a mess, stuff like that. And it's always been that way. Wherever wherever like at home, I'll have my bedroom. I'll late for some people they like they hang out in their bedroom. They do they watch TV in their bedroom. All that. I had another space for that. That was also a mess. That that's just how it was. But for say, like in high school and through Boy Scouts and through just my parents pushing me, I started to take more. What's the word I'm looking for? Ooh, take more charge in getting myself on track. So I started using Google Calendar like sophomore year of high school. And I think that was that might not even have been out of being pushed towards it was being irritated that I didn't know, hey, you have an appointment today and I was like, why didn't you tell me? So I just started doing it myself so that I knew ahead of time. And that was that was a huge help. So all my appointments and now in college, all my classes are on there. If I've got an activity, if I'm going to hang out with people, I put that on the calendar just so that I know ahead of time. Which also helps with forgetting, which is also something that a lot of people with ADHD tend to do is forget things really easily. And then in terms of like bills, I don't have a lot of bills yet, but the best thing that I've seen people do is set up auto pay. It's just you don't even think about it. All I do is set a reminder in my phone, Hey, auto pay is coming tomorrow. And then okay. Make sure all the money's in the account that that's going to be taken out and you're all good for in terms of like say, file management for classes, like get your homework, you got your exams, syllabi, online, PDF textbooks, whatever whatnot. I've used the same structure, since freshman year of college, break it down by semester, then by class, and then from there, whatever is needed or not needed. That was probably the smartest college decision I made. And then in terms of actually getting stuff done, I use an app called Todoist where I can put all my assignments, put it in there. If someone like on the offhand gives me, hey, you should take this course in the future or you should use this professor or whatnot. I put that in there is anything that I might need to reference later. I put in there and then from there I'll either organize it further later, if I remember to, I generally forget, And from there, that's pretty much how I manage it. I know a lot of people with ADHD struggle with this kinda thing. I was I'm a bit of a techie myself and by a bit, I mean to a nullifying degrading amount. So it comes easier to me because just interacting with a

computer or my phone or whatnot I actively enjoyed doing it and for for me and I notice for a lot of people with ADHD as well, if there's something that you enjoy, it makes it so much easier to do. So that's, I, I'm very lucky to be able to enjoy using my phone and all that for the most part. To stay and then use it to stay organized where it feels like I'm doing something that I want to do kind of, not all the time, but most of the time. And that really, really helps. So for some people this, this wouldn't apply.

[MANDI] Amy what has your experience been with other students?

[AMY] yeah, I mean, I think that's another great question. I think as, you know, I was kind of referring to their earlier and talking with you, Mike, that I think that every student has to find what it's going to work for them. And I, there's lots of options out there. And it is really figuring out what's the best fit and what's going to be most workable for it for the student as an individual. And you know, some people are really tech focused like Mike is and using technology comes easily and it's engaging and there's an interest there. And I think that's awesome. So if that's the case, you're using organizational apps like Mike, you referenced one. There's a ton of them out there. A lot of them are free and they do calendar management. Reminders that you do have to kind of log stuff in. You take some time to do that. But I think it can really keep people on track really well. And if anybody is interested in learning more about organization apps when they're listening to our podcast, today, you should checkout our website, which is, [Umaine.edu/studentaccessibility](http://Umaine.edu/studentaccessibility) and we've got a whole list of different apps there for you to check out. We also highlight a new app of the month every month and encourage you to, to look at it. So Mike you mentioned earlier, doing some sort of auto pay system for bills or reminders that like, you know, you're going to see regularly for important due dates. So I definitely encourage that as well. Personally, I'm a big fan of making small lists. And usually what I do if I know I have some really important things to get done, or even less important, smaller things is I just make a quick list of maybe two or three things that I think need to be done, maybe with a small due date. I just keep that list on my desk in my line of sight and it's there. I can't avoid looking at it. And then as I go along, as I accomplished like one or two things, they just scratch them off the list and I find that like, you know, scratching the thing off the list gives me a small amount of instant gratification, makes me feel good and makes me feel like I accomplished something. So I tend to do that quite a bit. And I also wanted to mention that some students aren't really into technology and it's frustrating to have to learn a new tech piece or a new app and have to transfer due dates and deadlines on to a new piece of technology. And so what I want to say is that some students just aren't going to use tech apps. And that's OK. So using good old pen and paper and, and using a paper calendar where agenda book or a white board or something like that is great as well. And like overall, I, again, I think it's just, it's important to find what

works for the individual. And then to also stick with some sort of routine and I don't know Mike do you have any feedback at all about that

[MIKE] Not off the top my head.

[AMY] Okay, I just figured I'd ask

[MIKE] I do have something to add, though. It should be noted for people listening that don't have ADHD. Like if in my case, if I put my homework assignments, all of them in my as soon as I get the email from, what are we using now Brightspace? Soon as I get the email Brightspace, this assignment is going to be due at this day, blah, blah, blah. Soon as I put that in, even though I'd put it in, does not mean it's going to get done, especially not in a timely manner. For example, this morning. I got out of bed and did my laundry. That's weird. I browsed amazon prime because there was a lot of stuff I needed to buy that was important, like I'm looking for a printer and stuff like that, stuff that I needed but wasn't a priority. I mailed my absentee ballot. But you know what I didn't do. I wasn't paying attention in class. And after this, I'm doing the homework that's due at 08:00 PM tonight when I could have done it for the past week. So just because we get like you can, you can, we can manage our time. Quote unquote, we can manage, plan to manage our time is a probably better way to do it. And then as soon as like I'm sitting down, I'm ready to do my work. And then suddenly some thought pops in my head, oh, you know what, I should do that instead, it'll only take me five minutes and then 50 minutes later, I should probably get back to the other thing that another thought pops in. So just wanted to put that in.

[AMY] Yeah, I think that's a great point. And that is certainly that you can have some good strategies and intentions to get stuff done, but then something else kind of puts you in a different direction. And I think being mindful of that as something that can happen is important. If it's possible to be mindful to try to redirect it if you can. You know?

[MANDI] One of the other questions I have is, what advice would you give to other students that either have ADHD or another disability if they're just they're just starting their experience? Now that you're further along in your education.

[MIKE] Definitely work with the SAS the accommodations that I've received because of my ADHD have probably what ended up keeping me in college because otherwise, I get extended time and quiet place to take tests because tests kill me. This has, this has always been true. This, this back through like middle school even I was always the last person to turn in, like a quiz or a test or whatever. And like like I said, I was doing great in high school grade wise by was still the last person to do it. And that's not because like I was doing it right. That's just because I'm slow. I'm just really slow it taking it. And that changed the game for me. So definitely work with the SAS. Something I

found that really helps me is finding a group of people in my major, taking as many as the classes that I can with them, hanging out with them. And that really helps keep me like on my A-game. And like Oh do we have the assignment due in case like I miss something in class or if I miss the note or something then they help me with that. I help them with that, blah, blah, blah. Before coronavirus, I'd like to go to for mechanical engineers. We've got a lounge in Boardman Hall that was great to work at. And then the library was also great on second floor in the quiet space. That was also fantastic. And in terms of actual just focusing and this applies, it applies to a lot of people, a lot of people like the lo-fi beats and whatnot on YouTube, that 24 hour live stream that's always going on. I do. I go for like soundtracks, like movie soundtracks, game soundtracks, Star Wars, Interstellar, Minecraft, stuff like that. They're all super soothing and really helped me focus. So I guess that's four quick points. I could probably go on, but that's all I got off the top my head.

[MANDI] So I have a question academic branch and we know this semester has been different for everybody across our entire country and probably internationally as well. And the shift to remote and online learning has been affecting people in a variety of ways. So what has your experience been with this shift to remote learning?

[MIKE] Miserable. Yeah. Which is which I mean, I had a hope at the very beginning that'd be fine. Because like, I'm a techie, I love being, I built my computer myself. I built this whole lab, really, that battle station, whatever you wanna call it Workspace,

[AMY] Command center

[MIKE] Yes, on something like that over the past 5-6 years now, it's 2020. I don't know. And I love working with it. But the the online, the the, the structure of it. Like some classes, asynchronous. It's just watch a video online. I am maybe three weeks behind in some classes. I'm just reading the book at this point. I mean, it's working. It works. But it's kinda like I don't understand how people can just sit and watch these dragging on lectures for hours on end is just video after video after video. And it's not it's it's and maybe it is probably because of just, I know there's a lot of professors that would much rather be in front of a whiteboard. And I would much rather be in a lecture room, which is something I did not believe I would be saying three years ago or two years ago or ten months ago. But it's just, it's it's not like for, Like I said, I built my computer, then I like I'd run it used to do that's how I made my money in high school was like fixing people's computers, being like some tech was Guy, the Geek Squad but, you know, cheap. All of that was self-taught. No one in my family had ever, no one in my family does stuff like that. And when I'm in my family, it's like, like taught me I didn't learn from Anyway. I'll learn from YouTube videos. I learned from reading online forums and stuff like that. But it was something I enjoyed and especially with the YouTube videos, the, the presenter, the host of the videos, had a much more living personality and a much

better onscreen presence. And it's a much more professional job because it's not like your staring. You hear a voice over and you're staring at a white board and it's just drawing the old-time No, it's you get a shadow presenter then they pan to whatever they're working on. And it's lots of motion and stuff like that. It's much more engaging. And these online lectures aren't that. And like the live ones are a bit better. But they're not great. And in just across the board, I'm struggling to take notes. And I would, I would much rather be in the lecture room being able to watch it. And even if I was there, I'd still be zoning out from time to time. But whereas here, right now this semester, I've had very few, like, that was a real productive lecture. I got so many good notes. Whereas like, especially because I would really sucked about this whole thing is last less spring semester, I was doing great. I was on top of my game, I felt awesome. And then coronavirus said, screw you. So yeah. It's rough. It's very rough.

[AMY] Yeah. And I want to thank you for sharing that in that there's so much that's happened this year and have been out of our control. And everybody is struggling, struggling in some ways with like the online learning format. And that probably includes professors too that, like you said, but that they probably would prefer to be in an in-personal environment too. But with everything going on with Corona and Covid, it that that's not the most optimal situation. And it's good feedback to hear that even if it's not good feedback, meaning like what you're reporting is, is that you're struggling and it's important for us to hear that. Hopefully, pass that on to professors. And I'm sure they're trying and they want to make it better. So yeah.

[MIKE] My mentality is just been trying keep on trucking. Whether it's it's it's it's been way like my mental health is slowly degrading by slowly. I mean, it's been pretty, I mean, it could it could always be worse. But like it's spent I've just been, you know, less happy now. But you just gotta keep on trucking because it's not the end of the world and most importantly, it's not my fault. So that's really what's keeping me going, is just get through the day. And once you're done with your work, there's good food to eat in the kitchen and stuff. So that's, that's what's gotten me go and through it.

[AMY} Right. And I think that self-care is more into like, you know, I think we met earlier in the conversation. I'm talking about like the small things, small things that you can find happiness in. It is really important to try to acknowledge. Because sometimes when we look at our current situation, things can look a little bit more gray or more miserable than they, they should be. And how do we find happiness? How do we move forward? And taking care of yourself, doing what works for you to try to improve happiness, whether it's exercising or socially distancing socializing, you know, interacting with your friends or playing music or doing meditation or crafts or something like that to try to improve mood is I think a really good thing to do. And sometimes it's, it's easy to lose

sight of that. Like, you know, what are the small things that we can do that maybe make us make us better, make us get through this situation.

[MIKE} Yeah, absolutely.

[MANDI] Thank you so much, Mike, for volunteering and for talking with us today. And we've really, really deeply appreciate it. Like I said earlier, we're, we're really looking for ways to talk and engage with students which is much harder this semester then and has been in the past. But to also really try and always be centered on the student's voice and not our own. And thank you Amy for joining and providing your experience as an accessibility services professional. And so just a couple quick wrap ups. We now have an Instagram. So you can go check us out. We're @umainesas on Instagram and we have also Facebook page. We're going to be posting various content about ADHD awareness month throughout this month and in the future about other things we want to challenge myths around disability and breakdown stigma and generally makes sure that all of the students that attend the university feel like they're having an experience that is valid for them and that they are seen and included. So as always if you know someone who meets our office or if you need our office, please reach out to us. And thank you all for listening. As always, SAS is here to help.

[AMY] And thank you again, Mike for this really powerful message that you've delivered today and so much.

[MIKE] My pleasure.

[AMY] All right, take care.