

A new perspective on attention deficit disorder

SCATTERED MINDS. A NEW LOOK AT THE ORIGINS AND HEALING OF ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

AUTHOR: **Gabor Maté**

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OVERALL RATING Very good

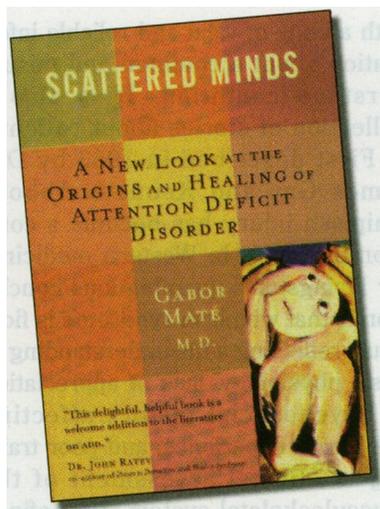
STRENGTHS Provides a novel, original, sensitive, and integrated perspective on the origin of attention deficit disorder and its symptoms

WEAKNESSES Treatment based on systematic, empirical research was not presented

AUDIENCE Patients, caregivers, and professionals

The author's objective in writing this book was to inform readers about the origins, manifestations, and treatment of attention deficit disorder (ADD). He has successfully integrated empirical research, professional experience, and personal experience (Dr Maté has ADD) to present a biopsychosocial understanding. Dr Maté's primary message is that ADD develops out of a lack of a calm, consistent, emotional milieu and attunement with an attachment figure. Importantly, the author succeeds in delivering his message without attributing blame to caregivers.

Dr Maté interprets ADD symptoms as an individual's attempt to satisfy his or her emotional needs rather than to be annoying, disruptive, or oppositional. This is a powerful message to be communicated to all individuals working with children with ADD. Dr Maté's descriptions highlight the constant negativity to which children with ADD are subjected and the potentially negative sequelae on development.



The author interprets the behaviour of an uncooperative, omnipotent child as an attempt to assert control in an environment in which he or she has little control. It seems, however, that these behaviours are not only triggered by a feeling of lack of control, but also by the absence of a strong, secure attachment figure. A healthy attachment relationship is fostered by a sense of security provided by a parent who is emotionally available, yet strong. Resistance arises not only out of fear of being controlled, as Dr Maté suggests, but also out of fear and experience of not being adequately "controlled." Guidance, structure, and limit setting are also integral to a child's development and are considered important elements of effective parenting of children with ADD.¹ This important distinction would be worth clarifying in the book, especially the manner in which it relates to the behavioural difficulties often associated with ADD.

Flowing directly from his understanding of the cause and manifestation of ADD, the author appropriately suggests that intervention focus primarily on fostering the emotional development of the child by building the parent-child attachment relationship and strengthening the marital bond. Unfortunately, however, he discounts the effectiveness of generally accepted cognitive and behavioural

treatments. Behaviour therapies are not simply attempts to control children, but rather, they are intended to educate and increase reinforcement opportunities for children who are repeatedly exposed to negative, punishing, and devaluing experiences. Such interventions are particularly effective for parents who have difficulty keeping organized and who need concrete, objective, and immediate suggestions. Dr Maté's recommendations might be difficult for families who lack the necessary resources and ability to comprehend and follow through on his suggestions. Ideally, recommendations should integrate systematic, empirical research studies along with case reports. Available research indicates that a multimodal management strategy that integrates pharmacological, psychosocial, educational, and behavioural (ie, parent-management training) treatment approaches is ideal.^{1,2} Otherwise, this book is a thoughtful, integrated, and innovative work that clearly captures the essence of ADD and provides a meaningful addition to the literature.

—*Marjolaine Limbos, MSW, MA*

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References

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2. Cantwell DP. Attention deficit disorder: a review of the past 10 years. *J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 1996;35:978-87.

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