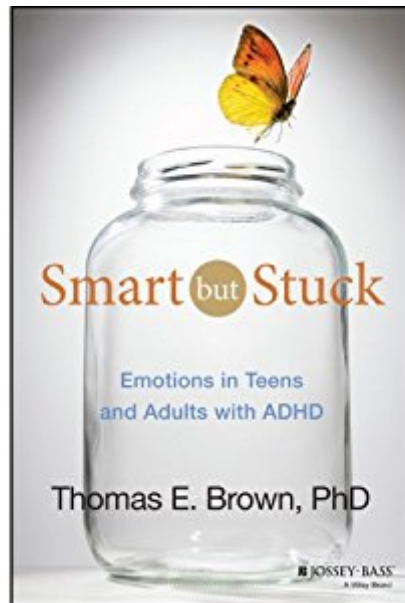




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# Smart But Stuck: Emotions In Teens And Adults With ADHD



## Synopsis

Compelling stories that present a new view of ADHD Smart but Stuck offers 15 true and compelling stories about intelligent, capable teens and adults who have gotten "stuck" at school, work, and/or in social relationships because of their ADHD. Dr. Brown highlights the often unrecognized role that emotions play in this complex disorder. He explains why even very bright people with ADHD get stuck because they can focus well on some tasks that interest them, but often can't focus adequately on other important tasks and relationships. The first book to explain and illustrate the crucial role of emotions in the daily functioning of those living with ADHD Brown, Associate Director of the Yale Clinic for Attention & Related Disorders, is an internationally known authority on ADHD. Drawing on the latest research findings, the book describes strategies and treatments for getting "unstuck" to move on to a more rewarding and productive life.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours 24 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: May 12, 2014

Language: English

ASIN: B00KAH3MEY

Best Sellers Rank: #79 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Education #144

in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Medicine #238 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Neurology

## Customer Reviews

Ironically, while writing this book review, I often found myself feeling "smart but stuck." This review was scheduled to be published last month but my inability to get started until the last minute got in the way. I believed writing this was important so I set earlier deadlines and forced myself to "work" on it (when I spent plenty of time staring at my blank screen to the detriment of other obligations.) But that wasn't enough in the moment I just couldn't force my brain to write sentences. And now that I've read this book, I understand exactly how that can so easily happen to someone with ADHD. Dr. Thomas E. Brown in his latest

book, *Smart But Stuck*, explores the role of emotions in the ADHD experience. *Emotions* • sometimes conscious, more often unconscious • serve to motivate cognitive activity that shapes a person's experience and action. For those with ADHD, chronic problems with recognizing and responding to various emotions tend to be a primary factor in their difficulties with managing daily life. And as Brown explains, being smart doesn't provide shelter from these problems. The patients discussed in this book were all very bright but still became stuck in school, relationships or work. The high incidence of comorbid psychiatric conditions with ADHD is well documented, but the impact of emotions on ADHD is even more pervasive when considering those affected by subclinical manifestations or "shadow syndromes." To anyone with ADHD, it is obvious emotions play a critical role in how ADHD symptoms manifest, yet very little has been written on the subject. This book appeals to a wide audience. The first chapter, entitled "ADHD in the Emotional Brain", reviews our current understanding of the role of emotion in ADHD by drawing on clinicians, researchers, and neuroscientists' latest research findings. Dr. Brown clearly explains the research without ever getting bogged down in technical language. In this very thorough yet very readable summary, he discusses topics including attentional bias, delayed rewards, the importance of context, executive functions, neurobiology and working memory. This sets the foundation for the remaining chapters where he illustrates and expands upon these topics through case studies. Much of the book is dedicated to exploring these issues through the personal stories of eleven of Dr. Brown's patients. Says Brown, "One of my special interests over the years has been adolescents and adults who are especially bright; they have taught me that being smart is no protection from attention impairments. Not only is it possible for people with a high IQ to suffer from ADHD, but it's likely they'll suffer longer without adequate support or treatment because the people in their lives assume, quite mistakenly, that anyone who is really smart can't suffer from ADHD." The patients in this book range from a 14 year-old high school student to a 50 year-old homemaker and mother. Six were college students, which is not surprising given Dr. Brown's practice at Yale University. But as Brown explains, context is crucial in ADHD and each of the students struggled mightily with the major changes in context encountered as they respectively entered high school or college. Dr. Brown weaves patient's stories with explanations of the specific challenges faced. Though they all fell under the umbrella of "Smart but Stuck", Dr.

Brown explains how he approached treating the unique problems of each patient differently. All challenging cases, they serve to illustrate how successful treatment is often the result of exploring and abandoning many approaches before finding one that works. These patients were not merely struggling; they were completely stuck and required a great deal of hard work to get them going again. ADHD is typically presented as a problem of cognition and the executive functions. When emotions are included in the list of symptoms, they are just one of a multitude of areas where problems with inhibition manifest and are dismissed as difficulty putting the brakes on. But as Brown points out, there are many instances where a problem might be better described as difficulty with the ignition system. The students described all invariably struggled with getting work done in classes that didn't interest them. They were smart enough but they couldn't get their brains activated to work when needed. Medication typically helped with this but therapy was also required to explore and resolve the conflicting motivations that consistently got in the way. Although each story is unique, there were many common threads. The patients were all very bright and had had many successes in their lives. However, their ADHD made universal success impossible and this inconsistency created many problems. Martin, a 23 year-old university student, belonged to Mensa but still struggled with his grades. His parent's had even explored the possibility he might have ADHD when he was young, but the doctors all said he was too bright to have such a problem. To outsiders, this achievement gap often appears to be an issue of willpower and so, for these patients, the gap between expectation and performance results in embarrassment and shame. And for someone with ADHD, it is easy for an emotion such as shame to fill their minds and prevent them from seeing the larger picture, leading to further problems. Here we see examples where their pain drove them to substance abuse, escape through video games and avoidance. The role of working memory in problems with emotions was illustrated in several cases. Emotions are complicated, conflicting and nuanced, but with limited working memory, it can be difficult to experience more than one emotion at a time, let alone weigh two conflicting motives against each other. In these cases, Dr. Brown talks about the importance of external feedback from a trusted source to point out overlooked nuances or contradictions. Sarah, the 50-year-old housewife, who first experienced ADHD-like symptoms at menopause, discusses how a decrease in estrogen levels can cause executive function problems for some women who had never experienced them before. While she technically would not qualify for an ADHD diagnosis, it is interesting how many of the same approaches helped, including the use of stimulants. This is still a new area of research and I expect we'll be hearing more about it in years to come. The stories were inspiring but also offered caveats. In most cases,

the patients eventually became unstuck and were able to move ahead with their lives. Treatment was quite intense and ramifications included lost time, lost tuition money and a marriage that couldn't be saved. One patient, Lois, whose severe ADHD problems had taken an enormous toll over time, was still struggling by the end of the chapter. I believe these stories taken together offer an encouraging but realistic picture. The last chapter summarizes the steps to help get unstuck: assessment, treatment and support. Finally, Brown talks about the importance of cultivating realistic hope. As he concludes, "With the right supports in place, many of those stuck with ADHD can develop realistic and sustainable hope can learn to survive and even to thrive." I found Brown presented a well-balanced view of his patients. He spoke of their weakness and struggles but also of their strengths and talents. As he told me when we spoke, "We all have this sort of illusion where we're often told, particularly people who are smart, 'You can do anything that you want to!,' but that's just not how the brain operates. I better appreciate that I need a more realistic view of what I can and can't do. I have a lifetime's accumulation of all the things I've been told and believed I should be able to do, but looking back with this new knowledge, I can see why I struggled so often, seemingly inexplicably at the time. If I can incorporate these insights into my future plans, I have hope I'll be able to avoid getting stuck quite so often. This is an important new book that shines light on the importance of considering the role of emotions when dealing with ADHD. This is not intended as a self-help book, but rather, is an exploration of the role of emotions through the use of story. The cases presented were all quite severe. I would like to have learned more about what might help people who weren't stuck per se, but were still struggling to meet their own, and others', expectations. I also would have liked to learn more about the impact of emotions on those who were diagnosed with ADHD much later in life. Any adult with ADHD or anyone who wants to learn more about ADHD would benefit from reading this book.

This book provided lots of examples of people with ADHD and how the classic treatment options don't address the extremely common comorbid problems. It's not particularly well written or fun to read. It is obvious that the author is a psychologist who happened to write a book, an author that happens to be a psychologist. This book assumes you already know a lot about the subject, and seems to be more of a guide to refer to and to supplement the knowledge of someone who already

had a degree in the field. As a patient, it was still interesting, but ultimately not particularly helpful.

Most of this book is a series of case studies (about a dozen) drawn from Dr. Brown's clients. All of the individuals have ADHD, almost always with co-occurring conditions (anxiety, depression), although most were not diagnosed until they were teenagers or adults. Most of the case study subjects are high school or college students who have hit a road block in school and are on the verge of dropping out or are on academic probation, although a couple of them are adults who are having problems at work or with personal relationship or other life stressors. Each case study describes the circumstances that led the individual to seek treatment along with the approaches taken to improve outcomes (e.g., medication, therapy, changing schools or jobs, etc.). Each study ends with a succinct summary of the different interventions that were used. After the case studies, there is brief chapter that tries to tie things together. As the parent of a child who could easily have been one of the case studies in this book, I found the book helpful in trying to understand why things started to go so wrong for my child. I wish the book had been available a year ago when I really could have benefitted from it! Even so, it was still a useful read. I can recommend it for any parent who has a teenager or young adult who is struggling with ADHD. I also think it would be an excellent read for high school and college guidance counselors or other educators working with students who are really struggling in school but who clearly have the potential to do better. The book provides many insights into why these students are having such a hard time and what can be done to help. I think there are many misconceptions by educators that reading this book could help to clear up. The only reason I didn't give the book 5 stars is that I felt that the book fell short at the end in terms of giving the type of prescriptive guidance that would be helpful to many readers, at least readers who are not mental health professionals. The case studies are written in a very clinical style--they are very descriptive and include a fair amount of detail, but there is very little commentary to tie things up and help the reader generalize. I love the case studies, but I was hoping that section of the book after the case studies would be a bit longer and give a fuller discussion of the role of emotions in ADHD and more importantly, how to deal with the intense emotions experienced by many of those with ADHD. I hope that Dr. Brown will write a second edition in a couple of years and include more of this. Even at 4 stars this is a very informative book.

This book really explains how the brain of ADHD/ADD people works. It gives you case studies and provides you with ideas on how to tackle behavior. It gives great advice.

A groundbreaking book that really takes a very fresh and insightful look at ADHD and how emotional regulation plays a huge part in it. Those overlooked by the old paradigm "ADHD as attention deficit" may recognize themselves in this very new interesting paradigm of "ADHD as attention surplus", i.e. inability to manage your emotions, interests, etc.

This is the book I have been looking for! this book is incredibly helpful, and real. The focus on executive function and emotion makes sense, creates insights and resonates deeply with my lived experience. The stories are touching and targeted, and help the reader access both research and the layers of ADHD in a way that makes you think and feel differently. This is clearly the work of a wise, dedicated researcher and human being.

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