

Stages of Recognition of ADD/ADHD in Adults

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While mingling with over three hundred participants at the first conference solely dedicated to serving adults with an ADD brainstyle in the early 1990s, the light bulb went off in my head. As it did, tears threatened to escape for all to see. I was viewing happiness, healing, and growing of adults who previously had been lost or wanting, or whose lives were in disarray.

I recognized people with intense emotions: [happiness](#), [sadness](#), [anger](#), [excitement](#), [euphoria](#), and [peacefulness](#). These wonderful people were experiencing different levels of awareness and understanding about their ADD. I began to realize that what I was seeing were the stages through which people go as they integrate information about their ADD brain style into their daily living. **Five distinct stages emerged.**

Stage One could be called the **“Aha, I have it,”** stage. “Finally I have an explanation for why my life is the way it is. There really is *something* different about me. But I’m not crazy, retarded, lazy, inadequate, or no good.” This is a time of awakening. It’s the recognition that “there are others like me.” “I’m not the only one.” Shock, excitement, and euphoria are likely to accompany this time along with an insatiable search for information.

Stage Two can be called the **grief stage**. Once the realization sinks in that there was a reason for not being able to live up to potential, the hurts, traumas, and losses suffered because of an ADD brain style began to surface. As your mind begins to recall the hundreds of incidents that were related to ADD, your emotions begin to react. Confusion, anger, “what ifs,” and depression all churn, creating emotional bedlam. This stage does end, but first it is important to feel your emotions thoroughly and grieve the losses in order to heal your wounds.

Stage Three involves seeking support and understanding companionship during the grieving state. This stage could be called “**the family stage.**” Over and over at the Adult ADD Conferences, I hear people say, “I’ve found my family. There are others like me. I plan to come every year to my family reunion.”

Not only can information and guidance be gained at such groupings, but all important emotional support can be obtained. “Coming home” to a place of unconditional acceptance heals the wounds of the past and supports the growth of the future.

Stage Four is characterized by seeking, exploration, and experimentation. It might be called the **growing up** phase. It’s a time for trying things. With ADD factored into a person’s life, suddenly everything looks different. Exposure to previously tried experiences is necessary in order to discover from the new ADD perspective whether you like or dislike them, can or can’t do them, want or don’t want to pursue them now. It’s an updating of data in one’s bank of life experience that you want to continue to draw from.

Stage Five means coming of age. It is surely a time for the unfolding of a new identity. It’s a time to redefine values, honor talents and gifts, and love who and what you are. “I know who I am now. I believe in myself. I can do whatever I’ve discovered I like. I am me.” Reaching potential is wonderful, beautiful, and heady stuff. It is also possible and real.

The integration of current information into the life experiences of innumerable people is opening the door for the development of a valuable resource known to each of us: individual identity. As differences are recognized and honored, by yourself and others, not only will individual lives be made more pleasant, but the world will truly become a better place in which to live.