Addicted to attention and drama? [1]

Dear Alice,

I was wondering if there is such a thing as attention addiction. I don't mean attention deficit disorder, I mean grown adults who crave attention and are addicted to getting positive or negative attention (like drama). Is there a true disorder where a supposedly mature adult can be addicted to drama and attention from other people to the point of doing weird behavioral things to get attention? And, if there's a disorder, what are the signs and symptoms? Is a diagnosis required for the individual to attend therapy to help him/her stop?

Sincerely,
Just Wondering...

Answer

Dear Just Wondering...,.

Actually, there's no official diagnosis for attention addiction, but there are mental disorders marked by continual attention-seeking. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) suggests that people with dramatic, emotional, or erratic behavior and thoughts that interfere markedly with day-to-day functioning might be suffering from a personality disorder.

To be more specific, someone who seems to crave and create drama and attention might be experiencing symptoms of histrionic personality disorder (HPD). Only mental health professionals can diagnose this when there is clear evidence that five of the following symptoms occur in various contexts and seem to have begun in early adulthood:

- experiences discomfort when not the center of attention
- often interacts in inappropriately sexual or seductive ways
- displays shallow and rapidly shifting emotions
- places extreme value on personal appearance and uses appearance to draw attention to self
- speaks with little detail while conveying vague ideas
- displays dramatic and theatrical expression of emotion
- is easily influenced by others and seems suggestible
- thinks interpersonal relationships are more intimate than they really are

You can imagine that people who meet criteria for HPD may experience some negative reactions from other people based on how they behave. Yet, many people with HPD lead
relatively successful lives. The problem is that they seem to fall apart when faced with situations where they perceive rejection from others and especially when romantic relationships sour. In fact, break-ups or instances of social rejection often push people with HPD into depression.

There’s some evidence to suggest that someone with HPD can benefit from being in psychotherapy. You asked if a diagnosis is required prior to beginning therapy. The short answer to that question is no, but it also depends on his/her willingness to participate in therapy and whether or not s/he has access to therapy through school or elsewhere.

Even if a person doesn't seem to fully meet the criteria for HPD, someone who is so concerned with getting attention may crack in situations when attention isn't given. In this case, the person could still probably benefit from some outside help. Students at Columbia can call Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) [2] at x4-2878 for more information or to make an appointment.

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health [3]
Miscellaneous [4]

Related questions
Finding low-cost counseling [5]
How to find a therapist [6]
My need for sexual attention is getting out of hand [7]
Liar, liar, pants on fire: Am I a pathological liar? [8]
My friend needs counseling [9]
What's the difference between an addiction and a compulsion? [10]

Published date:
Mar 16, 2007
Last reviewed on:
Jun 15, 2015

Footer menu

Contact Alice!
  • Content Use
  • Media Inquiries
  • Comments & Corrections

Syndication & Licensing
  • Licensing Q&As
  • Get Alice! on Your Website
  • Full Site Syndication
  • Link to Go Ask Alice!

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.
If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/addicted-attention-and-drama#comment-0

Links