The Cost of Accommodation vs. the Cost of Impairment

ADHD is an executive function impairment. Like any impairment, it cannot simply be wished away, overcome through effort alone, or permanently fixed. Pragmatically speaking, impairments require accommodation.

Accommodations come with a degree of inconvenience. We accept that inconvenience because it improves quality of life over the long term. A person with a mobility impairment may need a wheelchair. Someone with a vision impairment may need eyeglasses. A person with an executive function impairment may need environmental supports, external structure, or direct oral conversation to support problem-solving. Those struggling with digital addiction may even need to trade the convenience of a smartphone for the limitations of a flip phone.

Every accommodation involves a tradeoff. However, without accommodations, people often experience greater frustration, failure, and suffering. The question is not whether an accommodation is inconvenient.

The question is whether the inconvenience of the accommodation is less costly than the consequences of the impairment.

In the end, accommodation is not about convenience. It is about reducing the impact of the impairment and improving the ability to function effectively over time.

Disorders, Impairments, Disabilities, and Accommodations

A disorder is a diagnosed condition characterized by a recognizable pattern of symptoms or behaviors. The disorder may result in an impairment, which is the actual loss, reduction, or inefficiency in physical, mental, or cognitive functioning. A disability occurs when that impairment creates barriers to functioning in everyday life, work, school, or other environments.

The focus is typically not on "fixing" the impairment, but on accommodating it. An accommodation is a modification, support, or adjustment that reduces the functional limitations caused by the impairment. By lowering barriers and improving access to effective functioning, accommodations can significantly reduce-or even eliminate-the disability associated with an impairment.

Importantly, impairments do not define a person's potential. With appropriate accommodations and support, individuals with ADHD and executive function impairments can successfully achieve their goals and lead productive, fulfilling lives.