

## **So You Think You're Stupid? Maybe You Are.**

I recently received an email from a parent who is desperately frustrated over the struggles her middle-school son is facing. He has been diagnosed with ADHD and bi-polar disorder. School and everyday life, she says, is a real struggle; he loses everything and forgets everything. Like every other student I have met with these same characteristics, he also happens to be brilliant.

But, his mother says, "All I hear is, "I'm stupid! Over and over again..."

Maybe he is.

There are several formal definitions of the word, "stupid," according to Dictionary.com. In my world, however, "stupid" is the word I use to describe someone who has talents, gifts, and skills, but is choosing not to use them. Let me tell you, I know a lot of stupid people!

But, you don't have to be one of them. This struggling young man doesn't have to be, either.

Unfortunately, he is one of many, many students who think they are not smart for a variety of reasons. In his case, he is probably frustrated that he cannot organize and keep track of his papers as well as other classmates. "There must be something wrong with me," he thinks.

"There IS something wrong with you," he hears when he visits the doctor and is told that he has ADHD and bi-polar disorder. He can probably solve challenging problems, can think of creative solutions, or can design clever things, but he does not recognize any of these skills as gifts because he can't do something as simple as keep track of a homework assignment...and now he has a diagnosis to "prove" he's stupid.

Meanwhile, "I'm stupid!" becomes an easy excuse and a great way to get attention. When he says, "I'm stupid!" people tell him he's not. They feel sorry for him and give him attention. Eventually, they organize his things for him and do his work for him...It doesn't take long for "I'm stupid!" to become a crutch he depends on.

This is a very common, well-intentioned situation that has been turned upside down and is back-firing on this student and his family. It is understandable how he ended up here, but the cycle has to stop and he has to be willing to step off and stop being "stupid."

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How does he do that?

### **\*\*Action Plan\*\***

The best antidote against feeling stupid is to make a *\*decision\** to not be stupid anymore. That may sound overly simple and obvious, but this student HAS to decide that being successful in school is worth his while and -more importantly- that he is worth the effort. If he can acknowledge that, he will immediately stop being 'stupid,' and will have already won more than half of his battle.

The next step is for him to take action. As wonderful as our education system is, mandated curriculum has a way of beating students into a passive, coma-like state. Students quickly feel that "learning" is about sitting, getting, rehearsing, and spewing it all back on homework or a test. However, when a student realizes that he can be strategic... that HE can make some of that dry information just a little more interesting, that he can use a couple of tricks to learn it just a little bit faster, and remember it just a little bit better, he will quickly realize that there is a strategy to learning. Strategy can be fun!

There are millions of study strategies plastered all over the internet. The free Homework Rx® Toolkit at [www.soarstudyskills.com/freestuff.htm](http://www.soarstudyskills.com/freestuff.htm) has several quick and simple strategies. He can start by simply trying 2-3 of them. He will soon discover that all he needs are a few of the right tools (a.k.a. strategies) to learn how to learn and organize more effectively...and make learning more interesting.

Finally, he needs to stop using all of his labels as excuses. I'm not suggesting that diagnosing a student with ADHD, bi-polar disorder, or any other medical diagnosis is a bad thing. Instead, I am suggesting that the way those labels are handled can sometimes be a bad thing.

For example, I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis when I was 19. At that time, I did not even know what that disease was. There was no internet in "those days," so I went to the library and checked out a book about RA. Right from the first chapter, the attitude of the author was, "So, you have rheumatoid arthritis. That's (literally) a pain in the neck. BUT, you don't have to stop living! You just have to start living better." Throughout the entire book, as I learned about my disease and better ways to take care of myself, the author continued to emphasize that I could have a better life because of my experiences with the

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disease. After 13 years, I can honestly say that the quality of my life is much better because of the things I learned from my illness.

This is the same attitude that we should be bestowing on our students when we tell them they have ADHD. We should be saying, "Okay, you have ADHD. That means that you are going to struggle a little more in traditional school settings, but you're IQ is significantly higher than the national average and you can use your talents to do great things. We just need to figure out a few strategies to help you get through school."

Isn't that a much more empowering message?

### **\*\*Conclusion\*\***

If you think about what a child, or any human being, is really saying when they say, "I'm stupid," they are repeating messages they've heard or felt in some way, shape, or fashion. They can spend their life blaming other people for sending them that message, or they can decide to not be stupid anymore, take action, and be in control of their own learning!