

ADHD on the Pool Deck

Vigilance and the Right Kind of Challenge



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Hi! I'm Derrick.

I was...

a junior lifeguard at age 13,

a pool lifeguard/instructor at 16,

an aquatic supervisor at 28,

a program director at 30, and

diagnosed with ADHD at 36.

“It was like magic. It didn’t matter how chaotic things were. When I stepped on the deck, my mind got quiet.”

Why This Matters

- Lifeguarding requires intense focus and vigilance
- Distractibility, impulsivity, and boredom can become safety risks

Boredom = Pain*

*More about this in a bit.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Fast Facts About ADHD

- A complex set of paradoxical tendencies (brains are complicated)
- 20,000 more negative personal comments heard by age 12
- A neurodevelopmental condition (genetic)
- Impacts executive function: focus, time, emotion, planning, working memory
- Brain is wired for interest not importance
- ADHD is a terrible name

“A person with ADHD has the power of a Ferrari engine but with bicycle-strength brakes.”

- Edward M. Hallowell M.D.

ADHD Traits on the Pool Deck

- High energy or restlessness → guard paces or fidgets
- Inconsistent attention to scanning → starring or drifting
- Difficulty with transitions → loses track of time or freezes
- Emotional reactivity to feedback or conflict → outbursts or spirals
- Hyperfocus during emergencies → focused and unbreakable
- Task procrastination or aversion → not now or later mentality

ADHD Strengths in Aquatics

- Fast decision-making in a crisis
- Pattern recognition and out-of-the-box thinking
- Creative problem solving
- High emotional intelligence
- Willingness to take initiative or adapt under pressure
- At home in the chaos

Novelty + Urgency + Interest =
Chaos (also ADHD fuel)

ADHD Risk Areas in Aquatics

- Boredom can equal wandering attention
- Impulsive reactions or rule-bending
- Difficulty with paperwork or logs
- Emotional intensity with patrons or peers
- Forgetting instructions or misreading tone

Supervising or Training ADHD Staff

- ADHD trainers/instructors may improvise or scramble last-minute
- Avoid info-dumping instead use interactive demos
- Target interests, character strengths, and values whenever possible
- Expect strong passions and variable follow-through

When it comes to training, think visual, hands-on, and/or movement-based instructions. Get **curious** about what helps them stay engaged.

Supporting ADHD on the Deck

Supervisors/Trainers

- Clear and visual routines
- Provide novelty in routines
- Use interest-based incentives
- Gentle redirection vs. reprimands
- Offer structure, not micromanagement

Guards

- Use physical anchors (walk, touch, breathe)
- Personal scanning rhythms
- Follow the Monkey/Fish technique then re-anchor
- Time-blindness tools (alarms, visual timers)

Simple tools go a long way, but a tool only works if it's used.

“ADHD is a disorder of performance, not a disorder of knowledge.”

- Russell A. Barkley, PhD

Final Points

1. ADHD is real, invisible, and manageable
2. ADHD isn't a barrier—it's a brain type with unique strengths and support needs
3. Brains are complicated. Your most powerful tools are curiosity, kindness, and empathy



Questions?

Thanks!

If you have any questions or would like to know more (sources, resources, etc.), feel free to reach out.



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