

SPOTLIGHT EFFECT



What is it?

Humans think they are in the spotlight (i.e., noticed) far more often than they actually are. We think people focus on our presentation and our physical characteristics much more than they really do.

How to hack spotlight effect at home

You know who's likely to feel that all eyes are upon them, even if it's far from accurate? Your kids!

Teens and adolescents tend to subscribe to the psychological fallacy of spotlight effect more so than anyone else. This is likely because the part of their brains that derives value from social interaction has grown rapidly during this time, but the portion of the brain that governs self-awareness has yet to play catch-up. Consequently, they remain subject to an inflated sense of being watched or judged by their peers. Doesn't that explain why your ten-year old daughter might be "absolutely mortified" if she wears the wrong shirt to school, or your adolescent son might feel like he'll "totally die" if his haircut turns out badly? YOU know that likely no one else will ever notice - or ever care - but to your child, these little social faux pas might be the end of the world.



So, how do you help your mini-me gain a little perspective? It's not easy (remember, their self-aware brains are not fully developed!). But you can help show them how little anyone in high school is really paying attention. You can notice small things when you drop them off at school and then ask them about it later "Hey, looks like Janet got her hair dyed." Your child would not have noticed (I PROMISE you), and you can use this as an opportunity to reinforce the idea that no one's paying as much attention as they'd like to believe. The spotlight isn't on anyone - not on them, not on Janet!

How to hack spotlight effect at work

It's 7:00 AM, you are rushed getting out of home and now there is traffic to work! Ugh, could this morning get any worse?



At least you were able to stop by Starbucks to get your favorite American Machiatto. Suddenly, the car in front of you breaks and so do you, spilling some of the drink on your crisp laundered shirt, leaving a nice big stain! That's just perfect, isn't it?

What happened up until this point might not have been in your control, but what happens next is. You can either walk around all day with a sheepish look on your face and apologize for/explain the stain your shirt stain in every meeting, or you can realize nobody gives a damn!

Your shirt stain matters to them only because it bothers you first.