

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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What is ADD/ADHD?

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the most talked about, yet least understood of childhood behaviour disorders. What is more confusing is that ADHD lacks a single definition. Not all children with an attention disorder are hyperactive. Some may be withdrawn and listless, but not necessarily hyperactive. A diagnosis is made by comparing the behaviour of the child to the criteria for ADHD listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV) which is the reference guide for diagnosis of any mental health problem. The DSM-IV lists three types of ADHD:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Predominantly Inattentive Type
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Combined Type

There are several criteria for a diagnosis of ADHD. Overall, a child with ADHD has problems with *inattention*, which means they have trouble concentrating or focussing on one thing for very long, and *impulsivity*, which means they are prone to act before carefully thinking about consequences. The child may or may also display a high level of energy in terms of being fidgety and restless. Every child with ADD may not necessarily be hyperactive. The DSM breaks the diagnosis into several criteria, of which the child must have at least eight. Many of these criteria refer to behaviour that is seen in a school setting.

The diagnosis can only be made by a mental health professional after careful observation and detailed reports from the parents and the child's teacher.

How Common is ADHD?

Despite the great deal of attention paid to ADHD in the media, the consensus is that about 3-5% of all children are affected by ADHD. This means that out of 100 randomly selected children, 3-5 would pass the criteria for the diagnosis of ADHD.

Is ADHD a lack of attention?

This is perhaps the greatest myth about ADHD . In fact, most kids with ADHD have too much attention and energy, not too little. The problem is that they don't know how to focus all of that energy. Many famous people can be said to have the characteristics of ADHD. Among them are Mozart and Winston Churchill, both of whom had great difficulty focussing in the confines of a school. For them, the saving factor was that they found something to do that allowed them to focus their energies and be extremely productive. Russell Barkley, a psychologist who is world known for his research on ADHD argues that ADHD is really a problem with following rules and sticking to plans. ADHD is a disorder of *paying* attention

Does a child with ADHD have problems at home?

While the most parents whose child has ADHD will have plenty of examples from their child's behaviour at home, quite a few might not. This is not necessarily because they are poor parents. ADHD may manifest only at school, where there is an environment with a lot of distractions, such as a school setting. The parents, without even knowing it may have an intuitive understanding of their child and keep the home a fairly controlled environment.

Are ADHD kids at risk for other problems?

- Emotional/Behavioural Problems

Children with ADHD may also develop emotional and social problems. If you had ADHD and could not control your attention span, and constantly had others letting you know it was a problem, it might affect your self esteem. This is what happens with ADHD children. Constant negative reinforcement from other that they different, and therefore not “as good” can have a terrible effect on their self esteem. This could make their behaviour worse, or cause them to think that there is no hope for them to ever control their behaviour. In addition, ADHD has a big impact on the child’s ability to self regulate. A recent study by a team of researchers at the University of Toronto led by Dr. Donald Redelmeier found that teens with ADHD were more likely to be injured in a car crash either as a driver, occupant or pedestrian if they had received treatment for ADHD.

- Social Problems

Children diagnosed with ADHD because of their problems learning and following rules, may not know all the subtle rules of social interaction. This can lead them to be victimized by others, or become victimizers. The behaviour patterns that children with ADHD exhibit can make them especially hard to parent, thereby jeopardizing the most important social relationship a child has. The parent teaches the basic rules of social interaction, and provides a testing ground for the child’s growing ideas about the social world. Parents of ADHD children have been shown by research to use more negative statements with their child and issue more commands. This can mean that the child arrives at school already with a negative view of interaction with adults.

- Learning Problems

Children with ADHD often have learning difficulties at school. In fact, it is the presence of

learning difficulties that alerts professionals to the underlying cause of ADHD. Children with ADHD may be underproductive, and may have specific learning disorders such as language and memory problems. It is also not uncommon to find that children with psychiatric problems such as ADHD are suffering from an undiagnosed speech or hearing difficulty. In addition, the child's problems conducting their own behaviour in the classroom may compound existing problems and result in a string of failures-which are not good for self esteem and can make the ADHD worsen

What can the Early Childhood Educator Do to Help a Child with ADHD?

Frame of Mind

First, you have to acknowledge that *ADHD is just a label*-a helpful way of professional to share information and understand certain groups of people. The following rules are helpful:

- 1) Never mistake the child for his/her label. The disorder has the child, not the other way around.
- 2) Never blame young children suffering from ADHD for their behaviour.
- 3) Learn to separate what is intentional and what is not. Not being able to pay attention is not the child's fault, and all the negative statements in the world will not help. On the other hand, destructive, violent or very disruptive behaviour (unless the child has a Tic Disorder) should not be excused because the child has ADHD.
- 4) Always have a positive facial expression. The child knows your state of mind by your face.
- 5) Clearly state rules and directions, repeatedly if necessary. Be the child's one to one worker when possible.
- 6) Don't be negative-find ways to positively redirect the child's behaviour. One good way is to become involved and be a "cheerleader".

7) Don't be afraid to voice your concerns to his/her parents if the behaviour persists. They may be unaware that their child has problems focussing in very stimulating situations.

8) Never get into a power struggle with the child. One thing I have learned assessing children with ADHD is to give them their own stopwatch to play with right off the bat. I tell them to time me setting up the tests. This means that they are not inclined to grab mine, or anything else because their hands are full. It also anchors their attention on the activities, as I am using a stopwatch as part of the tests. Unless that child is engaging in a dangerous or outright cantankerous activity, I let them be themselves. If that means asking them questions as they crawl under the desk or explore the room that is o.k. The amazing thing is that they answer the questions.

9) When you are having trouble getting them interested in an activity, make them think that they are part of a great conspiracy that you are also a part of-namely doing the task. Make it fun, and be an equal player, restating the objectives and goals explicitly as you go. Children love this sort of activity, and the pretend play aspect helps their social development with other children.

Talking to Parents

When talking to parents - BE POSITIVE. You want them on your side. Here are some examples:

- *“Jesse seems to be very active in class and prefers to be on the go all the time. We want Jesse to be comfortable, and we want to nurture his talents, but this setting requires a sit down and quiet time component. What are some things that you do at home to help Jesse do things that require sitting down?”*
- *“Jesse is very active and creative, but does not like the sit down and group work. Can you help me think of some strategies that will help Jesse learn at his best in these*

situations?”

- *“I have noticed that Jesse’s learning style is different than the other kids. We don’t mind at all that Jesse likes to do things differently. How can we structure things so that Jesse will enjoy doing our activities in his own way?”*

Final Note

This is a brief introduction to the problem of ADHD. For further information, please see the annotated bibliography list at the end of the chapter.

Above all, as an ECE, you must confront your own issues around managing children diagnosed with ADHD. Know what your limits are, and get some information on how you can best interact with these special children. And remember *-Mozart had ADHD!*

References and Resources

Internet

Article on ADHD and injury proneness in motor vehicle accidents

<http://www.ctv.ca/CTVNews/Health/20101115/adhd-teen-drivers-101115/>

An article on how Canadian schools are doing at accommodating children with ADHD

<http://dailygleaner.canadaeast.com/cityregion/article/1284072>

ADHD Canada

<http://www.adhdcanada.com/index.html>

The Centre for ADD/ADHD Advocacy Canada

<http://www.caddac.ca/cms/page.php?2>

Books

Hallowell, N & Ratey, J. (2003). **Driven to Distraction**. New York: Pantheon

- *One of the first books on ADHD by a specialist who also has ADHD. Also one of the first to talk about the positives associated with having ADHD*

Monastra, V.J.(2004). **Parenting a child with ADHD: Ten lessons medicine cannot teach**. Los Angeles: Lowell House.

- *This is a good introductory handbook for parents and teachers that includes a plethora of information on ADHD, and tools that can help children, parents and teachers succeed*

Reif, S. F. 2005). **How To Reach And Teach Children with ADD/ADHD: Practical Techniques, Strategies, and Interventions**. New York: Jossey-Bass.

A widely used source of information about ADHD, and techniques to help school aged children for parents and educators.