

Working with the ADHD Student in the Classroom

Current Trends and Treatments

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Elementary School and ADHD

- Profile: a child who has difficulty sitting still, difficulty paying attention, and loves to talk to other children
- Environment: Classroom - this is a very difficult setting for these kids.
 - a lot of distractions
 - they are told to sit still
 - don't talk
 - pay attention (to boring worksheets)
 - stay on task until the work is finished
 - None of these things come easily to kids with ADHD. But day by day, off to school they go.

Hitting the Wall

- **Many Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder kids "hit a wall" in elementary school as their school year progresses.**
- Every week they just get a little farther and farther behind,
 - They lose their homework assignments, even after they have spent hours working on them.
 - They study hard for tests only to perform poorly the next day.

Third Grade

- ADHD is most often recognized and referred for treatment in third grade. This is when elementary school kids most often hit the "academic wall." Typical age is 8 or 9 years old
- In third grade they are expected to do more and more work on their own, and they are given more homework to do as well.
- In Florida – 3rd grade FCAT is a very big deal – if the student earns less than a Level 2 on FCAT Reading, they can be retained in gr. 3
- For these reasons, 3rd grade is the highest referring grade for psychoeducational assessments as students tend to “separate” from the pack if they are not doing well
- We also see many referrals when the child leaves Elementary School for Junior High School, with several classes and several teachers.
- Many Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder kids who found ways to compensate in Elementary School are totally lost in Junior High School

Comorbidity

- Approximately half of all children with ADHD have other mental disorders that can impact school learning as well, including:
 - Learning disorders/disabilities
 - Oppositional Defiant Disorder
 - Conduct Disorder
 - Anxiety
 - Depression

Risk Factors in School

- Students with ADHD may
- Find it more difficult time making and maintaining friendships
- Be more likely than their peers to fall behind in their school work
- Be more likely to use alcohol and tobacco
- Have a higher incidence of negative moods
- Spend less time with their families

Long Term Effects

- A longitudinal study (Fischer, M. 2005) following children with ADHD into young adulthood found that at age 20, young adults with ADHD were
 - less likely to have completed high school and be enrolled in college,
 - had more trouble maintaining friendships,
 - had lower job performance ratings than their peers without ADHD.
 - had sexual intercourse at an earlier age,
 - were more likely to be involved in a teen pregnancy and be treated for an STD,
 - had lower savings.

Current Trends - Teachers

- Many teachers will approach the instructional support team for assistance with a child with ADHD
 - They ask for help, usually in managing the child's behavior when
 - It disrupts the classroom
 - It impacts a child's grades/work completion
 - It results in office/discipline referrals
 - Basic ratings (Vanderbilt scale in Escambia) are available from most guidance counselors with parent permission to get an idea of where the problem could lie (inattention, hyperactivity)
 - Observation can occur by staff or school psychologist – typically a time on task percentage results
 - Parents often assume that when a teacher mentions ADHD or attention problems that they want the child on medication
 - Many teachers do, in fact, want the child on medication....this is a parent decision and a parent decision ONLY
 - The school/school district cannot legally require a child to be medicated to attend school (Florida Statutes Ch. 1006.0065)

School Treatment/Interventions

- Behavior charts, environmental changes, and behavior modifications are commonly used
- Positive reinforcement of on task behavior
- Extended time for work completion
- Separate testing environment
- Chunking of assignments/ single-step directions
- Frequent breaks
- Preferential seating (child's own office)
- Peer tutoring
- Lesson presentation (at desk rather than on board)
- Assignment of specific "jobs" to child
- Visualization activities of completed work
- Multi-modal lesson presentation (verbal, aural, tactile)
- Use of role playing
- Small group work
- Section 504 Accommodation Plan

Use of a Section 504 Accommodation Plan or IEP

- Many times parents request a Section 504 plan or an IEP for accommodations
- A committee at the school must determine that the impairment (ADHD) significantly impacts one of life's major activities (learning) in order for the child to be given a 504 plan
- A psychoeducational evaluation is not needed for a 504 plan but is needed for an IEP
 - Accommodations can include any of the previously listed strategies
 - Common accommodations are extended time, preferential seating, separate testing environment, and reduction of multi-step directions

504/IEP

- It is important to know that a 504 plan is not required to make accommodations in the classroom, teachers can make accommodations for any student
- A 504/IEP can/will follow the child throughout their education unless it is discontinued.
- A Section 504 Plan or IEP must be in place for accommodations to be offered on standardized tests (FCAT, SAT-9)
 - Accommodations on standardized tests are limited to the ones allowed by the test publisher and evidence that the child uses the accommodations in the general classroom setting must be presented prior to use on standardized tests

Current Trends - Parents

- Often underestimate the problems associated with ADHD:
 - Home is usually a less structured environment
 - Most homes do not have 18 other children
 - Parents will often indicate that the child does just fine with video games/ computers (immediate feedback)
 - Parents are typically hesitant to medicate and usually don't like hearing that option
 - For those that do medicate – expense can be a concern depending on their insurance

- Increasingly Parents are trying a dietary approach to ADHD
 - Use of whole foods
 - Elimination of processed foods, sugar, some carbohydrates
 - Increased use of fish oil, omega-3 fatty acids
 - Increased use of Multi-vitamins
 - Some will use caffeinated drinks for their child

Home Treatment/Interventions

- Parent education on the disorder
- Web resources
- Elimination of multi-step directions
- Environmental restructuring
- Set time for homework completion (especially if mastery is demonstrated or the homework is not graded)
- Organic/Whole Food/Vitamin approach
- Enrollment in Martial Arts

What can you do to help?

- Understand how a school works
 - There are processes in place for a reason (yes, they can take a while)
- Make appropriate recommendations
 - Recommending a 504 plan may/may not be appropriate
 - Recommending 1:1 assistance or Special Education placement may not be appropriate
 - Prescriptions for any of the above are ignored

Help

- Educate Parents
- Focus on the child's strengths, not weaknesses
- Ensure that you are up to date on research and evidence based practices
- Be aware that not all ADHD children will need help in school

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