

ADD/ADHD A Very Real Diagnosis

In the recent months I have been amazed at how many clients are dealing with mental disorders such as ADD and ADHD. These are very real disorders affecting at least 5% of students yet they often go untreated and misunderstood. These children do not want to have difficulties with organization, distractions, inattention, and impulsive behaviors.

Many times it is hard to spot what is really going on in the minds of some students. I've heard of parents offering harsh discipline for poor grades and cluttered rooms only to later learn that there was a disability behind all of this. Sometimes school personnel are unknowingly doing almost the same thing. This presents quite a challenge since all children need appropriate discipline and boundaries.

God has uniquely designed us. We all learn differently. As parents we must make an attempt to keep our eyes open and to advocate for our children. Sometimes parents can spot a disability before it is ever caught in the school.

If we are going to help our children succeed we must find where help is needed. It does little good to apply a cast to an arm when a foot is broken. It is therefore critical that the right accommodations be made. Your child's input can be crucial to finding the right solutions.

What "accommodations" would make school and home life more positive? Sometimes simply breaking projects into manageable parts keeps them from being overwhelming and also helps with memory. Sometimes help with organizational tasks is required. Some disabilities cause a child to be so scattered that a child will actually do the homework, but leave it in the locker and not turn it in.

Dealing with these challenges can be frustrating for parents and students alike. Students sometimes act out because they are frustrated academically. Unfortunately, parents have been known to act out too because they are frustrated with their children's performance. Parents are often disappointed to realize that their child may not be capable of making the football team or working at the same academic level as their classmates.

Sometimes one of the hardest things for a parent to do is to swallow their pride and allow their student to receive needed accommodations, maybe even medication. Denying disabilities does not make them go away. During these challenging times parents must keep their cool, act in love, and be proactive in searching out help for their children. Encouragement can be a positive accommodation. Words are powerful and can leave a lasting impression.

I encourage you to work with your school system to find the best help for your student. Your child's teacher may be able to help by simply changing their seating arrangement, offering peer assistance, or sending an extra set of texts home. Communication between you and your child's teacher is critical. Get your child help early before he or she gets too far behind.

You may need to approach your school now about putting a special plan in place for the next school year. Requests for testing and review of your child's history should be put in writing. Federal laws require that students receive needed services. I encourage you to visit www.about.com for more information about federal laws and the process of putting special plans such as 504's and IEP's (Individual Educational Plans) in place. My clients have also reported finding helpful information in the book *Teenagers with ADD and ADHD: A Guide for Parents and Professionals* by Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, M.S.

Special accommodations are available even for college students. Speaking of college students...today, April 14th is the deadline for all eligible WV college bound students to complete the FAFSA and receive up to an extra \$2,100 from the West Virginia Higher Education grant. That is gift money in addition to the Pell grant for the 2011-12 school year by completing the same form, www.fafsa.ed.gov.