

ADHD

Part I: Some Myth Busters

■ by Dr. Janet Irvine, Clinical Psychologist

I have received referrals from concerned parents stating that their child has ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and needs testing. Areas of concern include academic and behavior problems, difficulties concentrating, fidgetiness, and homework battles. The child may have difficulty, finishing work, or being organized. Some are focused on their social life while others are loners. The child may be considered lazy, a daydreamer or just apathetic. Some are creative, smart, driven and on-the-go.

Puzzled parents share that the child can play or read for uninterrupted hours. Some do very well in school, and yet come home and explode. How can the child have attention problems when they can sometimes be so focused?

ADHD is a misnomer. It is actually a biological and neurochemical inability to filter out unimportant information. ADHD children lack "blinders." They feel bombarded and either withdraw or explode. They can't focus on details in schoolwork and subtle cues of social interaction. The only consistent thing about ADHD is its inconsistency!

A good evaluation is important. It takes the efforts of those in the child's environment to be a part of the assessment. A developmental and family history, input from parents and teachers, and meeting the child are included. During the course of the assessment, we may find that some children do not, in fact, have ADHD, but suffer from one of many other disorders. A good evaluation is important to help sort out what is really going on.

Some types of ADHD are more difficult to diagnose than others. Even spacey day-dreamers may have "Inattentive ADHD." It is an internal form of "hyperactivity", impairing the ability to concentrate, focus and comprehend.

Treatment for ADHD includes developing structure and predictability to manage the frustration. Adding exercise, fun after-school activities and other ways to channel energy can be helpful.

Since ADHD is a biological, neurological disorder it often requires medication to help. Its biggest side effect is a reduction in appetite, which gives rise to the myth that it stunts growth. Reports insinuate that taking the meds creates a "zoned out", listlessness and so it is discontinued. Instead, parents should consult with a professional and determine more appropriate medication.

School is a tough time for these children, but with compassion and understanding they can challenge us with their inner drive and ability to create and persevere. Hopefully, the negative myths surrounding ADHD can be resolved as we strive to provide the care and support those with many gifts have to offer!

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<http://www.chicagochristiancounseling.org/newsletters.html>



Janet Irvine enjoys working with children and families in our Orland Park location.

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