

Health Bulletin

Helping Families Deal With Attention Deficit Disorder

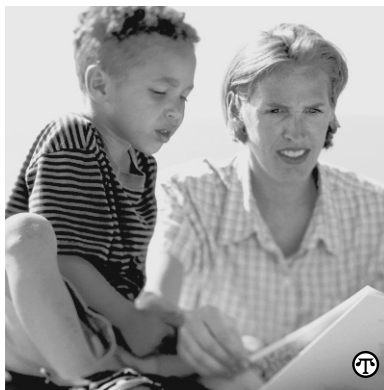
(NAPSA)—From a distance, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may seem to be only a school-related problem. However, ADHD affects sufferers—and their families—in many different ways. An expert looks at how ADHD affects many aspects of family life.

What is ADHD?

ADHD affects three to seven percent of school-aged children. The condition manifests itself in levels of attention, concentration, activity, distractibility and impulsivity inappropriate to the child's age group. Symptoms are severe enough to interfere with daily life and often affect a patient's ability to foster healthy relationships with others and function productively, whether at school, home or in social situations.

ADHD is often mistakenly blamed on parenting or just kids being kids. However, research shows ADHD is a medical disorder, characterized by differences in brain structure and function. Relatives of sufferers, both male and female, are more likely to also have ADHD. A National Institutes of Health (NIH) Consensus Conference on ADHD concluded in 1998 that "ADHD is a severe public health problem."

Children with untreated ADHD can be impulsive and disruptive, causing them to sometimes have difficulty making and keeping friends. Many of these children feel like failures because the disorder often makes it difficult or impossible for them to succeed in areas that children without ADHD already have mastered.



The negative effects of ADHD can be made less severe.

In addition, substance abuse is more common among adolescents and young adults with untreated ADHD.

Effect of ADHD on the Family

"ADHD challenges everyone it touches: the sufferer, siblings and parents," says Peter Jensen, M.D., director of the Center for the Advancement of Children's Mental Health at Columbia University.

Children with ADHD require more time, attention and structure from their parents than children without ADHD. They generally don't understand rules as well, and may test parents' limits repeatedly. Together, a family must constantly cope with the troubles their child is having at home, in school and socially. Research shows that dealing with a child who has ADHD often causes frustration, personal stress and even marital strain for parents.

Parents of ADHD children frequently get the message that their

child is having problems because they are bad parents. They rarely get credit for the challenges they face daily, or acknowledgement that their child is better off because of their help.

Also, other children in the family may feel neglected because their ADHD sibling requires so much parental attention.

How to Treat the Disorder

Dr. Jensen says, "Research has shown the combination of medication and behavioral therapy has proven to be the best way to combat ADHD." Behavioral therapies include parent training, child-focused behavior training and school-based interventions. Medication for ADHD has been studied for more than 50 years, and is effective in reducing symptoms.

Just as important as reducing symptoms, medication should have a positive impact on all aspects of daily life, including improving behaviors that typically cause family stress. "Current treatments for ADHD have proven effective in alleviating symptoms and—perhaps equally important—facilitating family functioning. We can look to future medications that are just as effective, with reduced side effects," says Dr. Jensen.

What advice does Dr. Jensen have if your child shows symptoms of ADHD? "Have your child tested for ADHD by a physician; if diagnosed, there are treatments that can improve the lives of the sufferer and the whole family."

For more information visit the Center for the Advancement of Children's Mental Health at <http://www.kidsmentalhealth.org>.