

Why is school such a struggle for my child?

Your child's education lays the groundwork for a lifetime of success both professionally and personally. So when your child begins to struggle in school, grades plummet, and homework which should take 45 minutes takes hours, the entire family experiences chaos. If we could be the proverbial "fly on the wall" in families where a child is struggling in school, we might hear variations of the following:

- "A score of 55 on your math sheet! I know you can do this; you did the same type worksheet two days ago and made a 95! What is wrong with you?"
- "If you would just sit still and focus, you could be through with this assignment in 30 minutes, but with all your fidgeting, jumping up and down, and checking out everything else that is going on in this house; it takes you forever! I don't know how much more of this I can take."
- "If you made great grades all the way up until 9th grade and now you are failing, you are just not applying yourself; you need to buckle down and get it together; or you will be grounded the rest of this semester!"
- "Your teacher says you are the model student at school, but at times she notices you staring out the window a million miles away, or just looking at her with a blank stare, and on your worksheets you do great on the first half of the sheet and then the further you go the more mistakes you make. You are going to have to pay attention in class and do all of your work. I am very disappointed in you."

What if your child had a developmental disorder that is largely due to a biological malfunction in the brain that was causing all of the above scenarios? What if there was very little or anything your child could do to control these behaviors on his own? Would you as a parent feel differently? Would you want to determine if there was an attention problem so that these struggles could lessen? All of these scenarios are examples of comments parents describe when they come to me with concerns about their child or teen's academic performance. All of the above children or teens have undiagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Back in the 50's and 60's we just thought these children were "hyper" but by the 70's and 80's we learned that these children have a developmental disorder known as ADHD Predominantly Hyperactive, Impulsive Type. These children have much difficulty with impulse control (being able to stop and think before acting), much difficulty maintaining attention on topics that are not interesting to them (which explains why they can watch TV or do video games for hours). They also have extreme difficulty staying focused on assignments, and many are even distracted by their own constant movement, talking, or fidgeting.

Other children who have ADHD are not hyperactive, do not fidget, or talk constantly; but they do have much trouble focusing, organizing, paying close attention to details, and are very easily distracted. This type of ADHD is known as ADHD/Predominantly Inattentive. This type of ADHD is frequently overlooked by parents, teachers, counselors, even physicians because the symptoms are so subtle. The child avoids tasks that require sustained mental attention; she is very forgetful, has trouble following conversations and directions; and, of course, difficulty focusing on what the teacher is presenting in class. Research reports for every three boys who are diagnosed with ADHD there is at least one girl who has the disorder. But in adult samples the ratio of males to females is one to one. Thus, girls are much less likely to be recognized as having ADHD because they do NOT exhibit behavior problems; they are usually very well behaved and eager to do well in school. But due to their

difficulty in focusing, this child cannot concentrate on what the teacher is presenting, is highly distractible, has much trouble organizing, and has trouble retaining the information she does learn. This type of ADHD is known as ADHD/Predominantly Inattentive Type.

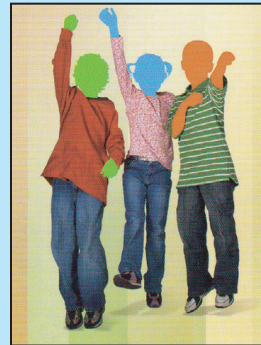
There is one other type of ADHD and that is known as ADHD Predominantly Hyperactive/Impulsive; Combined Type; this type is the most prevalent in the population. More than two-thirds to three-fourths of people diagnosed with ADHD will be placed in this type at some time in their childhood or adulthood.

What causes ADHD and how many children and teens have ADHD? ADHD is a developmental disorder that is largely genetic and biological in nature. This disorder is caused by a deficit of the neurotransmitters dopamine and norepinephrine in the frontal lobe of the brain. There is NOTHING a child or teen can do to produce more of these needed chemicals. There has been no documented evidence to support that diet (too much sugar, red food dye, processed foods); ineffective parenting or the lack of structure in the home causes ADHD. It is estimated that seven to ten percent of all children and teens have ADHD. Sadly, less than about 50% have been diagnosed. Thus, it is a myth that ADHD is over-diagnosed.

We will consider effective treatment of ADHD in our November issue. ∞

Suzanne B. Russell, LPC; PLLC specializes in ADHD treatment for children, teens, and adults. Contact her at (601) 770-7355.

Why is your child struggling in school?



Behavioral problems at school and home, problems with focusing, finishing assignments, following directions, anger outbursts, and defiance can be symptoms of TREATABLE DISORDERS. Phone 601-707-7355 for an appointment with Suzanne B. Russell, Licensed Professional Counselor; M.S. in Psychometry; and M.S. Reading Disorders.

SPECIALITIES:

Diagnosis and management of ADHD, inattentive ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, depression, all types of anxiety disorders, and behavioral and academic problems for children and teens.

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