

How Do We Really Treat ADHD?
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ADHD stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, it is often paired with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). Although ADHD was not properly diagnosed as a mental disorder until the 1960's, it began to be recognized by people in 1902. British pediatrician Sir George Still described it as "an abnormal defect of moral control in children." (Healthline, Kimberly Holland, Valencia Higuera). During that era, the schools did not completely understand ADHD and many of the children diagnosed were thought just incapable of handling school. If they couldn't concentrate, or acted out, they were disciplined for behavioral issues. This caused serious problems for the child, leading to many of them dropping out illiterate. Now that times have changed, children with ADHD are receiving a fair education. But is it the right education? According to Medical Press more children with ADHD are "at increased academic risk during the middle school and early high school period. Especially when we see that 40% of students failed to meet the national minimum standards in at least one academic area." (Ms Zendarski, Medical Press). Children with ADHD are suffering tremendously in schools and most people don't know why or how this is happening. The best way to figure out the reason is to answer the question: "How do we (the education system) really treat ADHD?".

What are some positive ways schools are helping children with ADHD?

Through programs, assistance, counseling and parental help, the education system is beginning to address the issue of ADHD. The most well known methods of helping these students is to place them in a special education program, offer one on one assistance in the form of a IEP (Individualized Education Program), and/or guide them through school counseling or professional help. The least well known, is asking for parental help. The help of the parents is extremely important in understanding what is really going on in the child's life. Being that ADHD is considered an invisible disorder, there are many cases of teachers using the latter method to understand their student's behavior. In addition, informed teachers research their student's background, and find it beneficial to look into child psychology. Of course, some students with ADHD are capable of doing great in a normal classroom, but in these cases, additional special education help might be denied. Some schools will refuse to let them go into the Special Education Program because the child must have a disability that meets special education related service qualifications for it. (pages 20-21 in *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law*). This means that not all kids with ADHD will be able to get into Special Ed programs, but they will still be offered help in other ways, IEP's for example. Although these IEPs are usually only used for children already in Special Ed, there have been certain programs exclusively designed to help ADHD. These programs include music, art, dance, and drama. Extracurricular activities outside of class may also help the child's hyperactivity (which is then trickled into creativity and imagination).

Another great way ADHD is helped is through tutoring and counseling. Sometimes, a child just needs some personal one-on-one with someone who can really make the subject capture the student's attention. As the book, *Understanding and Supporting Children with ADHD: Strategies for Teachers, Parents and Other Professionals*, states; "The importance of being respected and listened to is prominent in children's personal accounts. Children with ADHD commonly feel misunderstood... and complain that they received insufficient appropriate attention of this kind." (Lesley Hughes, Paul Copper pg.51). Most schools in the United States provide for these needs, but there are some that do not. Leading to difficulties, not only for the child, but for the teachers, parents, and other students as well.

What are some insufficient ways ADHD is treated in education?

Teacher discrimination is the most common way ADHD is treated poorly, in addition to peer pressure or bullying, textbook teaching methods, and unfair discipline. ADHD, according to *Beyond Consequences, Logic and Control; a Love Based Approach to Helping Attachment-Challenged Children with Severe Behaviors*, is "Scared children doing scary things... When children act out in a manner in which many find disturbing, they are not only confused and overwhelmed, but also cannot even remember what is safe and what is not safe." (Heather T.Forbes Bryan Post, PhD LCSW. pg. 3). Due to this feeling of uncertainty, a child with ADHD will often go into complete survival mode when in school. Sadly there are still a lot of schools in our country that don't quite understand how to treat these kids. So they handle the issue, in the child's eyes, in the wrong way. Examples of improper treatment would be teacher

discrimination and/or textbook method teaching. Most children with ADHD have trouble with concentration and simple obedience to simple rules. When ADHD is not known, the symptoms are thought to be laziness, disrespect, and inattention. Of course, these symptoms will just repeat themselves every day, soon teachers will start to become harder on and less compassionate towards those students. Sometimes the ADHD child has something that helps him concentrate well. My sister, now 17, used to need to bring silly putty to school that she could play with to help her concentrate in class. The teacher, though, was unaware of the need and usually took it from her and then gave her a demerit (docked off points for the day) for using it in class. This continual discipline was hard on my sister, and harder on my mom who decided to pull her out of the school. Some teach by the textbook, leaving the students to fend for themselves. As children with ADHD learn best when they are seeing, touching, and hearing; the textbook method of teaching almost always leads to failing grades, greater inattentiveness, and more disruption in the classroom.

Peer pressure and bullying can become a serious issue as well. Children who experience great amounts of peer pressure and bullying are known to become dangerous because they are constantly in “survival mode”. As are children with ADHD stemming from neglect or abuse. As the book *Beyond Consequences, Logic and Control: A Love Based Approach to Helping Attachment-Challenged Children with Severe Behaviors* says; “These children perceive the world as threatening from a neurological, physical, emotional, cognitive, and social perspective... (They) struggle to behave in a loving way. (They) cannot think clearly, and (they) swing back and forth in (their) emotional states due to an undeveloped regulatory system.” (Heather T. Forbes)

Bryan Post, PhD LCSW.pg.4). A good way to solve this problem is allowing ADHD be taught in schools to the children. This helps children understand why some kids behave differently than they might, or what they themselves are struggling with. This may reduce bullying and peer pressure, and is a good step in the right direction.

Private schools vs public schools, is there a difference?

All public schools are federal, funded by the government. Federal law states all public schools must treat kids equally, giving the best education to all children of any race, age, or disability. Because of this, public schools are obligated to treat ADHD in the best way they can. On the other hand, private schools are funded by parents and donors. They do not receive funds from the government, therefore they are not obligated to follow federal law. This generally means that if the school decides to treat ADHD unfairly, as long as they are not breaking any laws, they may do so. This has sometimes been used to the advantage of the private schoolers (not all private schools take advantage of their freedom). Although not in all cases, private schools tend to have a standard that is hard for special needs children to live up to. There are some private schools that do not provide accommodations for students that have ADHD. As an example, my sister's experience was at an Alabama private school. My brother also experienced prejudiced toward his hyper behavior. He often got in trouble for talking too loudly, and moving around, in the cafeteria. This led to more demerits and disappointment in the staff from my mom. The staff refused better interventions, and he was also soon taken out of that school. The same

brother and sister have attended public school. Their experience there, although not great, was better than when they were in private school.

Public school vs home school, which is the better option?

There are parents with children, that have been diagnosed with ADHD, that have chosen to home educate their child. There are many reasons why they've felt this option was optimal. In *Psychology Today*, Dr. Peter Gray suggested, "My analysis of these stories suggests that (1) most ADHD-diagnosed kids do fine without drugs if they are not in a conventional school; (2) the ADHD characteristics don't vanish when the kids leave conventional school, but the characteristics are no longer as big a problem as they were before; and (3) ADHD-diagnosed kids seem to do especially well when they are allowed to take charge of their own education."

Nicole Puckett, mother of twelve adopted children, not only has experience in the field of ADHD, but has lived with it for over 20 years. She has her own opinion on this subject that is greatly respected by many other adoptive families. In a private Home Education interview with Nicole, she explained why she chose to homeschool, "I want my children to have individualized education geared towards their gifts and talents. In their own way, in their own timing. I wanted them to socialize with people of all ages, from all walks of life, learning from those in society with more experience and wisdom. There are many other reasons, but these are two of the most important." She reasons that homeschooling is a better option than public schooling for her children with ADHD, she told me, "Children with ADHD or other deficits that cause learning

delays need a small room approach rather than a classroom with so much external stimuli. The ability to change the environment and allow lots of space for movement, or individual teacher engagement, is not possible in a school setting.”. I also asked her to tell me what one thing she would change about homeschooling and public schools. Nicole told me that she would change the grade model in public schools. She explained that she wanted children from all levels to be integrated with each other, and that ungraded children will feel they can compete against their own best, rather than peers. She added, “I would allow children to follow their own pursuits, and choose which classes they want to take.”. Nicole said that she would like to change, “the stigma that children who are homeschooled are not well-educated or well socialized, especially children who struggle with attention deficit or other special needs”. In explanation, Nicole stated, “Their (homeschoolers) instruction is not valued by those who are ill informed about home educating.”.

In conclusion, when it comes to teaching we must determine each factor of our student’s lives. Learning more about each student as we go. As for me, how will I apply this to my future teaching life? I believe that, even though each school strives to do the best for their children, there are lots of ways they can be changed. I know that when I become a teacher; children with ADHD will receive more understanding, a more involved curriculum, and a devoted listener. I hope that by the end of my career, each child who struggles with ADHD will be better educated by a compassionate system.

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