

**HEALTHY MINDS**  
A WEEKLY COLUMN ALL ABOUT MENTAL WELLNESS  
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**Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

Part I: What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?



This week, and for the next several weeks, we shall focus our attention on a subject involving other people's inability to focus their attention or are impulsive or hyperactive. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder – ADHD – is a common disorder found in people of all ages, especially in children, but can continue into adulthood. Those affected have difficulty not just at school, but at home and with their friends.

ADHD was recognized more than 160 years ago by an English physician who also wrote illustrated children's stories and poems describing different children; one was a boy he called Fidgety Philip which described the typical ADHD child, which we will do in some detail below.

Children with ADHD find it hard to pay attention or to control their behavior. There are three basic areas where their behavior is out of the ordinary, although a mild degree of these behavior symptoms are really quite normal. It is a question of degree.

- **IMPULSIVENESS** - They often act before they think, and don't seem to be able to restrain themselves. They have no patience in play, grab toys from other children, can't wait their turn, and cannot delay rewards, but must have it, say it, do it NOW. They may say inappropriate things to others, show their emotions without holding back, and may occasionally strike another child or adult when frustrated.

- **HYPERACTIVITY** – they can't sit still and will walk around, run, fidget, climb, or get out of their seat when others are seated, and they talk a great deal, interrupting others who are talking. Sometimes teachers, parents and others think that the child is just misbehaving. They can't sit still and always have to be moving around, or talking, or squirming and fidgeting, and are generally restless. They want to touch everything and do several things at once.

- **INATTENTION** – This symptom develops a bit later than the first two; the child seems to be easily distracted by whatever is going on around him/her including irrelevant sounds and sights; the child may daydream a lot, or just seems to be somewhere else. Children with inattention symptoms can get bored easily and quickly and can't keep their attention focused on activities, especially new tasks. (The exception is that they usually CAN focus on something that they really enjoy.) Homework is difficult for them, and they often forget assignments, forget to return books, and their homework is often full of errors, erasures, and cross-outs. They may not understand teachers' instructions but may appear to be working even when they are not. They make careless mistakes and often skip between one activity and another. However, these children are seldom hyperactive

or impulsive, and usually get along well with other children, unlike some of the impulsive or hyperactive children, and thus their problem is often overlooked.

ADHD is first noticed in the early preschool or school years. These children don't seem to be able to pay attention or to control their behavior. About 3 to 5 out of every 100 children (about 2 million in the United States) have this disorder. Because this is such a large problem, which can continue into adulthood, and a very controversial disorder in terms of treatment, I shall try to cover it thoroughly.

It is important to understand that occasional impulsive or hyperactive or inattentive behavior doesn't necessarily mean that the child has ADHD. Most importantly, is the behavior inappropriate for the child's age, and does this behavior cause a problem for the child?

We shall continue with this topic for the next several weeks, discussing how it is diagnosed, how it is treated, and how it affects the family; we are also going to look at some alternative expert views concerning the misdiagnoses of ADHD and the use of Ritalin and other prescription drugs used to treat this disorder, and the dangers that these substances pose to the child and to the community where they are often sold on the streets and abused by other children.

**TIP OF THE WEEK:** "The feeling of being valuable - 'I am a valuable person'- is essential to mental health and is a cornerstone of self-discipline." M. Scott Peck.

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