

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

Part VI: ADHD's effect on teenagers and adults



This week we shall finish our six-part examination of ADHD by discussing how this disorder impacts teens and adults.

When children with ADHD symptoms reach the teens the problems are greater, since the teen years are times when children are in the process of transferring their allegiance to a certain degree, to their peers, as they seek their own independent adulthood. They want to try new things, some of them forbidden (like drugs, alcohol, and sex), are afraid of failure in school, are afraid of social failure and can be subject to low self-esteem and lots of peer pressure.

Rules should still be maintained, though they should be easy to understand and follow. Teens should understand the reason for each rule, and should be posted (in a visible location); they should include household rules, social rules, and school rules. A second chart with a check off box could list chores for which the teen is responsible. Remember, the ADHD child needs organization and order.

Rules will inevitably be broken, and the parents' response is most productive when it is calm and neutral, and punishment used very sparingly. Time-out still works and lets a hot-tempered and impulsive ADHD teen chill out.

Curfews and use of the car will be part of the teens' demands, and they should be listened to. Negotiation and compromise are essential in good communication.

Statistics show that ADHD teen drivers in their first several years of driving have 3 times as many tickets and about 4 times as many accidents as non-ADHD teens. Recently, most states have introduced Graduated Drivers Licensing System (GDL), which grants full driving rights in stages. The full system exists in Tennessee but only a partial one in Kentucky. It is up to parents to monitor their children's driving habits and records, and maintain rules strictly in order to insure their safety.

Finally, let us discuss briefly the fact that ADHD also exists in adults. The 3 to 5% of children who exhibit the symptoms often retain those symptoms into adulthood; it is estimated that 30 to 70% of those ADHD children carry the symptoms into adulthood. Perhaps they weren't even diagnosed as children, and don't know that they may be diagnosed with the disorder, but they still have great difficulty keeping appointments, being productive at work, sticking to a job, or even follow the daily routines of getting up, getting dressed, and getting ready for work; they often have frequent automobile accidents as well, and show the classic symptoms of restlessness, impulsiveness, and distractibility.

Diagnosis is best made by a mental health specialist and sometimes involves interviewing others intimate with the habits of the person under examination. Diagnosis with ADHD often comes as a relief to these adults, as it brings understanding and hope that their behavior can change. Once again, the various forms of talk therapy are usually effective in modifying behavior and reducing or even eliminating symptoms.

We previously discussed the various medications that are used to treat ADHD. They are all controversial and have many harmful side effects. They can temporarily relieve some symptoms, but are a very profitable quick-fix pushed by “Big Pharma”, the major drug companies.

The best help you can give your child, whether ADHD diagnosed or not, is to listen, guide, communicate, compromise, support, and love that child unconditionally. Don't forget that you are the child's parent and not another friend. Children want and need the love, respect and attention of both parents. Be patient, gentle and firm.

TIP OF THE WEEK: According to the latest annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, pediatric patients who are taking anti-psychotic drugs get some relief to their psychoses but also develop a “worrisome” increase in body fat and lipids within just 3 months after starting therapy.