

## Chapter One - What is A.D.H.D.

If you have taken the trouble to look at this book, you are probably a parent who has been told by your child's teacher, doctor or educational psychologist that your son, or daughter, is suffering from A.D.D. or maybe A.D.H.D. A.D.D. stands for Attention Deficit Disorder and A.D.H.D. indicates that as well as suffering from A.D.D., your child is also hyperactive. Although you may be fully aware that there are certain problems that your child is experiencing at school, at home and with his or her friends, you may not be aware of the range of problems that a child who suffers from this condition could experience. It is perhaps helpful to know what the symptoms are or, if you like, what the fullest extent of the problems could be so that you can evaluate for yourself how seriously you believe that your child is affected.

### **Does your child really have A.D.H.D. ?**

It is very important to understand though, that our children are individuals; they are people in their own right, have their own personalities, their own sense of their future goals and expectations and their own ways of getting through life. Ask yourself some simple questions before you immediately decide that your child is suffering from A.D.H.D. just because he or she doesn't live their life just as you do. Firstly think back to your own childhood; were your parents always right about you, about your character, your personality, the person you chose to marry, the career that you chose for yourself or even the courses that you followed at school? Maybe you now regret that you didn't listen more closely to them and follow their advice, but the fact is probably that you made decisions about your own life that were directly contradictory to the plan that your parents had worked on for you.

It is very easy to believe that because we are older, because we have already been there and done it, we know what is best for our children. Perhaps we do, but sometimes we have to allow them to be the people that they are and not the people that we would like them to be, or the people that we would have liked to be if we had had the chance. A friend of mine is a well-respected professional in his own field, an extremely intelligent and capable man, married to an equally intelligent and capable wife. They have two children. The eldest won a place at Oxford University to read medicine, dated a girl who was exactly what his parents would have chosen, and caused no problems throughout his adolescent years. The younger son though, was entirely different, he had other interests that did not necessarily involve study in the way his father and brother had studied, his girlfriends were not really the kind of girls that his mother approved of and he had an overwhelming interest in sport. Because he appeared to be doing less well at school than his brother, had very different plans for his life and frequently fell out with his parents, his father quickly came to believe that he suffered from A.D.H.D.

As the boy's Head Teacher and a family friend, he wanted me to firstly confirm his suspicions that his son had A.D.H.D. and then find some way of dealing with it at school. It was fairly obvious that the younger son did not suffer from A.D.H.D., he had other problems, but they were not caused by

A.D.H.D. and with counselling and constructive advice, he secured a place in an excellent university reading a subject that really interested him and hopes to finish his training by studying to teach handicapped children. We cannot just assume that our child has A.D.H.D. then, just because they are not little copies of ourselves, or of other family members. There is a lot more to A.D.H.D. than failing to conform to family norms and we need to explore what the problems are that children who suffer from A.D.H.D. actually face.

### **Problems that A.D.H.D. can bring.**

These problems can most conveniently be placed into three categories: Problems at School, Problems at Home and Problems with Personal Life. Not all children suffering from A.D.H.D. will suffer from all the problems, indeed even the most severe case I have ever met did not suffer from everything, but if we examine all the possible symptoms, you can decide for yourself, which are relevant to your child.

#### **Problems at School**

The first indication that all is not well at school will probably come very early in your child's education. It is highly unlikely that your child is suffering from A.D.H.D. if problems are only noticed when he, or she starts secondary school, or when they begin adolescence in their teenage years. If A.D.H.D. has not made itself apparent at primary school, then problems at secondary school are almost certainly not A.D.H.D. related. Also, if your child's behaviour suddenly changes after some traumatic incident in his or her life, A.D.H.D. is almost certainly not the cause. Such incidents could include the death of a family member, or close friend; the separation, or divorce of parents; moving house, or the arrival of a new baby. Children view events such as this in their lives in a variety of ways, all of which are entirely normal, but which require some major adjustment and it is this adjustment that can easily cause changes in the way they behave.

#### **Pre-school problems.**

The activities in your child's life, which could suggest A.D.H.D., will almost certainly have been noticeable before he, or she even started school. You will probably have noticed that there is a lack of focus in most of the things they do. Activities are often started with great enthusiasm, but are rarely finished. Games, toys and activities seem to amuse them for only a short period of time, then they lose interest, quickly become bored, appear to quickly lose attention and try to find something for amusement.



Sometimes it's easy to spot the child with A.D.H.D.

This is a fairly accurate description of most toddlers, but with the A.D.H.D. child the attention span is shorter, the period of interest less prolonged and the variety of activities to maintain interest is far greater. When the child is at home, this can be very tiring for the parents, but when the child starts school, the problems often seem to multiply. At home you have your child and any brothers, or sisters he, or she may have and you are aware how difficult and demanding an A.D.H.D. child can be. Now imagine the school situation. The teacher has up to thirty children in the class, all of which have equal and constant demands on her time and patience and with only one A.D.H.D. child in the class, it is increasingly difficult to share out her time equally and cater equally for the children's needs.

#### **Problems for the teacher.**

The practical result of this is that the child with A.D.H.D. realises that he must compete harder to get the teacher's attention and the most usual way he achieves this is by exhibiting unacceptable behaviour. The more unacceptable his behaviour, the more the teacher takes notice of him, the more of her attention he can command and the less amount of time is therefore available for other pupils.

#### **Why problems seem to multiply.**

He will quickly discover that if he "forgets" his pencil case, or his books, or his lunch or whatever, he becomes a special case, as now the teacher will have to run around to find a replacement. If she fails to provide him with a pencil, his behaviour becomes disruptive because he is unable to take part in the lesson and quickly becomes bored. Quickly, the teacher learns that this particular

child frequently fails to bring pencils etc. to the lesson, so she has a little supply at the ready to begin the lesson. The effect is now lost, the pupil loses his position as a special case because the pencils are waiting for him at the start of the lesson, so he needs to find something to reassert his position as the attention grabber.

### **Do you dread Parents' Evening?**

The problems then develop from there and increase in severity. You, as the parent, will probably hear that there is a problem at the first Parent's Evening. After that, you can probably expect regular and frequent requests to visit the school to hear that your child: fails to bring anything to the lesson, fails to do homework, fails to complete class work, fails to remain on task for any length of time, fails to sit quietly and is always calling out, or running around the room, fails to make friends or sustain friendships, is often disruptive in the class, has temper tantrums, loses things, breaks things, fights and is aggressive, daydreams, is rude to staff, is not achieving in line with ability, is failing exams. Does this sound familiar? Are these the reports that that your child's teachers have been making about your child since they started school? If your answer to this is "yes", then there is a very good chance that your child is suffering from A.D.H.D.

### **Problems at home.**

Sadly, for parents, the problem does not just appear at school and remain there when the child comes home. It is an even greater problem at home because as parents you have to cope with it for longer. The average teacher will see your child, at most, for one year constantly in the primary school and for maybe only two or three forty minute periods a week in secondary school. You have the problem before the child goes to school, when he comes home, during the holidays and for up to eighteen years before he finally leaves home, assuming that there is still a home to leave after eighteen years of coping with an A.D.H.D. child.

The problems at home although related to the problems at school, usually appear in a different way. One of the most difficult aspects of A.D.H.D. for parents to come to terms with is that the child will respond to each parent quite differently. Where marriages have split up, parents have remarried and there are, perhaps, children by second marriages, it is easy to believe that one parent is better at forming a relationship with the child and so there are fewer problems.

### **Special problems for single parent families.**

Traditionally, children remain with their mothers. They do this for longer if the marriage does not break up, and when a marriage breaks up it is more usual for the mother to be awarded custody. The reality of this is that most children, especially young children see more of their mother and have the

opportunity to form a closer relationship with her than the father. You might then expect that it would be the mother who was better able to deal with A.D.H.D. children, but research actually shows it to be the opposite. A.D.H.D. children are more often under better control with the parent they see the least, which is usually the father.

### **Why do father's appear to be better disciplinarians?**

This has nothing to do with the notion that father's are better disciplinarians as there is absolutely no evidence to show that this is the case. It is convenient for many fathers to believe that they are better at disciplining their children and so blame the mother for her inadequacies, but there is no evidence to show that children see their father as a greater source of discipline just because he is a man. It is more likely that because the A.D.H.D. child spends more time with the mother, who is busy with most of the necessities of his life, the father is seen more as a novelty. He is someone new, someone interesting and someone able to maintain the attention span for longer by virtue of the novelty effect of spending less time with him.

It is also possible that the child can spend more quality time with the father. He has more time to spend on activities that the child will find interesting. Most A.D.H.D. sufferers are boys, so they will tend to find the activities that their fathers enjoy, pleasurable as well. The father then is less likely to notice the severity of the symptoms that will be obvious to the mother, who is exposed to the behaviour of the child for longer periods. We are not really sure why most sufferers are boys, but they outnumber girl sufferers by about eleven to one, which is a significant difference. Whether this is due to the different ways in which boys and girls are parented, or there are still different expectations of boys' and girls' behaviour that generates its own expected roles, is not really clear. At one stage it was believed that A.D.H.D. was caused by oxygen starvation to the child's brain during early pregnancy and that male and female foetuses developed differently, so that when the oxygen starvation mostly frequently occurred, it affected boys rather than girls. As A.D.H.D. has now been shown to have no medical cause, this explanation has been rejected.

### **Parental conflict and its effect.**

One of the possible outcomes of a child relating to one parent in a different way to the other parent can be conflict between the two parents. From the mother's point of view; she is the one who seems to be bearing the brunt of the problems, she seems to be taking most of the backlash from the school, the neighbours, parents of other children and from the child himself, but she often feels the most powerless to do anything about solving the problem. If the parents are separated, or divorced, then it is more usual for the child to remain with the mother and she then becomes responsible for the day to day responsibility of the child's welfare. The father on the other hand, is more often at a distance from the problems, even if the child is part of a united family with both parents living at home. He is seems more able to deal with

the child, there are less tantrums around him, fewer incidents with neighbours etc. and because of this, he finds it easier to blame the lack of control on the mother.

### **Blaming each other benefits no one.**

Perhaps one of the first pieces of advice that anyone should give parents of an A.D.H.D. child is that you will only make the situation worse if you apportion blame amongst yourselves. United you can deal with the problem, solve it and reclaim your child, divided you are playing straight into the child's game plan and you will find it next to impossible to ever come out on top. One of the biggest problems that divorced parents face, even if their child does not have A.D.H.D. is in showing a united front to the children. Divorce is very often about a break down in trust, almost always, one party feels that they have been let down by the other and that causes resentment. This resentment tends to show as a need to justify our own actions to magnify how untrustworthy the actions of our previous partner have been and a big part of this too often involves trying to persuade the children of the marriage to take one side or the other.

### **The mother's point of view.**

How many times do we hear mothers claiming that she has all the problems while the father, who only sees the child or children for a couple of days a month, and then often with the new girlfriend or wife in tow, has time and money to spend on the children. There is an implication that he can buy the affection of his child and this causes resentment to the point where the original hostilities that caused the marriage break up actually get worse and the child is caught in the middle. Don't have any delusions, the vast majority of children will quickly realise what is going on and play on it to their own advantage and the end result is always that, not only the parents, but the child as well will be losers. If you are going to reclaim your child from A.D.D working together is the way forward, not trying to score points off each other and present the other parent as the cause.

### **Things just get broken.**

Dealing with the mechanics of reclaiming your child will come later, for now we are looking at ways in which A.D.H.D. shows itself around the home. A.D.H.D. children can display a whole variety of behaviour patterns around the house that are quite often different from the behaviour patterns that the teacher will describe at school. For example possessions are seldom put away. That doesn't mean that every child who leaves toys around the floor is suffering from A.D.H.D. as many children tend to be untidy, A.D.H.D. children don't seem to have the ability, or any real will to tidy behind them. Things also seem to get broken with monotonous regularity. A.D.H.D. children are often described as being clumsy, although things tend to get broken because they are not really used correctly or with enough care. The