

ADD The Parents' Support Book Contents

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1: What is ADD?

All children behave differently. Some are more outward going than others. Some worry a lot. Others never seem to have a care in the world. In short they all have different personalities. Having different personalities is a major part of being human.

Children's personalities affect the way they behave. A shy child will normally be shy in all new situations - although in the familiar surroundings of home that shyness may well slip away. But children's behaviour is also affected by intelligence - although you may not always know it the first time you meet a child! And quite often you may wonder how your own child can seem to be of quite normal intelligence and yet behave in such a stupid way!

So the way children behave is affected by their personality and their intelligence. And of course children learn. They are influenced by the way they are brought up, and these influences also affect how they behave day by day. But doctors have known for some time that there are also a series of disorders that can make young people behave in ways that you wouldn't normally expect. These disorders are separate from the child's personality or the child's intelligence, and are not learned from day to day experience. One for example is dyslexia - a disorder that seems to prevent the child from learning to read as easily as we might expect.

There is also a group of disorders known as the ADDs which affect a child's ability to pay attention and behave in what is considered the 'normal' way. There are in fact four different types of ADDs that the medical profession has identified:

A: Attention Deficit Disorder (known as ADD).

Children with ADD cannot pay attention easily. They may daydream continuously - but their condition is often not noticed for many years because unlike other children with attention disorders, they do not disrupt those around them.

B: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

These children also fail to pay attention but their behaviour is combined with hyperactivity. These are the children we notice at once because they tend to rush around, looking, moving, poking, pushing, interrupting, experimenting - in fact everything except sitting still and paying attention.

A child with ADHD craves more and more attention from his or her parents. Normally the child gets this attention - it is hard to ignore a child who is about to climb out of a window, use a bookcase as a step ladder or put fingers in a plug. But the attention that comes from responding to crises is always negative. The child is happy - for the child has the attention, and that child is learning to repeat the behaviour to get more attention. The parent is just exhausted.

Attention deficit children find it impossible to change their behaviour on their own. However if you point out a problem to a child with an attention disorder the child will often be very unhappy. The child may apologise and genuinely mean it when saying it will not happen again. When it does happen again two minutes later the child is once more genuinely remorseful, but just can't seem to control its own behaviour.

C: Conduct Disorder (CD)

Conduct disorder is very different from ADD and ADHD, although at first sight the disorders can look the same. A child with conduct disorder does not feel genuinely unhappy when he or she causes a problem. While the child with ADHD feels remorseful and wishes he or she could stop, the child with conduct disorder gets rewards from the behaviour itself. For this reason no matter

what punishments are handed out CD children will constantly return to the same form of anti-social behaviour.

Children with conduct disorders are often involved in vandalism, may be expelled from school, are often highly aggressive and involved in fighting and theft. Extracting money with menaces, hurting animals, truancy, housebreaking, arson - these are the activities of the conduct disorder child.

D: Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

This final disorder expresses itself through children being openly defiant. They can be deliberately vindictive, and are often very angry and touchy. They are generally seen as delinquent from an early age.

You will understand at once that children with oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorders are helped best by the appropriate medical and child support authorities, and it is very hard indeed for them to be contained in a normal school. Sadly it is also often difficult for the child to be contained in a normal family home.

However, there is absolutely no reason for children with attention disorders to be removed from their normal environment. ADD children find it difficult to attend to what is going on around them. Those with the hyperactive element added are also overactive and impulsive. But they are all loving and kind children who deserve and need the same love and affection that is the right of all children.

By this stage you may be getting sceptical. For most of us the sight of a child running rings around its parents, climbing up the wall or throwing ink across the room, these are signs of bad parenting. We may not be quite sure why the parent is so ineffective, but the blame is obvious. Some firm discipline at home and all would be well.

You may feel that describing such a child as one who has a medical disability is going just too far. Isn't this just one of those American ideas which excuses all behaviour and blames anyone or anything other than the child?

In fact ADD was first recognised in Germany in the mid 19th century. In the early part of the 20th century George Still refined the work, and further research was added following the great influenza epidemic at the end of the First World War. This terrible tragedy left many people suffering from brain damage, which resulted in changed behaviour and led to very detailed investigation into how the brain influences the way we behave.

It is from this work that we have come to realise that not only is ADD a real medical condition, but that it is caused by the way in which the brain works in a minority of the population.

2: How do I recognise ADD?

If you believe that your child may have ADD you may recognise one or more of the following behaviour patterns. Children with attention disorders do not follow all of these patterns, but most attention deficit children are recognisable in at least three of these descriptions:

A sudden change in your child's behaviour pattern when the child started walking. There was no sign of attention deficit before this point, but from the moment of walking on the child acts like an unstoppable tornado.

- At playschool or in the reception class your child cannot sit and listen to a story being read by the teacher.
- Your child is known as disruptive at school from as early as the age of 5.
- When your child has the undivided attention of one adult everything seems so much better, although the child will fidget when the adult speaks for more than a sentence or two.
- At home your child keeps on moving and being active - there is never a stop for a rest or feeling tired.
- When playing in groups your child appears to be bossy and even overpowering, finding it difficult to share or take turns.
- Your child is impulsive and accident prone .
- Your child is unable to listen to instructions without interrupting.