

## JACK'S CORNER

**QUESTION:** We hear so much talk these days about A.D.D. Just what is A.D.D., and how do I know if my child has it?

**ANSWER:** A.D.D.(more recently, A.D.H.D) , Attention Deficit Disorder, is characterized by (1) attentions skills which are developmentally inappropriate, (2) impulsivity, and in some individuals, (3) hyperactivity. It is considered a neurobiological disability. Research has shown that individuals with ADD metabolized glucose in the brain at slower rates than normal. Prevalence is estimated to be about 3% to 5% of the population with 4 to 9 times the number of males than females.

ADD is diagnosed primarily through the use of the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th edition). This manual (which only describes behaviors, not treatments) contains a list of characteristics that are matched to the individual. Six of the following symptoms must have persisted for at least 6 months to a degree that is "maladaptive and inconsistent" with the developmental level of the individual.

- a. often fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- b. often has difficulty sustaining attention to tasks or play
- c. often does not seem to listen when spoken to
- d. often does not follow through with tasks
- e. often has difficulty in organizing
- f. often avoids or dislikes tasks which require sustained mental activity
- g. often loses things necessary for tasks and activities
- h. often is distracted
- i. often is forgetful in daily activities

(If these criteria seem to fit all children...and they often do... consider the degree, persistency, and developmental level.)

Also, some of the symptoms must have been present before the age of 7 (ADD is extremely difficult to diagnose before age 5), present in two different settings, and there must be clear evidence of "clinically significant impairment" in the settings.

In addition to using the DSM-IV... medical, intelligence, academic, social, emotional, developmental, and impulsivity testing should be used, as well as parent/teacher interviews. There are no laboratory tests that have been established as diagnostic, nor are there physical features associated with ADD.

ADD is often treated with psychostimulants (methylphenidate-- Ritalin), vitamins (B-complex), behavior management (positive reinforcement), and short-term psychotherapy...all with varying degrees of success. Children with ADD are often at risk (statistically) for emotional difficulties, academic failure, relationship difficulties, resentment and frustration within the family, and susceptibility to drug use and criminal behavior.

See Dr. Russell A. Barkley's book: *Taking Charge of ADHD* for more information.

A child with ADD can be a source of exhaustion and frustration for the entire family. As Christians, we believe that all struggles can be OPPORTUNITIES for us to know and depend

on God in deeper ways. One of the wonders for me as a counselor has been to watch, admire and applaud those individuals who have seized the opportunity of struggle and used it to draw near to God. If you believe your child may have ADD, be aware of how the diagnostic procedure works, don't let anyone diagnose from just an interview, consult with professionals who have extensive experience with ADD, be aware of other factors which can cause similar symptoms, don't be overly quick to medicate, get more than one opinion. There is a subjective component to diagnosing ADD and many mental disorders.

Jack Lipski, MA  
SOTHCS Counselor

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