Understanding Children’s Mental Health Disorders and the Impact on Learning and Functioning
Introduction to Children’s Mental Health

Attention and Behavior Disorders
What is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder?

• A condition due to the brain’s inability to regulate
  – Attention
  – Activity
  – Self-control
    • Behaviors
    • Thoughts
    • Emotions
Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder

Behaviors

Inattention

Impulsivity

Hyperactivity

School Performance

Interpersonal Relationships

Meaning
Mental Health Treatment in Minnesota

Nearly 1 in 10 children and adolescents in Minnesota have been diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Of the children receiving treatment:

27% Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder
24% Depression
15.5% Anxiety
15.5% Adjustment Disorders
11% Disruptive Behavior Disorders
Core Symptoms

Inattention

Hyperactivity

Impulsivity
Inability to Regulate Attention

- Disorganized
- Avoiding tasks that require focus
- Lose things
- Distracted
- Forgetful
- Not very careful
- “Hyperfocus”
Inability to Regulate Activity

- Fidgets
- Restless
- Loud
- Constant motion
- Easily excitable
- Talk excessively
Inability to Regulate Self Control

- **Thoughts**
  - Fast / jumpy thinking

- **Impulsive**
  - Blurts out
  - Interrupts
  - overreacts

- **Emotionally intense**
Changes to our Thinking

• Not the inability to pay attention
• The inability to regulate attention
• Emotional immaturity due to developmental delay in the brain circuitry involved in inhibition and self-control
• 3 year lag in emotional maturity

Shaw et al. 2007
Prefrontal Cortex

Regulates individual’s ability to stay focused, sustain attention, control impulses, and make decisions.
Delay in Development of Executive Functions

- Impaired working memory
- Inability to use thoughts to direct ourselves
- Inability to recognize social cues
- Inability to integrate newly learned information with previous learned information
- Impaired regulation of emotions, motivation and state of arousal
Negative Attention Cycle

Child’s Behavior

Negative Attention

Child

Adult’s Increased Arousal

Adult

Child’s Increased Arousal
Spectrum of Attention and Behavior Disorders

Uncomplicated
ADHD

Difficult or Feisty Temperament
Oppositional Defiant Disorder
Sensory Integration Dysfunction
Learning Disability
Depression
Anxiety
Bipolar Disorder

Complicated ADHD

Pervasive Developmental Disorders
Tics
Social Chaos
Chemical Abuse

Difficult or Feisty Temperament
Top 3 Take Home Messages

Understand Executive Function Impairment

Understand Inability to Regulate Emotions

Understand the Social as well as Academic Implications
Understand Executive Function Deficits

- Difficulty holding information in the mind while working on a task
- Problems with controlling emotions, staying motivated and being easily overly stimulated
- Difficulty recognizing and remembering previously learned skills in new situations
Inability to Regulate Emotions

• Less ability to regulate own emotional states
• Emotionally immature when compared to other kids their own age
• Negative redirection social feedback create increased risk for greater emotional and behavioral problems
Social Impairment

- Inability to recognize social cues and access previously learned social skills
- The impulsivity and problems with emotional control often lead to
  - peer relationship problems
  - Negative attention from adults
Impact on Learning

Over Active
- Difficulty listening to lectures
- Constant restlessness

Impulsivity
- Needs lots of stimulation
- Acts without considering consequences
- May have difficulty with group projects

Inattention
- Quick to lose interest
- Difficulty completing assignments

Forgetful
- Difficulty completing assignments
Promoting Wellness in Children with ADHD

Physical wellness

Social and emotional wellness

Accessing care
Physical Wellness

- Regular Bedtime Routine
- Adequate amount of sleep
- Healthy Diet high in protein and omega-3 fatty acids
- Physical activity for self-modulation
Promoting Social and Emotional Wellness

- Calming and self-soothing (reverse tendency to over-stimulation) activities
- Positive attention and feedback from adults and peers
- Opportunities for success behaviorally, socially and academically
Accessing Care

- Primary care visits
- Mental health care visits
- Regular Counseling/Therapy
- Medications
- Coordination between family, school, doctors, and counselors
Summary

- ADHD is a chronic condition
- The social implications are critical
- Management of attention and behavior disorders should involve physical, personal and clinical interventions
Summary

• Complicated ADHD requires more intensive approaches to treatment and follow-up
• Treatment should target specific areas to MAXIMIZE functioning
• We need to break the cycle of constant negative feedback these children receive by going out of our way to give them positive attention and reinforcement
The End
For additional information and resources contact:

Minnesota Department of Human Services
Phone: (651) 431-2368
E-mail:
Website: [http://www.dhs.state.mn.us](http://www.dhs.state.mn.us)

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References


• Shaw et al., Proc Natl Acad Sci 2007;104:19649-19654
