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Tips of the Trade from The Life Solution Center of Darien

It may not be “just” ADHD

Most people think of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as “that child” who can’t sit still in class and is always moving around as if driven by a motor. Why? Because often times ADHD is thought to be a behavioral problem. As a result, the children may go undiagnosed before the disorder is suspected. Here are some **common myths** regarding ADHD:

- ADHD is a behavioral problem
- ADHD is only a childhood disorder
- The treatment for ADHD is medication
- Once medication is started, the child’s symptoms will improve

The CDC reports that 11% of children ages of 4-17 have ADHD (6.4 million). ADHD is a psychiatric disorder, not a behavioral problem. MRI studies have been done in both children and adults with ADHD that show both structural and chemical changes in the brain, otherwise known as neuro-biochemical changes.

Often times, because the child is unable to focus or cannot stay on task, they become easily frustrated, angry and defiant and as a result may be labeled as “lazy” or “oppositional.” Parents may begin to wonder why their child does not like school and why their academic performance continues to decline. In actuality, it may be because they are having difficulty reading or writing due to their inability to focus. Who wouldn’t feel anxious, sad, frustrated and dislike school?

Children with ADHD are three times more likely to have anxiety, depression and relationship problems with peers. They are also more likely to have coexisting conditions such as learning disorders (LD). Often times LD’s are missed because the child with ADHD is considered to “simply” have behavioral problems.

Thankfully, the disorder doesn’t always require medication. Children diagnosed with ADHD can benefit from behavioral therapy too. Behavioral therapy helps younger children learn through play and helps improve executive functioning skills such as memory, focus, and organization. Parents also benefit from speaking to a professional to learn how to effectively parent a child with ADHD. Children with on-going difficulties can also be evaluated by a psychiatric professional to discuss medication management.

ADHD is not just a childhood disorder as many commonly think. It is chronic disorder and can continue into adulthood. Studies show 50% of adults with ADHD suffer from anxiety, depression and difficulty regulating emotions. If untreated, adults typically display more subtle symptoms but ones that have a big impact on their daily lives. Adults also have difficulty functioning happily when unable to stay focused at work, easily distracted, or struggling with time management.

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