



The WCPA News

12125 Woodcrest Executive Drive, Suite 110 St. Louis, MO 63141
Phone (314) 275-8599 info@wcpastl.com Fax (314) 275-8299

<http://www.wcpastl.com>

Volume 2, Number 1

September, 2000

Attention Problems in the Classroom

By Catherine Hasler, Ph.D.

Children display problems with attention, impulsivity and overactivity for a variety of reasons. We at WCPA have been increasingly alarmed at the overdiagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as the cause of these symptoms. Problems with attention and impulse control have become an increasingly common referral problem for children, adolescents, and adults. Unfortunately, the appropriate diagnosis of the cause of these problems is infrequent. Only too often, a child is diagnosed with ADHD after a brief meeting with a pediatrician and the review of behavior checklists. However, many different diagnoses can “mimic” the symptoms of ADHD. These include depression, anxiety, intellectual giftedness, mild mental retardation, learning disabilities, developmental delays, conduct problems, family problems, and certain medical conditions. For a child to be appropriately diagnosed with ADHD, these other “mimicking” conditions need to be ruled out as the sole cause of the child’s difficulties.

ADHD refers to a family of disorders that are characterized by developmentally inappropriate inattention, impulsivity, and/or overactivity. It is possible for a child to receive a diagnosis of ADHD whether or not they display hyperactive and impulsive symptoms. Approximately 6% of school-age children have ADHD. ADHD is a neurological disorder that appears to have a genetic basis. Children with ADHD have been demonstrated to have less activity occurring in the frontal lobe of the brain, which controls the executive functions (e.g., organization, planning), emotional regulation, and behavioral impulses. Attentional difficulties include tending to make careless mistakes, failing to finish work, seeming not to listen, losing things, having difficulty organizing tasks and things, being easily distracted and being forgetful. Hyperactivity and impulsivity symptoms include problems with fidgeting, staying seated, being restless, talking too much, “blurting out” answers, waiting turns and interrupting others.

People with ADHD frequently meet criteria for other diagnoses (comorbid conditions) in addition to ADHD. As such, in order to successfully treat an ADHD child, other comorbid disorders need to be identified and treated as well. If these mimicking or comorbid conditions are not identified or treated, then the treatment of ADHD may be either inappropriate or unsuccessful. Different interventions are needed for the various types of ADHD as well as the conditions that coexist or mimic it. Thus, the appropriate diagnosis of ADHD requires a thorough psychological examination by a psychologist who specializes in the diagnosis of ADHD and related conditions. Once a child has been appropriately diagnosed with ADHD and/or another condition, recommendations should be made regarding the various interventions that are needed to address the child’s difficulties. **(continued, next page)**

Web Site Under Development! We are pleased to share that a web site for West County Psychological Associates is currently under development. We plan to have our site up and running this Fall, and will include the site address in our next newsletter, so that you can visit us on the web! The web site will include:

- Our history as an organization
- Our philosophy and purpose
- Frequently asked questions
- Details about our services
- An overview of our staff and credentials
- Ways to contact us

Our Philosophy

We believe that individuals and systems:

- Are capable of permanent change
- Function best with clearly defined authority that stems from a family systems hierarchy
- Are accountable for both positive and negative aspects of behavior
- Achieve success by conscious choices that lead to strength and development of personal responsibility
- Control their environment by establishing boundaries that are consistent with their values

WCPA promotes change and growth by:

- Helping to establish order within the environment
- Meeting consistently in a collaborative relationship to achieve identified goals
- Helping to identify and process significant issues
- Aiding in resolving issues as they arise

The result for the system or individual is the development of a strong sense of identity and boundaries that allows for the achievement of goals.

From the Director

Welcome to the WCPA News. We believe that this newsletter will be a great way to communicate on a quarterly basis with the schools with which we are working and those that may be interested in working with us.

The Comprehensive School Services program has been evolving and expanding over the last ten years. We have a great group of therapists and consultants, who have been well trained to work with you in ways that will truly benefit your schools. Each of us works very hard to deliver high quality services, based on our philosophy of accountability and responsibility.

We at WCPA strive to create great relationships with schools and it is through this collaborative venture that we will all create an effective, healthy, learning environment for our students, staff and parents.

Mary Fitzgibbons, Ph.D.

Attention Problems in the Classroom (Continued)

For children with ADHD, there are some basic behavioral management techniques and interventions that need to be remembered:

- 1) Rules and instructions must be clear, brief, and posted prominently.
- 2) Have these children repeat instructions out loud or utter them softly to themselves.
- 3) Consequences should be delivered as swiftly and immediately as possible.
- 4) ADHD children require more frequent feedback and consequences than other children.
- 5) Consequences typically need to be stronger than those given to other children their age in order for the consequence to be meaningful.
- 6) Reinforcers for appropriate behavior will need to be rotated and changed frequently in order to maintain their effectiveness.
- 7) Positive discipline (i.e., rewards) should be used before negative discipline (i.e., punishment).
- 8) They should be prompted and reminded of rules for upcoming situations.
- 9) Children with ADHD should be seen by a medical doctor in order to determine whether they would benefit from pharmacological treatment for their difficulties
- 10) Behavioral interventions at school and home are critical for the success of ADHD children. A cooperative effort between the family, school, and mental health professionals is imperative.

We at WCPA are committed to providing thorough evaluations and treatment of children with attentional difficulties. We believe that it is critically important to have a collaborative relationship among families, schools and mental health professionals in the treatment of all children. Please contact us if you have any questions regarding these or related issues.

Dr. Hasler is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in the evaluation and treatment of attentional difficulties in children. Her other areas of interest include the treatment of depression, anxiety, perfectionism, and conduct disorders in children and parenting issues for adults.
