

## **Attention Deficit Disorder, What Do We Do?**

**By Lisa Harp**

It is estimated that there are over 2.5 million people who are diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder. The majority of these are boys. As a mother of a boy and a teacher, I have seen first hand the evidence of this, and I have to ask why we, as a nation, are content to medicate these beautiful, brilliant children instead of questioning the methods of teaching and choosing alternative educational settings for them. Wouldn't it be easier to reform our educational system than to come up with money for new drugs, doctor visits, psychologist visits, IEP meetings, at risk intervention programs, and yes, even prison terms? And yet, even with all of the previously mentioned strategies, academic success for these children is not met. True, there are many instances where medication is a gift for a child and makes a remarkable difference for him.

However, most parents who have placed their children on Ritalin have cited that it doesn't seem to help and the negative consequences outweigh whatever gains noted. In addition, in a report just released, researchers have found a link to the use of Ritalin and cancer. These are serious side effects and consequences. ADD is a relatively new player on the field of learning disorders. Just as labeling this as a disorder causes the child to wonder what is wrong with him. In addition, there is no blood test or definitive measure of diagnosis for this disorder. A child is diagnosed with having ADD through the use of subjective checklists.

If a teacher wants a student diagnosed as having ADD, it is really quite easy to accomplish, especially if a parent is unsure of what to do. At any given time, most people would exhibit symptoms of ADD. However, they don't need a strong medication to keep them from showing these symptoms. I find it interesting as I work with ADD students how they can learn to focus with some simple changes in their learning environment. Following are some easy solutions and suggestions for working with a student labeled with ADD. Keep in mind that our goal when working with these children is to help them succeed, both in school and in life.

- I always teach visual and auditory memory skills. After working with so many of these students, I have found that they are generally weak in these areas. Simple exercises will help their sensory processing. I personally feel that a lot of their behaviors are a result of not having the necessary "Velcro" to hold images and sounds in their brains.
- I use a lot of color with these kids. When I model a skill, I use blank paper and a colored marker. When I have them do work, I always have them use color. They can tune in to color - it holds their interest, and I feel that a great deal of ADD children are really right-brained, and color is a way to access the right side of the brain. When I have them do work, I have them use an erasable colored pencil.

- I play soothing instrumental music in the background as I work with these kids. Once again, the music is an avenue to access the right side of the brain. It calms these kids and helps them focus. I also stress to parents that they should keep these kids away from loud music that has harmful words, such as rap or heavy metal. The sensitive ADD/right-brained child should not have to compete with these lyrics and sounds to concentrate.
- Keep these kids away from fluorescent lighting. Most schools today have fluorescent lighting, which can be a nightmare for these kids. Keep in mind that their hearing is more sensitive than most kids and that they hear different sounds. Also, the hum of a computer or refrigerator can be a disaster for these kids. If your child's school only has fluorescent lighting, then seek a different school situation and see if this helps. If you can't do this, then have the child do ear aches on a regular basis, which can help balance the hearing centers of the brain.
- Try to keep the student in a class with a low student to teacher ratio. A busy classroom with over 30 kids will only feed the fuel of this child's disadvantages. The noise, energy, and motion of so many bodies will be a distraction, and believe me, the student with ADD will be the one that stands out, usually receiving the blame or punitive measures.
- Keep a positive attitude with this student. The world seems to pick him apart, and I know he can try your soul. However, he needs someone on his team, and as a parent that would have to be you. Offer a lot of exercise. Keep him away from junk food and soda. Believe me, I know this is hard, but these are super sensitive kids, and nutrition can make a huge difference.
- Limit television, video game, and computer time. I know how difficult this can be, but the visual images and graphics are harmful to this sensitive child. I have found that almost all of the ADD students I work with are content to build with Lego's or draw. On some level they seem to crave the quiet, calm activities. If provided with them, it is soon revealed what a talented, creative child you have and how a burden can be taken off of him.

ADD accounts for 50% of child and teen visits to mental health clinics. Boys are 5 to 6 times more likely to be diagnosed with ADD. Simple changes can make a huge difference to these children's lives, and it makes much more sense to make these changes than to medicate these creative children.