

## ADHD children

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a term that is appearing more often these days. Actually, ADHD was only formally included in the psychological definitions around 1980. Some attributed this to the prevalence of symptoms and growing awareness and thus reporting and diagnosis. Yet a decade later in the 1990s, there were discussions in the United States about whether ADHD is being over diagnosed and if it is a result of inadequate parenting. Singapore is now experiencing what the States went through about two decade earlier.

Before we go any further, let us explain a little about such definitions. In the world of psychology, as disorders are discovered or as we become aware, they get entered (or removed) to a manual called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM). Even homosexuality for example, was inside DSM from 1952 but removed in 1973 as it was no longer deemed a disorder and thus declassified! Based on these, it is therefore a human classification and while helpful for the professionals for diagnosis, **is not error free**. Diagnosis is based on this manual where a list of symptoms for each illness is listed. When a certain amount of the listed symptoms (like at least 3) lasts for a certain a period of time (like 6 months or more) and there is some form of disability (including social disability), a person is deemed to be having a certain disorder. Much of the matching to symptoms is by observations and feedback by the psychologist or direct from clients or family members. More scientific tests employed in recent decades present a more objective way for diagnosis and complements the DSM after a client is suspected of having a particular disorder based on diagnosis using the DSM. As such, it is good to know that such knowledge has its limitations.

We are not here to debate over diagnosis or whether it is because of inadequate parenting skills. There are cases where they are over diagnosed and inadequate parenting skills exacerbate them. There are cases where they are genuine and helped by medication or techniques employed. **We are here to suggest ways parents can help** should they know that their children are ADHD.

**Maintain moral standards**. Way back we shared about the funnel concept or what Focus in the Family calls the 'V of love'. In

trying to maintain moral standards, this concept should be followed **regardless of ADHD diagnosis** because we believe that such children are still **capable of learning**. Just because a child has ADHD, that does not mean they do not need to have good manners or can be disrespectful. Tendency is for parents with ADHD children to give in more to the needs of the children out of love, not heeding the stricter disciplines when younger and allowing too many choices too young. This not only will not help our children but may also allow them to do as they please, resulting in social issues later.

**Maintain schedule**. With ADHD, attention is a key issue and usually leads to learning impairment. As a result, parents think that letting them do as they like is better. Actually research has shown a fixed schedule is better, even in dealing with dementia and Alzheimer's clients, where memory and new learning are problematic, schedule is quite key. This **creates familiarity and helps stabilize the condition**. Of course, more patience is needed given their condition and that is the key cause of parents giving up. To see results, the harsher demands of smaller steps, great patience and a longer time are needed to see results from the fixed schedule.

**Schedule daily strenuous activities**. In the scheduling, include something that can **expend the children's energy**. This is critical for ADHD children because they are restless in the first place and actually do need some ways to 'let out steam', especially boys. We recommend sporting activities like running, swimming, outdoor ball games but for children who are more artistically inclined, their energy can be expended by drawing, dancing, and learning music. The idea is to allow them to enjoy something while expending their energy. If daily is too strenuous for the parents, make it at least 3 times a week.

**Schedule and increase sit down time progressively with one parent**. Another symptom for ADHD children is that they cannot sit down for long. As a result, they end up disrupting classes and not learning. At home, if a daily routine is done at a fixed time for a fixed interval, it will help cultivate attention. Even if it means reading with a parent for just 15 minutes and slowly increasing to 30 minutes and bringing in homework progressively for a longer time, it will be **beneficial to the child's learning and moral development**.