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This is my daughter Taylor. She was diagnosed with ADHD 3 years ago. As you can see she seems like a normal kid, but her brain processes things a little differently.



## Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder: One Parent's Battle to Understanding the Disorder

### Introduction

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder is a disorder in the brain that can profoundly affect a person's ability to focus, concentrate, and control behavior. The *DSM-IV Made Easy*, a clinician book used to diagnose ADHD and other mental health issues, states that ADHD was first described in 1902 and is a common childhood disorder. It affects 2% of boys and even fewer girls worldwide (515). In my research, I found that little is known about the number of adults who suffer from ADHD as some children will outgrow ADHD while others suffer from it on into adulthood.

My 12 year old daughter Taylor was diagnosed 3 years ago with ADHD by Dr. Villeneuve, a doctor at Holston Children and Youth. Dr. Villeneuve specializes in treating children with ADHD. Taylor had been having problems in the classroom for at least 4 years prior to her diagnosis. There were many signs that there was a problem. Taylor was having trouble focusing in class, she lacked the ability to sit still for long periods of time, she would blurt out answers, and she was having trouble controlling her behavior. Once my husband and I noticed Taylor was receiving lower grades from her inability to focus on her classwork, we decided it was time to have her officially tested for ADHD and see what our treatment options were available.

## **Causes of ADHD**

There are several causes for ADHD. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, genetics is one of the prime factors in a person developing ADHD. ADHD is linked to several genes and often runs in families. Environmental factors such as lead based paint or being born to a mother who smoked or used alcohol during pregnancy increases the likelihood of ADHD (National Institute for Mental Health). Exposure to smoking and alcohol before birth leads to smaller brain volume especially which can have an effect on a child developing ADHD (Zeeuw), The main cause for ADHD though is a developmental factor in which the brain will eventually mature completely but is on average 3 years behind (National Institute of Mental Health).

## **Symptoms of ADHD**

Children with ADHD usually start to exhibit symptoms before the age of 7 though many are not diagnosed until age 9 (Morrison 515-516). These symptoms include an inability to stay

focused, squirming in their seats, blurting out answers, and talking non-stop. Children often daydream, are easily distracted, and often act without regard to the consequences that follow. (See the section of this paper below entitled ADHD Diagnosis for a full list of symptoms associated with ADHD taken directly from the *DSM-IV Made Easy* by James Morrison.)

My daughter has several symptoms of ADHD. Before she was diagnosed, we noticed at home that she would go from task to task. As early as age four, we would notice that she would sit down to color, then five minutes later she would get a toy to play with, then a few minutes later she would get a book out to read, and then once she was finished with the book, she would come back to coloring. She would talk non-stop to us, the dog, or whoever would listen. We would ask her to do certain tasks and if we gave her more than two she could not complete them. If I would ask her to pick up her toy and put it up, put her book back on the shelf, and put up her crayons from where she was coloring, she would pick up the toy and put up the crayons but would not put the toy up or put the book back on the shelf. In the classroom, she would find herself distracted by her classmates moving, she would listen to her teacher and then zone out and miss part of the lesson, and she would rush through her work and make lower grades. Taylor would squirm in her seat, blurt out answers, and feel the need to touch those who were sitting around her. She would forget to turn in assignments even if the teacher had reminded them to do so.

## **ADHD Diagnosis**

Diagnosing ADHD can be difficult. Children mature at different ages so what appears to be ADHD can be just a difference in maturing levels (National Institute of Mental Health). Primary care doctors can diagnose ADHD, but they must first rule out medical issues such as

seizures, vision and hearing problems, and family problems (National Institute of Mental Health). A checklist is often used to determine whether or not a child has ADHD (Morrison, 516).

According to the *DSM-IV Made Easy*, the symptoms of ADHD have to affect two different environments such as home, work, or school. Symptoms cannot be attributed to another developmental or psychotic disorder. Symptoms must last longer than 6 months and be to such a degree that the person is considered maladaptive. A person must meet at least six of the eight Inattention criteria or six of the nine Hyperactivity/Impulsivity criteria in order to receive an ADHD diagnosis. The criteria from the *DSM-IV Made Easy* is as follows:

#### **Inattention**

- Fails to pay close attention to details or makes careless errors in schoolwork, work, or other activities.
- Has trouble keeping attention on tasks or play
- Doesn't appear to listen when being told something
- Neither follows through on instructions nor completes chores, schoolwork, or jobs (not because of oppositional behavior or failure to understand)
- Has trouble organizing activities and tasks
- Dislikes or avoids tasks that involve sustained mental effort (homework, schoolwork)
- Loses materials needed for activities (assignments, books, pencils, tools, toys)
- Is forgetful

#### **Hyperactivity**

- Squirms in seat or fidgets

- Inappropriately leaves seat
- Inappropriately runs or climbs (in adolescents or adults, this may be only a subjective feeling of restlessness)
- Has trouble quietly playing or engaging in leisure activity
- Appears driven or “on the go”
- Talks excessively

### **Impulsivity**

- Answers questions before they have been completely asked
- Has trouble awaiting turn
- Interrupts or intrudes on others

When my daughter was diagnosed with ADHD I had to fill out a checklist along with her teachers and my parents. The checklist we completed, though different than the one in the DSM-IV Made Easy, asked about Taylor’s behavior, sleep patterns, health problems, developmental milestones, her relationships with peers and adults, and her ability to complete work and assigned tasks. The doctor then took the checklists, scored the results, and compared them with the ADHD criteria on the checklist to see where her areas of weakness were. They told us that based on the checklist she did in fact have ADHD the inattentive type. The questionnaire that we filled out for my daughter is shown below.

|  | Always | Some-<br>times | Never |
|--|--------|----------------|-------|
| 1. Does child follow instruction?  |        |                |       |
| 2. Does child make friends easily?   |        |                |       |
| 3. Does child lose interests in tasks often?   |        |                |       |
| 4. Does child complete one task before beginning another?  |        |                |       |
| 5. Does child make friends easily?   |        |                |       |
| 6. Does child speak excessively?   |        |                |       |
| 7. Does child go from task to task without completing one task before starting the next?   |        |                |       |
| 8. Does child act as if driven by a motor or is always on the go?  |        |                |       |
| 9. Does child like to play alone?  |        |                |       |
| 10. Does child play well with others?  |        |                |       |
| 11. Does child have difficulty making friends?   |        |                |       |
| 12. Does child complete classwork?   |        |                |       |
| 13. Does child rush through classwork?   |        |                |       |
| 14. Does child make careless errors in their work?   |        |                |       |
| 15. Does child lose important items like homework, glasses, money, etc.?   |        |                |       |
| 16. Does child have trouble with organization?   |        |                |       |
| 17. Does the child get into fights with other children?  |        |                |       |
| 18. Does the child have trouble with authority figures?  |        |                |       |
| 19. Does the child have trouble listening?   |        |                |       |
| 20. Does child avoid, dislike, or is reluctant to participate in tasks requiring sustained mental effort, like schoolwork or homework? |        |                |       |
| 21. Does child have trouble waiting their turn to speak during conversations?  |        |                |       |
| 22. Does child often blurt out answers without being called on?  |        |                |       |
| 23. Does child fidget or have trouble sitting still?   |        |                |       |

|  | Always | Some-<br>times | Never |
|--|--------|----------------|-------|
| 24. Is the child unable to play quietly or, if older, do they struggle to participate in leisurely activities? |        |                |       |
| 25. Does child get at least eight hours of sleep per night?  |        |                |       |
| 26. Did child hit all developmental milestones on time?  |        |                |       |
| 27. Does child attend school on a regular basis?   |        |                |       |
| 28. Does child miss school due to extended illnesses?  |        |                |       |
| 29. Does child tap feet, move legs, or tap fingers?  |        |                |       |
| 30. Does child fail to complete one task before going to another task?   |        |                |       |

Once a person is determined to have ADHD they receive one of three diagnoses. The first is Predominantly Inattentive Type in which the person meets the inattentive criteria but not the hyperactive or impulsive criteria. The second type is Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type in which the person meets the criteria for hyperactivity and impulsivity but not inattention. The third type is Combined Type in which the person meets the criteria for inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. The Combined Type is the most common type of ADHD.

A diagnosis of ADHD has increased in recent years due to the significant push for standardized testing. Berkley Wellness, a publication from the Public Health Department at the University of California at Berkley, reports that this increase in the over diagnosis of ADHD is due to school based performance measures. This includes standardized testing. The emphasis of school budgets being based on academic performance, graduation rates, and test scores resulted in a spike of ADHD diagnoses. The diagnosis would either help children with ADHD symptoms get the help they needed in order to focus on their school work or it could result in their test scores not being included in the school report (Berkley Wellness).

My daughter's doctor said they notice a spike in the number of children sent for ADHD testing the closer it gets to TCAP testing time. Teachers suggest that children be tested in the hopes of improving their performance on TCAPS or other standardized tests. These scores do affect things such as teacher pay, school budgets, and the student's individual grades.

## **Ways to Treat ADHD**

Currently there is no cure for ADHD. Behavioral therapy is used to address behavior issues and teach children and adults ways to redirect their behaviors. Behavioral therapy trains the child, parent, or other caregiver in ways to deal with behaviors, monitor what they are doing, and reward the child when good behavior is demonstrated. This progresses until the child can monitor themselves and deal with the behaviors such as impulsiveness, self-harm, or inattention (My ADHD.com) Medication is the most commonly used treatment (National Institute of Mental Health). Stimulants are the most common type of medication used for treating ADHD with methylphenidate and amphetamines being the most prescribe types. Stimulants help activate the parts of the brain responsible for attention and focus which reduce hyperactivity. Education is used as a treatment. Schools can meet the needs for those who have ADHD through the use of an IEP or 504 plan. These plans will meet such needs as additional testing time, having a test read aloud, or testing in a different location.

A 504 plan is a non-medical plan that allows students to receive accommodations on homework and testing under Section 504 of the IDEA, ADA, and Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

An IEP is an individual education plan that also allows students to receive accommodations on homework and testing under the IDEA, ADA Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The IEP plan is written up by the special education teacher, the parent, and the academic teachers.



While medications are used most frequently, there are side effects that can result from the medications. Sleep loss, weight loss, and heart problems are among the top side effects (National Institute of Mental Health). My daughter started out on 18 mg of Concerta which falls under the stimulant methylphenidate and lost 10 pounds in her first two months on the medication. She is now on 54 mg of Concerta and it still causes a loss of appetite but her weight remains steady. Some other less common side effects include the development of tics, emotional changes, heart problems, and hallucinations.

## Famous People Who Have ADHD

|                   |                     |                    |                 |
|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Karina Smirnoff   | Jim Carrey          | Pete Rose          | Adam Levine     |
| Justin Timberlake | Paris Hilton        | Michelle Rodriguez | Robin Williams  |
| Will Smith        | Sir Richard Bronson | Solange Knowles    | Woody Harrelson |
| Michael Phelps    | Howie Mandel        | Albert Einstein    | Channing Tatum  |

Information gathered from <http://www.parenting.com/gallery/famous-people-with-add-or-adhd>

### Author's Bio

Kim Rigsby is a graduate student at East Tennessee State University pursuing a Master's Degree in Elementary Education with an English/Language Arts add-on. Kim resides in Kingsport, Tennessee with her daughter Taylor, her husband Shannan, and their two dogs, Poochie and Molly.

### Work Cited

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Only pages 515-520 were used for this paper as this was the section specifically on Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder.

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