Could Your Child Have Both ADHD and Autism?

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ADHD and Autism

Many people don't realize that ADHD and autism can go hand in hand. This overlap in symptoms of the conditions can confuse the family of those kids afflicted. When a child cannot sit still to perform tasks or participate in class, parents and teachers may think he/she has ADD.

The diagnosis by a physician may very well be attention deficit disorder since it is a familiar condition. But it is important that healthcare professionals recognize that some conditions that look like ADHD could also be another condition, such as autism.

It has been found that kids under stress due to learning disabilities, depression, anxiety, or sensory integration issues may have the same symptoms. It takes a skillful professional to evaluate a child to discern whether a child has ADHD and/or autism. This can be a child psychiatrist, skilled pediatrician, or pediatric neurologist.

When a Child Has Both Conditions

It is not easy to diagnose autism; it cannot be diagnosed with any type of medical testing. By observation and screenings as well as interviews and evaluations, it is possible to determine the presence of autism. After a year, another evaluation would be needed to clarify the diagnosis.

A child may not be given a diagnosis of ADHD if he/she already has the diagnosis of ASD. However, a child may still benefit from interventions addressing ADHD.

Types of Interventions for a Child with Both Diagnoses

- **Behavioral therapy.** If you are a parent of a child with ASD, you may want to start out with a treatment plan that excludes medicine for the time-being. Behavior therapy is focused on managing symptoms that hinder socializing successfully and achieving academic goals. It is aimed at reinforcing positive behaviors and discouraging negative ones. This can entail posting lists, rules, and schedule for the child so that he stays organized better. Checking off tasks can give the child a sense of accomplishment as well.
- **Physical exercise**. Another good intervention for ADHD children and ASD children is to ensure they get enough physical exercise to burn off all that boundless energy they seem to have. Channel that energy into something they enjoy like swimming or other activity that doesn't involve the need for other children. Exercising in solidarity helps them to enjoy the activity without the pressure of socializing.

- **Medication.** There may be some cases where behavioral interventions are not enough. This is where medication comes in. Children with ASD usually have erratic reactions to stimulant drugs, which are commonly given to people with ADHD. In the case of an ASD child, he/she may be sent to a psychiatrist where medication management can be overseen.
  Medications called atypical neuroleptics are effective treatment for a child with sleep disturbance,

repetitive behaviors, and restlessness. A good response to this type of medication may not necessitate the need for a stimulant.

Summary

The best type of professional to have involved when a child has ADHD and autism is a behavioral pediatrician or child psychiatrist with training in autism. It is even better if the specialist has an active autistic child of their own, so he/she can relate to you. A professional who understands what the child needs and empathizes with the family is the best physician to have.