Helping Kids With ADHD: Tips for Parents

by JEFF EMMERSON

Helping Kids With ADHD

A startling trend is occurring with kids diagnosed with ADHD: instead of having behavior therapy be the default, front-line treatment, kids are being put on powerful, potentially dangerous controlled substances like amphetamines.

In fact, studies show that about 43 percent of kids with ADHD are on medication without any therapy for ADHD whatsoever! This is scary, to put it mildly.

Roughly 13 percent receive only behavioral therapy, with about 31 percent receiving both medication and therapy as treatment. Think of that – kids 6 years of age and younger being put on very powerful pharmaceutical medications that can change their brains over time, affect their blood pressure, heart rates and other aspects of their development.

Why Medication Isn't Necessarily the Best Option

This excerpt from an article on ADHD medications by Dr. John Gorhol really hits home: “ADHD medications won’t work for a great many people without behavioral or other psychotherapy interventions.”

The more people I talk to online, the more I’m witnessing awareness being raised about over-medication and misdiagnosis, issues largely due to a lack of consistent education when it comes to people who are entrusted to properly and thoroughly diagnose and treat conditions like ADHD.

As I write this article, I’m reminded of the reality these days (as far as mental health is concerned, anyway) that each of us must become our own advocates, or in the case of parents with ADHD children, you must be your child’s advocate.

That can be an exhausting, scary thing to do at times. I wish I had a better, “easier” answer for you, but I don’t. This is what each of us must do for ourselves, loved ones and others we know going through tough times.

Here are some tips for parents of kids who are suspected to have (or have already been thoroughly diagnosed with) ADHD/:

Find a Good Specialist

This can be much easier said than done, depending on where you live. I’ve heard horror stories about kids being diagnosed in less than 10 minutes, for goodness’ sake! General practitioners (family doctors) don’t have nearly as much education as they need to be diagnosing kids and adults with ADHD, frankly.

Some make it their specialty, learning about the ways to avoid a misdiagnosis by ruling other possibilities out, but

unfortunately, most are just too busy to devote the time needed. It's the harsh reality we're facing these days, and that's why it's up to each of us to teach ourselves what to watch out for.

Keep going. This isn't something that's "black and white." In the end, you've got to find your way to solutions for your child. In a perfect world, we'd all have quick access to specialists who are at the top of current learning on the subject of mental health and thoroughly take their time working towards a diagnosis, but that's often not the case. Sometimes parents don't know where to begin.

This is a journey for all of us, myself included. Just keep going, getting second opinions if you feel dissatisfied with a physician or other professional.

Next page: Do your research.

Remember: Your Child Is Growing and Changing With Age

I'm by no means a doctor, but doctors I know (and articles all over the internet) have mentioned how complex and fragile our human brains and physiological systems (such as our respiratory, cardiovascular and endocrine systems) are.

When you add powerful pharmaceuticals to the body, changes can literally occur in the brain and throughout the body as well. Going beyond medication, acupressure and acupuncture for ADHD in adults and children can also cause a tremendous change in the body.

I have learned that we truly don't have conclusive research on the dangers of ADHD medications over long-term use, and I've also been made to realize that medications are simply a band-aid solution to the number-one recommendation of pediatric organizations: behavior therapy.

Medications for ADHD can cause the heart to race, potential blood-pressure issues and they're highly addictive, according to research articles coming out more and more these days. Make sure that you do your research when it comes to these powerful medications. After all – it's your child. Your future.

The Internet Is Your Friend/Research Partner!

There's a ton of research and information online where ADHD is concerned. There are many wonderful ADHD resources - websites, blogs and forums for people to raise their thoughts/concerns with medications and ADHD symptoms.

In this day and age, many run the risk of being incorrectly diagnosed, which makes it even more important to learn about suspected diagnoses like ADHD as well as trauma, thyroid issues, sleep deprivation and other disorders like anxiety, depression, bipolar, conduct disorders and oppositional-defiant disorder, to name but a few.

Depending on specialists to steer you the right way in treatment without first doing your own basic research can be dangerous. While parents and adults are rushed more than ever these days, that isn't an excuse for taking care of yourself and your family. The more that each of us makes the choice to be our own advocates, the better off we'll all be.

One Final Note on Helping Kids With ADHD

Do the best you can – that's all you can do.

We all feel hopeless at times. Your child might be acting out so much that you're at a loss for how best to deal with them. That's when you've got to be open to reaching out to different agencies in your area, not just put them on medication and hope it solves the challenges. Doing this won't get to the root cause of the behaviors and symptoms.

Medications help many people, but they are NEVER meant to be used on their own. Behavior therapy is the #1 recommended approach for a reason – it works.

For those who may not be able to afford therapy – you've got more homework to do, and your child is worth it! Look into counseling agencies, mental health organizations, and social work agencies in your area. Do they offer any sort of reduced-fee counseling or alternative teaching/learning options? That would be a great place to start.

Work your way from there, getting connected to all the potential resources in your area. That's your responsibility. It can be frustrating at times but stay the course.

Putting young children on medication is a dangerous proposition. Make sure you're getting all the information when you visit a doctor or other specialist who is prescribing medication and don't be afraid to ask lots of questions! After all, these specialists are only human, and many general practitioners don't know nearly enough about mental health to thoroughly diagnose.

In the end, we're only as successful as we are prepared, meaning that the more you make educated choices with the help of specialists by putting your heads together, the better your odds of successful treatment and a happier, healthier child.

The work you're putting in is a very small price for the future adult you're raising, a person who will learn from you along the way. Remember that your efforts are noble, and empowering for your child – even if it might not seem like it sometimes.