

Sometimes It's Hard to Reach Out!

By retired family therapist Teresa Parker

A concerned mom wrote to me...

"It's harder for me to reach out for some reason than I would like to admit. My son is a 1st grade, and he has been having some hard times at school. He thinks it is too long; he can't stay in the classroom, he climbs on desks, yells, grunts and hits when he is upset. He has had probably 3 days all year where he has been an angel and participated the entire day without an incident.

It's to the point where I feel pressured to have him medicated for ADHD. He has already been prescribed the medicine, but I have not started it. I was told I would be surprised how many kids take medication... which to me begs the question why are we medicating all these children? I just want to see what your thoughts are.

His dad seems to be on board with prescribing him something and is hoping that it works. But I don't know if I think that is the answer. His dad is just like our son, wired, all over the place, disorganized, and prone to anger. We are currently separated.

I love son's energy, but I can also see how heartbroken he is with all these emotions he can't control. I worry about all the learning he is missing out on by not being in the classroom. As of now, he can only tolerate to sit through (most days), art, music, Phy. Ed. I don't know what to do. I don't understand the role of medicine for ADD, and I don't want our son to turn into an addict or something. HELP!"

This is like so many other emails, phone calls and messages I receive from parents here at Kids Ranch. Clearly this mom is a sincere and caring parent who has a lot of anxiety about the diagnosis and treatment of AD/HD. Her message points to several issues that are typical of many parents' questions.

There is a lot of misinformation out there about AD/HD, and lots of articles about the pros and cons of using various medications. It can be unnerving for a parent to hear for the first time that a professional informs you that your child might have AD/HD. It's best to acquaint yourself with the classic symptoms of AD/HD; and to read about how the condition effects the child's self-esteem, mental/emotional health, and academic achievements.

AD/HD is not a one size fits all diagnosis, and it is definitely not a one size fits all treatment. It is so important that you learn what you can do to manage their behavior and deal with common AD/HD challenges. As a parent who understands ADD, you can help your child overcome daily challenges, channel their energy in a positive way, and bring more peace to your child and the family. I would recommend going onto the Web MD site, the Mayo Clinic or Dr. Amens ADD Clinic site. Don't be shy! Spend time browsing through the many topics offered on issues related to AD/HD. There are articles about the variation and range of symptom clusters, dietary interventions, and

natural ways to help lessen the impact of AD/HD, the different types of medications- the psychostimulants and the non-stimulants, information on sleep strategies, (sleep difficulties is often an issue with ADDers) and the negative impact of screen time on the brain.

There are also many helpful articles on helping a child with ADD learn social rules and improve their social skills, such as making friends.

Addressing this mother's concern about whether ADD medication could potentially cause drug addiction, there have been many large studies on this question.

Teens and adults with ADD, who are not treated for the disorder, may become vulnerable to the use of drugs as they learn by junior and high school age which drugs self-medicate their uncomfortable symptoms such as being unable to focus and accomplish necessary tasks, difficulties in learning or feeling anxious. However, research clearly shows that if children with ADD are treated appropriately for the disorder, they are not subject to addictions.

In his breakthrough book on identifying and treating different types of ADD, Healing ADD, Dr Amens wrote, "A very common myth in the lay community is that the use of medication to treat ADD children somehow predisposes them to drug abuse in later life. The theory is that giving kids or teens medicine to help their ADD somehow teaches them to abuse substances later on. Both my clinical experience (spanning 40 years) and an abundance of research shows in fact, the opposite is true. Treating AD/HD actually decreases the incidence of drug or alcohol abuse later on."

The prevalence of people with the diagnosis of AD/HD is significant; more boys than girls are diagnosed. It is estimated that 6 million children in the U.S. have variations of AD/HD, and a large group of adults as well. The practice of diagnosing adults with the disorder is still lagging way behind the number of school-age children, although this is being increasingly addressed by the media.

As this mom points out in her email, there are many advantages of having AD/HD, although these are too often overlooked by the media. While having too much energy for a schoolboy in class is clearly a disadvantage, as he grows, he will learn that ADD people have lots of energy and can be industrious for long periods of times if they are invested in the project. They are also people who are very creative and imaginative, in fact, as a whole, it is often this group of people who are responsible for a host of ground-breaking inventions, along with great achievements in the visual and material arts. They are also largely represented in the fields of architecture and engineering, as well as in a whole host of medical emergency professions.

Lastly, it is important that you persevere in getting the help you need. If you aren't getting the results you want from your doctor or therapist, keep investigating. Learn from the vast array of medical articles on-line and in books. Make sure that your sources are

dependable. And know that other issues such as head trauma, and co-occurring conditions like anxiety or depression may play a role in the severity of your symptoms.

Getting the right information and persevering in getting the help your child needs will lead to new hope for your child and for your entire family. And we always remind our parents, taking care of yourself as a primary caregiver is an essential first step!

1. Healing ADD, The Breakthrough Program that Allows You to See and Heal the 7 Types of ADD, by Dr. G. Amens.