

Problems of Children with ADHD

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and Key Words:

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is a neurobehavioral developmental disorder affecting about 3-5% of the world's population. It is most common in children with an incidence of about 8 to 9 percent of primary age school boys and 2 to 3 percent of girls. Boys show more unrest and are more often diagnosed than girls. Over 70% of children with ADHD met criteria for the disorder in adolescence.

The problems for children with ADHD are mainly difficulties with behaviour control, attention deficit, problems in social adaptation, problems with self-concept and self-esteem. When we see the higher percentage of boys with ADHD compared to girls and a not very optimistic perspective in the direction of antisocial behaviour it is evident that we should focus our treatment mainly on boys.

Mainly because of hyperactivity, impulsivity and attention deficit children with ADHD have problems with self-control, understanding verbal and nonverbal signals from other people, keeping rules, completing tasks, keeping order and with interpersonal interaction etc. They are often over stimulated and due to mainly negative feedback they demonstrate poor motivation and attitudes that leads them to self-defeating patterns of behaviour and using self-defence strategies such as aggression.

Key words: Hyperactivity, impulsivity, hyper excitability, attention, adaptation, interaction, self-esteem, feedback, aggression.

Similar topics:

Antisocial behaviour, aggression, motivation disturbances.

Materials:

- Paper
- Crayons

Duration:

2 x 1 hour in class or in hobby group

Number of participants:

10-15 participants (only boys)

Age:

9-11 years old boys

Aims:

- To teach boys to read other people's verbal and nonverbal expressions.

- To help boys to learn their own behaviour control.
- To choose the more desired behaviour.

(Short) Explanation:

Concept definition

Several intervention approaches are available to cope with children with ADHD. We can use two important methods of treatment- medical and psychological.

Medical treatment (e.g. Methylphenidat- Ritalin; Atomoxetin- Strattera) ranges from basic treatment and psychological treatment to subsidiary treatment. Psychological treatment works to people with ADHD accept themselves despite their disorder and to help them to develop better relationships.

Psychological treatment is focused by clients mainly on:

- upsetting thoughts;
- upsetting feelings;
- exploring self-defeating patterns of behaviour;
- learning to handle with emotions;
- understanding how to change or better cope with the disorder (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/index.cfm>).

In terms of psychological treatment we can take two perspectives to the problem - behavioural therapy and social skills training.

Behavioural therapy (BT) helps - rather than simply helping children with ADHD to understand their feelings and actions – it directs them to change their thinking and coping and thus it may lead to changes in behaviour. The support might be practical assistance, like help in organizing tasks or schoolwork or dealing with emotionally charged events. The support might also be in self-monitoring one's own behaviour and giving self-praise or rewards for acting in a desired way such as controlling anger or thinking before acting.

Social skills training can help children with ADHD to learn new ways of behaviour. In social skills training we discuss and model appropriate behaviours important in developing and maintaining social relationships, like waiting for a turn, sharing toys, asking for help, sitting quietly during mealtimes, responding to teasing etc., then give children a chance to practice. Social skills training can help the child to develop better ways to play and work with other children, to keep roles, to eliminate conflicts with teachers and parents.

There are a number of techniques for managing children's behaviour. Here are two examples:

1. System of rewards and penalties

This system of rewards and penalties can be an effective way to modify a child's behaviour at school and at home. The parents or teacher in cooperation with each other identify a desirable behaviour that they want to encourage in the child—such as asking for a toy instead of grabbing it, or completing a simple task. The child is told exactly what is expected in order to earn the reward. The child receives the reward when he performs the desired behaviour and a mild penalty when he doesn't. A reward can be small but it should be something the child wants and is eager to earn. The penalty might be some activity which children do like and we eliminate it (e. g. watching TV, playing computer games etc.). At school we prefer to work with rewards which could be represented by positive points.

2. Using “time out” or isolation

In school or particularly at home we can use of “time out” or isolation. This involves sending the child to a chair or bedroom when their behaviour becomes too unruly or out of control. During time out, the child is removed from the agitating situation and sits alone quietly for a short time (about 5- 10 minutes) to calm down without any possibility to read or play, they should think about the way they have behaved and try to understand how it affects them and others.

Parents should also give the child “quality time” each day, in which they share a pleasurable or relaxed activity. During this time together, the parent look for opportunities to notice and point out what the child does well, and praise his or her strengths and abilities (Halgin, Whitbourne, 1994; Oltmanns, Neale, Davison, 1995).

Guidance for the game or exercise:



Emotions performance

This exercise is to teach boys how to deal with emotions- how to read and express them which is important for building positive relationships. First ask the boys to discuss different emotions and their meanings. This helps them to understand more deeply the emotion and its characteristics. The second part of the exercise is to create a painting which represents their ideas about a feeling or an emotion. They should think about how it might be represented in terms of colour and shape. The work created shows the difficulties in expressing and reading different emotions- some are easy, some more difficult to express and read.

Step 1:

Discussion about emotions, characterizing positive and negative emotions, what are the differences between them...

“When you speak to other people or they speak to you, you often perceive different feelings and emotions. What could they be?” (Pleasure, fear, anger, sadness, ...)



Step 2:

Each boy paints one positive and one negative emotion on the cards and inscribes them.



Step 3:

Each boy randomly selects one emotion.



Step 4:

Give the boys time to prepare a short role-play of the chosen emotion, consulting with the teacher/practitioner to ensure it is appropriate. They cannot use words to express their emotion – only facial expressions and gestures.



Step 5:

Perform the short presentation.



Step 6:

Feedback

The boys try to guess the emotions performed and evaluate each performance. They should describe their own feelings, the attributes typical to a particular emotion, which situations are matched with a particular emotion and behaviour identified with a particular situation.

Step 7:

Repeat the activity choosing a different emotion at random.



Reflection:

It is important to keep some principles specifically for boys with ADHD. It mainly means we prefer to work in small steps. Each step is short and clearly defined and we provide feedback. We should interact with each participant and we give a positive evaluation after finishing each task.

To think about:

1. On what behaviour will you reflect?
2. How are you able to eliminate a disturbing and undesirable behaviour?

Variations (Continuation):

I am the leader

Let us now come away from the premise that most boys with ADHD feel socially excluded. Every child would like to be the centre of attention sometimes. This exercise gives them an opportunity to stay the centre of attention without using disruptive behaviour. The exercise is full of actions too and demands attention from the other participants. During the game boys learn to observe the behaviour of others and it may lead to discovering a new skill in their performing colleague - he is funny, he is good at it, he is a good actor...

Exercise description:

All boys sit or stand, making the circle with one of them in the middle - he is the centre of attention. The boy in the middle makes different movements and makes noises and sounds that the others must imitate. He has limited time for the show, when the time is over another boy comes to the centre of the circle.

At the end the boys discuss what they liked, what was difficult for them, what they felt etc.

Recommendation:

Together with each exercise educators should continuously reinforce desirable behaviour by providing more frequent and immediate feedback including rewards and praise.

There are some general principles which can be useful for most children with ADHD:

1. Rewards should dominate over punishment. They should be directed at the particular behaviour and at boy's personality (you are helpful, smart, ...). Punishment should be directed only at the boy's behaviour not himself (e.g. That was an unkind thing to say... not... you are very unkind).
2. Setting up the rules (there should be a limited number of rules, they should be understandable, appropriate and achievable).
3. Help the boy manage a large task step by step. Praise him as each step is completed.
4. Give the boys a timetable so they can see their routine every day, from waking up to bed time, which includes schoolwork, homework, play time and other activities. The schedule should be placed somewhere visible. If a schedule change must be made, make it as far in advance as possible.
5. Have a place for everything and keep everything in its place. This includes clothing, backpacks, school equipment.

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

We can presume ADHD when first the difficulties have appeared in preschool age and currently they have persisted longer than six months (In: Vágnerová, 1999, p 83).

Symptoms:

Hyperactivity

Hyperactivity is an excessive compulsion toward action, activity which is ineffective and senseless. Strong emotional reactions, impulsive behavior, and sometimes a short span of attention are also typical for a hyperactive person. The frequency and intensity of such activities are raised compared other children. Because ADHD demands high levels of energy children with the disorder have problems controlling and managing their energy output as a result children it leads toward faster tiredness and irritability.

Impulsivity

Impulsivity is a tendency to react to stimuli without thinking, often in an appropriate manner. Impulsive children are first fixed to actual stimulation and eventually to actual satiation. They are not able to understand the consequences of their behaviour or to regulate their behaviour.

The variation of CNS function which is non-controllable by a hyperactive child has been often misinterpreted as motivation disturbance.

Hyper excitability

Hyperactivity is often connected with hyper-excitability what means enhanced emotional irritability, with lower tolerance towards stress. Hyperactive children have the tendency to react emotionally from one extreme to another, from euphoria and enthusiasm to moodiness. Becoming easily tired and having lower stress tolerance are related to typical self-control disturbances, demonstrating affectionate and sometime aggressive reactions.

Attention deficit

The typical symptoms are poor attention, higher tiredness, inability of longer and quality concentration. Hyperactive children pay attention to everything that is intercepted by the brain, many times non-selectively. That is why hyperactive children are non-systematic and disorderly (Vágnerová, 1999).

Social consequences of hyperactivity

The consequences of the difficulties mentioned above is that the hyperactive child can be seen as an undesirable and inconvenient individual who is negatively appreciated and mainly denied by most people. Some deviations in unsettled child personal development are secondary, caused by negative reactions of the community on his difficult behaviour. Because children with ADHD are more often denied, criticised, evaluated negatively and seen as failures they often feel deprived of emotional acceptance and social needs. Also their self concept is mainly negative and their self-esteem low. So we can see the behaviour which responds defending to one own identity (e.g. being pushy, noisy, aggressive).

These problems are usually reflected in the following areas: school; family; professional career; personal relationships; conflicts with society.

School problems

About 90% of children with ADHD have academic problems. They are not able to concentrate, they rush their work, make mistakes and often they do not finish tasks, their outputs are fluctuating. Subsequently, teachers see their failure as a lack of motivation or effort.

The other problem is their inability to keep social norms and to respect school norms because of disturbance in the field of self-regulation. Children are not able to delay any actual need of satiation. The consequence of this is that they are negatively evaluated by teachers due to "bad behaviour".

Family problems, professional problems

Problems in family are coupled with unfortunate rearing by parents. A child with a disposition toward over-activity and moodiness is stressed further by a mother who easily becomes impatient and resentful. The child is unable to cope with demands for obedience and the mother in particular becomes more negative and disapproving. The relationship between mother and child becomes a battleground. Under such circumstances the demands of school cannot be handled and so the behaviour of the child is often in conflict with roles in classroom.

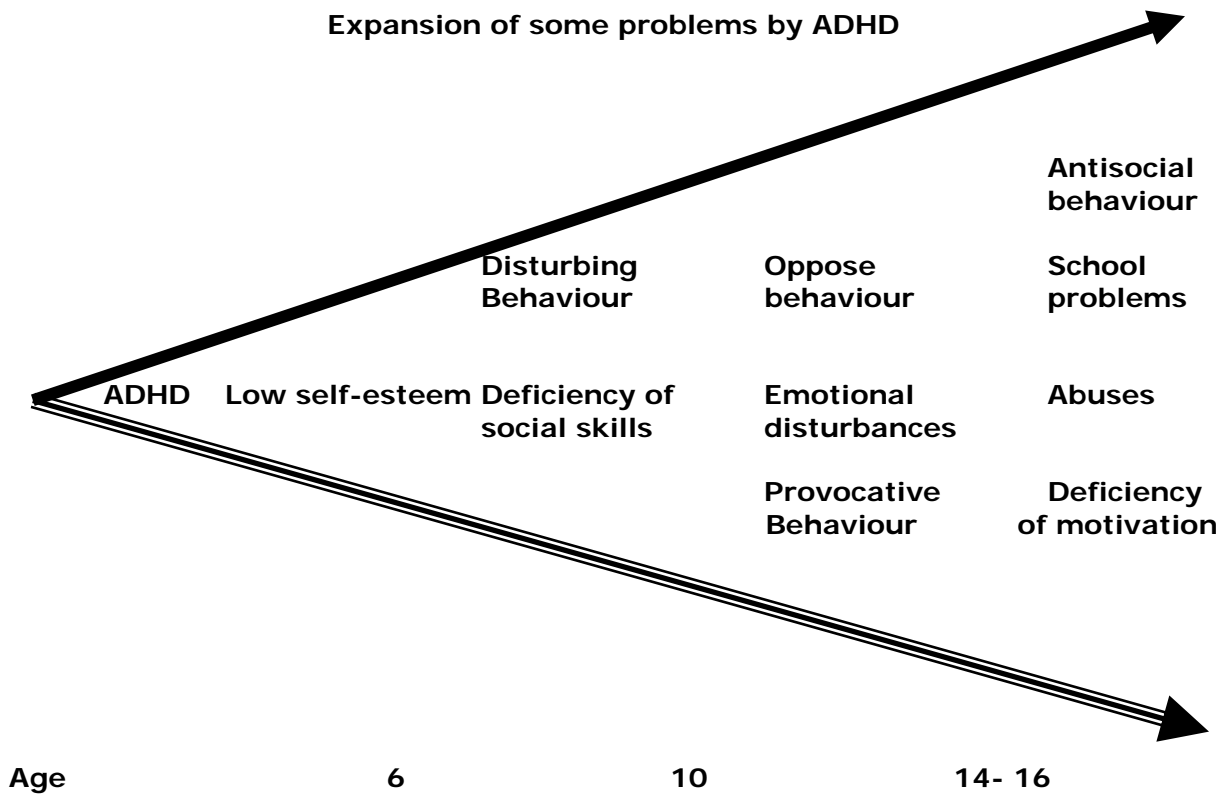
The negative feedback, criticism and refusal by others stimulates self-defending reactions which reflect themselves as secondary stress and have consequences in the further

development of the individual with ADHD. So, many problems are carried through to adulthood mainly in the areas of work, personal relationships and conflicts with society.

Individuals with ADHD often have a very negative attitude to school because of the reasons mentioned above. Therefore the main motive of their professional decisions is to dispose of school. The consequence of this is poor academic achievement. Also the impulsive nature, difficulties with self-control, low stress tolerance, disability of systematic activity and negative expectation reduce the probability of success in any professional role and escalate the risk of failure.

Impulsive, impetuous behaviour becomes more extraordinary in adulthood because we expect mature and responsible behaviour which is different from the behaviour of a child. We can assume that individuals with such difficulties and fixed ways of behaving will be less accepted as partners, they will have problems in any interpersonal relationships.

Teenagers and adults with ADHD often have deviations in personality and they have conflicts with society. About 60% of such people have problems with social adaptation, 25% are referred to special educational institutions or sadly, end up in prison. Their tendency to antisocial behaviour or self-destruction is higher than in other people. In adulthood some people with ADHD, mostly men, are more likely to abuse alcohol, gamble, and display antisocial behaviour and to have deficits in social and work-related behaviour (Oltmanns, Neale, Davison, 1995; Vágnerová, 1999).



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