

Explore all options when treating child for ADHD

Yvette:

I am a mother of an 8-year-old girl who was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) two years ago. She was put a couple of different medications only to find out that they either stopped working or gave her seriously scary side effects. I do not want to use my child as a guinea pig for these drugs by continuing to try different ones without solid proof that I am not doing her long-term damage. She is a very loving, funny, perceptive child who just has trouble sitting still and focusing.

Does anyone have a suggestion for a drug-free alternative to helping her?
Chrys

Dear Chrys,

I referred your question to Dr. John Campo, medical director for Behavioral Health at Nationwide Children's Hospital and the chief of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at The Ohio State University. Dr. Campo said, "while there is probably no substitute for a careful review of what medications have been tried, in what sequence, and at what dose, it sounds like the family is firm in their opposition to medication. They should understand that studies comparing medication treatments for ADHD to non-medication treatments such as behavioral therapy consistently show stronger treatment effects for medication treatment, particularly for stimulants.

"A study of 600 school-age children with ADHD found that medication management was superior to behavioral treatment and to routine community care. The combination of medication with behavioral treatment offered little more benefit than medication alone. Medication management with an experienced

Families are encouraged to send their parenting questions concerning their children's challenging or difficult behavioral issues to Brown at columbusparent@thisweeknews.com or Columbus Parent Magazine, 7801 N. Central Dr., Lewis Center, OH 43035.

physician sometimes can make all the difference.

"I certainly understand the concerns about potential negative long-term effects, since this has not been well studied. However, untreated ADHD has been proven to have negative consequences not only on school performance and social developments but also on putting kids at risk for accidents. That is something that we do know. Adolescents and adults with ADHD are at a significantly greater risk of auto accidents later in life, of job-related problems, underachievement and marital difficulties. Also, to put things in perspective about long-term medication effects, we do not know much, if anything, about the long-term consequences of many other drugs used in childhood such as antihistamines, asthma medications, etc. That said, however, there are several non-medication treatments out there that have been tested for ADHD.

"Behavioral interventions encompass specific techniques such as providing rewards for desired behaviors (e.g., positive reinforcement) or exacting consequences for failure to meet expected goals (e.g., punishment, response cost). Parent training in behavioral techniques and the use of behavioral interventions in the

classroom have been shown to improve the behavior of youth with ADHD. Classroom management generally includes increasing the structure of activities and the application of rewards and consequences using point systems or token economies.

"A common technique involves working to establish a school/home daily report card that can be used to reward the child for meeting specific target outcomes at home or in the classroom. Behavioral treatment may help most for kids who also suffer from anxiety, who are oppositional and aggressive, and who have problems getting along with parents. When ADHD impacts a child's educational performance, schools have an obligation to make classroom adaptations via a Section 504 plan. Classroom accommodations may include preferential seating, a decreased burden of assignments and homework, and increased time for test-taking."

You may want to look into CHADD, a very active parent advocacy and support group for families with ADHD kids at OSU. This interaction might help you get a sense of other families' perspectives and experiences. While behavioral interventions do not fare anywhere close to medication interventions for ADHD, having a highly competent therapist who knows the literature and who can work with the family around educational planning, home management and general psycho-education has been very helpful for many families. My best to you as you explore the options on this journey. You are wise to be an advocate for your child and to look for the intervention that best meets her needs now and in the future.

Yvette

time out and yells "no" to me when he disagrees with the consequence. I explain that if he doesn't like the consequence then he needs to change his behavior, but he still says "no." He is not good at sitting in time out. It's almost like a game for him. I'll place him in time out, he'll get up; I pick him up and place him back in time out, he gets up (while yelling "no"). I put him back in, and this goes on for a while. Sometimes, he'll give in and stay there. Sometimes, I have to shut his door to make him stay there.

He doesn't seem to show any remorse when he's hitting or kicking me. This aggressive behavior just started midsummer. I'm not sure what to do. He'll apologize after the episode is over, but I'm still not sure he's remorseful for hurting me. Any advice?
Jill

Dear Jill,

If your son's behavior is only directed at you, it suggests that he is angry or hurt about something. Did something happen this summer — such as the loss of a loved one through death or divorce? Did you change jobs or start working longer hours? Is he with a new baby sitter? Are you in a violent or aggressive relationship? Is it possible he is being bullied by an older child? I am sure there is a reason for your son's sudden aggressiveness and you need to determine what it is.

My recommendation is to talk to him when he is calm to see how he is feeling and what is going on in his world. Children will tell us if we take the time to listen. Try spending some special time with him one-on-one. Reward him for positive behavior and be clear on the consequences for negative behavior. When he is in his room for time outs, close the door and leave him there. Don't allow him to engage you by yelling and saying no. Simply go to another part of the house. Children will find ways to get our attention, either positive or negative. But remember, we teach our children how to treat us. This has become a test of wills for your son. You need to be firm, fair and consistent.

Yvette

Yvette:

My 4-year-old son has become very aggressive lately, and it's only with me that he shows this aggressiveness. He hits and kicks me when I put him in



Yvette McGee Brown is a former Domestic Relations/Juvenile Court Judge. She is currently the president of the Center for Child and Family Advocacy at Nationwide Children's Hospital.