

AUSTIN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER
GARY YORKE, PH.D. & JANE YORKE, M.A.

One Hand On The Door

(Answers to questions patients like to ask as they are leaving, with one hand on the door!)

Comorbidity and Psychiatric Diagnoses

A Comprehensive Assessment is necessary to identify co-existing conditions. For example, up to 50% of children with ADHD are suspected of having a learning disability. Many children with ADHD develop Oppositional-Defiant Disorder, and Major Depression.

Children who suffer from Anxiety may also be depressed. Children with an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder frequently manifest attentional problems and generalized anxiety. A variety of cognitive deficits are often a concern for children with Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder and Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

A Comprehensive Assessment will have sufficient variety and breadth of tests that educational, emotional, and cognitive issues will be identified.

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Helping an Adolescent with Academic Stress

It is almost time to go back to school and it's not too early to start planning for a successful academic year. Today's student is under more pressure than ever. Once the first grading period is over we start to see teens referred for anxiety, depression, overeating, insomnia, crying jags, and irritability as a result of the pressure they feel to excel in school.

Academic stress is the result of pressure a student receives or puts on themselves to be successful academically and ensure future success. This pressure can come from a myriad of sources. An authoritarian parent may expect their child to succeed beyond what is realistically possible for the child. Some families value academics above anything else. Both parent and student may be excessively anxious about getting into a college that they believe will guarantee future occupational success.

In addition to the emotional difficulties noted above, signs of stress may include:

- Increased use of energy drinks
- Cheating in school
- Obsession with grades and class rank
- Withdrawing from most, or all, social activities so they can study

Parents who are concerned about the stress their child is under should first talk to their student. During that conversation a parent should take a look at the messages they are sending the adolescent. Do they say they don't care about grades on the one hand, but get upset if the adolescent doesn't have A's? Do the parents talk about school and school work most of the time? Are the parents overly involved, both in practice and in ego, in the adolescent's education? Parents should meet with their child's counselor, teachers, and/or a school

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ADHD: A Complicated Neurological Condition

Clear neurological differences are emerging in the study of ADHD. For example, various studies have found decreased volume in the prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, basal ganglia, and cerebellum, while functional imaging studies have shown hypo-activation in these regions. Some studies show decreased volume in the cortex as a whole. One study found that cortical thickness in children with ADHD does not resemble that of typical children until age twelve, while another study found that the motor cortex matured earlier in children with ADHD, relative to a control group. A recent meta-analysis found hyper-activation in the default mode network in individuals with ADHD. The same meta-analysis found evidence of hypo-activation in the ventral attention network. PET studies have indicated that adults with ADHD have fewer dopamine receptors. While few genes have been identified as being associated with ADHD, studies have shown a significant concordance of ADHD among monozygotic twins, as opposed to dizygotic twins.

Despite recent changes and updates to the diagnosis of ADHD, a singular, reliable assessment methodology remains elusive. One recent change in DSM-V has allowed for more latitude when identifying onset. Since it is often difficult to retrospectively determine when something started, DSM-V now states that symptoms of ADHD must be present before age 12 years-old. Additionally, symptoms must be present, but evidence of impairment does not have to be present before the age of twelve. Individuals older than seventeen need only demonstrate five symptoms as opposed to the six required for younger individuals.

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administrator if the stress lasts for more than two weeks and reasonable reassurance and problem solving doesn't provide any relief.

As the adolescent progresses through school parents should educate themselves about the high stakes tests that are given such as the STAAR tests, SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement Tests. Proper planning and preparation can reduce stress. Parents should be sure that their child is getting adequate nutrition, exercise, and rest. Helping a child get organized may also reduce feelings of stress. Make sure the child has a time and place to do their homework, usually understands their homework, and is able to organize their materials and hand them in on time. Perfectionism can cause a significant amount of stress, and in some cases perfectionistic teens may require counseling. If a parent suspects their child has a learning disability or ADHD they should have their child evaluated. Undiagnosed learning challenges can contribute to a significant amount of stress.

If a student continues to manifest excessive distress and concern about their academic performance after the parent has taken all reasonable steps, an assessment by a mental health professional may be in order. Many students only need a few visits to develop a more balanced approach to their studies.

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...ADHD: A Complicated Neurological Condition

Another important change is that individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder may also be diagnosed with ADHD.

At this time the assessment of ADHD must continue to rely on indirect measures. Brain imaging remains inconclusive and is very expensive. As noted in previous newsletters, a thorough history, obtained from as many sources as possible, remains the most important component of the assessment. Another important component is well standardized assessment questionnaires that don't just focus on ADHD, but allow for screening of behavioral and emotional disorders that may, or may not, be associated with ADHD. Of the many standardized questionnaires that are available, the Child Behavior Checklist, the companion Teacher's Rating Form, and the Behavior Assessment System for Children are three of the best. If ADHD is suspected there are detailed questionnaires that can assist in identifying how the ADHD is affecting the individual.

The assessment of ADHD should not be limited to a the diagnostic interview and questionnaires. Especially in children, it is important to evaluate cognitive, intellectual, emotional, and academic functioning. A Continuous Performance Test (CPT) can also be very useful. In the last decade there has been a notable improvement in Continuous Performance Tests. A CPT can provide valuable information about an individual's attentional skills and level of impulsivity.