

ADHD
AWARENESS MONTH
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ADHD MYTHS AND FACTS
KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

Myth: ADHD is caused by bad parenting (Part 2)

Fact: Researchers do not yet know exactly what causes ADHD. Brain-imaging studies show that differences in brain structure and wiring cause problems with attention, impulse control and motivation.

By Elaine Taylor-Klaus

For parents of kids with ADHD, the struggle is real. As an 'invisible' condition, ADHD is difficult to diagnose and treat. In addition, children are often stigmatized as behavioral problems because their underlying neurological condition is not evident to the outside world.

Parents of kids with ADHD encounter a wide range of unexpected behaviors from their children, whose brains are wired to be impulsive, disorganized, hyperactive, distracted and/or emotionally intense. They are required to manage complicated medical, academic and emotional problems, and, more often than not, with minimal guidance. To add insult to injury, **traditional paradigms for parenting are often not only ineffective, but counter-productive for children with ADHD.**

It's a vicious cycle.

We generally set expectations for children based on their age. As a result, a child

who is lagging developmentally can appear willfully rude, disobedient or lazy. Children with ADHD experience developmental delays of about three years in certain areas of the brain.

Typical discipline approaches expect the child to learn from mistakes. These approaches assume that a disincentive is enough to prevent a child from repeating unwanted behaviors. And for typical children, that is often effective.

But when we hold children with ADHD to a level of performance that is not appropriate to where they are developmentally, we set them and ourselves up for failure. We fail to recognize that:

- **Challenges in working memory** make it difficult for our kids to learn from their mistakes.
- **Challenges with impulsivity** make it difficult for them to stop and think before they act.

- **Challenges with frustration** intolerance make it difficult for them to behave with respect.

When we judge children with ADHD as “naughty,” we miss the opportunity to help them learn self-management with their self-esteem intact.

FACT: Parents are essential to a child’s treatment plan.

According to the CDC, parents rarely receive referrals or encouragement to seek parent training, support and guidance.

Back to the vicious cycle.

When parents follow the guidance of traditional parenting “experts,” and they don’t see improvement, they begin to feel like they are failing as parents. Their stress rises, which leads to a more reactive approach to parenting. This is exacerbated by friends and family who judge their parenting with well-meaning suggestions like:

- “You’ve got to stop babying him.”
- “If you would only set some guidelines, she would be fine.”
- “You just need to be more consistent.”
- “They just need you to discipline them.”

When parents accept the accusation that they are **‘bad’ parents, they lose confidence in their intuition. They miss opportunities** to stay connected with their kids so that they can help them get to know and manage themselves.

As many leading experts will tell you, while ADHD is certainly not caused by bad parenting, **it can definitely cause bad parenting.**

Excessive stress and aggravation create a negative cycle of behaviors that are unhelpful to the child, and eventually damage the relationship between parent and child, and often between spouses.

Contrary to popular opinion, **children with ADHD are not misbehaving because they’re naughty, and their parents are usually doing the best they can** under extremely difficult circumstances.

Call to Action

Rather than judging parents as the cause of their children’s behaviors, professionals must take a more active role in following medical protocol. **Every parent of a child diagnosed with ADHD should be informed that they play a key role in their child’s treatment.** Parent training in behavior management (also known as “behavior therapy”) is a first-line recommended treatment, alongside medication, for any child with ADHD.

Until parents are routinely encouraged to seek support, training and guidance that goes beyond basic information about the condition, the myth that ADHD is caused by poor parenting will be perpetuated.

Resources for more information on Recommended Treatment for ADHD in children are on page 3.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Elaine Taylor-Klaus is the co-founder of ImpactADHD.com, the creator of Sanity School®, and the co-author of Parenting ADHD Now! Easy Intervention Strategies to Empower Kids with ADHD.

This article was adapted from Elaine Taylor-Klaus’ upcoming book, *The Essential Guide to Raising Complex Kids with ADHD, Anxiety and More*, Quarto Press, July, 2020.

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