

Is ADHD a real diagnosis?

There are so many conflicting stories as to whether or not ADHD is real and the exact causes of this diagnosis. I have heard it said that ADHD is simply the cause of “bad parenting” or lack of discipline in the home and I have also heard that ADHD is nothing more than a “baloney” diagnosis that doctors give children in order to prescribe more medication. After all, aren’t all children supposed to be hyperactive, impulsive, and inattentive? Aren’t all children supposed to be moving around constantly and never want to sit still? Most parents by the time they come in to see a mental health professional or a physician are at their wit’s end and have already tried everything they can think of to try and manage the ADHD behaviors. I have heard parents read me a list of things that they have already done and they feel hopeless as to what to do next. Their child seems to be in trouble all the time and is doing horribly at school.

Is ADHD a real diagnosis? Of course it is. ADHD is a developmental disorder of self-control. ADHD causes a child to have difficulties with paying attention, increased activity level, as well as poor impulse control. The problem is that children with ADHD look absolutely normal from the outside, so people have had a difficult time accepting the diagnosis and they feel that a lot of the time that the child is simply being “bad” and can control themselves better than they are currently doing. Research has shown that ADHD is a brain disorder and there is an imperfection in the brain that causes the child to constantly want to move and also to be inattentive. ADHD is not the result of “bad parenting” and there is nothing that the parents did to cause a child to have ADHD.

From a parent’s viewpoint, a diagnosis of ADHD is often very difficult and exasperating. Their child appears normal, however other children, school personnel, and adults often do not want anything to do with the ADHD child. Their behaviors are often very irritating to others and in addition to this parents with ADHD children are often judged by those around them as “bad parents” that do not know how to raise their child. For the child, a diagnosis of ADHD is also very frustrating. I have seen so many children over the years that have been in my office and are either very upset as a result of their ADHD behaviors or they are angry; defensive at having been “picked on” over the years. Especially for children that are hyperactive or impulsive, school is often a painful experience as they are often labeled as a “troublemaker” due to their inability to sit still or pay attention.

Many individuals also believe that a diagnosis of ADHD will simply be “outgrown.” I have heard parents say to other parents with a child that has ADHD. “There is nothing wrong, he will outgrow this.” ADHD is not a stage of development that is simply outgrown that a child passes through. Maybe this is true in a child that has a mild case of ADHD, however ADHD behaviors in a child still will persist for many years and telling a parent that a child will “outgrow” this is not much help when the child will be exhibiting these behaviors for years to come in many cases, whether the ADHD is mild or severe.

For parents, a diagnosis of ADHD is often difficult to accept because of the skepticism they will hear from family, friends, and those at their child's school, however as parents stand your ground and be your child's best advocate. In addition, the media has also spawned numerous reports of the overdiagnosing of ADHD as well as the negative effects of medications for the ADHD child. Parents need to become educated about what ADHD is as well as the long-term effects of medications and then draw their own conclusions.

Is ADHD a real diagnosis? Of course it is. Has it been misdiagnosed in children as ADHD when in fact it is in fact not ADHD. Probably, however, there are a large number of children out in society that have ADHD and have not been diagnosed as such. Recent research has shown that fewer than half of all children who have ADHD are diagnosed or properly treated for the disorder, and that only one-sixth to one-half of these are treated with medication. The greatest problem that continues to persist is that many children that are truly in need of treatment are not referred for help and when they do receive help their treatment is inconsistent. Whether a parent decides to manage their child's ADHD with medications, diet, psychotherapy, or alternative treatments is entirely up to them. However, parents should seek out some type of treatment for their child in order to get him/her the help that is needed.

Kara T. Tamanini, M.S., LMHC
Author and Therapist
Founder of Kids Awareness Series
www.KidsAwarenessSeries.com