

# TREATING ADHD

A HOLISTIC APPROACH BY DVORI BLUMENAU



**A**DHD IS A PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEM AND not a psychological one. However, it affects the child's behaviour and psychological well-being, as well as the home and school environments.

ADHD might be caused by one of the following factors which, in turn, cause brain alteration:

1. A genetic condition which is transmitted from generation to generation.
2. Unfavourable physiological environmental conditions which include: exposure to smoke, excess lead, chemicals and pollutants.

3. Deficiencies in vitamins, minerals, essential fats and protein. At times, reasons 2 and 3 are not the cause, but they may exacerbate a pre-existing condition.

### WHAT HAPPENS IN THE ADHD BRAIN?

In short, one or more of the following conditions might be taking place:

1. Neurotransmitter imbalance;
2. under-activity of the frontal lobes;
3. essential fatty acid deficiency.

Parents whose goal is to achieve optimum results from their ADHD child, and in the shortest time possible, will need to adopt a holistic approach to the challenge.

There is no easy way out, but certain efforts do pay off.

### MEDICATION

As ADHD is a physiological problem, more often than not, medication is needed. Medications do not necessarily need to be chemically based. I work with certain medical practitioners whose practices are populated predominantly by children with ADHD. The doctors check for various deficiencies and neurotransmitter functioning. At times they have ordered a brain scan in order to locate the problem. These medical practitioners use

chemically-based medication only as a last resort. They see unbelievable results.

### NUTRITION

People tend to underestimate the role that nutrition plays in brain functioning. People don't realise the extent to which sugar, preservatives, additives, colourants, dehydration and an unstable blood-sugar level can affect an ADHD child's behaviour and concentration levels.

### BRAIN GYM

Brain Gym is a wonderful tool which aids in activating the brain and in connecting the two hemispheres of the brain, which is a necessary precondition for learning to take place. This tool can aid teachers and learners to re-establish concentration when the class or the ADHD child needs it.

### BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

I would like to elaborate on this point, as it is the most challenging and essential for parents on a day-to-day basis.

- **Know what it is that you want** from the child without doubting it in your heart.

“IT IS NOT YOUR JOB TO FIX YOUR ADHD CHILD FROM A-Z. IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE, YOU NEED TO CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES AND IGNORE THE REST.”

- Decide on a **small number of rules**, it is not worth trying to win every battle. The rules need to be agreed on and explained to the child during a calm time and not during a fight with your child. You need to be persistent with the rules. When a rule is forgotten, you will need to reinforce it. Examples of rules could be: “You cannot use your sister's things without her permission”; “first homework, then playing”; or “dirty clothes must go in the wash bin” etc. If your belief is that it is your job to fix your ADHD child from A-Z, it is a mistake. In order to be effective, you need to choose your battles and ignore the rest. You need to clarify for yourself how important it is for you that your child sips his drink quietly, that his desk is tidy at all times, that he doesn't make funny and loud noises around the house, etc.
- Give simple and clear instructions while mentioning the child's name and **make and hold eye contact**. If it is a young child who you are talking to, and he is restless, hold his hand or gently direct his face towards you and talk. If it is an older child, touch him softly and stand in front of him, face-to-face. >

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— Mameela & Roberto Della Rocca, Parents of Italian Exchange Student 2011/2012



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• The instructions should be given **step-by-step** and not multiple instructions in one go. Do not mumble them, do not shout, do not nag and do not talk while the TV is on, as in this way you will get nowhere. If the child will not desist, ask him to repeat what you said.

• **Give regular rewards** which are meaningful to the child. Small rewards like stars, stickers, soldiers, hair clips and tokens can accumulate to big rewards such as going to the zoo etc.

• **Routine** – ADHD children need routine more than the average child. This helps them to cope better with their lives. They need to have fixed times for waking up in the morning, then they need to follow an order which could be written out or drawn for them on cardboard, which is stuck on the wall. The chart would include, for instance, “brush your teeth, drink water, get dressed, eat...”. They need to have fixed times for homework, play, supper and bedtime. You don’t have to be rigid, as long as the timing and order are more or less in place.

**CRITICISM AND POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

It is so easy and natural to criticise these children as they tend to inflame their surroundings on an ongoing basis. Resisting the critical tendency would be made more “doable” by noticing that the irritating behaviour is often not a voluntary functioning of the child. However, parents and teachers are human too. Therefore, one needs to search for a balance between positive regard and criticism. I once heard from a known educator that a ratio of one criticism to four compliments is the correct ratio. This makes sense to me!

Criticism should not take a blame format, with a “you” message, as in: “**You** always start with your little brother, can’t you leave him alone for once?” Rather, it should take the form of an “I” message, as in: “**I** really feel upset when I see you starting with your little brother.” This style of relating to others brings the defences down and more often than not, children are open to hear what you have to say. Positive reinforcement can also

take on a “thank you” form, as in: “Thank you for putting your bag in your room,” or “I noticed today that you managed to eat with your mouth closed, well done!” You need to “catch” your child doing something right, even if it was inadvertently done, and to point it out to him. This way, you will not be at risk of having your relationship with him destroyed or further damaging his already shaky self-esteem.

**AVOID ARGUMENTS**

In a competition of the best arguer, ADHD children will receive all the medals! There is no point in arguing with the ADHD child as the argument will lack logic anyway. The child will probably win and you will land up being frustrated. Therefore, state the rule and stick to it, for example:

“There is no watching DVDs before finishing homework!”  
 “But daddy let me last time...”  
 “There is no watching before finishing homework!”  
 “But I am tired now...”  
 “Sorry, there is no watching before finishing homework!”

When the child still doesn’t listen, count to three, for example:

“No jumping on the sofa...”  
 “I am not jumping, I am only going up and down...”

“I said no jumping on the sofa...”  
 “But you let David last week...”

Now count “one” (loud), and wait 5 seconds, count “two”, wait 5 seconds, count “three”. If the child is still jumping, move on to the next phase:

“Sorry, now you have ‘time out’.” He will need to go to his room for a period of time. It would be advisable to give him a timer so that he will not nag about when he can come out.

If the child refuses to go to his room, you need to have a back-up plan. You need to give him an option as to what the consequence of his action will be: “If you choose not to go to your room, there are no computer games today.” Giving the child a choice will usually reduce his inclination towards automatic refusal.

**SELF-ESTEEM BUILDING**

The first thing that gets affected by the ADHD condition is the child’s self-esteem. This turns into a vicious cycle. The low self-esteem affects the child’s behaviour and motivation. His negative behaviour and low motivation in turn call for more negative reaction from the environment, which, in turn, affects his self-esteem. In my practice, I use art therapy in order to help build the child’s self-esteem. At home and at school, parents and educators will need to adopt an “asset-based approach” and draw on the child’s strengths at every possible moment in order to strengthen the child’s self-esteem.

**EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

Even though ADHD children are often intelligent children, they may face learning challenges within the language, memory and/or speed domains. They normally have gaps in their learning due to their difficulties in concentration as well. Many of these children require remedial or educational assistance to prevent them from falling behind.

*DIARISE THIS:*

**Dvori will be running a conference on the subject of ADHD on Sunday, 9 September. Understanding ADHD – A Holistic Approach, is for professionals and parents. The conference will include the following topics and experts:**

**Ten steps before and/or during Ritalin:**  
 Dr Chantal Stanley – integrative medical practitioner

**Appreciating learning difficulties**  
 Leonard Carr – clinical psychologist

**Beyond survival**  
 The day-to-day management of ADHD at home and in the classroom  
 Anita Decaires-Wagner – educational psychologist and co-author of *Teaching and ADHD in the Southern African Classroom*

**Mastering the challenges of a family life**  
 Leonard Carr – clinical psychologist

**Self-esteem building through art therapy**  
 Dvori Blumenau – educational psychologist

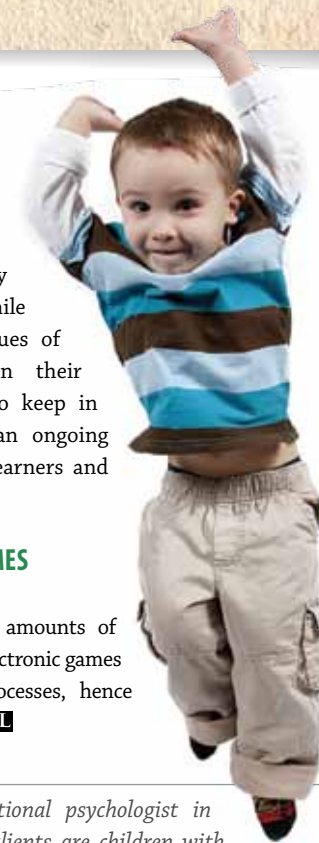
*For bookings and further details, email Dvori at [dvoripsychologist@gmail.com](mailto:dvoripsychologist@gmail.com)*

**ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS**

As this article is too short to elaborate on this very sensitive issue, I would like to say that it would be really worthwhile for teachers to learn techniques of handling ADHD children in their classes. Teachers also need to keep in touch with the parents on an ongoing basis regarding their ADHD learners and to work hand-in-hand.

**MINIMISING ELECTRONIC GAMES AND VIDEOS**

Research shows that excessive amounts of video watching and playing of electronic games causes maladaptive thought processes, hence you need to watch out for that. **III**



*Dvori Blumenau is an educational psychologist in private practice. Many of her clients are children with ADHD. She uses a holistic approach with them and offers courses to parents about treating ADHD.*

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