



AD/HD in Children: The Christian Response

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AD/HD



- AD/HD is considered to be one of the most common neurobehavioral disorders of childhood, an incurable mental disease
- The experts don't know what causes it or why it happens, they don't agree on when to diagnose it or how treat it, they don't even agree that it actually exists
- Yet, according to the Center for Disease Control, an estimated 4.4 million kids between the ages of 4 and 17 have been diagnosed as having AD/HD
- Half of the kids who have AD/HD will continue to experience symptoms as adults
- More than half of the children diagnosed with AD/HD are reported to be on prescription drugs to deal with the symptoms



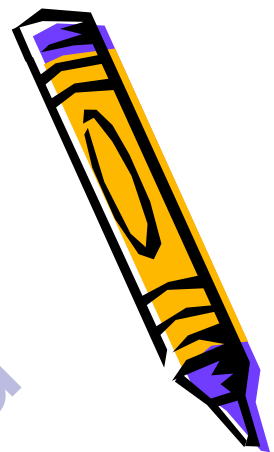
(CDC)

The Problem



A 3 year old boy whose parents are being urged to treat for AD/HD

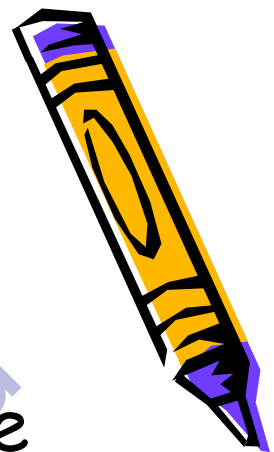
- The NIH Expert Panel (1998 Consensus Conference) concluded that the variability in physician diagnosis of AD/HD as evidenced by areas of extremely high and low distribution and prescribing rates of stimulants is suggestive of both over and under-diagnosis
- So what is AD/HD? How is it diagnosed? How is the medical community responding to what seems to be a growing problem? How are Christian leaders, doctors, and parents dealing with AD/HD?



What is AD/HD?

- According to Dr. Xavier Castellanos, the head of AD/HD research at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), "AD/HD is defined as symptoms of hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inattention beyond what's usual for a developmental age."

(Frontline, 2001)



General Symptoms

- The primary symptoms of AD/HD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity
- Symptoms appear early in a child's life; even adults who are diagnosed with AD/HD must have shown symptoms before the age of 7
- Those who have AD/HD usually have other mental disorders

(Frontline, 2001)



Classification

- There are three types of AD/HD, classified by the predominate symptom
 - Predominantly Inattentive Type - shows significant inattention, easily distracted
 - Predominantly Hyperactive-Impulsive Type - shows significant hyperactivity and impulsive, fidgety, impulsive speech, has hard time staying focused, can't seem to control emotions
 - Combined Type: shows equal signs of being inattentive and hyperactive-impulsive

(CDC)



How AD/HD is Diagnosed in Children

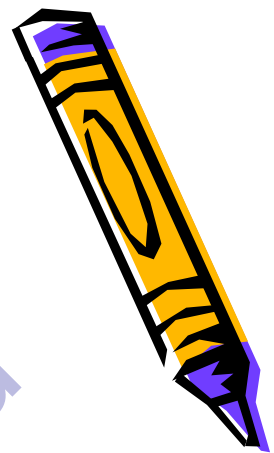


- There are no biological, physiological or genetic markers or independently valid tests that can reliably identify the disorder, but experts believe that diagnosis can be made reliably using well-tested diagnostic interview methods
- Scales and checklists, in conjunction with interviews and medical diagnosis, help obtain information about symptoms and functioning in various settings
 - AD/HD-specific scales are more accurate in distinguishing between children with and without the diagnosis of AD/HD, than global, scales that assess a variety of behavioral conditions



(National Resources Center on AD/HD)

Common Diagnostic Scales for Kids



- Parent-completed Child Behavior Checklist
- Teacher Report Form (TRF) of the Child Behavior Checklist
- Conners Parent and Teacher Rating Scales
- ADD-H: Comprehensive Teacher Rating Scale (ACTeRS)
- Barkley Home Situations Questionnaire (HSQ)
Barkley School Situations Questionnaire (SSQ)

(National Resources Center on AD/HD)



Treating AD/HD in Kids



- Drug Therapy
 - Ritalin, Adderall, Dexedrine, Concerta
 - Stimulants that act on the neurotransmitter dopamine, similar to cocaine
 - Increase activity within certain brain regions resulting in greater powers of inhibition
 - Sometimes prescribed with other drugs, if there are other co-existing conditions, such as depression
 - Regulated by DEA because of potential for abuse

(Frontline, 2001)



Treating AD/HD in Kids



- Behavior Therapy
 - ABCs:
 - Antecedents - things that set off or happen before behaviors
 - Behaviors - things the child does that parents and teachers want to change
 - Consequences - things that happen after behaviors
 - Adults learn to change antecedents and consequences to teach the children new ways of behaving and interacting with others
 - Less effective in treatment of AD/HD when used alone than drug therapy

(National Resources Center on AD/HD)



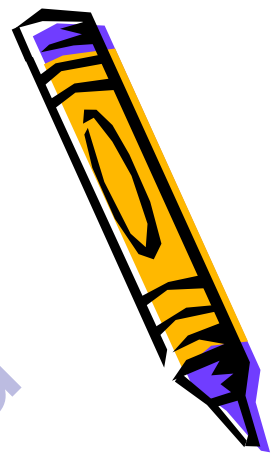
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Treating AD/HD in Kids

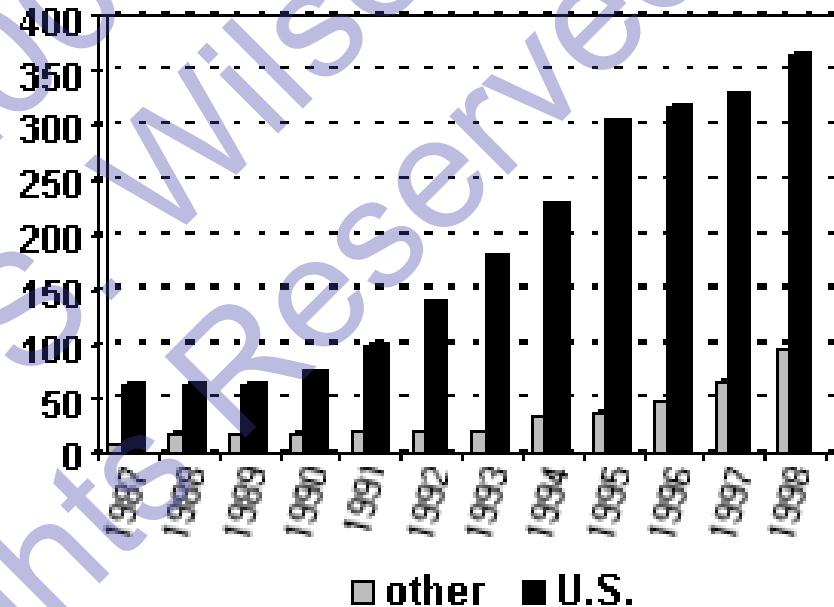
- Alternative Treatments
 - Many unproven non-standard treatments claim to provide the same or better results as drug and behavior therapies
 - As with any medical treatment option, careful research and assessments should be done before choosing to use

(National Resources Center on AD/HD)



AD/HD Drug Use

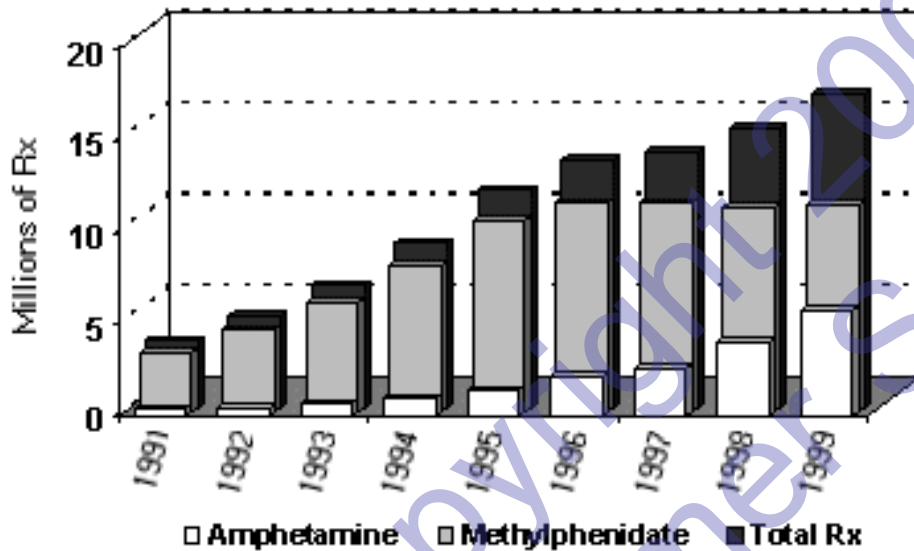
- The United states alone is responsible for "approximately 85%" of all ADHD drug usage



Consumption of Ritalin drugs in the United States as compared to other countries around the world, from 1987 to 1998. (DEA Congressional Testimony)



Drug Industry: Is AD/HD Their New Cash Cow?



Prescriptions of methylphenidate (commonly known as Ritalin) and amphetamine (Adderall and Dexedrine) from 1991-1999. (DEA Congressional Testimony)

- Strong influence on both the conduct of doctors and on the reporting of research and the clinical practice of medicine
- Often offer "educational seminars" that may be nothing more than ads for a specific drug, made more appealing perhaps by a catered lunch, gifts, free travel to attend (perhaps in a great locale as an inducement)
- Can doctors really independently assess the information they get from pharmacy representatives without developing a bias?

(Collins)

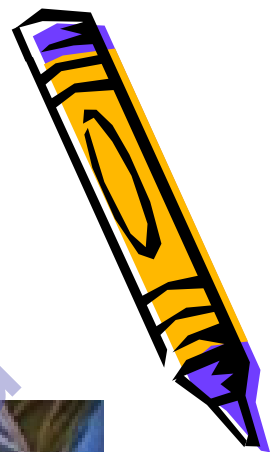


Side Affects of Drugs

- No one really knows what the long term affects will be yet
- Ritalin is an amphetamine closely allied to 'speed'
- Early use of Ritalin and other AD/HD drugs in kids may result in dysfunctional brain reward systems and depressive-like behaviors in adulthood
- In 1994, there were more U.S. high-school seniors who abused Ritalin than there were seniors who were legally prescribed the drug.

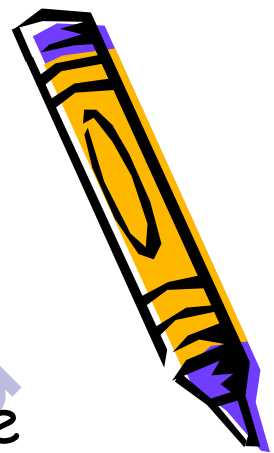


Robin Day, Diagnosed with AD/HD at the age of 10; constantly forced to be on drugs, despite not wanting them, off and on until 10th grade; tore his family apart with mom leaving and Robin continues to resent the fact that so many adults insisted that psychiatric drugs were ever the answer



Effects on Spirituality

- Socialization problems with the church service and in conforming to role expectations
- Difficulty focusing on teachings and "rituals"
- Can't internalize their faith, resulting in difficulty living a spiritually disciplined life
- Lack of stability in religious growth, more likely to have constant spurts and "roller coaster" spirituality
- Other problems often culminates in religious alienation and possibly giving up entirely



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Christian Doctor's Thoughts



- Unfortunately, many Christian doctors are as conflicted as secular ones
 - Some agree with secular views that AD/HD is a medical issue that needs treatment, with many being split on the use of drug therapy
 - Some view it as a behavioral problem that can be fixed with proper discipline, training, and changes to diet and environment
 - Extremists consider it the work of the devil that only prayer and faith can fix



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What Can The Church Do?



- Education congregations so that parents of AD/HD children do not have to combat ignorance and prejudice on top of their existing stress
- Form a support group and offer appropriate bible studies to the congregation has several people affected by AD/HD
- Look at options for making services AD/HD friendly if children are part of the main service
- Make sure Sunday school teachers are equipped with the information needed to handle AD/HD and that they work with the parents of AD/HD kids for working out a teaching plan



I'm A Christian Parent with an AD/HD Child

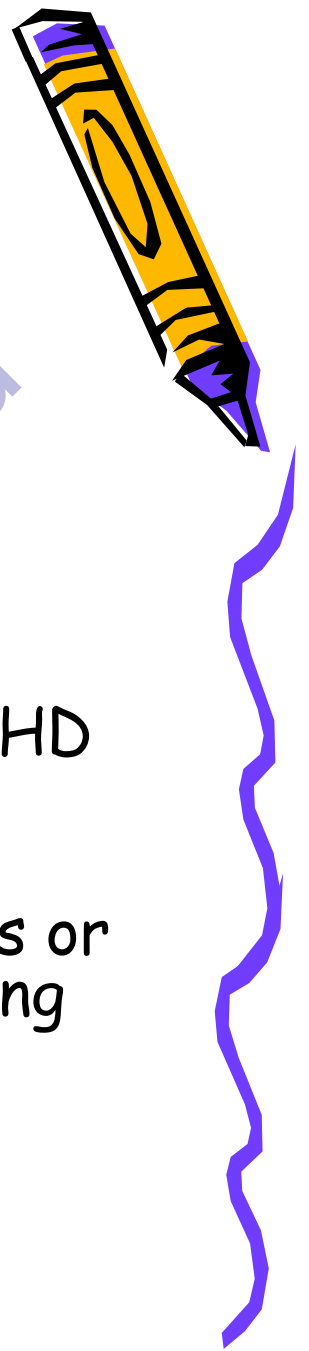


- Avoid blaming yourself or your child if AD/HD is diagnosed
- Do your own research and learn as much as you can before deciding on a treatment option
- Pray for guidance, for strength, for patience, for support; don't forget the Lord is there for you always
- Talk with your pastor about educating the congregation about the disease and talk with the Sunday School teachers to alert them to the issue and what they should (and shouldn't do) if there is a problem during class
- Don't forget to take care of yourself! Make sure you eat, sleep, and exercise regularly and in a healthy fashion
- When stressed or upset, deal with it so you don't take it out on your family



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Sunday School





What Can We As Christians Do For Those Dealing With AD/HD

- Act out a biblical worldview in how you talk, think, and act towards the family
 - Be supportive towards the family
 - Be compassionate and loving!
 - Avoid pre-judgments about parents of AD/HD children or about the children themselves; instead educate yourself about the illness
 - Do not presume or propose that the parents or the child are unspiritual, backslidden or living in sin



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Conclusion



The issue of AD/HD is complex with a lot of unknowns and what ifs, however in the end the way we should deal with anyone afflicted with AD/HD or, if we are battling AD/HD ourselves, can be summed up with this scripture:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself -
Matt 22:37-39 (NIV)



Additional Resources



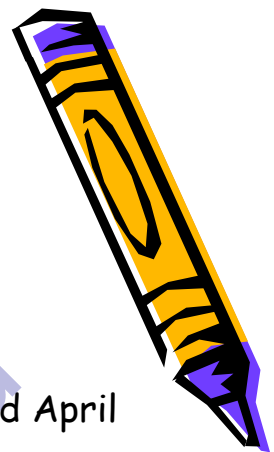
- <http://www.christianadhd.com/> - a Christian site offering information, help, and hope for affected by AD/HD
- <http://www.marklowry.com/> - Mark Lowry site, a Christian Comedian who offering hope for those dealing with AD/HD
- <http://www.chadd.org> - CHADD - Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- <http://www.help4adhd.org/> - National Resource Center on AD/HD: A Program of CHADD



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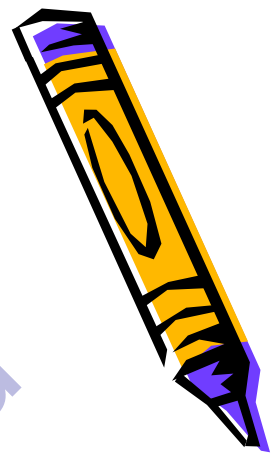
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