

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!)

Evaluating ADHD

A recent editorial in the Wall Street Journal decried the over-diagnosis and misdiagnosis of ADHD. A comprehensive psychological assessment can assist the physician in reaching an accurate diagnosis. The key components of a comprehensive assessment are:

- The intake history should cover all aspects of functioning and include a thorough health history
- The diagnostic interview should include both the child and parents
- Information should be obtained from multiple sources such as teacher questionnaires, relevant records, and prior assessments
- A battery of well standardized tests and questionnaires should be utilized
- The assessment should include a feedback appointment
- A comprehensive report summarizing results, diagnosis, and recommendations should be provided to the parents and provider(s)

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Adolescent Stress

American teens are reporting increased stress and experiencing stress at levels that follow a similar pattern to adults. According to a recent survey released by the American Psychological Association (APA) teens say their stress level is higher than levels reported by adults in the past month. Findings from *Stress in America™: Are Teens Adopting Adults' Stress Habits?*, which was conducted online by Harris Interactive Inc., (on behalf of APA) suggest that unhealthy behaviors associated with stress may begin manifesting early in the lives of teens.

Self-reported stress in teens is alarmingly high. Teens report that their stress level during the school year far exceeds what they believe to be healthy and tops adults' average reported stress levels. Many teens also report feeling overwhelmed (31 percent) and depressed or sad (30 percent) as a result of stress. More than one-third of teens report fatigue or feeling tired (36 percent) and nearly one-quarter of teens (23 percent) report skipping a meal due to stress. Approximately twice as many say their stress level has increased in the past year (31 percent) or believe their stress level will increase in the coming year (34 percent).

Teens tend to underestimate the impact of stress. "It is alarming that the teen stress experience is so similar to that of adults. It is even more concerning that they seem to underestimate the potential impact that stress has on their physical and mental health," says APA CEO and Executive Vice President Norman B. Anderson, PhD. "In order to break this cycle of stress and unhealthy behaviors as a nation, we need to provide teens with better support and health education at school and home, at the community level and in their interactions with health care professionals."

What can be done?

Primary care professionals, parents, and counselors can help educate teens about stress and model more adaptive behavior: "Parents and other adults can play a critical role in helping teens get a handle on stress by modeling healthy stress management behaviors," says Anderson. "When spending time with teens, we can encourage them to exercise, eat well, get the sleep they need and seek support from health care professionals like psychologists to help them develop healthier coping mechanisms for stress sooner rather than later."

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What College Students with ADHD and/or Learning/Processing Disabilities Need to Know

All colleges and universities have an office for students with disabilities. At the University of Texas-Austin this office is called "Services for Students with Disabilities." Texas A & M and Harvard call it "Disability Services", while Texas Tech calls their office "Student Disability Services." These offices were created to help students who have a disability obtain accommodations in college if their disability substantially affects their ability to learn. Common accommodations are extended time for taking tests, note-taking assistance, books on CD or MP3 (formerly books on tape), priority scheduling, disability management counseling, and the option of taking tests in a quiet environment.

Many parents and students erroneously believe that because they got services in high school these services will automatically continue in college. This is not true. Current testing must continue to show a substantial impairment in a major life activity. A major life activity, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act includes, but is not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.

In plain English this means that being diagnosed with and treated for ADHD, a learning disability, or a processing deficit does not satisfy the requirements to obtain services in college.

Parents and students should begin planning early if they believe accommodations will be needed for college or standardized exams. If a student needs extended time on the PSAT, SAT or ACT they must have updated testing in their file at their high school for six months prior to requesting accommodations from one of the standardized test corporations. It is helpful to wait until the student is 16 to have them tested so they can be tested on adult normed tests. This will kill two birds with one stone: it will serve the purpose of obtaining accommodations on standardized tests (like the SAT) and the assessment will still be current when attending college. In general testing cannot be over three years old when the student applies for services in college.

Offices for students with disabilities are typically very clear about the documentation required to obtain accommodations. For example, the following information and documentation requirements are typically required for ADHD:

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One Hand On The Door Newsletter

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Adolescent Stress

Stress and sleep - Make sure your teen is getting adequate rest. On average, teens report sleeping far less than the recommended amount — 7.4 hours on school nights and 8.1 hours on non-school nights, compared with the 8.5 to 9.25 hours recommended by the National Sleep Foundation. Nearly 1 in 5 teens (18 percent) say that when they do not get enough sleep, they are more stressed and 36 percent of teens report feeling tired because of stress in the past month.

Stress and exercise - Humans need to move in order to stay healthy. The survey found that 1 in 5 teens (20 percent) report exercising less than once a week or not at all. Teens who report high stress during the past school year also say they spend an average of 3.2 hours online a day, compared with two hours among those reporting low stress levels during the past school year.

Stress and eating – Encourage your teen to eat regular meals and reduce the availability of “junk food” and other highly processed foods. Twenty-three percent of teens report skipping a meal in the past month due to stress and 39 percent say they do this weekly or more.

Seek help – Many teens benefit from brief cognitive therapy which can provide strategies for dealing with stress. Encourage teens to consult with their school counselor, a trusted teacher, and to confide in their parents. Don't ignore complaints of being “overwhelmed,” “stressed,” or feeling out of control. Be proactive in helping your teen prioritize and manage their time.

For additional information on stress, lifestyle and behaviors, visit APA's Help Center and read APA's Mind/Body Health campaign blog: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/> and <http://www.yourmindyourbody.org/>

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What College Students with ADHD and or Learning/Processing Disabilities Need to Know

Evaluation completed by a psychologist that includes:

1. Developmental history – including evidence of early and current impairment
2. Types of assessments used in the evaluation
3. A medical or clinical diagnosis that meets Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5 criteria

Quantitative and/or qualitative information that supports the diagnosis:

1. Area impacted by AD/HD and severity of the condition (past and present)
2. Recommendation for accommodations including the rationale for the recommendation

Recommended Documentation

1. Intellectual Assessment – recommended tests include: Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-IV Edition (WAIS-IV), Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Cognitive Ability
2. Achievement testing – recommended tests include: Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement
3. Medical evaluation, noting medication prescribed, if any, and its effects and side effects
4. AD/HD behavioral rating scales
5. A continuous performance measure of attention and response control (e.g., Conners Continuous Performance Test or IVA-CPT)

There is no need to identify yourself as a student with a disability before you apply to college. If a student has a disability it will be important obtain and use appropriate accommodations in college to facilitate success. Do this before the first day of class. Many schools give the student a letter to give to their professors that explains what accommodations they need, but does not reveal the student's disability.

www.myparentingpage.com and www.myspecial504page.com are two informational websites for parents and are maintained by Austin Behavioral Health Center.