



Attention in Early Development

By Drina Madden, M.A., C.A.S

Introduction

- Attention is essential for perception and learning
- Effective attention requires interplay of
 - Intense concentration
 - Inhibition of distractibility
 - Ability to shift awareness from one focus to another
 - Inner needs, past experience and/or external reality

Early Signs of ADD with Hyperactivity

- Spend less time playing
- Engaged in more functional play
- Act younger than their peers
- Less construction and dramatic play
- Less time playing beside or with other children
- Less likely to converse with other children
- More negative interactions with adults
- Difficulties increase when need to sit still
- More impulsivity
- Behavior reported as being more problematic by their parents than controls
- Differences continue into grade school

Developmental Patterns of ADHD

- More restless
- More disobedient
- Less concentration than others
- More behavior problems
- More destructive
- Less popular with peers

Early Signs of ADD without Hyperactivity

- Low attenders
- Less adaptable
- Less likely to approach new objects and situations
- More negative mood
- Less sensitive or responsive to sounds and sights

ADD in Other Conditions

- Regulatory disorders that continue past 6 months
- Disturbances in sleep
- Difficulties in consoling self
- Difficulties around feeding
- Hyperarousal (disorganization and distractibility in the face of new stimulation)

Dr. Valerie Scaramella Nowinski
Pediatric Neuropsychology
Pediatric Neuropsychology Diagnostic and Treatment Center
(708) 403-9000
www.ndcbrain.com

- Difficulty regulating the state necessary for sustained and focused attention
- Cannot inhibit their own body concerns to be able to attend
- May have difficulties behaviorally engaging with their environment

ADD in Autism

- Prefer simple toys
- Less attentive to adults' points, shifts in gaze and displays of objects
- Social attention
- Difficulty in attending the complexity and unpredictability of social events
- Easily become over-stimulated
- Communication
- Less likely to communicate with gesture
- Less likely to look from toy to adult
- Less likely to display positive emotion
- Facial expressions tend to be neutral
- Decreased joint attention

Summary

- Attention deficits are due to a breakdown in the ability to
- Initiate
- Engage
- Sustain and/or shift attention
- They have a biological, neurological base:
- Metabolic
- Electrical
- Brain formation
- They can be predicted by behaviors in preschool
- Early inattention interferes with top-down, self-regulating attention development