

Emotion Regulation and ADHD

In this issue, our research update focuses on the role of emotion and emotion regulation in individuals with ADHD symptoms.

EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING

How are childhood ADHD symptoms related to emotional and peer problems?

Instead of focusing on children diagnosed with ADHD, this study looked at the relationship between ADHD symptoms, emotional functioning, and peer problems in children who did not have a diagnosis of ADHD. The authors found that the children who had high levels of

ADHD symptoms plus poor positive emotion regulation or reactivity (such as happiness or exuberance) at age six were less well liked by their peers three years later. This suggests that focusing on emotional functioning—especially when it comes to positive emotions—in children with ADHD symptoms might help address some of the peer problems often faced by these children.

Thorell, L.B., Sjöwall, D., Diamatopoulou, S., Rydell, A., & Bohlin, G. (in press). Emotional functioning, ADHD symptoms, and peer problems: A longitudinal investigation of children age 6-9.5 years. *Infant & Child Development*, epub ahead of print.

EMOTION REGULATION

How are ADHD symptoms associated with physiology and emotion regulation?

This study also focused on understanding the relationship between ADHD symptoms and emotional factors, specifically the physiology related to emotion regulation and parent report of emotion regulation problems. The researchers found that children with higher levels of ADHD symptoms showed more abnormal physiological responses when experiencing stressors, and were rated by their parents as having more emotion regulation problems.

Importantly, these relationships were unique to ADHD symptoms; that is, they were not accounted for by other symptoms that often co-occur with ADHD, such as symptoms of oppositional defiant disorder. This reinforces the notion that the ability to effectively regulate one's emotions may be disrupted in the context of elevated ADHD symptoms, and suggests that targeting emotion regulation difficulties—both on the physiological and behavioral levels—may be helpful for children with ADHD.

McQuade, J.D & Breaux, R.P. (in press). Are elevations in ADHD symptoms associated with physiological reactivity and emotion dysregulation in children? *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, epub ahead of print. 

Meghan Miller, PhD, is a licensed psychologist and a postdoctoral fellow at the UC Davis MIND Institute, where her research focuses on identifying the earliest behavioral manifestations of ADHD and autism spectrum disorder.

Children who had high levels of ADHD symptoms plus poor positive emotion regulation or reactivity at age six were less well liked by their peers three years later.

