Recognizing challenging behaviors in young children: Could it be ADHD?

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ADHD in Young Children

- Significant problems with inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity (APA, 2013)

- ADHD tends to be chronic for at least 50% of young children with early symptoms

- Approx. 2% of 3-4 year-olds are diagnosed with ADHD

- Symptoms in young children associated with significant behavioral and academic impairment (DuPaul et al., 2001; Lahey et al., 1998)
Diagnosis of ADHD in Preschoolers

- Diagnostic interview with parents re: DSM-5 criteria for ADHD and other disorders
- Parent rating scales (e.g., BASC & Conners)
- Preschool teacher rating scales (e.g., BASC & Conners)
- Direct observation of child behavior, if possible
- Rule out developmental disorders including autism

DuPaul & Kern (2011)
Challenges of Diagnosis in Early Childhood

- Symptomatic behaviors (inattention, impulsivity, high activity) relatively common

- Wide variability in behavior among children in this age group

- Critical to establish
  - High frequency relative to age & gender norms
  - Chronicity of behavior for at least 6 mos. (some suggest 1 yr)
  - Association with social, academic, or behavioral impairment
  - Symptoms not related to other disorders and/or developmental delays

DuPaul & Kern (2011)
Roles in Assessment Process

- Teachers
  - Observe child behavior relative to peers, over time, and across settings/activities
  - Discuss concerns with parents in descriptive terms
  - Encourage assessment if behavior is severe and associated with impairment
  - Complete behavior ratings
Roles in Assessment Process

- **Parents**
  - Meet with teachers to discuss concerns
  - Observe child behavior over time and across settings/activities
  - Follow up on teacher referral
  - Complete interview and behavior ratings

- **Health professionals**
  - Discuss referral concerns with parent & teacher
  - Conduct comprehensive assessment
Potential Organizational & Legal Constraints

- Limited opportunity to observe child behavior based on schedule
- Educators do not “diagnose” ADHD but rather provide descriptions of behavior and related concerns
- Do not recommend medication but rather refer for evaluation
- HIPAA restrictions regarding communication
References

To Ask A Question:
Ask the Expert
Educator Edition

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Upcoming Webcasts
Ask the Expert *Educator Edition*

Classroom management supports for ADHD behaviors in early childhood education settings
Tuesday August 2, 2016 at 2pm ET
Guest expert: Desiree Murray, Ph.D.

Tailoring learning settings to engage young children with ADHD
Tuesday August 16, 2016 at 2pm ET
Guest expert: Mary Wonderlick

Building partnerships with parents and caregivers
Tuesday August 30, 2016 at 2pm ET
Guest expert: Lee Kern, Ph.D.

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