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***Ask the Expert* Chat Series**

June 17, 2010 – Parenting Young Adults with ADHD

Moderators – NRC Staff

Expert – Sheryl K. Pruitt, Med, ET/P

Moderator 1: Thank you for joining us today. We will begin shortly. Just to remind everybody, this is a moderated chat. All questions go to the moderator for review. We will do our best to post as many of your questions as possible .

Sheryl K. Pruitt, MEd, ET/P, is Clinical Director of Parkaire Consultants, a clinic she founded to serve neurologically impaired individuals. She previously conducted a State of Georgia exemplary Model Learning Disability Program and taught behavior-disordered students. She has served in various capacities for several organizations dealing with ADHD and Tourette Syndrome . . .

Ms. Pruitt has co-authored two books with Marilyn P. Dornbush, PhD: *Teaching the Tiger and Tigers, Too*. She is also a contributing author to the Tourette Foundation of Canada's publication for Educators, *Guide on Tourette Syndrome*. Her newest book *Challenging Kids, Challenged Teachers*, which she co-authored with Leslie E. Packer, is scheduled to be published by Woodbine House in July 2010.

Sheryl K. Pruitt teaches a State of Georgia Professional Learning Unit Course for teachers and parents, on students with neurological impairments. She presents both nationally and internationally. Her presentations incorporate not only professional experiences, but also her personal experiences living with children, a spouse and herself with these conditions.

Welcome Ms. Pruitt! Are you ready for our first question?

Sheryl Pruitt: Yes, and thank you for having me here today.

Joanne: Your young adult is struggling with getting their life together. They seek financial support, but are unwilling to get therapy or coaching. Their lives are interconnected with young children. How do you get these young people to therapy?

Sheryl Pruitt: Joanne, that is a great question. One of the ways that we find helpful at our clinic is to have the young person look at where they are on transitioning to independent adulthood. We have

them fill out a transition checklist that you can download off this website:

<http://parkaireconsultants.com/transitionCheckList.html> .

This transition checklist allows them to see where they are and where the holes are in their ability to stand alone as an adult; sometimes that will help to allow them to see what they need to do. In that list there is a ready to start section for where they have not even begun to transition.

Sometimes a therapist is later and a certified ADHD coach is a better first step because they deal with the present needs and do not talk about painful areas that may be overwhelming to the adult and they can help create a transition plan.

Mary: What should we as parents be doing this summer to help prepare our son for living away on his own at college?

Sheryl Pruitt: Such an important question. College students are leaving their parents; which is to say they are leaving their frontal lobes at home. This means that no one will be available to remind them of things or wake them up.

Sit down and identify which areas the parents have been reminding teens to do things in and identify how they will handle this at college. Disability services, if they are eligible, can help with editing and assisting in academics.

An ADHD coach or mentor can also help do the reminding where needed. Practicing some of those skills this summer are important, e.g., doing laundry, waking up at a set time every morning – this resets their internal clock and makes it easier to get up.

Look at the transition sheet and will give you many areas to work on.

mary0412: My son is 18 and struggling with finding and holding a job. I am trying to be supportive but not even sure of the best way to help him with his job search.

Sheryl Pruitt: One of the services that we have at our office is a vocational counselor and job coach. Additionally, we help students develop job skills and a resume. One of the best things they do is to have a student test out their job skills by doing volunteer charity work and seeing where the holes are in their work habits.

Jobs are so much scarcer now that the volunteer position can be a job development setting and can go on a resume so that the person does not look idle for a long period.

Another advantage to that is you can receive feedback easier from a volunteer supervisor than from an employer.

mimi: My son is 21. He is not in school and not working. There seems to be a level of inertia that my husband and I cannot overcome. How can we jumpstart his ambition?

Sheryl Pruitt: This is a more complicated question than may appear. Executive dysfunction can cause an inability to initiate, depression can cause an inability to initiate, anxiety can cause an inability to initiate, a sleep disorder can do the same, etc., etc., etc...

It is important to get a good work-up by a neuropsychologist to find out what the cause is because the treatment is very different for each of the above conditions. Many students with ADHD Plus do not even know what direction to go and do not see the future to understand where they need to be going.

It is very important that students begin to recognize the relationship between hard, sometimes boring, work and success. Chores are one of the most important first steps with a loss of privileges that follow from not doing the chores. This is the real life lesson, but if the medical disorder(s) are causing this they must be treated first.

Mary: There has always been disruption in our household with our son. Now that he is a young adult, please give some techniques on handling his anger outbursts.

Sheryl Pruitt: The questions are so on target for what we see as priorities in our clinic. Doing chores, sleep issues, and rages or what we call "storms" are the primary presenting issues.

For storms we first look at the cause. I know I will sound like a broken record on this, but cause leads to correct treatment. If the irritability is due to a mood disorder such as depression or bipolar, then medication treatment is first. Sometimes it can be caused by anxiety, in which case cognitive therapy would be first. Irritability is an important medical symptom that is frequently overlooked in ADHD.

The majority of people with ADHD have an associated disorder. Especially those that are difficult to medicate and need to be screened by a psychiatrist. If this has been done, then having an appropriate behavior program would be important – an example would be to have the person understand the impact of their behavior on others and on themselves.

Let's say that the person argues with their parents for an hour over an issue when the parents have said the answer is, "No!" Then the person owes the parents an hour of the parents' chores because the parent has lost an hour of their time. This must be mentioned ahead of time and never be given as a surprise consequence or it can cause a "storm."

Moderator 2: Sheryl, would you please provide the link to the checklist one more time. Some of our participants have shown a strong interest in viewing the transition sheet but are having trouble accessing the link.

Sheryl Pruitt: I would be glad to. <http://parkaireconsultants.com/transitionCheckList.html>

Moderator 2: Thank you, now for our next question

Judy_S: I have been unable to teach my daughter (16 yrs old) how to vacuum, cook and do laundry. She has been argumentative to the point I am frustrated. She has short term memory loss. I am also dealing

with my own issues and don't seem to be able to teach her. Does there exist a sort of "camp" or facility that I can send her to so she can learn basic home/life skills.

Sheryl Pruitt: That is a great new business idea. I do not know of one, but will tell you what I would do instead. An ADHD certified coach that specializes in adolescents can help as well as a professional organizer who works with ADHD students.

The other technique we teach parents is to give them a laminated list of what to do-step by step- and walk them through it the first time. Then, have them not get their privileges until they have completed their list. Sympathize when they are saying they want to get on facebook and have not cleaned up their room, but do not let them on it. You do not have to yell. Just withhold the goods until they have delivered the work. Life will be doing this to them in the near future.

Heather: In your experience, at what age are ADHD kids ready to start this transitional checklist? I know there's a range, but about where should we be starting?

Sheryl Pruitt: I usually start in elementary school. Our kids do not learn skills that they are uninterested in very fast. The earlier the easier and the quicker they progress

Moderator 1: Being a CHADD member not only provides valuable products and services, such as Attention magazine, to you and your family, it also supports CHADD's work on behalf of individuals with ADHD at the local, state and national level. [Join CHADD today!!!](#)

Amy: My son is 21, and also has anxiety. He does not want to identify himself as ADHD take advantage of programs that could help him - college services, vocation rehab. (he has never held a job) or disability benefits (we have had huge medical bills). Is there a way to get him to accept these aids?

Sheryl Pruitt: Amy... that is such a tough situation. We see that frequently. What we do in the clinic is give the students a Power Point presentation with humor and pictures of the brain and show them the proof of the disorders and tell them what the treatment is. We show them the percentages of untreated ADHD when it comes to employment, successful relationships, car accidents, etc.

We have people with ADHD and anxiety that talk about their before and after. Some are young and the young adults can relate. The bottom line is that if they will not go for treatment then they have to function at an expected level that is successful or no electronics, etc.

You are providing them help, and if they refuse they need to get consequences close to the real world. One day when you are gone this will happen. It is better if it happens when you are here to help. They are only entitled to basic clothing, food, shelter, and medical. Everything else is a privilege that you earn through your hard work.

Kerri: Is there an advantage to in-person coaching vs. long-distance phone/e-mail coaching? Do ADHD college students benefit from coaching?

Sheryl Pruitt: Two coaches, three opinions on this. Our preference here is in person, but we do have phone, e-mail, and Skype relationships. My husband, Dan Pruitt, who is a certified ADHD coach always wants at least one in person meeting if possible before a student goes to college.

He is a member of the Edge Foundation that provides college students with coaches and there are some scholarships for a few people, but you have to apply for one.

We always recommend coaches for students with executive dysfunction and memory problems that go to college and have been using their parents to supplement their frontal lobe functioning

In case you need the website it is Edgefoundation.com

Moderator 1: To learn more about ADHD and coaching, please see our [What We Know Sheet #18](#).

Bgood: What is the best way to go about finding a coach? Is this covered by insurance?

Sheryl Pruitt: Coaching is usually not covered by insurance. I am going to post some websites.

- ADHDcoaches.org (ADD Coaches Association) Americoach.org (Sue Sussman site)
- ADHDcoachinstitute.org (Institute for the Advancement of ADD Coaching)

Lixnaw: My 18-year old daughter has ADHD and is unable to wake herself in the morning. What strategies do you recommend so she can do this when she's not at home?

Sheryl Pruitt: There is a long sleep hygiene program that we use, but I will give you the short version. She has to wake up at the same time everyday including (ugh!) Saturday and Sunday no matter when she goes to sleep.

No electronics (no screens) one hour before bedtime. No eating 1 hr before bed. Have the same routine every night for an hour before bed. The first thirty days of this program you wake her up and the next she has to do it herself.

If she misses school it needs to be unexcused after the first thirty days of assistance. There is a four alarm clock system that we use here; it is two double alarm clocks. One by the bed, one on the other side of the room.

She puts music of her choice 45 minutes before she has to get up on the one by her bed and snoozes it, then 15 min later a buzzer that she snoozes next to the bed. Then 15 minutes after that, across the room, another radio station of her choice goes off. She snoozes and then 15 min later a buzzer that she gets up with. Hope this helps – it is usually a little more fleshed out.

Moderator 1: Want to receive well-rounded comprehensive knowledge about ADHD? [Parent to Parent courses](#) offered in local communities and online, provide educational information and support for individuals and families dealing with ADHD and learning to navigate the challenges of ADHD across the lifespan.

Kerri: Is it better to have a college kid live at home their first year if possible or attend a community college even if they get into a university?

Sheryl Pruitt: This is so dependent on the child. If they have been able to transition to some independence and self-discipline, then it is better to have the college experience.

If, however, the professionals and parents think there is little chance for success, then stay home and get some independent training for a year or start college at home with training.

Sharon_R: My 17-year-old daughter is looking for her first job. If she gets hired, how closely should I monitor how things are going? I want her to be independent, but I want this to be successful and I know this will be a challenge for her.

Sheryl Pruitt: This is a great chance for a job coach or ADHD coach to take the place of the parent so that the adult starts to become more independent. It is also a way to save the parent child relationship.

Moderator 1: Are you an NRC Facebook Fan? If not, please click on the Facebook icon on the NRC homepage – www.help4adhd.org – and keep informed of all NRC activities and updates!

Mary: What do you think about a contract between the parents and the college-bound child? How would you word it?

Sheryl Pruitt: I love for ADHD young adults to know what is going on and what will happen if they do not do what they are supposed to.

Wording the contract is a big question; some of the components would be:

- What grades are acceptable?
- Which ones we will pay for and which course with bad grades we will not pay for.
- What happens if you come home?
- What will be your jobs at home?
- What will you be allowed to do and not do?
- How you will be treated – not as a child anymore but an adult with adult expectations.
- Job or volunteer activity for so many hours per week.
- Behavior expectations, etc.

Hope this is a good beginning.

Lschwab: Are there certain careers ADHD individuals should avoid?

Sheryl Pruitt: Career choices are so important. If we love what we are doing, we will be less inattentive, etc. So first is our talent and interest, then our academic strengths and weaknesses can play a part as well as our neurological disorders, e.g., a depressed person should not work at night only and with an ever changing sleep schedule.

Given that I have a learning disability in written expression, bad handwriting, and multiple disorders and have still published books, Your work ethic, passion, and talent can override whatever we say.

Moderator 1: Thanks to everyone for all your questions! While we try to post as many specific questions as possible, we also try to post questions about different issues. We appreciate your patience and will continue trying to get through as many questions as possible in our time remaining

Catsanddogs: My daughter just graduated from high school (whew). She is going to community college because "there is nothing else to do." Counselor there is great, but my kid says "I don't like to plan" and I end up nagging her to make appointments, register, etc. She seems to think she can just show up on the first day of college and take any class. Do I let her fall on her face? Any suggestions about motivating her to understand the consequences of inaction?

Sheryl Pruitt: I encourage parents to let students not apply and get consequences. You can ask if they want you to remind them. If they say no, do not.

The parents who have filled out the applications for their students have found the student back home within a year or less. This way it will not be your fault even if they say that, and they will know and learn something.

Moderator 1: We have ten minutes left. Sheryl will move through as many questions as possible. If we are unable to get to your question please contact one of our Health Information Specialists on ADHD by calling 1-800-233-4050 between 9 AM- 5PM EST or by clicking on the "Ask A Question" link on the top of our website: www.help4adhd.org.

Rick: Our son would like a gap-year between high school and college. What features should we look for in a program to strengthen his abilities (vis-a-vis ADHD) and his independent living skills?

Sheryl Pruitt: Find a specialist in ADHD that will help check on the transition issues and any academic holes. Sometimes that is two rather than one professional. I like the gap year to fill holes, so make sure you structure it. The person needs to be busy even if you add that volunteer component. NO sitting at home on electronics all day.

Shirley: My daughter is 16 and wants to take a work load more than she can handle during senior year despite my advice. Should I let her fail as a consequence or should I hire tutors to help her out so that she can attend a four year college?

Sheryl Pruitt: Tell her if she chooses to do this against your advice and has to be tutored, that she needs to contribute to the tutoring with allowance or chores. Be sure to check and see if the counselor agrees and can support your point of view. The other question is why she wants to overload her senior year if not needed so that she does not enjoy it.

Moderator 1: Thank you to everyone who joined us today. We have time for one more question.

Shirley: Could you please recommend a book talking about various contracts e.g. for driving, college, etc. between adolescents/ young adults with parents?

Sheryl Pruitt: We have our own contracts here and have had no need for a book. Look through the CHADD Bookstore and other bookstores for this or go online and look at contracts and find one that makes sense to you.

Thank you for this opportunity and the great questions.

Moderator 1: Thank you Ms. Pruitt! Your answers will help our participants to know how to support their adult children while allowing them to be independent adults. Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful responses!

Moderator 1: If you have a question that was not answered today, please contact us online (National Resource Center's Web site at <http://www.help4adhd.org>) or by phone (800-233-4050) between 9AM and 5PM EST and one of our health information specialists will respond.

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