



CHADD and the National Resource Center on ADHD

***Ask the Expert* Chat Series**

March 24, 2011 – Therapy for Children with ADHD: When is it Useful and How Can it Help

Moderators – NRC Staff

Expert – Joyce Cooper-Kahn, PhD

Moderator 1: Welcome to today's Ask the Expert chat sponsored by the National Resource Center on ADHD (NRC). The NRC is a program of CHADD and is funded by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to provide science-based information on all aspects of ADHD. Today's topic is, "Therapy for Children with ADHD: When Is It Useful and How Can It Help?" Our expert this afternoon is Joyce Cooper-Kahn.

Dr. Joyce Cooper-Kahn is a clinical child psychologist who has been in practice for over 20 years, specializing in the variety of learning and emotional challenges affecting children and their families. She has a particular interest and expertise in attention disorders with an emphasis on interventions for executive functioning difficulties.

Dr. Cooper-Kahn maintains an active clinical practice in Severna Park, MD. She is the co-founder of Psychological Resource Associates where she provides consultation, treatment, psychological assessment, parent guidance, and school consultation. She is also the author, with Laurie Dietzel, PhD, of *Late, Lost and Unprepared: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children with Executive Functioning* (Woodbine Press, 2008).

Dr. Cooper-Kahn, we are privileged to have you here today. Thank you for joining us!

Joyce Cooper Kahn: I am happy to be here and look forward to chatting on this important topic.

Moderator 1: Now, for our first question.

Mom_of_3_boys: At what age is therapy useful/recommended? My son has combined ADHD, is on medication and is 7 years old.

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Therapy serves a variety of purposes. There are many circumstances in which a 7 year old can benefit from therapy. The question is always, What are your goals?

Getteski: What is executive function training and is there a particular age to begin implementation? Who assists in this training?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: If we define executive function training as teaching a child about his/her own strengths and weaknesses and how to compensate for the weak areas, then parents and professionals can begin quite early. For example, a therapist might work with parents to come up with a plan for helping an impulsive young child to better manage difficult situations.

Perhaps that would also involve building a team that includes the classroom teacher or day care staff. The earlier parents learn an approach, the better they can help their kids over the long haul.

Dalia: One of my twin girls is in the habit of telling tall tales, and now she takes things without permission. I set an appt for behavioral therapy, but is that the correct way to go?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: You are describing a behavior that could be due to impulsive behavior or might be more of an emotional issue. So, a meeting with a therapist who first works on understanding the behavior better and then decides on an approach would be the way to go.

Calvin's Mom: I'm trying to figure out with therapist/specialist is best to go to when a child with ADHD is having difficulty with sensory/texture issues and picky eating. We've been bounced around all over the place and need to find the right person.

Joyce Cooper Kahn: That is a confusing one for so many parents (and professionals)! There is some controversy over sensory issues and treatment. Often, an occupational therapist is involved and works on the sensory issues. At the same time, you may need a therapist who can work on ways for you and your child to manage frustrating situations.

Getteski: I am interested in how effective socialization training is. Is the best method working with a behaviorist or are there therapists that specialize in socialization?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: There are two general approaches to working on social skills – individual and group social skills training. It is often hard to find a good social skills group, but is also often very helpful when you *can* find one. If the problems occur with peers, then a group is often the best way to address that. However, if the socialization issues are more general so that they occur with adults, too, then an individual/family approach may be helpful.

Moderator 1: To learn more about behavior management please see our [What We Know Sheet # 7S: Behavioral Treatment for Children and Teenagers with AD/HD](http://help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk) found in the list at <http://help4adhd.org/en/about/wwk>

Susie: What do you think of organizations that advertise "brain training" vs. tutoring to improve short term memory and focus for a 9 year old girl with ADHD (inattentiveness)?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Another controversial issue. In general, I would say that we do not yet know enough to know whether "brain training" is effective and, if so, for what kids under what circumstances.

I do know one such group that has said that they have the most difficulty with students who have executive functioning weaknesses.

It is my general experience that the most progress comes when the student works with a really good tutor who can tailor the interventions to that child and really hone in on building compensatory skills and habits.

Ninny: What is the best type of therapy would be helpful for a child with ADHD and ODD when it comes to the anxiety with homework and school?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Well, the issue here again is that there are a limited number of ways that human organisms can show distress, and anxiety is a generic symptom. So, it is important to know what is causing the anxiety. Perfectionism? Experiences of failure? End of the day fatigue? Oppositionality? Definitely, a therapist well versed in ADHD, ODD and general child development would be helpful.

Susie: Have read about organizations incorporating diet changes, supplements and enzymes along with therapy (Brain Balance Centers) to treat ADHD - inattentiveness/mild aspergers ... what's your opinion?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: My opinion is that this falls into the "promising but unproven" category of interventions. We just don't know enough yet to say if it will help, who it would help and under what circumstances. My biggest concern is what is not being done when the focus is only on nutrition.

If you want to try a nutritional approach, then do so with a plan for how you will measure progress and how you will decide whether or not to continue that approach. And keep up with all the other helpful interventions.

Moderator 1: Do you live in the northeastern part of the US? Come to CHADD's Regional Conference taking place in Long Island on May, 14th 2011! For more information visit <http://www.chadd.org/> and go to "Conferences & Training."

emma6494: Because the brain is "plastic" and can be "retrained" can the neuropathways that have been established revert if the therapy that created them is stopped? Basically, will the benefits of therapy stop when therapy is stopped?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: When we create new neural pathways, as we do by learning new behaviors, then it is the use of the behaviors that maintains the pathways. However, sometimes we learn things that we don't use immediately and later can call into action. I see this often with young children.

Susan: Do you feel that Tae Kwan Doe or Kung Fu and Meditation are helpful - are there any studies?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: I don't know this research well, however there is some data that does show that meditation can be helpful for some kids.

Martial arts training has benefits, too, I would suspect, but for different reasons. Many trainers teach an approach to self-control that may carry a message for kids. However, it is important to remember that you cannot re-make and ADHD kid into a non-ADHD kid. Nor should that be our goal.

Joia: My son does not follow even the simplest directions, is extremely slow when doing anything and is distracted if a speckle of dust floats by. He has a very bad temper, a bad attitude and does not care if he is punished. I have tried being understanding and tolerating and when that doesn't work I will punish him or take away the use of his video games and that doesn't work either. What should I do?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: It sounds like you would benefit from help with a behavior management plan that is built on earning privileges, rather than just punishment. These systems can help by building in short term reinforcement, concrete rewards, and building a more positive environment.

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.

Suzanne: My 10 year old son with ADHD has such strong emotions that he yells almost every time he speaks. His therapist doesn't get to see that. I try to video, but he erased the first batch and now hides when he sees the camera. Ideas?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Much of what happens outside the therapy is only available to the therapist by the parents' reports. Sometimes it helps to see the parents and child together. However, the therapist should incorporate the information you provide into a treatment plan. Check with the therapist to get a feel for whether they are taking your information into account, and if not, why not.

Theresa: What are the negative effects of therapy? Sometimes I think that I try too hard and that perhaps paying too much attention to my son's ADHD can make it worse, and instead I think it's sometimes best just to let him spend his free time hanging out and having fun instead of yet another appointment

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Well, you are certainly correct that kids with ADHD need free time, too! The decision about whether to include therapy depends on how much impairment there is and what the balance is in your lives at this time. Sometimes it changes over time.

Adrienne0505: How do explain to a child why they are going to therapy?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: With honesty and brevity! For example, "You seem to have so much trouble making friends and you have so much to offer. This is a person who can help to make the friends thing easier for you."

Moderator 1: [Take the CHADD Spring Fling Escape!](#) On Friday, April 8th, the Hyatt Regency Hotel ballroom in Bethesda, MD will be transformed into a mini-Cherry Blossom Festival for an evening

extravaganza featuring getaway trips to Hawaii, Florida, South Carolina, and New Mexico; Caribbean cruises to the Bahamas; theatre and sports event tickets; and certificates to many well-known restaurants.

Kartal: What about a child who is resistant to going to a therapist? Any ideas for getting through to such an individual?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: I wish there was one general answer here. Sometimes, we choose to work with the parents only when a child is very reluctant. And then I try to teach the parents what they need to know to help the child.

Other times, we may decide that we need to give the child time to adjust to the therapy situation and build an alliance with the therapist. With adolescents, sometimes I set a behavioral goal and the reward is that they get me off of their backs and out of the picture as soon as they reach the goal.

Hungrylyon” Of my two daughters with ADHD, the eldest refuses treatment; denies there's a problem. We are trying to get her into "art therapy" to give her an opportunity to explore her inner self & triggers. How would that kind of therapy compare to say, a talk therapist?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Art therapy can be a less direct approach that bypasses some of the emotional hurdles. However, many talk therapists are quite skilled at tailoring an approach to the child, too.

Moderator 1: Are you on Facebook? If so, be sure to visit our Facebook Page and join the almost 2,500 others who “like” us. To find our page, click on the Facebook icon on the NRC homepage – <http://www.help4adhd.org> – and don't forget to “friend” Phil Fidgety in order to keep informed about all NRC activities and updates!

Ellamama: How should one evaluate whether a therapy is improving things/worthwhile?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: You and the therapist should have a defined set of goals and think together about how you will know if the therapy is helpful. Together, you should come up with a set of realistic expectations regarding change and the pace of change. Sometimes, the progress is immediate and obvious. Sometimes not. But the yardstick should be something you think about from the beginning.

JRC: We've had some bad experiences with therapy, how do I get my 13 year son who has ADHD/ODD to go to another therapist and trust him?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: I'm sorry you and your son have had bad experiences. I think you need to carefully evaluate what you are looking for in a therapist, and then as the parent, you do a round of initial consultations with possible therapists first.

Rather than take him to possible therapists, you do the legwork. Then when you feel you have found the right person, tell him that you think this person has something helpful to offer. The therapist's job takes over then.

Moderator 1: It's never too early to start planning! [CHADD's 2011 Annual Conference](#) will be held in Disney's Contemporary Resort, Orlando, FL, Nov. 10-12. Save the dates!

Joia: if a child with ADHD does not get help will he become worse?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Worse in what way? It always comes back to what you are trying to change. We cannot "therapize" away the primary symptoms of AD/HD. What we can do is help the child understand these symptoms, learn compensatory skills, and deal with the emotional fallout. With this kind of help, we get better adjusted, AD/HD individuals.

Moderator 1: Do you Tweet? Follow the NRC on Twitter @help4adhd and receive regular tips on how better to manage ADHD, and be notified about future Ask the Expert chats!

DawnS: I have tried therapies (along with medication) including group social skills, and individual cognitive. Things don't "stick" they way I'd like. Is that normal? If not, what would you advise?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: I do think that is the normal course of things with many kids. I have found that I often first meet with a child when they are young, and then I may meet with him/her on and off over the years as new demands occur or new issues arise.

Sometimes, it is not until the mid-teen years that I start to see the child's own motivation for therapy emerge. But they show signs that they have really taken in some of what we worked on early on.

Bhccj: Living in a rural area limits the amount of help available to our son. I am concerned to get him the appropriate help, how can I tell if the therapist is qualified for his needs?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: First, do your own homework by creating a list of what the problems are and what would be different in your mind if he got good help. Then talk to other parents who have used therapists and see if you can come up with some good recommendations. Ask the therapist about his/her practice and about how often he/she works with clients like your son.

If you cannot find anyone within a reasonable distance, you might consider ADHD coaching by phone if you think it would be helpful. Good luck with your efforts. It is really difficult when there are few professionals available in your area.

Moderator 1: Being a CHADD member not only provides valuable members only benefits, 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!](#)

Judith: I am an ADHD parent and Coach. Do you think it is important for a child with ADHD to understand what ADHD is, or is it better to deal with the differences of his brain without labeling?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Personally, I think the label helps many individuals to put the issues into perspective and prepares them to deal with the challenges. Somehow, calling it a difference in how their

brain works seems in my experience to minimize the impact and does not allow kids to express their own depth of experience.

Lola: Can you advise on parenting strategies for an explosive child? I find it best to wait out the storm. Once he's calm he still tends to blame shift and has a hard time taking responsibility for his choices. Any advice?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Have you tried the Ross Greene book *The Explosive Child*? I think it is one of the most concrete, helpful books for parents. He does start with the concept of choosing your battles carefully, which it sounds like you do. But it is also important to incorporate a focus on building strategies before the next explosion and to slowly build a repertoire of self-management skills. Greene's book does a nice job of laying out such an approach.

David: Has cognitive training been shown to be effective? My son (9) was enrolled in a 60 hour program last summer. He spent 2 hrs each weekday with a cognitive education therapist at a local learning center. It was very expensive (\$6500) and I am not sure there was any benefit.

Joyce Cooper Kahn: It sounds like your experience mirrors what I know. It seems like cognitive training is another intervention that falls into the "promising but unproven" category. I have spoken with some who think it was helpful, but many who did not.

I do not think that the research is yet clear on who it helps and under what circumstances. On the other hand, I do not think it is harmful if you are willing to take a chance on the time and money you will expend.

Sammy: When is play therapy useful for a child?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: When the goal is emotional expression, then it can be quite helpful. The primary symptoms of ADHD, if it has been accurately diagnosed, will not change with play therapy. However, it might be useful for some of the secondary emotional problems that sometimes occur or for other issues in a child's life. Children often "speak" through imaginative play, and so it is a good medium for approaching some issues for children.

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

Jgmom: Do you find social groups helpful for children with ADHD, or do you think these groups are so unlike real-life situations they don't really help?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Good questions. All social skills groups are not alike! There is good research showing that effective social skills groups incorporate planned generalization, or ways to take the skills learned in the group and practice them in real-life.

A good social skills group is not just a play group although it does incorporate play. There should be goals, skills taught and practiced, homework, and a parent component so that the adults can reinforce new learning in other settings.

Moderator 1: Missed part of the chat? Past chat transcripts are available to [CHADD members as a benefit](#).

Ellamama: How is "therapy" different from "coaching"?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Coaching is designed for individuals who are motivated to set goals and have the interest and maturity to work on these without a lot of emotional baggage. Therapy is more effective if there are significant emotional challenges, or if the work requires the participation of the family or other caretakers.

Moderator 1: We have about ten minutes left. Dr. Cooper-Kahn 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 – 5 PM EST or by clicking on the "[Ask a Question](#)" link on the top of every page on [our website](#).

Dalia: what is to be expected from a behavioral therapist?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Behavioral therapy is a specific form of therapy that focuses on behaviors and how to change them. In general, the focus is not on why things happen or the reaction to events but on specific behaviors that need to change.

However, most experienced therapists incorporate a variety of different styles into their approach and apply these as needed. Most people who work with ADHD clients incorporate behavioral strategies.

DJ: what do we look for when looking for social skill building groups with peers. i.e. the counselor, age of children etc.

Joyce Cooper Kahn: The reputation and approach of the therapist and the composition of the group (age, types of problems) are very important. The therapist should be able to articulate what the goals are, how they will be addressed, and how these will generalize to daily life.

Moderator 1: Before our next question, you should know that the NRC produces a series of Information Sheets. All of our "[What We Know](#)" Sheets are found at the [NRC website](#), in the "[About ADHD](#)" section.

MelissaA: Our son is 11 years old and diagnosed with inattentive ADHD. He is on medication for ADHD and for anxiety. What is a good way for us to help him with peer social interaction?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: How to help depends on exactly what kind of problems he is having. Often the predominantly inattentive AD/HD kids are not so much excluded as generally ignored. If your child has difficulty approaching kids, then sometimes building on his own strengths and interests through extracurricular activities helps. If he is timid, then very small groups should be the starting point.

I know some parents who have offered to start a school club and they build it around their child's interests, such as a Lego club. You might benefit from some consultation from a therapist to come up with some ideas and a plan.

Joia: My 9 yr old son goes to bed at 8:30 and it takes him to almost 11 to fall asleep. Then, staying asleep is difficult, and he often wakes several times throughout the night. Sometimes he also sleepwalks and talks while doing this. Is there therapy to help with sleeping difficulties?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: There are many sleep clinics that focus on these problems in kids, including some university-based centers. I would seek an individual or clinic-based specialist in sleep disorders in kids.

Karen: What would you say are the most effective therapies for elementary age kids with AD/HD combined type?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: As we discussed earlier in the chat, it depends on your goals. Remember, therapy is a general category sort of like "restaurants." There are all different kinds of restaurants with different food and price ranges and styles. You have to choose therapy based on what you are looking for--what symptoms are you trying to treat? What are your goals?

Then you seek someone who specializes in those things. Sometimes it helps to set up a consultation with a therapist to help develop a realistic set of goals and a plan for reaching them. It helps to prioritize what you want to achieve and to think through the team you will need to help you get to your goals.

Moderator 1: Before our final question, please help CHADD help those affected by ADHD. As a non-profit organization, CHADD relies on membership dues and donations from individuals to support most of its work in serving the needs of people with ADHD. [Please consider CHADD](#) in your financial giving plans.

Gigi: Ultimately, it seems as if the answers to many questions boils down to therapy; whether it be individual or group. What is the best resource for finding a therapist that is helpful?

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Other parents are often the best resource. Schools and pediatricians too. Talk to others dealing with kids and with ADHD. If you can't find someone that way, most mental health disciplines have a state association. They often have referral lists. Good luck finding someone who meets your needs.

Moderator 1: Thank you Dr. Cooper-Kahn for all your clear and concise answers! Your insight will help parents feel more confident in building a treatment plan for their children with ADHD.

Moderator 1: "For more of Dr. Cooper-Kahn's expertise advice, you may purchase her book, "Late, Lost, and Unprepared" thorough the [CHADD store on Amazon](#): or through her publisher, [Woodbine House's website](#).

Joyce Cooper Kahn: Thank you all for your thoughtful questions and I wish you the best of luck in your efforts.

Moderator 1: If you have a question that was not answered today, please contact us online (National Resource Center's Web site at 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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