ADHD in Preschool: Placing all young children on a path to success

Courtney Zulauf-McCurdy, PhD
Acting Assistant Professor
Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences | General Pediatrics

Disclosures

I am currently receiving research support from:
- Foundry10
- National Institute of Health

Today's Goals

> Describe what ADHD in preschool looks like?
> Identify what you can do if you suspect ADHD?
> Practice how you can involve parents in the process?
Children of color are less likely to get a diagnosis of ADHD
ADHD interventions are less effective for children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds
Preschool expulsion rates 3X higher than K-12
• Large discipline disparities by gender and race
  • Black children 19% of enrollment, 47% of those expelled

How can we place all young children on a path to success?

Research to Practice Gap

Child presents with challenging behavior
Trigger Search
No Behavior Improvement
Intervention
Behavior Improvement
Hopelessness
Partnering with Parents
Taking and implementing an Evidence-Based Practice

What is ADHD?

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
Neurodevelopmental disorder
5-10% of school-age children
Endures into adulthood
**What is ADHD?**

**Hyperactivity/Impulse**
- Fidgety
- Can’t sit still
- Runs around
- Difficulty staying quiet
- Takes things from others
- Blurs out answers
- Doesn’t want to nap

**Inattention**
- Doesn’t appear to listen
- Forgetful
- Distracted
- Difficulty staying on one task
- Takes a long time to eat

---

**An Example**

Sam is a four-year old who has difficulty sitting still, at circle time they are the first to shout out an answer, and they often require redirection during routines. During structured learning time, Sam becomes easily upset when they don’t know the answer.

---

**Recognition of ADHD in preschool is on the rise!**

- Children as young as 4 can be diagnosed with ADHD
- According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, approximately 194,000 preschoolers (2.4%) had a current ADHD diagnosis
  - By some estimates it is up to 5%
- Research shows that 3-year-olds who show symptoms of ADHD are much more likely to meet the diagnostic criteria for ADHD by age 13
Warning Signs

- “When compared with other preschoolers of the same age, where does this child’s behavior fall?”
- Has this kid been suspended or expelled before?
- Are they having difficulty learning concepts?

Preschool is a time of rapid development

- These early years are a time of significant brain development
- It’s best to address problematic behaviors sooner rather than later

How can we support young children at-risk for ADHD?

- Behavioral Interventions are well-established treatments
  - Recommended as the first line of treatment by the American Academy of Pediatrics
  - Don’t need a diagnosis!
What are behavioral interventions?

> They support adults in reinforcing positive behaviors and skill development
> Can occur in clinics and schools
> They can support parents, teachers, or both!

What does it look like in the classroom?

- Teaches the child and the adult
- Increase positive behavior with positive discipline
  - Decreases negative behavior with extinguishing
- Helps manage negative behavior
- Helps adults develop a positive relationship with the child

Parent Behavior Management Training

- Teaches the child and the adult
- Increase positive behavior with positive discipline
  - Decreases negative behavior with extinguishing
- Helps manage negative behavior
- Helps adults develop a positive relationship with the child

Triple P; Incredible Years; Parent-Child Interaction Therapy
Teaching Emotions: Mood Meters or Feeling Charts

Teaching Regulation:
- Wiggle Breaks
- Calm Down Corners
- Deep breathing

Teaching & Modeling: Calm Down Jar
- Shake all of your anger, frustration, disappointment, or sadness into this jar when it’s all wound up.
- Watch the glitter settle and think of your mind settling down.
- Take big slow breaths while you watch the glitter calm down.
- When your glitter is all at the bottom, how do you feel now?
Step 1. Take off your coat

Step 2. Breakfast

Step 3. Wash your hands

Step 4. Books

Reinforcing Positive Behaviors: Routines and Transitions

- Planned Choices
  - "Do you want to put your shirt on first or your pants?"
  - "Which one do you want to put on first?"
  - "I need your help with putting on your clothes."

- Reinforcing Positive Behavior: Token Economy
  - Children earn "tokens" for desirable behaviors
  - Focus on specific behaviors
  - Helps you catch the child being good

- Reinforcing Positive Behavior: Daily Report Card
  - Allows parents and teachers to communicate
  - Lists daily target behaviors at school (and home!)
  - Indicates when child meets target behavior goals
  - Provides rewards for meeting goals
Steps for responding to challenging behavior

- **Step 1: Label and Validate the Emotion**
  "I can see that you are very angry. Is there anything else that you are feeling?"

- **Deal with the bad behavior**
  "It is okay to feel angry, but it's not ok to throw things"

- **Problem Solve & Plan for the future**

Remember consequences should help kids learn!

- Should be developmentally appropriate
  - 2 minutes in the calm down corner

- Should help the child next time

- Shouldn't remove the child from the opportunity to learn and practice skills

Key Elements of behavioral interventions

- Teach and model appropriate behavior
- Reinforce positive behaviors
  - Ignore undesirable behavior when you can
- Respond to undesirable behavior in a way that helps the child learn and grow
Most young children don’t receive these supports
CDC estimates that only 1 in 2 preschoolers receive the recommended behavioral treatment
Large disparities by child race and SES

Reality Check… this isn’t easy

How can we support teachers when faced with challenging behavior in the classroom?
You aren’t in this alone

You can pour from an empty cup, take care of yourself first.

Tips and Tricks

• Connect early and communicate often
  • Set up a system for communication with all families at the start of the year
• Build a respectful partnership
  • Learn about the families
• Don’t run from Healthy conflict
  • Keep an open mind
  • Don’t take things personally
  • Be aware of how your body is feeling

Consider fitting in 5-min “Calm Moments” during your day that tap into one of your 5 senses (vision, smell, taste, touch, hearing).

Example activities:
- Petting a cat or dog
- Writing, sending a text or family member
- Watching clips from favorite shows
- Stop, make, and breathe for 1 minute
- Playing with blocks
- Swing side to side
- Stand on favorite music
Questions?

Please reach out, I want to hear from you!
czulauf@uw.edu