

# Bradenton Herald

Tuesday, October 07, 2014

Living & Entertainment>Living>Health

## **Mental health minute: How to live with a very active child**

By Mary Ruiz

What do Terry Bradshaw, Will Smith, Sir Richard Branson, James Carville, Justin Timberlake and Mariette Hartley have in common? They all have or had ADHD. And most of us would agree, they're successful. At some point most parents are convinced their child has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Sometimes it's difficult for parents to determine if a child's outrageous behavior is just childhood exuberance or something more serious. Always talk with your pediatrician about concerns and make sure you maintain those lines of communication.

Key indicators of ADHD are that the symptoms interfere with his or her development and negatively impact their lives in two or more settings: school, home or with friends.

Children with ADHD have higher occurrences of other issues such as speech and language difficulties, depression and a learning disability, as well. Therefore, the child first needs a broad assessment.

The core symptoms of ADHD are:

Inattention:

- Fails to finish tasks
- Poor organization
- Often loses things
- Careless mistakes
- Doesn't listen
- Forgetful
- Unable to sustain effort
- Distractible
- Avoids effortful tasks

Hyperactivity/Impulsivity:

- Difficulty waiting turn
- Interrupts others
- Blurts out answers
- Talks excessively
- Can't play quietly
- Acts as if "driven by a motor"
- Leaves seat inappropriately
- Fidgets
- Runs from one place to the other

The best way to determine if a child has ADHD is to seek psychological testing or a psychiatric evaluation. Testing takes about four hours and a psychiatric evaluation last about a hour.

For many young people, the most effective treatment for ADHD is a combination of medication and skills building. "Medication is beneficial for short-term improvement," said Manatee Glens clinical psychologist Bart Hodgens, Ph.D. "Skills building is necessary for long-term, continual success."

Behavior management with structure and feedback is very beneficial. "We know from brain imaging studies that ADHD is a real medical condition, and something a child is born with," said Hodgens. "My message to parents is that they are not the cause of the problem, but they are part of the solution."

Parents and teachers should work together on a plan. According to Section 504, which requires schools to accommodate students with disabilities, the school will create a plan for the child's education and will

outline steps to ensure the child receives the structure he or she needs. This can be especially helpful as the child transitions from elementary school to middle school. Parents usually need to advocate for their child to encourage the school to develop the right plan and to evaluate progress along the way.

Children with ADHD do get better. Many adults with the condition have found ways to actually turn what could be a negative into a positive that advances their careers or avocations. They go on to live fulfilling, productive lives, and some are quite financially successful as well.

Mary Ruiz is president/CEO of Manatee Glens, Your Community Behavioral Health Hospital specializing in mental health and addictions. For information, visit [www.ManateeGlens.org](http://www.ManateeGlens.org).