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ADHD: Maladaptive Disorder or Evolutionary Adaptation

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ADD, ODD or Just BAD

ADHD: Maladaptive Disorder or
Evolutionary Adaptation

March 3, 2015

National Youth at Risk Conference
Savannah, GA

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Objectives

- ▶ Explore research that presents ADHD as adaptive rather than maladaptive
- ▶ Analyze the implications of viewing ADHD symptoms as strengths
- ▶ Discuss how parents, teachers, helping professionals and physicians can use this information to assist children impacted by ADHD

Hunter-Gatherer Theory

- ▶ Researchers of evolutionary psychology propose the idea that inattentive, impulsive, and hyperactive symptoms typical of ADHD increased survival in harsh prehistoric hunter gatherer societies (Hartmann, 2003).
- ▶ Thom Hartman calls the “symptoms” response ready characteristics. Sedentary learning environments promote failure among response ready individuals (Stolzer, 2009).

Hunter-Gatherer Theory

- ▶ Rather than medicating natural and adaptive traits, researchers suggest that school systems creatively harness the strengths of response ready children.
- ▶ The implications of viewing the symptoms of ADHD as strengths may change the vantage point and possibly the scope of treatment, parenting and education.

Implications of the Evolutionary Adaptation Theory

- ▶ **Medication**
- ▶ **Education**
- ▶ **Therapy/Treatment**
- ▶ **Parenting**

Implications for Medication

- ▶ Children need nutrients to meet the demands of their rapid metabolic systems
- ▶ Foods high in sugar, caffeine, food additives, and artificial ingredients contribute to behavioral problems.
- ▶ Medications used to treat ADHD often suppress the appetite which leads to malnutrition (Romm & Romm, 2000).

Implications for Medication

Phillips (2006) also argues that dyslexia and autism are highly problematic disorders with no particular pharmaceutical treatment, but the pharmaceutical giants are far less adamant about educating teachers about these disorders.

Educational Implications

- ▶ Hartman (2003) discussed Thomas Edison's marginalization by the his school.
- ▶ His teacher described him as slow, inattentive and too active.
- ▶ Edison's mother removed him from the school and taught him herself.
- ▶ She did not give up on him and did not allow the teacher to define who he was and what he was able to do.

Alternative Educational Options

- ▶ Barkley (2005) contends that the teacher is the most important component to success of ADHD diagnosed children in the school environment. He expresses the importance of parents communicating openly and frequently with their child's teachers.

Alternative Educational Options

- ▶ Stolzer (2009) suggests the impetus rest on the education of the educators.
- ▶ Encourages teachers to learn more about the gender differences between boys and girls
- ▶ Recognize that sedentary learning environments may be counter productive for boys and children diagnosed with ADHD.

Alternative Educational Options

The Hunter School

Alternative Educational Options

- ▶ Montessori Education
- ▶ Maria Montessori, born in 1870

- ▶ Thought that each child is born with a unique potential to be revealed, not a "blank slate" waiting to be written upon.

- ▶ Preparing the most natural and life-supporting environments for the child

- ▶ Observing the child living freely in this environment

- ▶ Continually adapting the environment in order that the child may fulfill his or her greatest potential, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Source: www.montessori.edu/maria.html

Alternative Educational Options

▶ Diamondback Ranch Academy

Implications for Parents

Focus on your child's strengths

Inform your child's teachers of his or her strengths

Encourage participation in a variety of extracurricular activities

Encourage fresh air play and activities (hiking, biking, outdoor activities)

Show pride in your child (brag to others about his or her strengths)

Use strength based behavior modification approaches

Focus on motivation systems

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