

Summer Vacation and ADHD: Tips and Activities

Written by Ashley R. Carlson
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During summertime, children are out of school and lack as many activities to keep them engaged and interested during the day. Children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) can especially struggle during this time. AFM talked with Lexis Preparatory School and one of the owners, Developmental Pediatrician Raun Melmed M.D., about the ADHD diagnosis, productive ways to combat symptoms, and why Lexis Preparatory School was opened to better address this way of learning and behavior.

AFM: Could you give us a description of ADHD and symptoms of the disorder?

Dr. M: ADHD is a neurobiological disorder which begins in childhood and often continues through into adulthood. There are two important aspects which need to be considered before making the diagnosis. The first is the presence of symptoms of inattention, distractibility, impulsivity and hyperactivity. Of course, not all symptoms have to be present in each individual. This has led to the creation of sub-types, such as inattentive type, or hyperactive impulsive type. Now, anyone might say that they have many of these types of symptoms and they are doing fine, so what's the big deal? That leads us to the second aspect, which is that the symptoms must be present in at least two settings such as at school *and* at home and even more importantly, that the symptoms must be causing dysfunction or harm. So the presence of the symptoms is not enough to make the diagnosis—the individual must be suffering as consequence, such as social isolation, school failure, or family disruption.

AFM: The ADHD diagnosis seems to have increased in recent years. Is this due to more medical knowledge gained about it?

Dr. M: As a developmental pediatrician, I see many reasons for the increase. Maybe old wine in new bottles? What we used to call delinquency or other disorders of moral turpitude, are now being scrutinized in a more in-depth fashion which has led to the delineation of the developmental underpinnings of behavior. No longer will calling these children lazy, crazy or stupid suffice as an explanation. So that's the good news. Indeed in some settings ADHD might actually be under-diagnosed. Certainly doctors are more attune now to ADHD—definitely in the pediatric arena; however physicians seeing adults are still relatively unfamiliar with making the diagnosis. There are no shortcuts though. The diagnostic assessment takes time and no glib label will suffice. Symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity can be seen as a result of a variety of pediatric disorders ranging from chronic illness, to learning difficulties, to abusive home situations and depression. That's why a comprehensive look at the problem is essential. There certainly might be other environmental factors responsible for the increase—in the same way we have seen a rise in the diagnosis of conditions such as diabetes, asthma and autism. The diagnosis is the first step, and the best coping tool is knowledge. Read about ADHD, look at the CHADD [Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder] website and attend support groups.

AFM: What are some ways to address the ADHD diagnosis, and treat the symptoms?

Dr. M: Evidenced-based interventions include both behavioral treatments as well as the use of medications. Some behavioral interventions can easily be accomplished in the home and at school. A student accommodation plan can be constructed to address challenges in any classroom. ADHD rarely travels alone and often there are associated learning problems. Sometimes more intensive intervention is required, and that is where Lexis Preparatory School comes in!

AFM: Tell us some more about Lexis Preparatory School, and why you and Anita Werner MS., CCC Speech-Language Pathologist, started it.

Dr. M: The Lexis Preparatory School is a school that was developed with a passion for children who learn differently...[We] developed the school so that children who learn differently can celebrate their strengths and recognize that every challenge can provide an opportunity for growth. The highly trained Lexis faculty and staff work collaboratively with students, parents and professionals to create a nurturing, but challenging learning environment. Our goal is to know our children well and engage them on a daily basis in an exciting, interactive curriculum. Through individualized, multisensory instruction, students develop critical thinking skills and acquire the tools and strategies needed to become successful and independent learners. A supportive positive learning experience inspires our students to have confidence in themselves and in their abilities.

The Lexis Preparatory School also provided a comprehensive list of tips and fun activities to do in the summertime to help with ADHD symptoms:

- Maintain a routine.
- Keep a calendar of upcoming events, such as camps, vacations, and tutoring.
- Very early morning exercise has been shown to help with symptoms. Running, hiking, biking, and tennis are all good summer activities, and for mid-day consider swimming, indoor rock-climbing, or bowling.
- Get involved with local recreation centers for karate, gymnastics, and swim classes.
- Join a local children's theater group or art classes.

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- Go to the zoo or train park in the early part of the day.
- Visit museums.
- Limit television and video games, but allow in short amounts.
- Go to the mall or grocery store for short periods of time.
- Play board games and Legos at home, and look on Pinterest for fun craft activities.

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To learn more about Lexis Preparatory School, visit: <http://www.lexisprep.com/>.

To visit the CHADD website, go to: <http://www.chadd.org/>.