

PARENTING THE BOUNCY OR DISTRACTIBLE CHILD

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ADD: DISORDER OR THINKING STYLE?

First let me say that, as an Educational Therapist, I prefer the terms “bouncy” and “distractable,” as they describe normal child behaviors which can interfere with learning. Although I recommend solutions for these kids, I do not like seeing them labeled with a “disorder.” ADD is less of a “disorder” and more of a learning style – which can be accommodated.

I believe that ADD and ADHD are a continuum. Some of my students are on the mild end of the symptoms we are going to discuss, and are not diagnosed with ADD or ADHD. Some of them are in the middle, and may have a diagnosis. Others have severe bounciness or distractibility, and get diagnosed as hyperactive or inattentive.

I am concerned that so often, when these students come to me, someone has told the parents that the child needs to be medication. Certainly ADD and ADHD medications are tools – but they are not the only tools. Behavioral modalities have been shown repeatedly in research to reduce and eliminate the need for these medications.

Additionally, the medications have side-effects with real consequences for the families who use them, and they only work when they are taken.

If, for a moment, we consider other approaches to helping bouncy and distractible children, we can find ways to improve their lives on a long-term basis – ways that don't include harmful side-effects.

I always default to long-term solutions for bouncy and distractible kids. I want them to learn how to control symptoms now so that they can lead healthy, productive lives. I do not want to make them lifetime customers to a pharmaceutical company.

If you want more information on the ADD thinking style and how it is a learning style, rather than a disorder, click this link and check out this book: [Attention Deficit Disorder: A Different Perception](#).

SYMPTOMS OF ADD AND ADHD – ON A SCALE OF 1 – 5

INATTENTION

- Does not listen when spoken to
- Makes careless errors in schoolwork
- Avoids or dislikes tasks requiring sustained attention
- Short attention span
- Disorganized
- Loses things
- Trouble keeping up with personal property

- Easily distracted
- Forgetful in daily activity
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Gets bored easily
- Stares into space / daydreams
- Low energy, sluggish or drowsy
- Apathetic or unmotivated
- Frequently switches from one activity to another
- Trouble concentrating
- Falls asleep doing work
- Failure to hand in work
- Trouble doing homework
- Trouble following directions
- Excited in the beginning but doesn't finish
- Difficulty learning

HYPERACTIVITY

- Fidgets with hands or feet
- Squirms in seat
- Frequently leaves seat inappropriately
- Runs, climbs or moves excessively

- Difficulty working or playing quietly
- On the go
- Driven
- Talks excessively
- Can't sustain eye contact
- Needs a lot of supervision
- Pays attention to everything
- Frequently "rocks"
- Excitability
- Lacks patience
- In trouble frequently
- Restless

IMPULSIVITY

- Cannot see consequences of behavior
- Blurts out answers or comments
- Difficulty waiting turn
- Frequently interrupts
- Butts into others' conversations
- Engages in physically dangerous activity
- Acts before thinking

- Frequently takes risks
- Takes all dares
- Frustrated easily

Bouncy and distractible kids may also exhibit signs of oppositional defiant behavior, immaturity, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, tic disorders (such as Turret's), aggressive behavior and developmental or learning disorders.

IMMATURE DECISION-MAKING

Immature decision-making is a hallmark of ADD/ADHD. For the parent of the distractible child, these are the moments when you are standing next to your child saying, "I can't believe you just did that!" or "You're (insert age) years old; you should know better than this by now!"

Interestingly, every bouncy child I have ever worked with has presented with something that seems to be a personality characteristic. I call it a high need to make their own choices (autonomy).

Here is how I think it fits together: these kids don't make mature decisions. Intuitively, they know this, and they also know that they only learn by doing. Hence,

they feel a strong need to make their own decisions all the time in order to make enough decisions to learn how to make good decisions.

Makes sense, doesn't it? And most of the time, I see adults respond to these kids by taking away their choices. We don't trust them to make good choices, so we take over and control. What you need to realize when you do this is that you are **increasing** the problem.

So what's the solution?

When I work with bouncy and distractible kids, I find ways for them to make as many choices as I can provide for them. When my daughter and I started having trouble with her food choices, we stocked a cupboard down low enough for her to reach with food that we could both agree on.

Once she had control over her food choices, she calmed down about them.

In order to set up a situation where your child can have control – it has to be something you won't take back two weeks later, saying, "I gave you responsibility, and you couldn't handle it, so now I'm taking it back."

You need to think this through before you begin and choose ways to help your child that won't blow up on you later.

Let's take pea plants for example. You and your child learn how to take care of pea plants. You provide the plants and water. You let your child take care of the plant.

Most of the time, the plant is going to die, and you may be tempted express your sadness and pain in the form of some judgment. Let's try a different approach. The plant dies, and you have a conversation about the experiment.

Why did the plant die?

What could you have done differently?

How can you remember to take care of it?

Let's try it again.

Now you start over with no blame or negativity. You just try it again. How many times will it take before your child remembers to water the plant? It takes as long as it takes.

I want to be clear here that I did not suggest your child take care of the family pet. It is both illegal and immoral to allow an animal to starve because the children are too immature to remember to care for it.

I suggested a plant, but you can find your own projects based on your interests and your child's. Children are naturally interested in doing what their parents do. My child plays the piano, knits and loves to assist smaller children in school. All are direct imitations of mommy; so think of the things you enjoy that your child finds interesting, and go from there.

Your child's bedroom is not a beginning autonomy project. This is the sort of scenario that will lead to you re-asserting your control as the room's condition degenerates. Room-cleaning is a project where the child should be allowed a very small level of autonomy, then a little more at a time over 10 years or so. I do suggest that you comment excitedly about how pretty the room looks and how nice it is when it is clean. I started here with my daughter, and, soon, she was showing off her clean room to friends when they came over. Eventually, that turned into a natural desire to keep the room looking clean and pretty.

Find small ways for your child to make choices. It doesn't bother me to take my daughter out wearing fairy wings, a football uniform, a snorkel, and slippers. So I can let her be in charge of her clothing choices most of the time. If this scenario would make you crazy, then it's not the right one for you to choose.

TIMING

When I have a bouncy child in a group, and I say that we are going to do the alphabet now, the child will nearly always start saying the letters out as fast as possible.

These kids want you to know that they know the information, but they do not have a feel for the rhythm of a group. It can be taught with practice, however.

In my office, I choose something simple, like the alphabet or a simple rhyme. We practice saying it all together at the same time in the same rhythm. We may clap hands at the same time, or walk together with the same step rhythm.

What other children might intuitively learn from observing the group, a bouncy child may need to be taught directly. The key is that it needs to be taught by a calm adult.

You need to plan time to model and practice the new behaviors, rather than scolding or chiding about the behaviors you don't want.

CHANGING DIRECTIONS

The ADD mind is somewhat like an ocean liner. You may turn the wheel now, but it will take quite some time to make a ninety degree turn.

Whenever an ADD person gets on a path, it can be very hard to get them to stop before they have reached their logical conclusion. I remember working with a little boy who started counting to 10. At the time, I made the choice to wait until he had reached his logical conclusion before continuing the lesson.

I don't recommend always waiting, because that would increase the symptom. There will be times when you choose to help an ADD person change direction. This will happen spontaneously, and you will deal with it in the moment.

As a parent, you need to know that transitions may be particularly hard for your child. They may enjoy both activities, but have difficulty moving from one to another. Gentle adult assistance and insistence can help a child learn how to transition.

DEALING WITH DISTRACTIBILITY

You are calm, centered and relentless.

You must pull together all three of the above if you are to help effectively. Let's say, for example, you are doing homework with your child. You say, "what's 4 + 3?" and your child starts to tell a story.

You point to the page, calmly say something about looking at the problem, and say, “what’s $4 + 3$?” and your child asks you what’s out the window.

You stay calm, point to the page, request your child look at the problem, and say, “what’s $4 + 3$?” Repeat. Repeat. Repeat as many times as you have to.

Eventually, your child will look at the problem, count it out, and say, “seven.” You may begin the entire process again when you request the child write 7.

This is not easy for most adults – but it helps to remember that your child is not deliberately trying to make you mad.

As I have been writing this, my daughter has come in and asked me to take her ice skating. I said yes, and then suggested she get appropriate clothes on (she’s currently wearing a bikini).

As I guessed, she immediately got distracted and went off to play. She just came back to give me a kiss and show me she had an Omega burst in her mouth (we’ll discuss Omega burst in a few minutes). I commented that she was still in a bikini, which won’t work so well for ice skating.

She went off in search of clothing, but has gotten distracted somewhere along the way. Regardless how this turns out, I know that my job is to stay calm, centered, and relentless. I won't scold if she misses ice skating. I'll quit writing and go if she gets ready.

I'm guessing we'll probably make it there late, but we'll get there. Whatever the outcome, it will be directly related to the maturity of her decision-making, and her ability to control her own distractibility.

Consequence is the only true teacher.

Getting and staying focused is hard for your child, so I am going to tell you about some of the focus tools my family and students use.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD GET FOCUSED

BALANCE BOARDS AND ACTIVITIES

In my years in learning centers, I have run across a number of programs that offer you the moon. Having bought a number of them, I can tell you that I do not yet own the moon.

That being said, I have learned that combined approaches are more effective than any of these programs by themselves.

There is a clear connection between focus and balance. A number of programs use balance to create focus, and they are effective. At one point, I paid over \$300 for a poorly made balance board with a workbook and a CD that wouldn't play.

I'd rather you not make the same mistake. I do strongly believe in balance boards. They are fun, challenging, and can make a real difference if used over time. Click here for a great one here: [balance board](#).

This balance board is designed for athletes, and is not part of an educational program – so it is both more challenging and less expensive than the educational ones. Click here to download a set of balance board games from my website: www.focalpointwenatchee.com.

If you want a balance board that is more fun (but also more expensive), you might prefer to try this one: [fun balance board](#).

If you like to comparison shop, you can compare and read about your balance board options [here](#).

At FocalPoint – all students have the option to sit on an exercise ball to do their work. Virtually all of them prefer the ball, and I have had disappointed kids when I did not have enough balance balls for everyone. With some experimentation, I have discovered that the 75 cm ball places you at the right height to the table, whereas

the smaller ones do not. However, if you have a 65 cm balance ball at home, you can use it by adding this: [balance ball base](#).

I have also discovered that the stay-put balance balls are better for kids. You can find the ones I prefer here: [balance balls](#).

Other balance related activities: because I know balance and focus are closely connected in the brain, I have been doing balance activities on a budget since my daughter was little. I got us a season pass and taught her how to ice skate when she was three. Every Christmas and birthday features some great new toy that will require her to balance. She has no idea how I am manipulating her into brain development, but she is having a great time.

Here are some balance-related activities for your child. Control click on any link to see the items:

[Pogo Sticks](#)

[Jumpers and Bouncers](#)

[Stilts for Kids](#)

SUPPLEMENTS

Although I do not recommend prescription medications with side-effects, there are a couple of supplements that my family and my students have used with success.

Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids are proving it be an important part of a healthy body. Some people take them for heart health. They are also an essential part of a healthy

brain. My understanding is that Omega 3 and 6 are the fuels the brain burns. If your brain does not have optimum fuel, it will burn something else.

Just like low grade fuel will muck up your engine, it will muck up your brain as well. I find that the Omega 3 and 6 I take every day helps me stay focused for longer periods of time. I get more done, and stay more focused on my goals with omega fatty acids than without them.

Everyone in my family takes an Omega 3 and 6 supplement every day. I take an adult supplement. I have had some bad experiences with other products that left me literally with a bad taste in my mouth. With some research, I found a product with an extremely thick coating. It does not break down in your stomach, but in your intestines. That means you take fewer supplements and get better results – all without that bad fishy taste. You can find my preference here: [Norwegian Gold Omega](#).

My daughter and my students take one that is especially designed for children. This one is in a little squeeze pack and tastes like pudding. Even my pickiest students have been willing to take this omega. You can find it at: [Coromega Omega 3](#).

A number of years ago, I heard blue-green algae, in the form of chlorella, recommended for ADD kids. I mentioned it to the parents of my students, and soon they were coming back to me and telling me what a life-changer it was.

It seems to help with distractibility, and has made a difference for my students. The best quality is Sun Chlorella. There are other brands, but I have not seen the same results. Feel free to experiment, but my recommendation is this one: [Sun Chlorella](#).

As a second choice, I would recommend the powdered chlorella you can find [here](#).

You can compare and read all about your chlorella choices [here](#).

More recently, I decided to check out focus supplements. I discovered the DMAE is a natural substance that has been shown to increase intelligence, improve mood and increase focus. Once I started my daughter on it, we had fewer melt-downs and got more of her home school done more quickly. I like this one: [Focus For Children](#).

NEUROFEEDBACK

For several years, I have been referring ADHD students out for neurofeedback with a local counselor. It costs about \$60 per session and takes 30 – 40 sessions for it to work. Some of these counselors can bill your insurance company, and others cannot. It depends what kind of a degree they have, and if they have taken the right classes.

For a while, I was in talks with a local woman who has her certification in neurofeedback to come in and work with my students at my learning center. This sent me into some research about neurofeedback.

In my research, I discovered that there are a number of companies out there that will sell parents the equipment to use neurofeedback techniques with a specially modified video game at home.

This is cutting edge technology, and after my research and consideration, I decided to get the one that is NASA certified. This was developed for use on astronauts to help them get and stay focused in an extremely demanding environment.

The machine has a helmet with sensors that measure the frequencies being given off by the brain. When the student gets distracted, she gives off lower frequencies, and the game slows down and won't work quite right. When she starts to focus, she gives off a higher frequency brain wave, and the game speeds up, works right, and gets more fun.

The game is designed to reward the brain for a focused state such that, over time, students increase from being focused 50% of the time to maintaining focus 80% of the time.

In research, the modified videogame and the neurofeedback got about the same results. However, the videogame had a distinct advantage in that it was more fun. As a parent, you know that more fun translates to more likely that your child complete the whole program.

You can find the neurofeedback game at: [CyberLearning Technologies](#).

You can listen to an NPR report about it here: [NPR Story](#).

PARENTING THE BOUNCY CHILD

When you are dealing with an ADD or ADHD child, you are going to need three things:

Patience.

Patience.

And, of course, patience.

These kids can be highly to work with and teach. Yet these are some of the brightest, most creative kids I have ever met. With the right mind-set and techniques we can help them unleash their potential and really achieve.

As a parent, you are your child's first and most important advocate. I have not hesitated to step between my child and an adult who did not understand her high energy level. I simply will not allow anyone to put her down for being who she is.

Because I did not feel she was capable of classroom work, I home-schooled her for four years. You may not have the expertise or resources to do that, but you can still be your child's advocate. If you can afford it, shop independent schools in your area. I highly recommend Waldorf and Montessori. Other non-affiliated independent schools can be excellent as well.

At fourth grade, I put my daughter in public school. I made the extra effort to go and meet with her teachers, and to make sure the classroom would work for her. I have been impressed with the customer service and the attention we have gotten at our local public school. After homeschooling 4 years, I was a little worried when I put her in school, but they really worked with me.

Sometimes, I might be the "squeaky wheel," and they might get a little frustrated with me. But – when my daughter needs me to come to her aid – I do. At fourth grade, I greet her from school every day and ask for each item on my list of potential homework. Sometimes she has it all together, and sometimes she needs to go back and get it. Because organizational skills are a challenge for her, I have found ways to place assistance into her life.

If you cannot physically pick up your child every day, I suggest you find another way to have assistance worked into the schedule. Children with special needs can get accommodations through 504 plans and Individualized Education Plans. Depending on the school, you may need to be the squeaky wheel and push for accommodations. Often, meeting with guidance counselors is a good way to get and maintain accommodations.

Do not assume that an accommodation is happening because it has been written into the plan. Ask. Talk to the teacher directly. Ask your child. Make sure your child is sitting in the front of the classroom if that is the agreement. Stop into the class before school, after school or email the teacher. Yes, this is very assertive, and it may be uncomfortable with it. Give yourself to be assertive. Even if it makes people a little uncomfortable, you will help your child get his needs met.

TIPS FOR HOMEWORK TIME

You will also need to be pro-active with homework. I do not ever recommend you send your child into another room to do homework. You *might* be able to do this in high school, but do not plan on it before.

- Have the child near you in the house, so you can observe.
- Choose a well-lit area.
- Choose a comfortable place to sit and a table or desk to write on.
- Turn off TV's, video games and computers (unless you are completing homework on the computer). *The visual feed of TV, video game, or computer is highly distracting to these kids. You cannot expect any work to get done if you do not require them to turn it off.*
- Radio can be allowed for students who can concentrate with it on: test out this theory before you agree to have it on.
- Remove cell phones and texting to another room or turn them off.
- Provide water (always), and healthy food (as necessary).

- Give assistance when needed.

My daughter is not ready yet to complete all homework without my assistance, so I give some. I am always looking for ways to push her to do more unassisted work, asking questions, providing hints, but not giving answers.

I let go of the belief that a certain age translates to a certain ability level. Kids mature at different speeds. Your job is to observe your child's current level of maturity and respond to that. You can always be stimulating a greater level of responsibility and maturity without demanding or assuming it should already be learned.