



CHADD and the National Resource Center on ADHD

Ask the Expert Chat Series

July 13, 2011 – What African Americans Should Know about a Diagnosis of ADHD

Moderators – NRC Staff

Expert – U. Diane Buckingham, MD

Moderator 1: Thank you for joining us today. We will begin shortly. Just to remind everybody, this is a moderated chat. All questions go to the moderator and we will do our best to post as many of your questions as possible.

It's likely that many of you may have similar questions dealing with the same issue. Even though your particular question may not be posted, please try to see how Dr. Buckingham responds to other question may apply to your situation.

And now for our first question

KurlyGrl: Thank you for hosting this chat geared specifically towards the African-American community. I am an African-American mother of a 7-year-old son with ADHD. I struggle with all the same concerns, questions and information as any other parent who has a child with ADHD. Knowing that each individual child is unique, it seems as if a child with ADHD is the same as any other child with ADHD, generally speaking. I don't think the condition affects our children differently, but the public perceives our children differently. Why do you think that is?

What makes the African-American community unique in that we need a platform to discuss our children apart from the general population? In a perfect world we would not even need a separate discussion like this but I am grateful that we have this outlet here.

Diane Buckingham: I agree. Each child is an individual. Social, environmental, and cultural factors might influence how our children are perceived by teachers, family members and parents. Other factors that can influence the perception of our children are cultural differences, economic status, language, knowledge, and personal experiences with children who have ADHD.

Also the willingness to seek help and not deny the symptoms of ADHD is important for all. I appreciate each and every one of you having the desire to seek help and a second opinion today. We need to start breaking down the stigma that ADHD has in the African-American community.

Wendi30: Why is there such a stigma giving our children medicine?

Diane Buckingham: "Don't put your business in the street." Secrets. It is easier to deny ADHD than to address it, and by addressing it, many parents feel they are opening themselves up for criticism, as do many of our children who have ADHD.

It is interesting to see what happens when I walk in the halls of different schools. Often, if I am in the hall of a school that is attended by patients of mine who are white, I hear someone yell, "Hey Dr. Buckingham, come on down."

Often with other cultures, but not all, blacks/African Americans, will not acknowledge their psychiatrist in the hall this way, even when we have had great communication.

Bennettosu: Do the symptoms of ADHD manifest differently in someone who is African American? How can a clinician best educate parents about ADHD?

Diane Buckingham: The symptoms generally present the same, but each parent has a different level of tolerance for the symptoms. Some parents will see the symptoms as a sign that something more is going on, others will be in denial.

Knowledge is power. Know the risks of medical treatment and alternative treatment or non-treatment vs. the benefits. A good resource is the [National Resource Center on ADHD's website](#).

Proper treatment starts with assessment, evaluation, and an interview with the child or teenager. Frequently, parents want a doctor/CRNP to prescribe medication based only on the interview with the parent and not see the child or teenager. That is generally not in the best interest of the patient. Individual assessment and thorough review of other underlying physical or emotional issues are vital parts of a detailed evaluation.

Smiles: From a doctor's perspective, what concerns should a parent have when her African-American son has been diagnosed with ADHD?

Diane Buckingham: A few that come to mind are how do you as a parent understand the clinician's concerns, how do you as a parent want to proceed in the care of your son and how much does your son understand about what you are doing? What medication or non-medication intervention is needed? How much your relatives believe the behavioral issues are parenting and not the result of a disorder like ADHD?

Historically, as per research studies, a higher percentage of African Americans perceive the problem as disciplinary and not ADHD, especially among relatives.

Moderator 1: While we are waiting to learn more about confronting the myths and misconceptions about ADHD, please see our article [Myths and Misconceptions About ADHD: Science over Cynicism](#).

Melinda: Is it safe to put an 11-year-old girl on medication? Our daughter was diagnosed with the inattentive variety of ADHD last fall and we have been managing her disorder with counseling and academic coaching. We are nervous about meds but want to give her every opportunity to reach her potential. Please weigh in. Thanks!

Diane Buckingham: Each child is an individual with medication needs based on the symptom severity. Closely follow-up with your physician/CRNP regarding symptoms and determination of medications if needed. Work with the school for accommodations. If symptoms interfere with the emotional growth of the child, than medication options need to be reviewed with the child's treatment provider.

It is great to know that your child is receiving that academic support. Awareness is key to your child's level of function.

Moderator 1: To learn more about Managing Medication please see our [What We Know Sheet #3](#), for children and adolescents.

Sevepeete: Are African-American children more or less likely to be diagnosed with ADHD in schools?

Diane Buckingham: Overall in the country, the data shows African-American children are less likely to be diagnosed with ADHD in school. Frequently children of color get a diagnosis of conduct disorder or oppositional disorders. Boredom plays a major factor in the outcome of the presentation. The boredom can be due to ADHD issues, but also can indicate a gifted child who needs a creative environment.

Jennifer: What do teachers need to be aware of in regard to cultural differences in the manifestation of ADHD?

Diane Buckingham: Knowledge of the child as a person is key. Each child is different and symptoms manifest differently. Being aware if they ate breakfast or lunch and if they get enough sleep can help as these factors can influence behavior. Communication with parents is important too. Teachers should also have knowledge of not only ADHD symptoms, but anxiety, depression and other emotional and physical illness which can lead to ADHD-like symptoms.

Moderator 1: Want to receive well-rounded comprehensive knowledge about ADHD? [Parent to Parent courses](#) offered in local communities and online, provide educational information and support for individuals and families dealing with AD/HD and learning to navigate the challenges of AD/HD across the lifespan.

Createwithdenise: What are the culturally correct assessment tools for ADHD? Are they the same in schools as in medical offices?

Diane Buckingham: There are extensive studies on tools of assessment underway. Treatment providers should have a strong awareness of: symptoms, language, personal issues, acculturation, economic issues, definition of impulse, and understanding of labels. There are also cultural issues of trust vs. mistrust that have to be overcome. Work to find a provider who is culturally sensitive.

Beautiful: What are some examples of non-medication interventions? Would you consider treatment by diet or other forms of alternative treatment, especially for older teens and young adults?

Diane Buckingham: Forms of non-medication treatments for teenagers can vary. Some simple questions that may help manage symptoms at home are:

- Where is the cell phone?
- How much sleep does your teenager get? Sleep is greatly important for attention improvement.
- How much down time is spent with the family?
- How many hours do you spend 1:1 with your teenager reviewing homework and relationships?
- How many times do you sit with your teenager to eat dinner?
- Where do they sit in school and how much do they eat in school?
- Some children and teenagers have a risk of diabetes, thus sugar may play a role in their response.
- What environmental factors are in play, such as how often do you argue with your teenagers and argue in the house? These factors play a significant role.

Moderator 1: While we are waiting to learn more about behavior management please see our [What We Know Sheet # 75: Behavioral Treatment for Children and Teenagers with ADHD.](#)

Reatewithdenise: Is it true that ADHD is more identified in African-American kids and it relates to the rate at which fathers are often not in the home? That seems to be a big misconception. Or is it?

Diane Buckingham: There is research that has reviewed the diagnosis and treatment of ADHD in minority populations. It has been found that ADHD is under-diagnosed and undertreated in these groups. It largely depends on the area a person lives in, but in general, ADHD is often missed.

Regarding fathers: It does not matter if black, white, or other background, the lack of a father figure impacts the child. As we know, it is sad that many African-Americans don't have that role model. We can overcome that barrier by providing strength in our families and helping our children to grow with what they have, vs. what they wish they had in their family.

Scotty: What is the best approach for addressing the parenting myth with family members?

Diane Buckingham: The best approach to address parenting is:

- Accept that you can change yourself but you might not be able to change your relatives.
- Continue to educate them on ADHD if they will allow, but if not, let it go.
- Deal with your pain of not having a relative understand of what it means to you and your child.
- Consider using some examples of people in the media.
- Look at the impact of what is lost due to untreated ADHD, Bipolar, and other mental illness.
 - Lost money.
 - Lost jobs.

- Conflict with coaches and others.
- Look at the lost souls in jail, many of whom suffer from untreated ADHD or other mental illnesses.

ADHD is a myth no more; it is real and has a real world impact. Thus, ADHD treatment is needed.

Sevepeete: When finding a professional to work with for treatment, what questions should a parent ask a doctor or mental health professional to determine their competency with ADHD?

Diane Buckingham: What percentage of their patients are children? Adults? Thus, if you are seeking adult services for ADHD and they only see children, you know they cannot provide the services you need.

What types of screening tools are used?

If that clinician does not learn how symptoms present across a variety of settings such as school, home, and social, it is easy to miss other possible underlying issues. What is the severity of the symptoms they see compared to what you see?

Ask if they screen for physical causes of attention and impulsive symptoms and assess a collection of history from you and your child/teenager.

Mental Status Examinations: See if that provider observes your child with and without you present.

Make sure they take time for you to hear their concerns and to address your concerns. Also, willingness for them to hear from your child or adolescent their response in regard to medications.

Moderator 1: We have about ten minutes left. Dr. Buckingham will move through as many questions as possible. If we are unable to get to your question please contact one of our Health Information Specialists on ADHD by calling 1-800-233-4050 between 9 AM- 5PM EST or by clicking on the “Ask A Question” link on the top of [our website](#).

Jay: How do you help/teach your African-American teenaged son to accept his ADHD, especially so that he is more receptive to treatment? And, what resources would you recommend using?

Diane Buckingham: As a parent, clarify what he thinks about each aspect: Medication, diagnosis, etc. What are his barriers to treatment? Educate yourself on ADHD and be ready to explain to him the importance of seeking proper treatment and the consequences of leaving it untreated. Also be ready to eliminate myths. A great resources I recommend is help4adhd.org.

If group support, family therapy or individual therapy might help, find a good therapist, and allow alone time with the therapist so your son can voice his concerns.

Most importantly, just be there for him.

Moderator 1: Thank you Dr. Buckingham for being our expert today. Your knowledge is sure to help those affected by ADHD in the Multi-Cultural Community.

If we did not answer your question today, please feel free to contact one of our Health Information Specialists on ADHD by calling 1-800-233-4050 between 9 AM- 5PM EST or by clicking on the “Ask A Question” link on the top of our website: help4adhd.org.

Diane Buckingham: I appreciate all your questions, input and your willingness to seek help. Thank you.

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The views expressed in this chat are those of the guest expert and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), the National Resource Center on ADHD, or the CDC.

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