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Drug-Free Approach For ADHD

Fidgety, high-energy children are often labeled with ADHD and put on powerful drugs for years. Now there's a new drug-free approach to help children focus in the classroom.

This isn't your typical American middle school class. These kids, labeled with ADHD, are practicing transcendental meditation, or TM.

William Stixrud, Ph.D., clinical neuropsychologist: "It allows you to do, to experience very profound levels of relaxation while you're wide awake."



Dr. Stixrud claims TM is easy for kids. They simply sit, eyes closed for 10 minutes, twice a day. He says, while the body is at rest, the mind is not.

Sarina Grosswald, EdD, educator: "There's increased blood flow to the brain, and that's important because that's one of the things they show with ADHD is that there's reduced blood flow in the brain."

Educator Sarina Grosswald led a study on TM for kids with ADHD.

Sarina Grosswald, EdD: "Dramatic reductions in stress, anxiety, depression."

She says organization, memory and strategizing skills also improved.

Alejandro, 14 years old: "It felt really refreshing, like really cleansing, and I felt really relaxed."

Eleven-year-old Chana says TM makes her less impulsive.

Chana, 11 years old: "I'm starting to think before I talk to my friends."

Will, 11 years old: "It's amazing how easy it is, and yet, yet it does so much for you."

Dr. Stixrud would like to see meditation in all of America's schools.

Dr. Stixrud: "It's crazy that we'd have kids, where the first response for a kid who's anxious is put him on medicine and not teach him a way to regulate his own mind and body."

Of course, critics say, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is over-diagnosed. After all, one in 20 U.S. children gets labeled with ADHD and put on powerful drugs like Ritalin to make them behave in crowded classrooms. Whereas in Europe and Canada, the

diagnosis is still very rare. Nevertheless, it seems like meditation is a drug-free solution that may help children focus no matter what the diagnosis.

Whether TM can reduce the meds kids need hasn't been studied, but doctors hope to look at that next and they hope to try it on all ages of children.

Research Summary: ADHD Meditation

ADHD IN OUR SCHOOLS: ADHD is a disorder that affects nearly 4.5 million kids in the United States. It's the most common psychosocial disorder in children. William Stixrud, Ph.D., a clinical neuropsychologist, says: "It's a disorder of executive function. Executive function refers to the kind of mental skills you need to carry out goal-directed behavior." Ritalin is the treatment most commonly offered to children with ADHD, but it has its drawbacks. Stixrud says: "Ritalin is an important treatment at this point in our cultural history. The challenge is that it's an imperfect treatment. Certainly very few kids are functioning optimally on Ritalin." Researchers and educators across the country are looking for a solution to ADHD. It may not replace medication just yet, but some say meditation could be a simple treatment with big results.



MEDITATION IN SCHOOLS: Transcendental Meditation (TM) is a specific form of meditation. It is a simple, natural process that helps the mind settle down to a state of "restful alertness." Stixrud says: "TM is a mental technique that involves simply narrowing the focus of the mind in a very effortless way that allows the mind to settle down. Once the mind settles down, the body becomes deeply relaxed. It allows you to do, to experience very profound levels of relaxation while you're wide awake." Educator Sarina

Grosswald and Stixrud recently studied how TM helped kids with ADHD in the school setting. For the study, kids with ADHD meditated 10 minutes, twice a day. They simply sat in silence, eyes closed, thinking about nothing more than a mantra, which could consist of a single word. Sarina Grosswald says: "People say, 'Can these kids really meditate?' because there's a concept that it's something that requires focus. TM is the exact opposite of that. It's effortless. It's natural, and it uses the natural tendency of the mind."

RESULTS: Grosswald and Stixrud's study revealed kids who meditated had significant improvements in several areas. There were 45-percent to 50-percent reductions in stress, anxiety and depression. Kids also showed significant improvements in organizational skills, memory, strategizing, mental flexibility, attention and impulsivity. Grosswald says, "It really did exceed my expectations in looking at the results that we saw." Other studies of TM on kids without ADHD have shown it lowers blood pressure, and it can also actually raise IQ. A two-year study of children practicing TM revealed the children made significant gains on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (more than 20 percentile points in math and 15 percentile points in reading). For kids with ADHD, the benefits might run much deeper. Stixrud says: "It's crazy that we'd have kids, where the first response for a kid who's anxious is put him on medicine and not teach him a way to regulate his own mind and body. Absurd." He and Grosswald would both like to see the use of TM spread through America's schools. Stixrud says, "It's absolutely doable."

HOW TO GET TM IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL: Some schools across the country have already incorporated meditation into their daily routines. Stixrud urges parents to contact the national TM organization to have a speaker come to their child's school to talk to officials about TM. For more information, contact: www.tm.org