

# ADHD

**Question:** Does the diagnosis change the discipline techniques? It seems that in the Christian community ADD/ADHD is not a valued diagnosis. I have three children and many years of childcare and parenting experience. My child with ADHD is much different than any children that I can recall. I really trust that she is different and processes things differently. This is a recent diagnosis and I don't want to rely on worldly advice. I would like to know a Christian viewpoint on parenting a child with ADHD.

**Response:** I am certainly no expert in regards to ADD/ADHD. It is certainly a huge issue in today's society. A [2007 study](#) showed that about 9% of kids in the U.S. have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and only about a third of those kids are on medications for it. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) [reported in 2008](#) that around 5% of kids aged 6-17 years old have been officially diagnosed with ADHD by a medical professional. Obviously, the implications are staggering. Millions of kids are affected.

I suspect there are a few reasons people question the validity of an ADD/ADHD diagnosis. 1) A lot of people think it can be a valid diagnosis, but one that is over diagnosed or over medicated. 2) Many of the symptoms for ADD and [ADHD](#) are similar to those exhibited by undisciplined children. 3) There is no definitive test for ADHD (according to my research).

There is no doubt in my mind that children are remarkably different from one another. They have different temperaments, personalities, and interests. Some are self starters and others can hardly be coerced into going to the circus. One child will burst into tears over a look of displeasure, and another will set his mind to disobey even in the face of severe consequences. There is undoubtedly a percentage of kids with certain temperaments and personalities who will make the job of parenting extremely challenging, to say the least.

So, without a doubt, some kids present a significantly greater behavioral challenge than others. Doctors have labeled a certain set of these kids, who have particular behavioral issues, as having a disorder called ADHD. I'm certainly in no place to argue with them.

So, what do we do about it? Unfortunately, the Bible does not clearly address a number of current topics such as this one. However, biblical principles can still guide us. In my mind, the important question to ask oneself is, "Does my child have the ability to obey?" If you know she can obey, then it doesn't matter if she has a disorder or not. She still needs to obey. A loving parent will help her learn to obey by giving boundaries and appropriate discipline. That might take a lot more work than with an ADHD child, but it still needs to be done.

A child who absolutely cannot obey should not be disciplined for something that she cannot control.

So, let's assume a child has ADHD and you give her the task to pick up his room and you give her 20 minutes in which to do it. After 20 minutes you come back and it looks like she picked up three things. The question to ask is, does she have a complete inability to focus long enough to pick up, or does she merely have a propensity toward distraction, and if she was properly motivated (through positive and/or negative consequences) she could have done it?

My (non medical) opinion is that almost all kids can be motivated toward better behavior. I think the real danger is to think that because they have ADHD that they can't obey, and as a result structure and discipline are withheld. That sounds like a recipe for disaster, and in many families that is exactly the scenario that is playing out.

In *The New Strong-Willed Child* (2004), James Dobson has a chapter on ADHD. He quoted from Dr. Domeena Renshaw's *The Hyperactive Child* and number one on the list of discipline guidelines was "Be consistent in rules and discipline." He quoted Dr. Walt Larimore as saying, "The most important treatment for children with ADHD is abundant affection and affirmation." Lots of love and lots of correction. That sounds like great advice to me for parents of all children.

On his [website](#) he relayed the following correspondence:

*One of our constituents wrote to Focus on the Family saying, "We have a 5-year-old son who has been diagnosed with ADHD. He is difficult to handle, and I have no idea how to manage him. I know he has a neurological problem; I don't feel right about making him obey like we do our other children. It is a big problem for us. What do you suggest?"*

*Dr. Dobson responded to this mother: "I understand your dilemma, but I urge you to discipline your son. Every youngster needs the security of defined limits, and the ADHD child is no exception. Such a child should be held responsible for his behavior, although the approach may be a little different."*

In short, if I had a child with ADHD, I would still use biblical principles in training her. That does not mean that there is nothing wrong with her, or that she is just like every other child. I do not believe that. However, with consistent love, guidance, and correction, in addition to lots of prayer and hard work, kids will respond and make significant behavioral improvements.