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Parents and Teachers Working Hand in Hand: Training Programme for Parents and Teachers of Pupils with ADHD

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MONITORING, EVALUATING & ASSESSMENT OF ADHD

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Despite the existence of relatively clear diagnostic guidelines (APA, 1994), establishing a diagnosis is a difficult matter (Anastopoulos & Schaffer, 2001; Neul, Applegate & Drabman, 2003). Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are generally characterized by their inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Nevertheless, these characteristics may vary a lot, according to the child, the situation and the circumstances. They may occur in different degrees of severity, affecting students in different ways, and may be associated with other disorders.

The authors conclude that any assessment of ADHD must be comprehensive and multi-dimensional in nature, to capture variations and differences in all situations and settings. To identify any co-morbid features and the impact on home, school and social functioning (op. cit, 2001).

There is, to date, no single diagnostic test to identify ADHD. Professionals should rely on a battery of measures and data to diagnose ADHD and to organise an intervention plan. This battery varies according to different authors. Wright (2002) proposes that the battery should consist of documentation of general educational interventions, parent and teacher interviews, behaviour rating scales and classroom observations. Resnick (2005) suggests that evaluation of ADHD should be based on the following sources: (a) Psychological, developmental, and social history, including employment and educational history for adults; (b) School records, including report cards, achievement tests, teacher/school reports, and special services / special education testing along with Individual Education Plans (IEP's); (c) Teacher ratings; (d) Parent ratings; (e) Computerized Assessment Tests, measuring inattention, distractibility, and impulsivity (ex: Conner's Continuous Performance Test); (f) Mental Status Exam, observing the person for symptoms of ADHD while ruling out other diagnoses.

We are going to review some of the data sources mentioned above, paying special attention to measures that should be obtained in school or at home, and that are particularly important to the organisation of a behavioural intervention plan. Specifically, we are going to talk about: Interviews, Behaviour Rating Scales, Clinic-based Measures and Direct Observation. We are going to pay special attention to a method called Functional Behaviour Assessment, very useful for understanding behavioural sequences that are affecting the behaviour of the child.

Interviews

Interviews are generally conducted by a clinician and are very useful to access the cumulative knowledge base of adults closely associated with the child (Wright, 2002). Given their flexibility, unstructured and semi-structured, interviews with parents, teachers and the child itself can yield a wealth of information about the child's functioning in a large number of situations and settings (Anastopoulos & Schaffer, 2001). Besides, they allow the clinician to clarify any point they

consider pertinent arising from the interviews, and helps setting the groundwork for effective behavioural interventions.

The major drawback is that unstructured and semi-structured interviews don't allow accurate, normative, comparisons, complicating the process of documenting deviance from usual developmental milestones (Anastopoulos & Schaffer, 2001). Only structured interviews allow this process, but on the other hand, these are not very easy to employ in clinical settings.

Parent Interviews

Parents are considered the most comprehensive source of information about the child's previous development and adjustment, including ADHD characteristics, displayed within the home. Parents can also provide information on the child's developmental and medical history, family background, and peer relationships. It is also important to learn about family relationships and the home environment, about families coping strategies with the child's behaviour and the success of these strategies (Carter, 1994).

Teacher Interviews

Teacher interviews are an opportunity to collect information about the student and, most importantly, about the classroom environment and teaching strategies used by the teacher. The teacher can also offer their perspective on the student's cognitive and emotional functioning. Finally, intervention strategies and plans can be discussed between clinicians and teachers (op. cit.).

Student Interviews

An informal interview with the student can reveal important information about family, school, social interactions, the student's feelings and how these influence behaviour, the student's strengths and weaknesses and many other subjects. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that student's behaviour during interviews should not be considered an example of their behaviour in other settings (op. cit.).

There are standardised procedures regarding child / student interviews. Anastopoulos and Schaffer (2001) mention the Diagnostic Interview Schedule for Children (DISC; Costello, Edelbrock, Kalas, Kessler & Klaric, 1982) and the Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents (DICA; Herjanic, Brown & Wheat, 1975), both of which can be now administered via computer in a format compatible with DSM-IV. Carter (1994) also suggests the Child Behaviour Cheklist – Youth Self-Report (CBCL-YSR; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1987) as a useful screening measure for symptoms frequently associated with ADHD.

Behaviour Rating Scales

Standardised behaviour checklists and rating scales are very convenient. Their ability to be completed by a range of respondents such are parents and teachers, allied with their ability to gather information across any time interval and being norm referenced have led to their widespread application in clinical practice (Anastopoulos & Schaffer, 2001).

McConaughy (1993, cit. in Wright, 2004) outlines the main characteristics of behaviour-rating scales: they typically contain a list of characteristics and behaviours, often stated in observable behavioural terms, to be endorsed by a teacher, parent, or other person who knows the child well. The responses are then summed up to generate an overview of the student's functioning. The results are usually stated in standard scores based upon a normative sample. This normative sample allows comparisons of the child's behaviour and the behaviour of children of the same age and gender, to determine if the behaviours identified in the behaviour rating scale are exhibited to a significantly greater or lesser degree (Carter, 1994).

Behavioural Rating Scales for Teachers

Teachers should only be asked to fill in these scales when they have a good Knowledge of the student's behaviour (at least 45 to 60 days). Additionally, behavioural rating scales are subject to rater bias and dependent on the teacher familiarity with the student and, therefore, may present an inaccurate picture of the student (Carter, 1994, Wright, 2004).

Some of the scales usually found in literature include:

- ADHD Comprehensive Teacher Rating Scale (Ullman, Sleator & Sprague, 1991)
- Child Behaviour Checklist (Achenbach, 2001)
- School Situations Questionnaire – Revised (DuPaul & Barkley, 1992)
- ADHD Rating Scale (DuPaul, Power, Anastopoulos & Reid, 1998)
- Conners Teacher Rating Scales (Conners, 1997)
- SNAP Rating Scale (Swanson, 1992)
- Child Attention Profile (DuPaul, 1990)

Behavioural Rating Scales for Parents

Parents can be excellent sources of information because they have observed their child for a long time in a wide range of situations but, conversely, parents are more prone to lose their objectivity, answering according to what they believe would be more desirable. In addition, parents are not usually familiar with other students of the same age as their child, therefore losing their "normative" knowledge.

Some of the scales include:

- Child Behaviour Checklist (Achenbach, 2001)
- Home Situations Questionnaire – Revised (DuPaul & Barkley, 1992)
- ADHD Rating Scale (DuPaul, Power, Anastopoulos & Reid, 1998)
- Yale Children's Inventory (Shaywitz, Schnell, Shaywitz, & Towle, l986)
- Conners Parent Rating Scales (Conners, 1997)

Clinic - Based Measures

Laboratory measures of sustained attention and impulsivity are commonly included in ADHD evaluations and assessments (Anastotpoulos & Schaffer, 2001). Of these, perhaps the most widely used is the Continuous Performance Test (CPT), of which there exist a number of versions: the Conners (Conners, 1994), the Test of Variables of Attention (Grenberg & Waldman, 1993) and the Gordon Diagnostic System (Gordon, 1983). Although they seem to differentiate groups of ADHD children from children without ADHD, they frequently produce unacceptably high false negative rates when applied to individuals (Anastopolous & Schaffer, 2001).

Direct Observation

Conducting behavioural observations in the classroom using standardised techniques to observe selected behaviours of the target student is a fundamental part of the ADHD assessment (Wright, 2004). Frequently it is considered a second phase of the assessment procedure, following the diagnosis, and is conducted to ascertain the extent that ADHD affects

the student's academic performance (Carter, 1994). Teachers know that student's behaviour may keep them from learning in class therefore, a team effort is needed to develop Individualised Education Programs (IEP's). These should be based on a functional behaviour assessment that allows the team to develop a behaviour intervention plan to deal with behaviours that interfere with the learning of the student or with the learning of others (or that require disciplinary action).

The behaviours we are talking about don't usually have a single cause, and it is fundamental to understand why a particular student presents a given behaviour. Although many students display behaviours that present as very similar their causes or triggers can be quite different (Quinn, Gable, Rutherford, Nelson & Howell, 1998). If we focused only on the presenting behaviour(s), we would have little information about the underlying causes and therefore, planned interventions would have only a small likelihood of being effective. If we identify the causes or functions of the behaviour, for instance, what the student gets or avoids with their behaviour, we can design an intervention program that is aimed directly at their behaviours, not just at the consequences of the behaviours. Just focusing on the presenting behaviour(s) is often unfair to the student and may become a barrier to a positive student - teacher interaction and communication.

Functional Behavioural Assessment is a method of identifying the causes and functions of behaviours, which incorporates a range of techniques and strategies of data collection. It addresses environmental, biological, social and even cognitive and affective variables that are important in the initiation, sustaining or prevention of behaviours.

Another major issue with functional behaviour analysis is that, most of the time, although the behaviour presents as inappropriate the intended outcome of the behaviour in not inappropriate. The team generating the student's individual education plan, (IEP team), should take this fact into consideration (op. cit). If a student is misbehaving to seek attention from their teacher then the focus of the intervention plan shouldn't be to prevent misbehaviour from happening but to teach the student acceptable ways to seek attention and provide positive reinforcements when students use these strategies.

CONDUCTING A FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT

The process of assessment has four main steps: (1) identify the problem behaviour; (2) to conduct an indirect assessment; (3) direct observation; (4) formulate a hypothesis about the function of the behaviour (Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency, 2003; Winsor, 2003).

Identify the problem behaviour

The basis for the functional analysis is to provide a clear definition of the problem behaviour(s). The goal of the IEP team should be to put the problems in an objective way and where possible, in a behavioural sequence (Antecedents – Behaviours – Consequences, or ABC). If we have more than one problem behaviour we should try to prioritize them.

Therefore, we should be certain that the behaviour we focus on is, in reality, the behaviour that is causing problems for the student, their peers or teachers. For instance, we can identify "gets out from their seat", as the problem behaviour, but that would not be as much of a problem if the student wouldn't hit and kick their peers each time they left their seat. This implies that the team should look at behaviours from many angles trying to clarify some questions: (1) is the problem behaviour linked to a skill deficit? (2) Does the student have the skill but doesn't desire to modify their behaviour? (Quinn et al, 1998).

The first question suggests that some behaviour problems result from a lack of knowledge about how to behave in a particular setting. Also, if a student doesn't know how to complete a particular task, they may exhibit misbehaviour as a strategy to avoid attempting, and usually failing at, the task. In these cases, the functional assessment should look for an answer to some specific questions: (1) Does the student understand how they are expected to behave in that situation? (2) Does the student understand that their behaviour in inappropriate, or are they just "used to behaving that way"? (3) Is the behaviour within the student's self-control, or do they need support to achieve control? (4) Does the student have the skills necessary to perform adequately in that situation? (op. cit).

The second line of questioning points to situations where the student is able to behave adequately but, for some reason, doesn't use that behaviour consistently. The reasons for this can be varied. Most frequently inappropriate behaviour occurs because it is rewarded and / or the appropriate behaviour is not sufficiently rewarded. To help clarify this situation, several questions should be answered: (1) Is the student clear why the appropriate behaviour should be displayed? (2) Does the student get any benefit by undertaking the appropriate behaviour? (3) Is the behaviour a way of avoiding a task (whether it is too demanding or simply boring)? (op. cit)

Identifying the questions that need to be answered is the best way of determining which instruments and techniques should be used. Some questions require gathering data from contexts that teachers don't have directly access, other questions require information directly observable, and others may even require interviewing the student. More frequently, as mentioned earlier, we have to gather various types of information and data.

Indirect Conduct Assessment

The information and data needed to formulate an explicit hypothesis of the problem behaviour must be collected from various contexts. As teachers are not able to collect data directly in contexts other than school, they have to gain data from non-school settings by indirect assessment. The most common way to get this information is by interviewing parents and other significant adults from the student's background.

Questions that should be asked cover the following aspects: (1) In what settings is the behaviour observed? (2) Are there any settings where the behaviour doesn't happen? If so, which? (3) Who is present or absent when the behaviour occurs? (4) What happens just prior to the behaviour? (5) What happens immediately after the behaviour? (6) What has been tried previously to stop the behaviour and how successful were these strategies? (7) Are there any medical conditions, family dynamics or parenting issues that may account for the behaviour? (Quinn et al., 1998).

Sometimes it can be necessary to interview the student in order to understand their point of view about the situation. We can access, in this way, their interpretation of events and who they feel is to blame for them. The student's understanding of events prior to the behaviour their perception and understanding of the consequences. The benefit of this process is to understand possible affective or cognitive distortions of the situation that the student has. Understanding these variables can be important when designing an intervention plan. Questions such as : What was in your mind…? How did you feel…? What happens after…? are usually used.

Direct Assessment

Usually, when we speak about direct assessment, we are referring to observation techniques that allow us to identify and quantify situational factors that impact on the problem behaviour identified before. The organisation of an observation protocol depends on the type of behaviour,

of the context where it occurs, of the available resources and other factors. We should keep a number of issues in mind: (1) the goal of this observation process is to gather information that can help us in designing and implementing a successful intervention program; (2) the observation protocol that we design should allow us to present data in a simple way (if possible in a graphical manner); (3) the protocol will be implemented for the whole period of assessment but also for the period of intervention and, therefore, it should be realistic and able to be implemented for long periods of time.

The process of observation must be consistent and reliable. This means that the process should be clear enough so that any person will identify the same behaviours or environmental aspects in the same way, and that it will be consistent over time. In the process of designing the instruments, several questions must be answered (Rutherford & Lopes, 1993):

(1) who will perform the observations? Observations could be performed by various people, often the teacher or other classroom support staff are the best choices in a classroom setting.

(2) What will be observed? We should determine whether the behaviour has a beginning, a cycle and an end. This gives us the opportunity to clearly identify the behaviour and whether we are observing a new presentation of the behaviour or just a continuation of a previous behaviour.

(3) Where will the observation be done? Usually the observation is done in the setting where the behaviour usually occurs, where it has the most significant impact or where it is seen as a problem.

(4) When will the counting be done? Depending on the type of the behaviour being observed, we can decide on a long interval – a school day, for instance or a small one – for instance, counting the frequency of the behaviour per minute.

(5) How can it be recorded? The quality of the data collected depends largely on the quality of the instrument we use to record our observations. There are six types of recording techniques:

a. Students' permanent outcomes

b. Continuous recording

c. Frequency recording

d. Duration recording

e. Time interval recording

f. Periodic sample recording

Permanent Outcomes
This method is very useful to identify academic behaviours, for instance behaviours connected with student's learning that we observe and record after their behaviour occurs. For instance, we can record behaviours, such as: (1) number of words correctly spelt; (2) number of mathematical sums correctly answered; (3) number of tasks completed. To record these outcomes doesn't require any particular grid rather just to record of these outcomes, in terms of frequency.

Continuous Recording
This technique is used in very specific situations where the observer tries to record a continuous narrative of the student's behaviour, trying to identify antecedents, describe the behaviour and, again, identify possible consequences. This process is done in a behavioural way, using the ABC model. Frequently, this technique is used in the first stage of the process, when some elements about the target behaviour are still not clear. With the data collected using this technique we should then try to use another system, such as a frequency or a duration recording, to validate the data.

Continuous Recording Grid

Students name:					
Date:					
Observers name:					
Start of the observation: End of the observation:					
Total time of observation:					
	Antecedents	**Behaviours**	**Consequences**		**Results**
Hour	Classroom activity	Students Behaviour	Teachers response	Colleagues Response	Result of the consequence

Frequency Recording
This observation technique involves the counting of the number of times a given behaviour occurs in a previously defined period of time. This type of observation is used with behaviours that have a clear cycle, whose duration is relatively short and with an interval between incidents that allows for accurate recording (i.e. it's not too frequent). This technique is very easy to use and has the advantage of producing data easily transferable into a frequency graph. The recording can be made in specific grids or on any piece of paper, not requiring any special instruments.

Frequency Recording Grid

Student:
Date:
Observer:
Start of the recording: End of the recording:
Total Time:
Classroom activity:
Behaviour observed:
Number of events:
Comments:

Duration Recording

This type of observation technique aims at recording the length of a behaviour in terms of time. We can have two students out of their place twice in an hour – that would be a frequency registration. But if we record the time they spent out of place, it's conceivable that they have very different profiles. Therefore, we can decide that the time they spend out the place is a more accurate measure than the frequency.

One subtype of this recording technique is the one that allows us to measure the interval between two behaviours. For instance, we can measure the time a student is able to stay at their place without getting out of their seat.

Duration Recording Grid

Student:		
Date:		
Observer:		
Start of the recording: End of the recording:		
Total Time:		
Classroom activity:		
Behaviour observed:		
Start	End	Time
Comments:		

The other method is the Time Intervals Observation, intended to measure the occurrence of a behaviour in a given period of time. We don't want to measure the number of events nor their duration, just to see if, in a given period, the behaviour is present or absent. The time intervals are usually between 6 and 30 seconds – the observer might use a device to help him identify these intervals – and the results are translated into frequencies. For instance, if a behaviour is present in 8 out of 10 intervals, then it is present in 80% of the time. This type of observation is very demanding in terms of the attention of the observer. If it's not possible to undertake a Time Intervals Observation then a simple frequency observation should be done. On the other hand, it allows us to have a clear idea both of the frequency and of the duration of the behaviour.

Time Interval Recording Grid

Student:					
Date:					
Observer:					
Start of the recording: End of the recording:					
Time interval:					
Classroom activity:					
Behaviour observed:					
Comments:					
Number of times the behaviour occurs:					
Proportion of the number of intervals / total number of intervals:					

Periodic Sample Recording

Through this recording we want to identify if, after a given period of time, a specific behaviour is taking place. The main difference to the last method – the time intervals recording – is that the period of time is significantly longer. This method is able to be implemented with little resources and is not very demanding in terms of observer attention. On the other side, it doesn't allow for a very accurate view of the situation rather only an estimate of the intensity or frequency of the behaviour. Data can be recorded into a grid similar to the one presented before in the time intervals recording method, only changing the duration of the intervals.

Formulating a Functional Hypothesis

At this point, the personnel involved should be able to formulate a hypothesis about the reasons for the behaviours in question, predicting the general conditions under which the behaviour is most and least likely to occur (antecedents), as well as the probable reinforcing consequences that serve to maintain the inappropriate behaviour (Quinn et al., 1998). This is the basis for an individual behaviour intervention plan. The major issue, then, is to identify the motivation behind or trigger for the problem behaviour to be displayed. The Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency (2003) established some usual categories of reinforcement for behaviours:

- Attention-seeking: to gain attention / interaction of others, including positive or negative attention, from adults or peers;
- Communication: consider the behaviour as an attempt to communicate a specific message, particularly in the case of children with language problems.

- Escape / avoidance: the behaviour may serve the function of preventing or stopping something that in unpleasant to the student, usually a non-attractive task. E.g. a work avoidance strategy.
- Gain access to things or activities: when the child gets what they want, the behaviour is being rewarded.
- Control: the behaviour is a way for the child to control (predict or structure) the environment.
- Automatic reinforcement: refers to behaviours that are intrinsically reinforcing, providing pleasure to the individual or alleviating some unpleasant condition.
- Obsessive / compulsiveness: repetitive or ritualistic behaviours that don't seem to have an apparent function.
- Fear or phobic responses to specific stimuli: some students may exhibit exaggerated responses to a specific stimuli or situation that sometimes seem irrational.

When these motivators are well identified, the team is able to design an intervention plan that draws upon the knowledge they have about the child / student, their family and all the other environmental settings in their lives.

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