

After every difficulty there is ease for mum with ADHD child

By Yohanna Abdullah

Being a mum is a challenging task for anyone but being a mum and a caregiver to a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) has its own unique challenges. For Mars (not her real name), 48, the first four of the past five years since her child was diagnosed with ADHD had been a struggle. Recently having joined Club Heal, she is finding support for her child, Vanessa (not her real name), 12, and herself and is finally enjoying her life anew.

Mars is a mother of three and has two other children aged 25 and 24 who have grown up and are now working at their careers. She is working as a crew in McDonalds. Her youngest child, Vanessa is a special girl who goes to a special school, Grace Orchard School in Jurong West.

Vanessa was diagnosed in ADHD in Primary 1 and was asked to change school as she was showing behavioural problems at school, hitting her classmates and angering their parents. Since she attended her new school, she is happy said Mars.

“Now she has no problems of other children bullying her. She feels happy and can cope with her studies. She gets along well with teachers and friends. Every day she looks forward to going to school,” said Mars.

According to Mars, Vanessa who has an IQ of 68 is a lovable child who loves eating, singing, dancing, playing computer games and other games and especially loves outdoor activities and doing puzzles and drawing.



“She has mood swings, one moment she loving the next moment she wallops you,” said Mars.

Added Mars, “She cannot sit still. She needs more attention. She can focus on her studies just for half an hour at a time for she cannot sit for long. She speaks fast.”

Since her diagnosis and taking of medication and since attending her present school, Vanessa has improved a lot said Mars who takes care that she has nutritious food and ample rest. However she is pained by the fact that Vanessa tends to bully her at home and outside in public too.

“She can get aggressive, scolding, yelling, using vulgar words. It is very hard for me when such words come out. I feel sad why my daughter can do this. When you hit a person the person feels pain. Why should she bully me like this,” said Mars

“She hits me on any part of the body. Once she hit my face just below the eye. I have glaucoma I have to be careful if I am hit in the eye I can go blind forever.”

Each time Vanessa throws a tantrum, Mars calm herself down by doing breathing exercises, listening to the radio which makes her feel happy and morally uplifted. She learns how to cope with an ADHD child by reading up and following the media reports and articles on the disorder.

Coming to Club Heal is a milestone for her. For Mars it is the body she has been looking for support through her life journey with an ADHD child. “For four years I had been coping alone, it was a sad

and painful time but now I feel happy I have people to turn to. The exercises we had at Club Heal helped Vanessa and me. Now I feel the journey ahead is bright and happy, not like the dark days I went through alone. Now I look forward to facing the challenges,” said Mars.

She added, “What I learned from courses such at Club Heal is that I have to show care, love to my child, listen to and try to understand her more.”

Box story: What is ADHD?

ADHD is a problem with inattentiveness, over-activity, impulsivity, or a combination. For these problems to be diagnosed as ADHD, they must be out of the normal range for a child's age and development. ADHD is the most commonly diagnosed behavioural disorder of childhood. It affects about 3 - 5% of school aged children. ADHD is diagnosed much more often in boys than in girls. ADHD may run in families, but it is not clear exactly what causes it.

What are the symptoms of ADHD?

The symptoms of ADHD fall into three groups:

- Lack of attention (inattentiveness)
- Hyperactivity
- Impulsive behaviour (impulsivity)

Some children with ADHD primarily have the inattentive type. Others may have a combination of types. Those with the inattentive type are less disruptive and are more likely to not be diagnosed with ADHD.



Inattentive symptoms

1. Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork
2. Has difficulty keeping attention during tasks or play
3. Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
4. Does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace
5. Has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
6. Avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork)
7. Often loses toys, assignments, pencils, books, or tools needed for tasks or activities
8. Is easily distracted
9. Is often forgetful in daily activities

Hyperactivity symptoms:

1. Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
2. Leaves seat when remaining seated is expected
3. Runs about or climbs in inappropriate situations
4. Has difficulty playing quietly
5. Is often "on the go," acts as if "driven by a motor," talks excessively

Impulsivity symptoms:

1. Blurts out answers before questions have been completed
2. Has difficulty awaiting turn
3. Interrupts or intrudes on others (butts into conversations)

How do you treat ADHD?

Treating ADHD is a partnership between the health care provider, parents or caregivers, and the child. For therapy to succeed, it is important to:

- Set specific, appropriate target goals to guide therapy.
- Start medication and behaviour therapy.
- Follow-up regularly with the doctor to check on goals, results, and any side effects of medications. During these check-ups, information should be gathered from parents, teachers, and the child.

If treatment does not appear to work, the health care provider should:

- Make sure the child indeed has ADHD
- Check for other, possible medical conditions that can cause similar symptoms
- Make sure the treatment plan is being followed

MEDICATIONS

A combination of medication and behavioural treatment works best. There are several different types of ADHD medications that may be used alone or in combination.

BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

Talk therapy for both the child and family can help everyone understand and gain control of the stressful feelings related to ADHD.

Parents should use a system of rewards and consequences to help guide their child's behaviour. It is important to learn to handle disruptive behaviours. Support groups can help you connect with others who have similar problems.

Other tips to help your child with ADHD include:

- Communicate regularly with the child's teacher.
- Keep a consistent daily schedule, including regular times for homework, meals, and outdoor activities. Make changes to the schedule in advance and not at the last moment.
- Limit distractions in the child's environment.
- Make sure the child gets a healthy, varied diet, with plenty of fibre and basic nutrients.
- Make sure the child gets enough sleep.
- Praise and reward good behaviour.
- Provide clear and consistent rules for the child.

Alternative treatments for ADHD have become popular, including herbs, supplements, and chiropractic treatments. However, there is little or no solid evidence that these work.

What is the prognosis for a child with ADHD?

ADHD is a long-term, chronic condition. If it is not treated appropriately, ADHD may lead to:

- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Failure in school
- Problems keeping a job
- Trouble with the law

About half of children with ADHD will continue to have troublesome symptoms of inattention or impulsivity as adults. However, adults are often more capable of controlling behaviour and masking difficulties. (Information on ADHD extracted from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov>)