

Teachers Cannot Diagnosis ADHD

The kind of story that makes everybody unhappy

A mother in Colorado is now homeschooling her son after being given three choices by the local school district:

- Sit with your son in class
- Homeschool him
- Put him on Ritalin

According to the school, the third grade boy was "uncontrollable" in class. He was disruptive, always in motion and was, in general terms, not a well behaved child.

He was also a "B" student.

The boy was not diagnosed and had not been to a doctor to be checked for ADD. In fact, the parent had refused to take the child in for diagnosis, saying that the boy behaved just fine at home and the problem must be in the classroom.

Finally, the teacher had enough. An ultimatum was issued at a meeting involving the parent, the teacher, and other representatives of the school.

Rather than have her child on medications which she considered unnecessary, the mother opted to homeschool her son.

AN INVENTIVE MIND

He was a boy who learned only by doing. At age six, he had to see how fire worked and accidentally burned his father's barn to the ground. The next fall he began school, where he alternated between letting his mind travel to distant places and keeping his body in perpetual motion in his seat. Because he was distractible and restless, he did not last long in a formal classroom. His teacher called him "addled." Eventually, his mother had to home-school him. As an adult he would recall: "My father thought I was stupid and I almost decided I must be a dunce."

**-From [The Edison Trait](#)
by Lucy Jo Pallandino, Ph.D.**

This is Not a Good Thing

Perhaps we should look at some job descriptions:

Teachers teach.

Doctors diagnose.

Any questions? If the teacher wants to be a doctor, then she should quit teaching and go to medical school.

If the teacher wants to just play doctor, then she should get a boyfriend and a toy stethoscope....
and maybe some kind of cute little doctor outfit...
she could make her boyfriend wear one of those cute little hospital gowns with no back...

But I digress. The point is that teachers are not doctors. They know kids and they understand what is "normal". But ADD is a complex diagnosis which requires a medical background. Ritalin cannot be indiscriminately passed out like so many Tic-Tacs. For example, in children who are bipolar, mania can often be mistaken for the hyperactivity of the ADHD child. But, if a bipolar child is put on Ritalin, the Ritalin can induce or even heighten the manic state.

That's just one example. There are a hundred other reasons why you don't just look at a kid and give him a pill. That's why we have doctors and other health care professionals. Again, if this teacher wants to be a doctor, she should go medical school.

Where did this go wrong?

Once more, with feeling: A teacher CANNOT diagnose.

[The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) is very specific about parent rights and other issues regarding the education of the child. First and foremost of those rights is the concept of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This alone nullifies the school's "Tough Guy" ultimatum - unless the district is willing to provide a tutor for the child at home.

Aside from the threat to illegally deny educational services, the district made a few other tactical errors. They apparently forgot to tell the parent about [the IEP process](#) too. This is also federal law, with very specific instructions regarding timelines, procedures and parental rights.

The district could argue that because the child had not been diagnosed or placed in special education then IDEA does not apply. However, that contradicts their assertion that the child should be on Ritalin. If the child truly needs the medication, as they teacher stated, then the school is directly responsible for IDEA procedures under the category of [OHI - Other Health Impairment](#). People who have ADD, or parents of children with ADD, understand [the potential benefits of appropriate medication therapy](#). They also understand how difficult it can be to face [a decision about medicating your child](#). Nobody likes the idea of having their son or daughter on [Ritalin](#) or any of the other [other medications used to treat ADHD](#).

And, while medications are a Godsend to the ADD Person who needs them, the person also has **THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ALL TREATMENT** if they or their parents so choose. You cannot force a child to take Ritalin, nor can you make medical treatment a requirement for attending school. There are very strict laws regarding medicating people against their will. In the case of a child, it is ultimately the decision of the parent.

Even if the school doesn't like it.

In this situation, I must confess that I agree with [Colorado Board of Education](#). While I would never recommend denying medication to a child who needs it, I would also never stand by while someone other than a medical professional made recommendations - or, in this case, gave orders - that they were clearly not qualified to give.

People who use medications for ADD are making a conscious decision to treat a medical condition. There is a world of difference between that and in someone forcing another person to take psychiatric medications against their will or the will of the parent.

What was the teacher supposed to do?

Step One: Talk to the parents.

Teacher: Mrs. Applespitter, I am having some problems with your son Damien. Can we work together to help Damien to continue to do well in school and not to be so disruptive?

Mom: I don't understand why there would be any problem. Damien acts just fine at home.

Teacher: I'm sure that's true. However, Damien isn't receiving the same one on one attention from me that he is getting at home. Also, the classroom isn't as casual as your home. We have a lot of things going on and we need to cover all of them everyday.

Mom: Well, I still don't see what the problem is...

Teacher: Let's try this: Let's have Damien keep a notebook and write down everytime he gets in trouble during the day. To be fair, we will also have him write down every time I get to tell him that he has done a good job.

...or something. Why must we immediatly become adversarial - on either side?

Step Two: Teach to the needs of the Child

Diagnosed or not, the child may have a learning style that could benefit from the same [techniques you would use to teach an ADD student](#). You do not have to have a doctor's prescription to try different education techniques.

Step Three: If all else fails...

Mrs. Applespitter, I am still having some problems with Damien. I know that you've tried working with him too. Do you have any ideas about what could be causing this? Is there something going on that may be bothering him? Could it be possibly a medical problem?

I will keep working with him in my classroom, but I am really concerned about his future in school. You might want to consider talking with his pedicatrician.

Not only does this save the parent and the teacher a lot of frustration, it also leaves the school open to implimenting any discipline action or behavior programs that may need to be put into place. Nobody is being called "disabled" and no one is being threatened.

And Damien gets to stay in school.