

# Disruptive disorders in children

## What we should know as parents?

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### What are Disruptive Disorders?

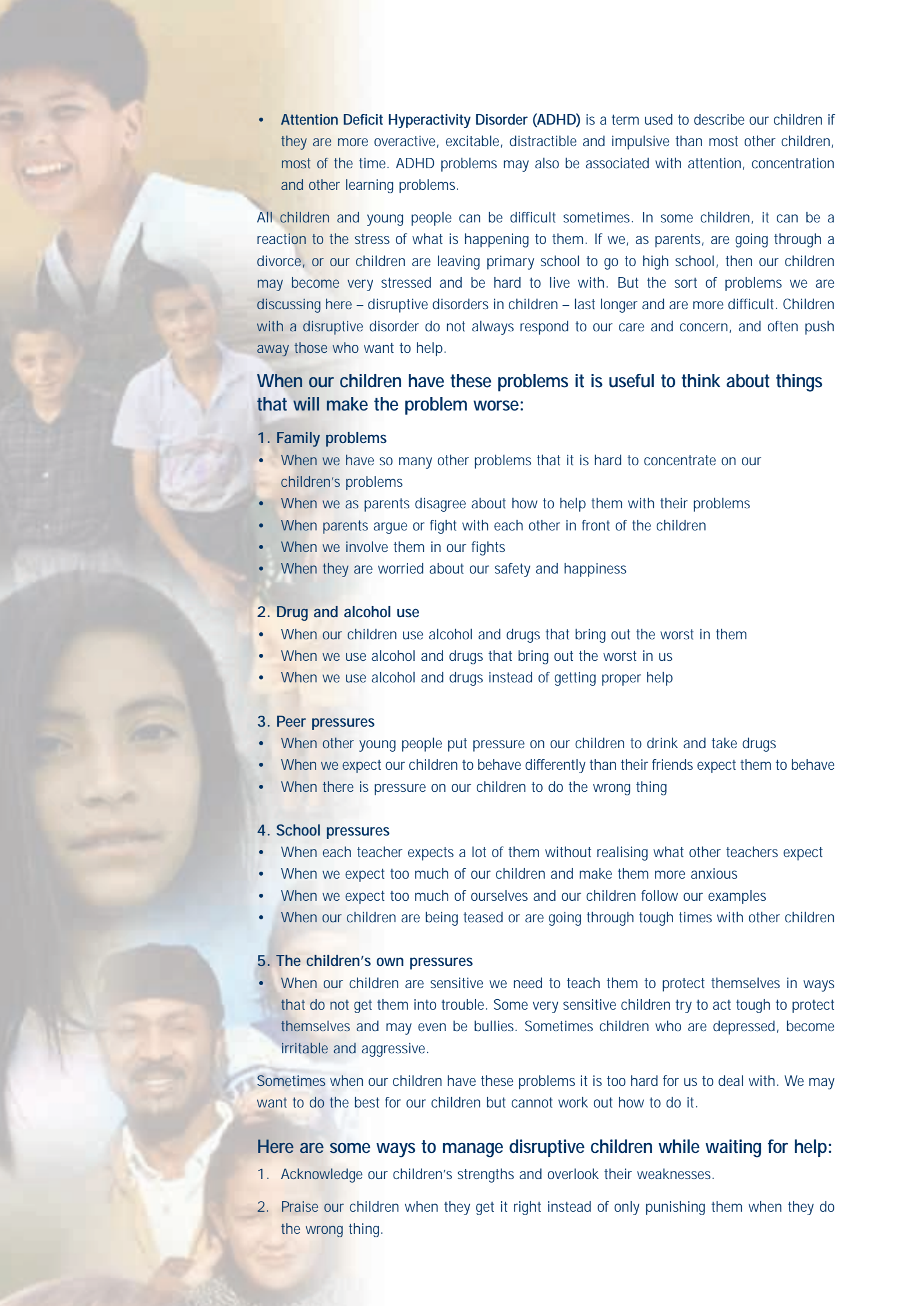
Disruptive Disorders are what health professionals call the problems our children are having when they have difficulty in following the rules that most other children accept.

### Some examples of these problems are:

- Not doing as we tell them. Most children disobey sometimes, but children with disruptive disorders disobey almost all the time, even when they know they may be punished.
- Having tantrums that are much more frequent and severe than the average child their age.
- Becoming aggressive and carrying out destructive behaviour. This may involve damage to people's property, or stealing, or threatening or dangerous behaviour.
- Always disagreeing, arguing and making small situations seem bigger than they really are. Children with disruptive disorder often want to have the last word.
- Refusing to do everyday tasks such as homework and attending to personal cleanliness. Most children are likely to have untidy rooms and to be hesitant to help with the housework. However, constant refusal to do anything to help and a disregard for basic cleanliness and hygiene is less common.
- All children lie, especially if they are frightened of getting into trouble or want something desperately. However, some children with a disruptive disorder lie repetitively, even when they do not need to.
- Children with a disruptive disorder often show other antisocial behaviours such as excessive anger and swearing, offensive behaviour such as spitting at people, and repeatedly disregarding the rights and feelings of others.

### Some names given to the extreme form of these behaviours are:

- **Oppositional Defiant Disorder** is a term used to describe children who become angry quickly and argue a lot. Oppositional defiant disorder is more common in younger children who frequently defy their parents and teachers. These children are not usually cruel, bullying, deceitful or antisocial; but they may develop these behaviours if their problems are not dealt with.
- **Conduct Disorder** is a term used to describe children who have the problem of constantly breaking reasonable rules set by parents or teachers.

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- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** is a term used to describe our children if they are more overactive, excitable, distractible and impulsive than most other children, most of the time. ADHD problems may also be associated with attention, concentration and other learning problems.

All children and young people can be difficult sometimes. In some children, it can be a reaction to the stress of what is happening to them. If we, as parents, are going through a divorce, or our children are leaving primary school to go to high school, then our children may become very stressed and be hard to live with. But the sort of problems we are discussing here – disruptive disorders in children – last longer and are more difficult. Children with a disruptive disorder do not always respond to our care and concern, and often push away those who want to help.

### **When our children have these problems it is useful to think about things that will make the problem worse:**

#### **1. Family problems**

- When we have so many other problems that it is hard to concentrate on our children's problems
- When we as parents disagree about how to help them with their problems
- When parents argue or fight with each other in front of the children
- When we involve them in our fights
- When they are worried about our safety and happiness

#### **2. Drug and alcohol use**

- When our children use alcohol and drugs that bring out the worst in them
- When we use alcohol and drugs that bring out the worst in us
- When we use alcohol and drugs instead of getting proper help

#### **3. Peer pressures**

- When other young people put pressure on our children to drink and take drugs
- When we expect our children to behave differently than their friends expect them to behave
- When there is pressure on our children to do the wrong thing

#### **4. School pressures**

- When each teacher expects a lot of them without realising what other teachers expect
- When we expect too much of our children and make them more anxious
- When we expect too much of ourselves and our children follow our examples
- When our children are being teased or are going through tough times with other children


#### **5. The children's own pressures**

- When our children are sensitive we need to teach them to protect themselves in ways that do not get them into trouble. Some very sensitive children try to act tough to protect themselves and may even be bullies. Sometimes children who are depressed, become irritable and aggressive.

Sometimes when our children have these problems it is too hard for us to deal with. We may want to do the best for our children but cannot work out how to do it.

### **Here are some ways to manage disruptive children while waiting for help:**

1. Acknowledge our children's strengths and overlook their weaknesses.
2. Praise our children when they get it right instead of only punishing them when they do the wrong thing.

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3. Try to do the things that THEY like doing rather than what WE want them to do.
  4. Listen to our children. If we want our children to listen to us we need to learn how to listen to them.
  5. Be open and fair. If we think the best of children, but also acknowledge when they have done the wrong thing at school or with the law, we show our children support and honesty.
  6. Show our children that we do not blame everyone else when we do the wrong thing or when things go wrong through bad luck.
  7. Show our children how to focus on finding solutions instead of finding someone to blame.
  8. Try to encourage our children to do the right thing by setting a good example, rather than force them to do the right thing by threat or punishment.
  9. Let our upset feelings settle before we try to talk with our children about what they have done wrong.
  10. Not fighting our partner in a way that upsets the whole family and worries the children.
  11. Let the children talk when they are upset without getting upset ourselves. This helps them know that being upset is safe and can be talked about in a helpful way.
  12. Set fair and consistent rules for our children.

### **When do we need to seek professional help?**

- When the family is finding it difficult to cope and we as parents have lost confidence in what to do next.
- When the disruptive behaviour disrupts our children's education, leads to them or someone else being hurt, or if they are in trouble with the police.

### **What can we do when our children need help and we don't have the answers?**

- Call the Transcultural Mental Health Centre for advice in your language
- Call the Children's Hospital at Westmead for advice and information
- Talk to the children's school counsellor
- Call the local community health centre
- Talk with a general practitioner for advice about local professionals such as child psychologists or paediatricians.

### **Transcultural Mental Health Centre**

Tel: (02) 9840 3767 (during business hours)

Freecall for rural and remote areas of NSW: 1800 64 8911

### **Kids Help Line**

Tel: 24hr 1800 55 1800



the  
childr<sup>en</sup>'s  
hospital at Westmead

Transcultural Mental  
Health Centre



A Service for NSW