



Canadian Psychological Association Journals
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For immediate release

Time to focus on the strengths of children with ADHD

Ottawa, ON (October 1, 2015) – A new literature review published in *Canadian Psychology* suggests that current strategies that are commonly used to support children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in the classroom are missing half of the equation – capitalization of the child’s strengths and abilities. Children with ADHD are typically portrayed in a negative light. Focusing on a child’s strengths, while acknowledging their weaknesses, can nurture positive behaviour and foster resilience.

The start of a new school year can be exciting as students are reunited with friends, meet their teachers, and prepare for new challenges. But for children with ADHD, their parents, and their teachers, this excitement can be overshadowed by the stress of coping with academic and social challenges.

An estimated 5-10 per cent of school-age children in Canada have a diagnosis of ADHD; a disorder characterized by problems of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity. Because of these challenges, children with ADHD often struggle in the classroom and may experience negative interactions with teachers and peers.

Current assessments of children with ADHD often look at their core deficits to help identify solutions to their social and behavioural problems. Though pharmacological treatments and behaviour management have been shown to help reduce core symptoms, attempting to “fix” deficits tends to create a negative bias, leading parents, teachers, and the children themselves to focus only on what is going wrong.

Authors Dr. Emma Climie, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, and Dr. Sarah Mastoras, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, argue that identifying and building on the strengths, resources, and abilities of children with ADHD may help parents and teachers see beyond frustrating behaviours to better help these children develop positive strategies and coping mechanisms. These strategies can then help children to compensate for areas of deficit, leading to more positive classroom experiences that may in turn protect them from developing depression and/or anxiety.

Though more research is required to determine best practices for using strengths-based interventions in the classroom, the research review highlights the following promising interventions:

- fostering positive relationships with school staff and using goal directed solitary play to buffer a child from the impact of peer rejection;
- incorporating a child’s interests into classroom activities to encourage focus, motivation, and perseverance;

- using group activities with a variety of roles that play on each child's strengths to foster inclusivity;
- using enthusiastic teaching with active participation and novelty to maintain interest and focus;
- identifying and promoting promising friendships; and
- creating helper roles in the school setting to promote self-worth and a sense of responsibility.

To learn more about the use of strengths-based interventions, please read the full article [ADHD in Schools: Adopting a Strengths-Based Perspective](#) in Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne, Vol 56(3), Aug 2015, 295-300.

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About Canadian Psychology

Canadian Psychology is one of three journals published by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) in partnership with the American Psychological Association. It is published on a quarterly basis and features generalist articles in areas of theory, research, and practice that are of interest to a broad cross-section of psychologists. [Learn more](#).

For more general information about ADHD, what psychological treatments can be used to manage ADHD, and what resources are available, see [CPA's fact sheet on ADHD](#).

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