



Chiropractic Newsletter

Well-Being

Are We Medicating What It Means to Be a Child?

The labels are becoming all too familiar to modern families: ADHD, ADD, OCD, ODD, and bipolar disorder, to name a few. Twelve percent of U.S. children and teens carried a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in 2011, a figure that rose 43 percent since 2003. Of those, 69 percent were medicated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that almost 70 percent of doctor's visits in the U.S. involve drug therapy. Perhaps a more disturbing figure is that one-third of prescribed medications are antidepressants.

Statistics like these are overwhelming for any parent. We must ask: Are these diagnoses accurate? And if they are, why is our children's mental health rapidly declining, and what can we do about it? As a former child and family therapist, I remember the outrage I felt as I read the charts of children who were diagnosed without warrant. Many kids carried

multiple labels. Once applied, these were difficult to remove, no matter how inappropriate. I often wondered how quickly these children had been diagnosed.

Professor Philip Mitchell, head of the School of Psychiatry at University of New South Wales in Australia, reports that many general practitioners can only spend 8 to 12 minutes with each patient. This makes it more practical to write a prescription than to delve deeper and get to the heart of a patient's issue. If doctors took the time to sincerely talk to a child, they would realize they were, in fact, diagnosing the child's living conditions. Take away stress, remove the fractured family structure, eliminate poor diet, and stamp out abuse, and in most cases, one could dismiss the diagnosis. Many doctors are categorically medicating a child's life circumstances, not the child.



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As parents, we all strive to make the best decisions we can for our children. Many of us believe we can trust doctors without question. We need to recognize we have a choice.

Our Kids Are Not Broken

The misguided habit of viewing children and teens who are struggling with the unreasonable demands of modern life as broken in some way leaves us susceptible to influence. It may sound extreme, but easy targets make easy prey. Unknowingly, we're encouraged to detach from normal feelings and view them through the lens of disease. Yet, to feel is healthy. To experience emotion is human. And to struggle is to grow. Part of growing into a well-adjusted adult is the ability to navigate a spectrum of emotions throughout life. We cannot mute the negative without diminishing the positive.

Normal behavior, such as a reluctance in young children to concentrate on their homework or sit still for long periods, is marketed by pharmaceutical companies as a potential symptom of ADHD. This leads parents of healthy children to ask their doctors about whether their kids need treatment for their "problems."

Many people believe this has propelled the exponential rise in ADHD (mis) diagnosis.

The Answer Is Not Always Medicine

Our western culture has pathologized the very essence of the human condition. If you have a symptom, America has the pill. Sometimes a diagnosis is easier than addressing change.

If we can acknowledge that the answers to our struggles are not always medicinal, we open our minds and give ourselves the freedom to invite true healing into our lives. Embracing a community of support, reaching out to loved ones, nourishing our minds and bodies with real food, and feeling the sun on our skin while keeping our bodies in motion can offer a restorative, side-effect-free path toward wellness—far more powerful, in many cases, than medication. I became a therapist because I'm an optimist who believes in the innate wisdom of the human spirit. I believe people can change for the better. And as a parent of three young children, I want the healthcare system to be better.

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