



Beverly H. Rohman

## Communications and Chemicals - Harming or Helping our Children

I am often asked why there seem to be more children diagnosed with ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and learning problems today than ever before. My answer is always the same ---- these conditions have been around forever ....we are just getting better at recognizing them. And, I also add that I believe our society has created an environment that stimulates the very mind that is prone to distractions and impulsivity, social challenges and swiftly shifting attentions. Our 24/7 world is filled with sounds, electronic technology, color and speed --- non stop activities which fuel the very brain that thrives on such stimulation. So, are we actually diagnosing more children with learning differences like ADD or are we creating an environment that helps induce the disorder?

Dr. Ned Hallowell, child and adult psychiatrist and author of ***Delivered from Distraction***, explains it like this - "Electronic-communications technology...has commandeered our attention to an alarming degree. Television, cell phones, Walkmen, the Internet, video games, Game Boys, e-mail, Blackberries and all the rest of the electronic means and devices...have wound their way so possessively into our lives that we spend less and less time with one another." Particularly the computer and television have gripped our attention and invaded every aspect of our lives. In addition to the speed of electronics and gadgets and action, we have also become a deeply chemically dependent world. Dr. Hallowell claims that, "Never before in history have we been so saturated with chemicals: the air we breathe; the clothes we wear; the cosmetics we use; the detergents that wash our buildings and bodies; the medicines we take; the foods we eat; the waters we bathe in, swim in and drink --- all of these teem with chemicals we use to make life better, safer, cheaper, faster, tastier, softer, and even, ironically, cleaner." He talks about the rise in ADD but also the "dramatic increase in the diagnosis of asthma over the past decade, from around 7 million in 1980 to around 25 million today." Looking at these influences on other conditions, he acknowledges an "equally dramatic increase in the diagnosis of autism-spectrum disorders, including classic autism and the increasingly prevalent Asperger's

syndrome.” These are all on a rapid rise for reasons unknown. Dr. Hallowell speculates that “various factors in our environment may be poisoning us.....electronic super stimulation coupled with interpersonal disconnection and chemical intoxication ...are worth monitoring as they are so pervasive and under our skin.”

I share his concerns and suggestions. In his expertise and wisdom, he theorizes that “ADD – as well as asthma, autism, and Asperger’s - may be canaries in the mine shaft of modern life. They may be telling us to watch out and to change our ways. They may be telling us to spend more time with one another and not get addicted to electronics. They may be telling us to watch carefully what we eat, drink, breathe, bathe in, touch, and ingest as medicines.”

Whether you agree with Dr. Hallowell’s logic or suggestions, or dismiss him as alarmist or unfounded, beware that this is not new information. In 1986, Neil Postman, author of ***Amusing Ourselves to Death***, was one of the first to predict the damage that the electronic culture could do. Jane Healy, in her books ***Endangered Minds*** and ***Failure to Connect***, written in the late 1990’s, raised concerns about the use of computer technology in the classroom and pervasive television viewing by children that showed an overwhelmingly negative impact on learning.

While we may feel helpless and prey to the world that is created around us, we do have choices. “We can begin by taking the simple steps of watching less TV, surfing and e-mailing on the Net fewer hours, and spending more time with one another, face-to-face, making friends a priority, taking in the positive energy of the human connection.” Eating a healthier, less chemically dependent diet, becoming increasingly aware of the toxic cleaning products we use in our homes, being careful how we pollute our air, and recognizing how exercise can impact the need for fewer medications ---- finding ways to help and not harm ourselves or our children.

We may not be able to change the diagnosis of ADD or other heritable conditions, but tuning in to the effects of technology, communications and chemicals --- sensitizing ourselves to the impact these have on our lives --- and realizing that what we do can have a positive influence ---- that’s powerful and great news!

*For more information about learning differences and ADD, contact The Learning Connections, at 3 Goldsborough Street, Easton, MD 21601, 410-763-7097, or write to [beverly@thelearningconnections.net](mailto:beverly@thelearningconnections.net)*

*Beverly Rohman is the founder of The Learning Connections LLC, Senior Certified AD/HD Coach and Learning Consultant.*