

BUILD A FOUNDATION: LEARN TO FOCUS

There are so many children diagnosed with ADD and ADHD these days. Some kids are struggling to pay attention in class or are labeled as the class clowns or troublemakers at school or other organized events. Whether it be hyperactivity or an inattention to task, could there be a common thread that was missing when we evaluated these children? We utilized standardized tools such as the Bruininks, VMI, WOLD and Jepsen. They all tended to score below their same aged peers on these tests, handwriting was poor and sometimes it just didn't seem like they heard what you were telling them.

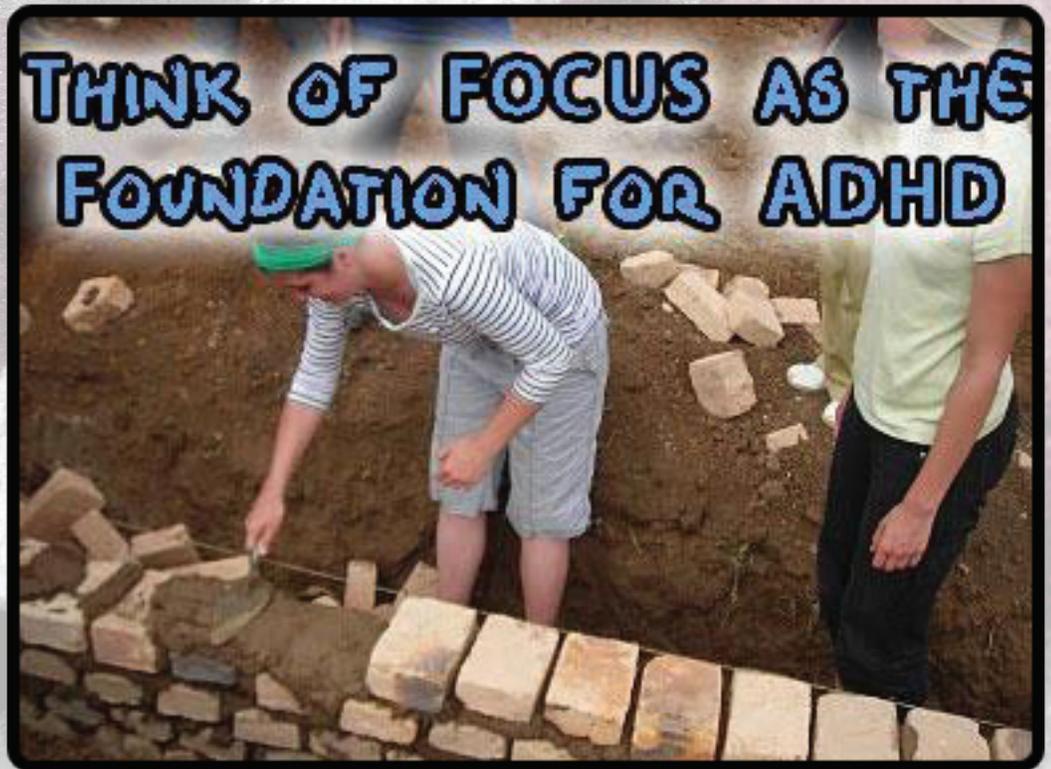
In my experience, it seemed that by the time the children came through our clinic doors, 75% of them were already taking medications such as Ritalin, Adderall, Focalin and Concerta, just to name a few. All of these medications definitely seem to have their benefits for our kids, but they also come with side effects that may or may not rear their ugly heads. I've had many parents report to me things like "they just don't seem like themselves anymore" or "her personality just doesn't shine through like it used to!" There are also those who say that the medication has changed their child's life in a very positive way and has enabled their child to be available to learn. Issues, concerns and positive results are very legitimate as parents wind their way through the medical system to see what will help their own children.

Is there anything out there that can help reduce or even possibly eliminate the use of these powerful medications? I would certainly think that it be worth a try! Sensory Integration techniques seem to have an impact on helping our children organize and regulate themselves. Programs such as the ALERT Program teach children how to register "how their engine is running" and what sensory techniques they could use to help calm themselves so they can focus and learn. Another program that I feel strongly about is the Interactive Metronome program. Many parents are just astounded after I go through the IM Long Form Assessment with their child. Many times these children are on the go all the time so it is very difficult for caregivers to see how "off" their children are when it comes to their timing and rhythm. Sharing results with them is very revealing and they begin to see how poor timing can impact their child's skills.

With the IM program, the children are initially asked to clap with a cowbell sound (not before, not after – and the bell keeps a constant tempo). One thing that almost always comes up in the testing is their child's percentage of "early hits" or impulsivity. These kiddos are thinking, acting and moving before they even register the tone. No wonder they have difficulty in school following directions – they are jumping ahead of what the teacher is saying. They may be "missing" assignments or completing them partially because they aren't taking the time to take it all in.

children what it feels like to feel focused. They learn how to achieve "bursts" in the IM program, which means they are "super right on" the beat and focused. As they show improvement, I try to start adding in some distractions in the environment to help them learn how to keep their focus even when something else is going on around them. Have all of them been able to discontinue their medications? No, but several have been able to reduce their dosage.

If you are a parent of a child who may be exhibiting ADD/ADHD or has already been diagnosed, you may want to investigate the use



I have also seen children with ADHD who seem to be very outgoing actually have difficulty maintaining a conversation on topic or interrupting a conversation inappropriately over and over again. They have no concept of timing and how to slow themselves down for just a few milliseconds to listen and watch what is going on around them. I once asked one of my patients "What does it mean to pay attention" and their reply was "I have no idea!" Doesn't that make sense? Something we say to children with ADD/ADHD over and over again, and many of them have no idea how to pay attention or focus to get a task done. Through the use of IM, I have been able to teach these wonderfully delightful

of the Interactive Metronome or IM-Home as a modality during your child's OT, PT or Speech therapy sessions. Think of learning to focus as a foundational skill that could have an impact in many areas of your child's life.

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