

Does your child have ADHD?

Marchelle Abrahams

WHEN Nicola Carter took her seven-year-old son, Ryan, to a paediatrician specialising in neurology as a last-ditch attempt to diagnose his hyperactivity, she laughed after being told that he was a carbon copy of a child suffering from attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

It wasn't a shock, says Carter, but rather a relief after visiting specialist after specialist.

Finally, she could put a label on her son's overtly busy nature.

"He was overweight and busy from Day 1. I was a single parent at that stage and just put it down to him having a tough start because he had spent the first 10-and-a-half months of his life in a children's home."

Ryan started his ADHD medication at age four.

Carter admits it's been a gruelling two years as she tries to find the right balance for his dosage.

"We started him on a low dosage of Ritalin because he was very young. That didn't work. Then we changed to Concerta – it worked for two to three weeks."

"Ryan had no impulse control, he was emotionally stressed, moody and crying all the time."

Eventually, after much trial and error, and finding the right dosage, Carter and psychiatrist Dr Renata Schoeman achieved success.

Today, Ryan is a thriving happy boy at a Cape Town

remedial school where he also receives speech and occupational therapy.

Carter's first-hand experience of proper diagnosis and treatment has changed her and Ryan's life.

"I'm pro-medication if you have the right diagnosis. Too many times parents give up because they find the meds don't work."

"Keep your channels open with your doctor – once you have the right combination, it's worth it."

Ryan is one of the lucky ones. Thanks to his mom's persistence, his ADHD was diagnosed and treated.

But at least one in 20 children in South Africa are believed to have ADHD and their parents don't know it.

Dr Schoeman and top athlete Nic de Beer launched the Goldilocks and The Bear Foundation, which will offer the country's first non-profit ADHD screening and early intervention mobile clinic in rural and township schools.

The foundation plans to intervene at school level by educating teachers and parents about the symptoms and signs of ADHD.

"We teach them what to look out for, what the kids might be struggling with, how they might be behaving," says Schoeman.

She uses questionnaires that teachers and parents complete with regard to the symptoms the child is displaying.

Possible ADHD children are screened further with additional questionnaires and interviews.

Schoeman is quick to point



As many as one in 20 children in South Africa are believed to have ADHD – and their parents don't know they have it.

PICTURE: FLICKR.COM

out that they rule out other variables such as tiredness, visual problems, depression and anxiety.

Once children are identified as "probable ADHD", they are referred to

Department of Health mental health clinics.

Schoeman says that sometimes, when children are deemed uncontrollable and wild, they are labelled as naughty and bad-mannered.

ADHD is the furthest thing from a parent's mind.

There are three core symptoms, she says: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.

Some children also display

emotional difficulties such as poor self-esteem and social difficulties in a group.

If your child displays these signs, it doesn't necessarily mean they have ADHD.

Misdiagnosis could lead

to inappropriate labelling and treatment.

On the other hand, missed diagnosis and non-treatment can cause significant personal, interpersonal and social burdens, impacting negatively

on the overall quality of life.

Not being diagnosed can sometimes lead to depression or anxiety and might lead to inappropriate treatment.

"Children could suffer from learning disabilities, anxiety, depression, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, tics/ Tourette's syndrome and substance abuse; also poor self-esteem and not fulfilling their potential," says Schoeman.

Mention ADHD medication and Ritalin comes to mind. The drug has been receiving some bad press lately.

But medication alone does not make up the treatment.

Dr Schoeman believes psychotherapy, parental guidance, educational support, physical exercise and nutritional intervention should encompass successful ADHD treatment.

The notion that ADHD is a childhood disorder prevailed until the 1990s.

Now research and public awareness have highlighted the presence of ongoing symptoms in 60% of adult patients. Only about 40% of children seem to "outgrow" ADHD, says Schoeman.

But there is light at the end of tunnel.

She says symptoms often appear to decrease over time – in number and in severity.

And some adults can go on to lead normal lives by choosing lifestyles and careers that suit them.

● Visit Goldilocks and The Bear's Facebook page for more info or www.gb4adhd.co.za if you want to get involved.

We are not doing enough about school bullying

Marchelle Abrahams

THE life of a bullied child is a sad and lonely one.

Ostracised by their peers, they have nowhere to turn, often resulting in isolation, depression or sometimes even suicide.

In October 2015, Cape Town teen Charné Roberts hanged herself in her toilet after she was bullied. US teen Brandy Vela sent her siblings a shocking SMS just hours before she put a gun to her chest and pulled the trigger in front of her parents and grandparents – she'd had enough of the merciless abuse from her cyber bullies.

The stories go on and on...

Ryan Duncan Prithraj would come home from school every day sad and irritated. Bullies called him ugly names and taunted him because of his weight.

His dad, Vicky, only learnt years later that he had been subjected to ongoing abuse throughout his school career.

Years later he's used the power of those negative provocations and turned it into something positive. He matriculated with nine A's and a 95.6% aggregate. And, because of his outstanding achievements, the UCT student got a White House invitation to former US president Barack Obama's

second inauguration.

Fresh out of high school Ryan heard that his sister, Sarah, was going through the same torment as he had.

This is when he and Vicky came up with the idea of the Bully Boogie Challenge board game.

"We took the concept of Snakes and Ladders and Monopoly and fused the two," says Vicky.

Ryan explains that they are piloting the use of the game as a supplementary tool to combating bullying in many schools around the country, and there's been a positive response with the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape endorsing it.

Radio and TV presenter Terence Pillay has been a staunch supporter of anti-bullying campaigns over the years.

"Bullying is fast becoming one of the biggest challenges that we face and the results for children who are being bullied can be grim," he says.

He has observed that often children are too scared to say anything, and it's for this reason that up to 85% of bullying goes on undetected.

Child rights specialist Joan van Niekerk says bullying can take a variety of forms, from physical to verbal.

"Some children refuse to



POSITIVE THINKING: Ryan and Sarah Prithraj play the Bully Boogie board game.

go to school when the bullying is severe and it creates anticipatory anxiety."

Joan believes that schools need to implement an anti-bullying policy that is drawn up with engagement from educators, parents and the children themselves.

The policy should be "distributed to every child on enrolment at

that school and also displayed as a poster in foyers and classrooms".

But bullying doesn't only occur inside the classroom and on the playground.

"With today's modern and sophisticated phones, cyber bullying is quite pervasive," explains Joan.

She goes on to say that it

can take the form of sexual bullying where a couple may have taken intimate photos of each other. The relationship breaks up and then there is the threat of, or actual, distribution of the evidence to friends.

We often treat a bullied child with concern and empathy. But what about the

bully? "Bullies usually have a history of being bullied and bullying another child deals with their sense of disempowerment and anger," says Joan.

"They need to be evaluated in terms of contributors to their behaviour and offered help."

Terence believes that



Anti-bullying advocate: ECR presenter Terence Pillay

parents of bullies need to get real and "ask yourself, are my children a product of who I am, what I believe and what I stand for?"

Often when children are being bullied, a parent's response is "go hit him back". Vicky points out that sometimes parents contribute to the problem: "The longer you put the child on the wrong footing, you have them scared."

Children are taught to suck it up and deal with it.

Joan couldn't agree more that that's the wrong approach "as it underscores physical, sexual, verbal and emotional bullying/violence as a solution to the problem. In fact it exacerbates it."

"One cannot deal with any form of violence with violence and then expect behaviour to change."

These children need to be equipped with life skills to manage their emotions and the effect their behaviour has on others. "Sadly life skills get

very little attention, especially at high schools, where other subjects are seen as more vital."

While researching this article, I contacted a 16-year-old high school girl who agreed to tell her story.

On completion of it, she reluctantly declined, saying that the emotional pain of recalling her experiences would be too much for her.

Her story is not unique. Thousands of children go through it every day. How do we deal with it?

"We need well trained life skills teachers who are specialised in their subject matter and who actually do skills training and don't just teach the theory."

"They also need to regard themselves (as should all educators, really) as role-models to the children they are teaching," concludes Joan.

● Visit the Bully Boogie Challenge website: <http://bullyboogie.co.za/>

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