

Wild Child



HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD

with **ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD)**
and **OTHER BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS**

DON MORDASINI, MA, MFT

Don Mordasini, MA, MFT

Wild Child
*How You Can Help Your Child
with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
and Other Behavioral Disorders*



*Pre-publication
REVIEWS,
COMMENTARIES,
EVALUATIONS . . .*

“Wild Child is a very comprehensive book for parents, teachers, and students in understanding and dealing with ADD children. As a parent of an ADD child, I found the section on chores very helpful. I appreciate Mr. Mordasini's frankness about his personal experience with ADD as well as the self-monitoring that parents must do to make sure they are centered when approaching a challenging situation. This book is a great assistance in producing family harmony.”

Lolita Foster, BA
*Teacher,
Evergreen School District,
California*

“This book is a must-read for anyone who has an ADD child or who works with one. Written in an informal style, yet clearly research based, this book will appeal to both parents and educators. Using a combination of narrative and anecdotal writing, Mr. Mordasini provides insight into the minds of the children and offers a common-sense approach to helping them. Mr. Mordasini tackles the hard questions and gives real answers. As an educator, I found Chapter 15, 'Easing the Homework Struggle,' particularly valuable in that it lays out a detailed, step-by-step approach to dealing with specific homework problems a student may encounter.”

Gayle E. Hirsch, MA
*Chairperson,
Special Education Department,
Sagamore Junior High School,
Manorville, NY*



More pre-publication

REVIEWS, COMMENTARIES, EVALUATIONS . . .

"Congratulations to Don for doing a great job in documenting his life's work—as an ADD individual, as the parent of an ADD child, and as a mental health professional with an ADD specialization. He has found the 'growth opportunity' in his trauma, and he is now sharing his wisdom with his patients and those who read his book. He writes with insight and compassion, and he has the professional expertise to translate clinical technique with layman's terms. This is a book that every ADD family should have on their bookshelf. The kids may even appreciate it more than the parents."

Ken Deaver, LCSW
Los Gatos, California

This page intentionally left blank

Wild Child

*How You Can Help Your Child
with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
and Other Behavioral Disorders*

THE HAWORTH PRESS
New, Recent, and Forthcoming Titles
of Related Interest

- Maltreatment and the School-Age Child: Developmental Outcomes and System Issues* by Phyllis T. Howing, John S. Wodarski, P. David Kurtz, and James Martin Gaudin Jr.
- The Handbook of Psychiatric Drug Therapy for Children and Adolescents* by Karen A. Theesen
- Treating Children in Out-of-Home Placements* by Marvin Rosen
- Children, Medicines, and Culture* edited by Patricia J. Bush, Deanna J. Trakas, Emilio J. Sanz, Rolf L. Wirsing, Tuula Vaskilampi, and Alan Prout
- Spiritual Care for Children Living in Specialized Settings: Breathing Underwater* by Michael F. Friesen
- Making Families Work and What to Do When They Don't: Thirty Guides for Imperfect Parents of Imperfect Children* by Bill Borchardt
- The Effect of Children on Parents, Second Edition* by Anne-Marie Ambert
- Parents, Children, and Adolescents: Interactive Relationships and Development in Context* by Anne-Marie Ambert
- A Parents' Guide to CFIDS: How to Be an Advocate for Your Child with Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome* by David S. Bell, Mary Z. Robinson, Jean Pollard, Tom Robinson, and Bonnie Floyd
- Treating Children with Sexually Abusive Behavior Problems: Guidelines for Child and Parent Intervention* by Jan Ellen Burton, Lucinda A. Rasmussen, Julie Bradshaw, Barbara J. Christopherson, and Steven C. Huke
- Bridging Worlds: Understanding and Facilitating Adolescent Recovery from the Trauma of Abuse* by Joyce Kennedy and Carol McCarthy
- Sexual, Physical, and Emotional Abuse in Out-of-Home Care: Preventive Skills for At-Risk Children* by Toni Cavanagh Johnson and Associates
- Sibling Abuse Trauma: Assessment and Intervention Strategies for Children, Families, and Adults* by John V. Caffaro and Allison Conn-Caffaro

Wild Child

*How You Can Help Your Child
with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
and Other Behavioral Disorders*

Don Mordasini, MA, MFT

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc.
Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, microfilm, and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book should not be used as a substitute in place of psychotherapy for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or other mental disorders. The reader should consult a physician for matters relating to symptoms that may require medical attention. The case studies and vignettes presented in this book are based on actual clinical cases. However, all names, genders, and ages have been changed to protect the privacy of those individuals.

Cover design by Jennifer M. Gaska.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mordasini, Don.

Wild child : how you can help your child with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and other behavioral disorders / Don Mordasini.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-789-01102-2 (PBK)

1. Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder—Popular works. 2. Behavior disorders in children—Popular works. 3. Conduct disorders in adolescence—Popular works. 4. Child rearing. I. Title.

RJ506.H9 .M662 2000
618.92'8589—dc21

00-040735

to

My mother, Dorothy Mordasini, who was afraid to answer the door when the kids yelled, "Donny's hurt again." She loved me in my slowness, when I was put back a grade in school, when I was in trouble for gambling in the boy's john in the sixth grade, and later when I stayed out all night. Her stern words, "Wear your galoshes," "Put a scarf around your neck," I carry in my heart today. I give her thanks for teaching me unconditional acceptance.

to

My daughter Monika, who softened me with her glorious affection and adoration. She made love sooo *easy*.

to

My daughter Beate, who I virtually forced to ski avalanche mountains in the Alps, ever at her dad's side, even though she chewed me out when we got home. Her grace and beauty made love sooo *easy*.

to

My daughter Manuela, who made love so goddamn difficult with her own ADD. I give her thanks for *stretching* me to look beyond behavior to find the pearls inside.

to

Shri Ananda Ma, the universal embodiment of love, who taught me to find the divine incarnated throughout the creation.

My special appreciation to God as feminine, who wore all those faces for me and somehow maneuvered through my masculine rigidity so that I might pass on some of the gifts I received.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1983, **Don Mordasini, MA, MFT**, was a successful and rising star in the professional world—a vice president with Dean Witter Reynolds—and climbing the corporate ladder. In that year he experienced an emotional breakdown that culminated not only in a twenty-year marriage unraveling, but also in his giving up his professional career. He spent the next several years searching for who he was, trying to put the pieces together. It was at that time that he learned he had ADD.

Today, Don is a noted ADD psychotherapist, an area to which he brings a unique perspective, not only as an ADDer himself, but also as the father of an ADD daughter. As a partner in the highly respected Los Gatos Therapy Center, which is on the leading edge of ADD work, Don treats children, adolescents, and adults for ADD and its typical attendant disorders, anxiety and depression.

Don holds a bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley. He is also a graduate of the Naval Officer Candidate School, and the Goethe Institute in Munich, Germany. In addition, he holds a master's degree from the Professional School of Psychology in San Francisco.

CONTENTS

Foreword	xiii
<i>Bruce M. Wermuth, MD</i>	
Special Acknowledgments	xvii
Introduction	1
PART I: DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING	
Chapter 1. My Struggle As a Parent	7
Chapter 2. What My Personal Experience Has Taught Me	13
Parental Rigidity	13
Cause-Effect Behavior	14
Emotional Enmeshment	14
Loss of Self-Esteem	15
A Sense of Perspective/New Learning	15
The Power Struggle	16
Chapter 3. Attention Deficit Disorder from the Inside Out	19
What Is Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder?	19
I Do Not Remember!	20
Inattentiveness	21
Hypersensitivity	23
Hyperactivity (ADHD Trait)	26
Impulsiveness (ADHD Trait)	27
Peer Relationships	28
Some Frequently Asked Questions	29
Rejected Parents	33
A Prescription from the Horse's Mouth	34

Chapter 4. Your Child <i>Can</i> Change: Teaching Your Child New Behavior	37
Developing a Plan for Your Child	37
Planning Helps the Parent	39
Five Basic Rules	39
Chapter 5. Charting the Course to a New Life: Motivating Your Child to Change His or Her Behavior	45
A Few Comments	45
Another Look at ADD	46
Verbal Encouragement	49
Nonverbal Encouragement	50
Indirect Verbal Encouragement	50
Tangible Rewards and Privileges	51
Point Charts	52
Negative Incentives	63
Phasing Out the Reward System	65
Moving Forward	67
Chapter 6. Changing What Happens Inside: Empowering Your Child	69
Understand That Your Child Needs Special Help	70
Invite Your Child into the Decision-Making Process	73
Negotiate with Your Child	74
Allow Your Child to Make Choices	75
Praise Liberally	75
Use Medication Appropriately	75
Do Not Interact with Your Child or Make Decisions When You Are Emotionally Upset	76
Chapter 7. Lessons for Parents	77
Self-Check	78
Modeling	79
Contact	80
Awareness	80
Choice (Empowerment)	81
Reinforcement	82
Putting It All Together	82

Chapter 8. New Perspectives on ADD Medication	85
Chapter 9. Putting It All Together	89
A Summary of the Steps	89
Applying the Behavior Techniques We Discussed	91
Discussions with Your Child	91
Self-Monitoring, Choice, and Reinforcement for the Parent	92
Use of Point Charts	93
What Age Should My Child Be to Benefit from the Information Summarized?	95
 PART II: SPECIFIC PROBLEM BEHAVIORS (WORKING WITH CHILDREN AGES FOUR TO FOURTEEN)	
Chapter 10. Taming Aggression	99
Parent's Composure Review	102
Time-Out Review	103
Problems in Dealing with Aggressive Behavior	104
Conduct Disorder	106
Chapter 11. Temper Tantrums	109
Why Do Children Throw Temper Tantrums?	110
Distinguishing Between Temper Tantrums and Disrespect	111
Stopping Temper Tantrums	112
Chapter 12. Teaching Respect	115
Improving My Behavior List	117
Parent's Composure Review	119
Chapter 13. Time for Chores	121
How to Motivate Your Child to Do Chores	122
Suppose This Does Not Work	126
Examples of Typical Problems I Have Encountered	127

Chapter 14. How to Help Your Child with School	129
Problems with Focusing	130
Hyperactivity and Impulsiveness	132
Additional Notes	134
A Final Word	135
Chapter 15. Easing the Homework Struggle	137
Helping Your Child	138
Communicating with Your Child's Teacher	139
Interventions	140
Chapter 16. Peers and Socialization	155
Relationship Problems	155
A Social Skills Model	157
Coaching Your Child	161
Entering the Social Arena	163
Chapter 17. Daily Challenges and How to Meet Them	167
Four Basic Rules	167
Additional Problem Behaviors	169
Going Forward	178
PART III: PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS	
Chapter 18. The Challenging Teen Years	181
Case Examples	182
Chapter 19. What Parents Need to Know	187
Parenting Styles	188
Parental Pitfalls	190
Parental Resources	192
A Few Notes	197
Chapter 20. Adolescent Anger	199
Conduct Disorder	200
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	201
Preventive Parenting	203

Chapter 21. School Problems	207
Guidelines for Parents Whose Teenagers Have Difficulty in School	208
Typical Problems	210
Chapter 22. Winning with Drug and Alcohol Problems	213
ADD Teens and Substance Abuse	214
Signs of Drug Use	215
Managing Drug Use	217
A Final Note	218
Chapter 23. Additional Teenage Problems	221
Messy Rooms	221
Sibling Fights	222
Curfew	223
Homework	224
Truancy	225
Out of Control	226
Learning to Step Back	230
Index	231

This page intentionally left blank

Foreword

The entire subject of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) presents itself daily in newspapers, on television, on talk radio, and on the Internet. Exciting and significant advances are being made in the understanding of ADHD. Therapists, physicians, teachers, and even politicians are expressing many concerns about underdiagnosing or overdiagnosing, undertreatment or overtreatment. Health insurance company policies, HMOs in particular, and dwindling monies for mental health treatment reimbursement have led to shorter and less costly evaluations and treatments for children with ADHD. This often results in giving children medication only, or in not treating them at all. This shortsighted and inadequate approach does a tremendous disservice to these needy children and to their parents who often end up with merely a pill as their only means of professional help. The pill or no pills at all approach ignores the need to change ADHD children's long-standing maladaptive behavioral patterns developed in a desperate attempt to cope with their chaotic ADHD world. Also lost is the opportunity to help the parents of these children view ADHD with more understanding and change their parenting approaches.

In this current, sometimes confusing ADHD arena, it is timely and refreshing to be redirected, reorganized, and better grounded by Don Mordasini's new book, *Wild Child*. It is a remarkable, no-nonsense, practical, helpful guide for children and adolescents with ADHD, for their parents, and for therapists in the field. The book emphasizes what constitutes the condition and how misdiagnosis or undertreatment with medication alone can harm children's self-esteem and continue family chaos and parental sense of inadequacy. Don's goal is that of changing unwanted behaviors and learning new behaviors to help children and teens become more responsible, self-sufficient, and self-confident individuals.

The degree of organization, clinical examples, charts, and intervention strategies lend distinctive beauty and effectiveness to this book. This is so helpful for parents reading the book because many of them also have ADD traits themselves. The very organization of Don's book reaches out effectively to these particular parents who need specific structure, order, and step-by-step guidance. This book is an excellent resource for parents who are overwhelmed by details or intimidated by too much information. What a gift!

In addition to offering practical, easy-to-understand guidance, the book is equally if not more important because Don's own life circumstances play an integral part of the text. Don grew up having ADHD and raised a daughter who had ADHD. Now, as a therapist in private practice, Don treats ADHD children and their parents. Don's rich and valuable viewpoint of having "walked in others' shoes" is rare and exceptional in a book of this type and allows him to effectively present the materials from three unique perspectives: the ADHD child, the parent, and the therapist. Who better to help than one who has been there and has grown stronger and wiser as a result?

Wild Child is divided into two sections. The first section presents an understanding of the basic nature of ADHD and its diagnosis. The second section deals with therapeutic techniques and treatment. This section is subdivided into two parts that deal with the major practical issues that are essential for proper and effective treatment of children and adolescents. These sections form the heart and soul of the book by informing readers what to do for the child and parents once the diagnosis of ADHD has been made. His understanding of pertinent issues is priceless and his interventions are practical and comprehensive.

Each chapter contains basic rules for children and parents to follow. Ample use of clinical examples illustrates the points made in the text. Practical rubber-meets-the-road guides for parents are given to help their children with familiar and important issues such as aggression, temper tantrums, chores, bedtime difficulties, messy rooms, and getting dressed and ready for school. Breaking curfews, truancy, running away, and substance abuse are some of the many issues addressed in the section on adolescence.

Although *Wild Child* primarily deals with ADHD, it has much broader implications to help treat other important clinical conditions such as oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and much more. Some of these conditions often coexist with ADHD, while some of them masquer-

ade as ADHD due to overlapping clinical features. However, all can be helped substantially by the interventions offered in these core chapters.

Before closing, I want to share the following thoughts about my relationship with Don Mordasini with whom I have worked for several years. Don is an inspiration—consistently positive, affirming, and enthusiastic. However busy, he always makes time to be helpful and readily shares his information and ideas. He is excellent at assessing clinical situations and quickly focuses in on the salient issues. His therapeutic abilities are well honed and he brings into play the skills of a diagnostician, therapist, mentor, teacher, and role model. Don also is able to handle the delicate balance between treating the child or the adolescent while involving the parents in a constructive way. I especially appreciate his follow-up procedures on tough cases and his commitment to helping achieve positive results, which have resulted in remarkable success with a wide variety of patients. He is also quite comfortable and skillful in working with other professionals such as schoolteachers, tutors, counselors, or psychiatrists. He is committed to developing a strong treatment-team alliance. I look forward to continuing my personal and professional relationship with this most talented and special person.

Bruce M. Wermuth, MD
Los Gatos, California

This page intentionally left blank

Special Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Hal Zina Bennett for editing *Wild Child*. I imagine it was no easy task for him to edit an ADHD author's manuscript. I know I must have been looking out the window when English grammar was being taught. I thank him for his patience and perseverance.

I also wish to thank Katy Day, typist extraordinaire. How did you get those charts to fit so neatly? And how come all the sentences are in a neat little row?

This page intentionally left blank

Introduction

I was in my fifties when I learned that I have attention deficit disorder. Somehow that sounds as though I was late investigating what makes me tick. I was. I was too busy and too successful to slow down and look over my shoulder. When I did glance back, I saw a shadow behind me, so I kept running. Helena, my wife, used to ask me why I did not slow down and take an easier, less stressful job. Each time she said that, I shuddered, not knowing exactly why that suggestion bothered me so much.

I was a professional businessman for twenty years, and during that time my energies were primarily focused on raising a family and building a business. Through trial and error, unaware of my condition, I had learned many coping strategies to manage my life. I was blessed with strong intuition that kept me out of areas of activity where my ADD would have been my downfall. However, the inevitable can only be delayed so long and I met up with myself when I had a nervous breakdown at the age of forty-eight.

During that period I virtually lost my identity. I had been a high achiever in business and I was unable to work any longer. A marriage I treasured for twenty years became unraveled. Divorce and taxes drained the financial security I had built up for retirement. Children I had held and loved every day of my life became frightened of my breakdown, and a distance grew between us. I began a long period of self-loathing. I had identified myself by what I could do and the various hats I wore; none of them fit anymore. I cursed myself as a misfit, weakling, loser, and burden to others.

The period of self-loathing I experienced was the start of my healing, excruciatingly painful though it was. I had come smack up against a deep-rooted belief in my own inadequacy. It was not a new feeling. I had experienced a sense of it from the time I started primary school. It followed me through high school, college, and my career. I had to climb ever-higher mountains to prove my own self-worth.

My identity was in my accomplishments. It was all *out there*. Without my accomplishments I was nothing. I was caught up in the age-old conflict between “doing” and “being.” I had to find new ways to be comfortable with myself or perish. I spent the next several years searching for who I really am. I was forced to find my self-worth outside my achievements. I was forced to let go of self-worth concepts based on profession, physical comforts, and material success. I had to stop measuring human worth against any yardstick whatsoever.

Beginning with childhood, I had compared, analyzed, evaluated, interpreted, and reviewed, always comparing myself against others. I always fell far short of the mark: I was not scholastic; I was too clumsy, slow, loud, wild, misbehaving, ad nauseum.

Self-comparison always occurs in the child’s mind, and the ADD mind is continually processing such information, sometimes repressing the thoughts, other times entertaining them. *This is the curse of the child’s mind and it continues until, as an adult, he or she becomes aware of these thoughts and begins to question their validity.*

When I found out that I had ADD I felt a burden lift from my shoulders. I was able to look at my distorted thinking and begin the true healing process of correcting my own false assumptions of myself. It was my first step toward throwing away the measuring tape. Unfortunately, the healing process does not end with the diagnosis. One tries to throw away the measuring tape only to pick it up again and again. As I began to slow down the mental nonsense, I started to get in touch with my own innate goodness. Nevertheless, the process of reconstructing a view of myself had begun and I was firmly on the path toward self-healing.

This path ultimately brought me to a decision. What was I to do with the rest of my life? As I reflected on this matter, I felt that our planet was seeded with enough stockbrokers that my absence from the profession would not be particularly noticed. I realized that I wanted to use my experience to help others, and since I had crossed the hot coals, I thought I might help others to circumvent them. Thus, I began forging a new career as a psychotherapist.

As a clinician, I believe the most serious harm that can result from undiagnosed and untreated ADD is the painful and devastating loss of self-esteem. With absolutely no malicious intent, parents, teachers, relatives, peers, preachers, television, and the media tend to make it difficult for the ADD child to develop normal self-esteem.

As an insider, so to speak, I have written this book to help parents feel better about their children and to help children feel good about themselves.

My concern is that ADD children learn to trust themselves, feel good about themselves, and have confidence in their worth as unique individuals.

Many parents are concerned about their child's behavior in school and at home: lack of motivation, inability to progress academically with peers, mood swings, temper tantrums, and inability to concentrate. When I was raising my own ADD daughter I was puzzled by these problems. At that time, I had no idea about dealing with these and other ADD issues.

My mission for this period of my life is to help parents and children change unwanted behaviors and learn new behaviors. Although learning new behavior is very important, *the overall goal is to help children become responsible, self-sufficient, self-confident individuals.*

This book is written from three perspectives:

1. The first perspective is that of the ADD child. You have an opportunity to view life through the lens of the ADDer. From this vantage point you can gain an understanding and a fresh appreciation for the challenges an ADD child faces.
2. The second perspective is that of the parent (myself) working with a very demanding ADD child, caught up with my own bewilderment, frustration, and occasional sense of helplessness.
3. The third perspective is from the vantage point of a clinician. This perspective is the hand holding, tutoring, and the explaining part, offering new ways to help your child. I have tried to be very careful to take you slowly, step by step, through each chapter so that you build upon your own knowledge and experience. This allows you to build confidence in your ability to help your child develop a solid sense of self as he or she learns new constructive behaviors with your guidance.

I no longer run from my shadow. We are one. Thank God! The difficulties I experienced as I faced myself gave me a deeper appreciation of who I really am. Deep inside me I found a love for humankind, and, even more wonderful than that, I discovered how I could use my experiences to help others. To be able to follow my bliss, as the great mythologist Joseph Campbell would say, is a very great gift indeed!

This page intentionally left blank