

# Inhibited Sadness: A Psychological Cause of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity<sup>1</sup> Syndrome (ADHS)

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This paper describes psychological syndromes which mimic ADHD, a neurological disorder. The focus here is children who cope with an underlying sadness by avoidance, denial, and inhibition/repression. This way of coping is not very successful and adds to the stress levels of the child. The result is concentration problems, irritability and anger, poor compliance with teacher expectations, poor focus on classwork, and provocative and disruptive behavior. These lead to misdiagnoses of ADHD which lead to grossly inappropriate interventions. One of the clearest indications of this syndrome, an avoidance of discussion of feelings or emotions, is often obvious in early therapy sessions. When feelings are brought up, the child is likely to become hyperactive and provocative, to make denials of sadness which are too strong to be believable, to skillfully change the subject of conversation, to refuse to deal with the subject, or to become belligerent and mildly aggressive. The major components of treatment include (a) development of therapeutic rapport and alliance; and (b) the cognitive behavioral methods of exposure, interpretation and education, goal setting, discussion, and games to reduce the discomfort of sadness and help the child develop more effective coping methods.

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<sup>1</sup> In Mills, G.M., Al-Mateen, C.S., & Freeman, E.B. (1997). *Children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders: Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Virginia Beach Conference*. Richmond, VA: Commonwealth Institute for Child and Family Studies, Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University.