

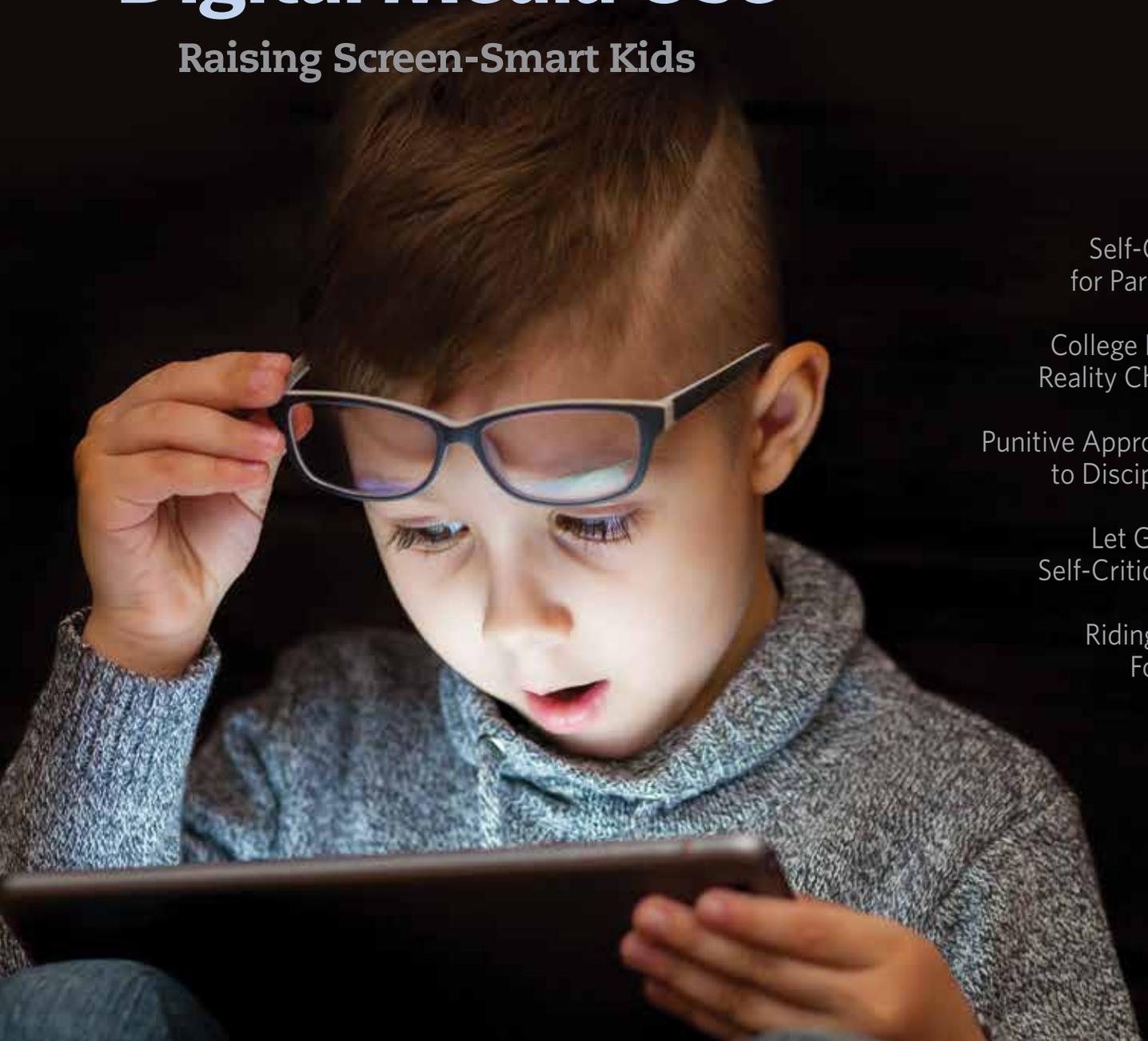
# Attention chadd.org

LIVING WELL WITH ADHD

WINTER 2017-18

## Healthy Digital Media Use

Raising Screen-Smart Kids



Self-Care  
for Parents

College Prep  
Reality Check

Punitive Approach  
to Discipline

Let Go of  
Self-Criticism

Riding for  
Focus

# The punishment mindset and school discipline

by Linda Swanson,  
MA, ACC, CACP

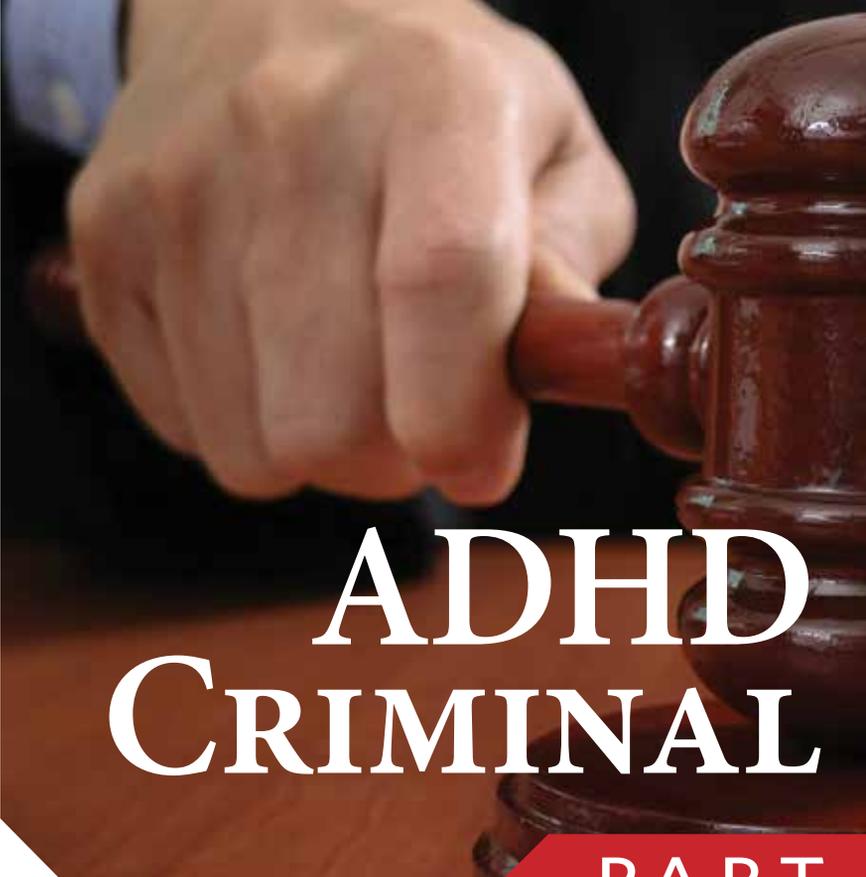
**I**NDIVIDUALS WITH ADHD or similar disorders have brains that function differently, in some respects, from the brains of neurotypical individuals. To many readers of this magazine, that is well known and understood. These are our children, our students, our siblings, our parents, and even ourselves.

But there are many people who interact with individuals with ADHD and similar disorders who do not yet understand neurodiversity. They may believe that ADHD is not real; they may think an ADHD diagnosis is a convenient excuse for bad parenting; they may think that all brains are the same and that everyone can be “whipped into shape” with the right combination of carrots and sticks.

We know that some behaviors of people with ADHD stand out, cause disruptions, and attract the attention of people in positions of authority, such as teachers, principals, security guards, police, judges, and so forth. When the people in authority do not have an understanding of neurological differences and have not been trained to remain calm and to look behind the disruptive behaviors for what might be prompting them, situations can escalate. The consequences of escalation can be life changing for the individuals involved, especially if the juvenile or criminal justice systems are brought into the picture and if there is the absence of understanding and compassion in the school and community.

This article tells a difficult story. It describes some of the ways we got to the place where between 25 and 50 percent of individuals in jail or prison in the United States (and other countries) are believed to have ADHD, most often undiagnosed and untreated. But this article and especially the one to follow in the next issue also tell the hopeful story of how the tide seems to be turning. There is growing understanding of ADHD, thanks to programs like global ADHD Awareness Month in October and the dedicated work of an ever-growing number of ADHD professionals and volunteers. Old beliefs that led to heavy-handed policies are proving to have been misguided and those policies are starting to change.

Parents, teachers, attorneys, coaches, and others are learning about ADHD and educating their friends, families, neighbors, school officials, and criminal justice departments. Programs such as CHADD’s Parent to Parent and



# ADHD CRIMINAL

## PART

Teacher to Teacher are teaching the facts about ADHD and how best to support individuals with this type of brain. Communities are coming together to create programs of restorative justice with the support of police and the courts to offer individuals an opportunity to correct and learn from mistakes in judgment.

Part two will describe some programs that are addressing this challenge here and abroad and will suggest ways to get involved on the local level to foster a more compassionate and positive community approach. In part one, we’re looking at some of the factors that have led to the statistics mentioned above, and we’re starting with what has been called the school-to-prison pipeline.

### The punitive approach

It is a sad fact that some schools in the United States suspend children as young as preschool, with black children suspended in disproportionately higher numbers (3.6 times more often than whites), according to a study from the US Department of Education that used public school data from the 2013–14 school year.

At the same time, there is an underdiagnosis of ADHD in black children, which a 2016 study suggests leads to their over-punishment and to their over-representation in what is called the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

Kids with diagnosed behavior problems, including ADHD, are the most likely to be disciplined. Students with disabilities who are served by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) are twice as likely to receive one or



# AND JUSTICE

## ONE

more out-of-school suspensions, with two-thirds of those students having been placed in restraints and seclusion.

It doesn't make sense to punish children for behaviors over which they have little or no control. The impulsivity of an ADHD child is often perceived as a willful choice the child has made rather than the result of an immature or differently wired brain. A teacher's failure to properly understand or interpret such behavior can result in escalation of the situation and subsequent punishment.

Children who are put out of school on suspension are children who are not learning. They are six times more likely to repeat a grade. One study found that students who repeat a grade are 68 percent more likely to drop out of school, so they will need extra support to succeed. Students who have dropped out, who have been expelled, or who are temporarily out due to suspensions are likely to get into trouble by being in places they shouldn't be without supervision. Clearly this does not serve the student or society well.

One factor that has contributed to some children moving from school disciplinary action to juvenile justice and on to prison is that many schools have outsourced their discipline to the courts and the police. Inside the schools of the United States are between 14,000 and 20,000 sworn law enforcement officers—police, who are working with the title of School Resource Officer (SRO). These individuals are trained as full police officers, but they are not likely to have received specialized training in youth development and working with young people. Schools with SROs often move students quickly from misbehavior to punishment

(including suspension or expulsion or even being turned over to the juvenile justice system), often for infractions as minor as causing a teacher to feel disrespected. Sometimes there is little or no time spent trying to understand what underlies the behavior, and the punishment is often disproportionately harsh.

### **Moving away from failed policies**

There is no evidence that harsh punishments or removing young people from school actually benefits schools or young people. People are finally waking up to that fact. There is evidence, on the other hand, that the zero-tolerance policies that began in the “tough on crime” era of the 1980s have actually made schools less safe. Expulsions and suspensions disrupt the educational

process for students who are then more likely to become involved in the criminal justice system. Sending a teen to juvenile detention, where social connections are made with other troubled youth, puts him or her on a track that often leads to not completing high school and to ending up in prison as an adult.

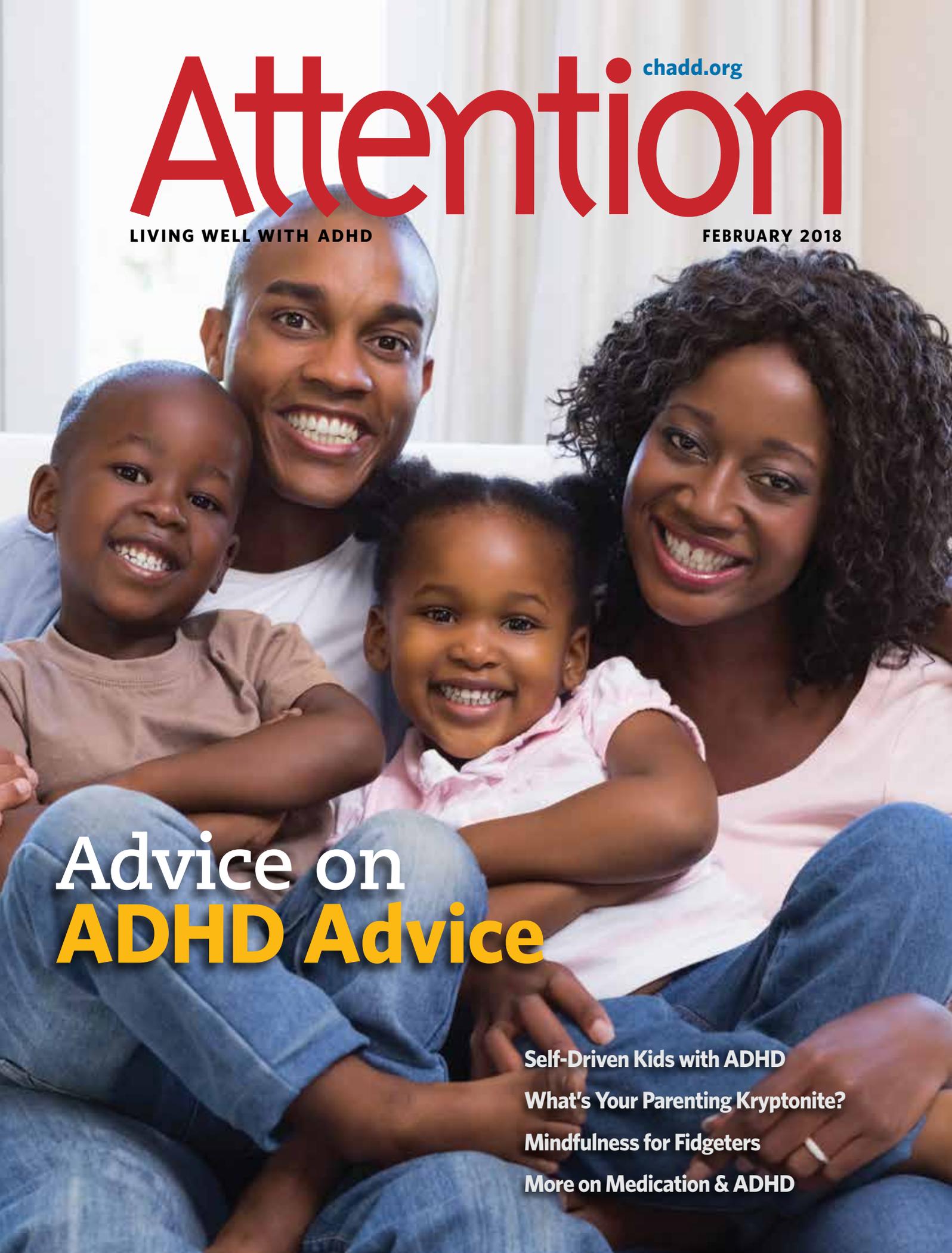
Fortunately there is evidence that the failure of zero-tolerance policies adopted by schools decades ago is finally being acknowledged. We also now know that is especially important to keep young people in school when they are having behavior problems if we want to help them become contributing members of society.

There is a welcome and growing movement toward Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and restorative practices or restorative justice. Some schools have adopted proactive programs such as Dr. Ross Green's Collaborative Problem Solving model that is based on the understanding that “Kids do well if they can,” as opposed to the more traditional view that “Kids do well if they want to.” The latter philosophy often leads to a punishment mindset, and we have seen where that takes us.

In part two of this series, we will look at some programs in community, school, and prison settings that are taking a nonpunitive approach. These programs are educating, supporting, nourishing, and giving hope. 🗨️

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# Attention

LIVING WELL WITH ADHD

FEBRUARY 2018

## Advice on **ADHD Advice**

Self-Driven Kids with ADHD

What's Your Parenting Kryptonite?

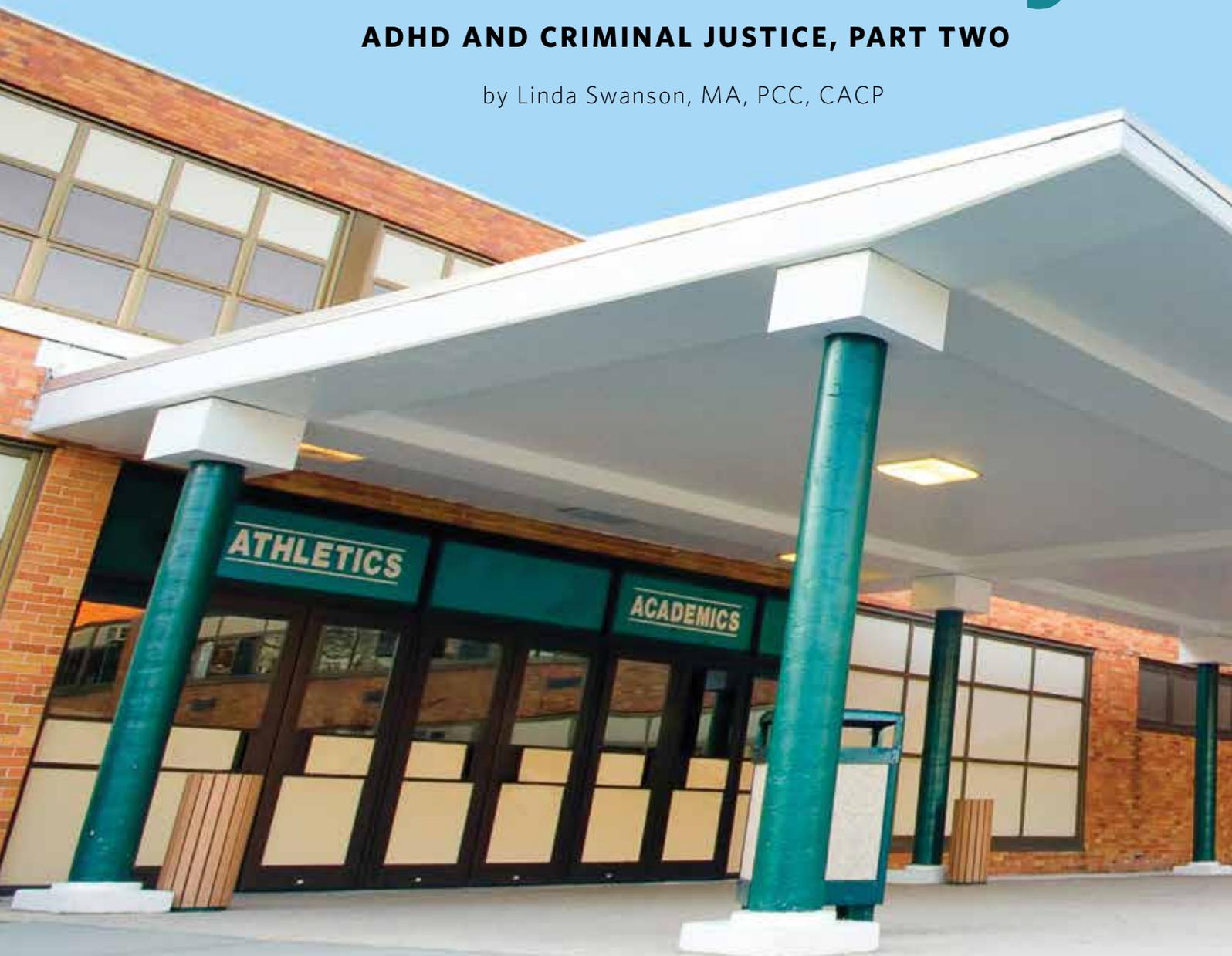
Mindfulness for Fidgeters

More on Medication & ADHD

# RAISING ADHD Awareness IN THE Local Community

**ADHD AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE, PART TWO**

by Linda Swanson, MA, PCC, CACP

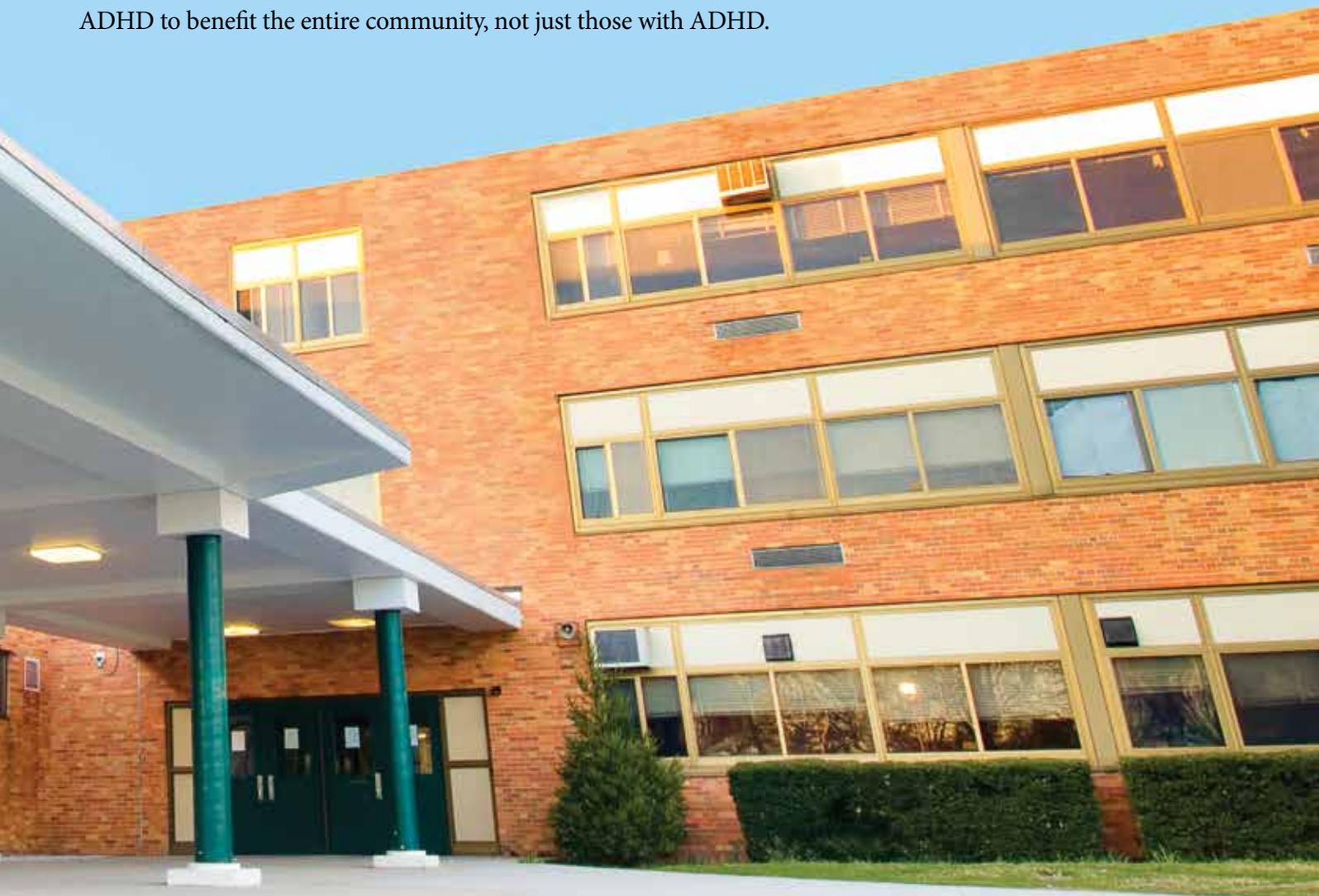


**E**VERY OCTOBER we observe International ADHD Awareness Month. Those of us in the worldwide ADHD community have the opportunity, even responsibility, to raise awareness about ADHD during the other eleven months of the year as well.

The people we encounter in our communities impact our lives in many ways. Those impacts are much more likely to be positive if there is a common understanding of neurodiversity in general and ADHD in particular.

Part two of this series focuses on ways to bring education about ADHD to the people involved in the school-to-prison pipeline described in part one. Fewer individuals would find themselves in that pipeline if their teachers and school disciplinarians understood more about ADHD. And if more people in the criminal justice system were educated about how someone with ADHD might respond when under stress, the result could be a reduction in the number of people charged with crimes, as well as a reduction in the recidivism rate. This is especially true given that, according to many sources, as many as 50 percent of the citizens currently involved in the justice system have ADHD.

What can each of us do to help? It turns out, quite a lot! This article challenges us to step up to the opportunity to educate one or two or more people in our communities each year about ADHD to benefit the entire community, not just those with ADHD.



## What we have done in our local schools

My husband, Neil, and I are ADHD coaches in a small town in rural Fauquier County, Virginia, just on the outskirts of what is considered the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. We have become aware of a number of ways people in our local and wider community are responding more and more compassionately to ADHD and neurodiversity. We are doing our best to contribute to that effort and to encourage more movement in that direction.

We know that teachers and school resource officers who regard the actions of a child with ADHD as bad behavior are likely to respond with punishment rather than with understanding and support. There are alternatives to punishment that are not as likely to start a child down the pipeline. Are your teachers aware of those alternatives?

## We know that teachers and school resource officers who regard the actions of a child with ADHD as bad behavior are likely to respond with punishment rather than with understanding and support. There are alternatives to punishment that are not as likely to start a child down the pipeline.

We have learned that one program our school system uses is called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS; learn more at [www.fcps1.org/Page/998](http://www.fcps1.org/Page/998)). This program is part of a Virginia Department of Education state project to provide supports that address students' needs by offering "a rich menu of positive behavioral support options." Is your school system using PBIS or some other similar option to punishment?

School systems welcome speakers for their various meetings and training programs. Neil and I have worked with and given presentations about ADHD to our school system's Parent Resource Center, as well as to school administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers to be sure they are aware of the needs of students with ADHD.

What civic committees might welcome your input as an advocate for individuals with ADHD? Neil is in his third year serving as a member of the county school board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), which is tasked with keeping the school board advised of needs in the area of special education. Through this work he is constantly made aware of ways the school system is falling short, and he is doing what he can to help. He is known for his advocacy for ADHD, so his presence assures that ADHD is not overlooked in that committee. In the spring, we are scheduled to give a presentation to SEAC about ADHD.



The Fauquier County Mental Health Association has done a fabulous job of educating hundreds of citizens (including a large number of the public school teachers) in mental health first aid and youth mental health first aid. Neil and I have taken both of those two-day courses, and they are wonderful—but there is only a tiny mention of ADHD. We have provided the instructors with more information and understand that they are sharing it in their classes.

If you are interested in bringing one of the mental health first aid courses to your area, we recently learned of a new group to teach. Just last week I heard a podcast from the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice that described a program in Connecticut that teaches youth mental health first aid to students so that they will have the tools they need to assist their peers in distress. That's a great model—don't young people much more readily turn to other young people than to adults? Every bit of new awareness helps.

## Outreach to law enforcement and the justice system

Have you ever been stopped for a traffic violation, felt a rush of righteous indignation, and blurted an inadvisable comment to the officer? If the officer was aware of characteristic behaviors of folks with ADHD, especially in stressful situations, she or he might be more understanding, so long as there was no risk to safety. A pause to reflect on what might be going on for the driver provides



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the officer with an opportunity to choose to head down a radically different path from arrest—one that can lead to a positive future for the driver and the community.

Fortunately, some individuals in the criminal justice system have a personal understanding of ADHD, as did a law enforcement official with whom we recently spoke. A member of his family has ADHD, so he was inclined to be more understanding. Not everyone has that personal perspective, however. Where understanding is lacking, the individuals need to be educated. That's where we all have an opportunity to act and contribute.



We have given presentations to parole boards, to members of the sheriff's department, to members of a citizen's panel (to which we belong) that addresses the needs of juveniles involved in the justice system. With whom might you meet in your community?

Our local chapter of CHADD (NOVA/DC) presents a series of monthly lectures. In May, Neil and I will be presenting one of those lectures along with two leaders from two local county school systems. One woman will discuss how the PBIS system is working in her county. The other speaker will be a woman who was instrumental in creating a restorative justice program in her county of well over a million residents with a huge school system. Has restorative justice been introduced to your school system or community?



Neil and I have been looking further afield to a program for teaching pro-social skills, cognitive skills, and values to youth and adults that was developed several decades ago in Canada. We hope to be trained in this program and to bring it to our county. Some nonprofits have already expressed interest.

The program is called R&R—Reasoning and Rehabilitation—and it has a primary focus on helping people who are involved in or likely to be involved in the criminal justice system. R&R has been taught to over 70,000 offenders in twenty countries and a few US states.

In 2005, a specialized version of the training was developed specifically for individuals with ADHD. Called R&R2 ADHD, this fifteen-session program, usually delivered once a week, has been shown to greatly reduce recidivism.

**Most restorative justice programs rely in part on volunteers. Some training is usually required, but if you already know about ADHD you will have good background understanding of the issues and can share your understanding with others in the program.**

The schools in nearby Fairfax County, Virginia, have a strong restorative justice program. It emphasizes accountability, character development, and school and community safety. It is a formal, multi-step process that teaches social and emotional skills, fosters empathy, and makes clear the many ways one person's actions have an impact on many others.

Fairfax County also has an alternative accountability program that offers young people in trouble a voluntary restorative justice program. Through a series of conferences, the young person who is accused of a crime meets with those who were harmed by his actions. They engage in a circle process during which the victim expresses how she has been harmed, the accused is asked to share what he was thinking at the time, the community reports the wider impact, and the parties come to a mutual agreement about how the harm can be repaired. Some of these cases never go to court if they are successfully resolved through the restorative justice process.

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### **Reach out to thought leaders and decisionmakers**

These are just a few examples of ways you can get involved in raising the level of awareness of ADHD among thought leaders and others in your communities. The diagram on page 31 shows the agencies, schools, and others that we have targeted in our immediate area. We have not yet approached them all by any means, and the chart surely does not include everyone who could benefit from understanding ADHD better, but it's a start.

If you would like to receive a blank version of this chart so you can fill in the relevant agencies and individuals in your community, contact me at [linda@freetobecoaching.com](mailto:linda@freetobecoaching.com) and I'd be happy to send you a PDF. It can serve as a mind map of the many opportunities you have to raise ADHD awareness.

We have found that most people are eager to help. Just as Dr. Ross Greene says about kids: "If they could do better, they would do better," we might say, "If they (the public, particularly the decisionmakers) had the knowledge and understanding to support those of us with ADHD and our children, there's a pretty good chance they would respond better."

Consider taking a step outside your comfort zone for ADHD awareness. That's what we've been doing, and it's enormously rewarding. The sense of community and common purpose you will find is its own reward. 📍

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