

Treating a Child With Anxiety and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder? Don't Rule Out Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

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Abstract

Anxiety disorders (ADs) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are two of the most common psychiatric disorders in youth and approximately 25% of those with an AD have comorbid ADHD.¹ Children with AD and ADHD evidence greater impairment than those with either disorder alone, making them a particularly vulnerable population in need of effective treatment.² Although a strong evidence base supports the efficacy of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) for treating anxiety in children,³ there is little information to guide practitioners on how to best treat those dually diagnosed with an AD and ADHD. Questions have arisen as to whether the cognitive, attentional, and behavioral impairments associated with ADHD interfere with the ability of these children to benefit from CBT for anxiety.⁴ Does the distractibility and overactivity characteristic of ADHD inhibit, perhaps differentially, the ability of these children to effectively engage in CBT for anxiety (e.g., psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, therapeutic exposure)?