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In Person

DR. JUDY WEINER

The Ripple Effect

At first glance Dr. Judy Weiner seems tiny, then she begins to speak and she fills the room. Her tiny corner office - with the great view - seems to expand as her enthusiasm and passion for what she does quickly becomes obvious. Her voice rises as she speaks about her "kids". Dr. Weiner is a professor in the Human Development and Applied Psychology Department at OISE/University of Toronto.



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Mostly she works within the School and Clinical Child Psychology program where she teaches courses in psychological assessment, prevention, and consultation. She also teaches a course on the psychology and education of children and youth with learning disabilities and ADHD. When asked how she first developed her passion for working with kids she says that, "In 1997 I was on sabbatical doing literary research and I became concerned about the lack of information and understanding concerning kids and teens with learning disabilities and ADHD. "

She is the current president of the International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities, an international professional organization dedicated to conducting and sharing research about individuals who have learning disabilities. "There was such a lack of information on children and youth with ADHD," she says. "Especially pertaining to how the kids actually saw themselves. There was nothing on bullying or parenting and I wanted to know more about the kids and how we can help them."

Dr. Weiner is fascinated with what she calls the ripple effect of ADHD – how ADHD impacts the self-understanding and mental health of these children and youth, and their relationships with parents, peers, and teachers. The ripple, however, does not go one way. Parents, peers, and teachers play a major role in how these individuals function at home, in school, and in society.

The ripple effect affects kids in the classroom and how their teachers perceive them. What teachers view as a lack of co-operation is often a direct result of their ADHD. Teachers are also frequently disappointed in them for not being able to better control their ADHD in the classroom.

With peer groups, kids are often bullied because of their ADHD and sometimes they resort to bullying themselves as a control mechanism. Kids walk around with an invisible dark cloud hanging

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over them. They are often labeled as troublesome or aggressive and are frequently harassed by their teachers. Weiner points out that "The kids often believe that their most problematic behavior is often out of their control." Their biggest complaints are that they are stigmatized for having LD/ADHD.

Parents who have ADHD themselves face additional parental challenges. Mothers become overly stressed as first they have to deal with their own ADHD and secondly their child's.

The ripple effect causes additional stress on parents as they are frequently unable to find babysitters for their kids. Additionally, kids with ADHD are less likely to be included in play dates and social gatherings, like birthdays and parties. "This costs parents precious stress relief and a loss of valuable recharging time," she says. "Stress is reduced when we have more social support."

"We are working towards gaining a better understanding of bullying of and by teens with ADHD. More research is crucial to achieving a better understanding of these kids and how they cope with their ADHD." She adds with a wry smile, "We still don't know much about teenagers and relationships and the sexual behaviours of teens with ADHD.

Dr. Weiner is proud of the fact that they are working at helping teens with LD/ADHD to self-advocate. She says that thanks to the tech savvy of her graduate students, "We now use Facebook and Twitter and other forms of social media to reach out to youth, teens and their families." For further information on Dr. Weiner and her work, or if you are interested in participating, visit: <http://www.adhdld.com>.