

Reading, Writing and Ritalin  
More And More Kids Are Being Put On Drugs

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--- CBS News

In the second of two reports about the two to three million American children diagnosed with hyperactivity and attention disorders, CBS News Medical Correspondent Elizabeth Kaledin tells about the search for ways to treat attention disorders in children without powerful drugs.

Like average 9-year-old boys, Kristopher Shonta is nonstop action. But when it came to school, his inability to sit still was not average.

Karen Shonta, his mom, says, "Kristopher was falling behind in classes. He had a problem, difficulty reading, doing math, concentrating."

His parents, Karen and Steven, were told he had attention deficit disorder and that the drug Ritalin could solve the problem. Without hesitation they refused.

"I was dead against it. Karen was also." says Steven Shonta.

"It doesn't cure the problem. It only hides what's there," added Karen Shonta.

Parents of children with attention deficit disorder have few treatment options. Doctors say drugs like Ritalin can have an 80 percent success rate but it can also mean years of keeping a child medicated. Kristopher's parents went looking for an alternative.

What they found was neurofeedback.

"What happens to children with attention deficit disorder is that they have a dysregulation of their brain function," says Dr. Jonathan Michealis.

In the first of what will be about 30 sessions, Dr. Michealis and his colleagues will attempt to help Kristopher re-regulate his brain function by controlling the brain waves that disrupt his ability to focus.

Using only his powers of concentration Kristopher must keep a green space ship ahead of two others. If his mind wanders or he fidgets, the other space ships gain ground meaning that the same brainwaves distracting him in class are taking over.

"It's a skill that they learn just the same as riding a bicycle or learning to play a sport," says Michealis.

Five months of neurofeedback appear to be working wonders for 8-year-old Kyle Lapidus.

"He reads more books than I've ever seen him read -- ever-- since he started school and his grades have improved immensely," says Mark Lapidus.

"Michealis has treated about 400 patients and claims an 85 to 90 percent success rate." says Dr. Peter Jensen.

Jensen warns our understanding of the brain is not yet sophisticated enough to prove to parents neurofeedback works.

"When there are high costs for innovative new treatments that have fancy names or fancy technologies, it's very easy for parents to be misled that this new hope will actually address their child's problems," says Jensen.

At one \$125, a neurofeedback is more expensive than drugs and insurance won't cover it. But to some parents there's a bigger price to pay subjecting their children to years of medication.

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