

Middle School-based and High School-based Interventions for Adolescents with ADHD



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KEYWORDS

- Adolescents • ADHD • Schools • Psychosocial treatment • Organization
- Academic impairment • Social impairment

KEY POINTS

- Evidence indicates that the Challenging Horizons Program and Homework, Organization, and Planning Skills program are likely to be effective treatments for many adolescents with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).
- There is inadequate evidence to make scientifically informed decisions about moderators and mediators of treatment effects as well as optimal sequencing of treatment modalities.
- Benefits of treatment seem greatest when sessions are once or twice per week and continued over many months.
- There are many access advantages for school-based services compared with clinic-based care. Services integrated within the school day seem to have advantages for keeping students engaged compared with after-school services.
- Treatment development work is needed to address many of the challenging areas of impairment shown by adolescents with ADHD, including problems with driving, substance use, delinquency, and school dropout.

BACKGROUND

When children enter middle school they are in the midst of many developmental changes and experience significant shifts in the expectations of parents and

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Abbreviations	
ADHD	Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
CBT	Cognitive behavior therapy
CHP	Challenging Horizons Program
HOPS	Homework, Organization, and Planning Skills program
ISG	Interpersonal skills group (a group treatment of social impairment)
MTA	Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD
OCEBM	Oxford Center for Evidence-based Medicine
SMHP	School mental health professional (school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists)

teachers.¹ The onset of puberty coupled with increased expectations for independence from parents and teachers can be challenging, and this is particularly true for children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Although ratings of ADHD symptoms may decline during adolescence, they remain increased compared with peers,² and the transition to middle school is associated with an interruption in the decline of symptoms.³

Impairment in the school domain is one of the most prominent difficulties faced by adolescents with ADHD. Compared with their peers, adolescents with ADHD earn significantly lower school grades; score significantly lower on standardized achievement tests; and experience higher rates of special education placements, grade retention, and school dropout.⁴⁻⁶ Adolescents with ADHD are more than 8 times more likely to drop out of school than their peers without ADHD.⁴ In addition, problems with delinquency and substance use begin as young as age 11 years⁷ and continue throughout adolescence.⁸ Consistent with the findings related to performance in secondary school, adolescents with ADHD are far less likely than their peers to receive any postsecondary education or training.⁹ As a result, addressing the social, behavioral, and academic problems of adolescents with ADHD is a high priority for parents of these youth and important for promoting positive long-term outcomes.

There continues to be a great deal of treatment development work being conducted for adolescents with ADHD.^{10,11} Much of this work has focused on school-based treatments because of the considerable academic and social impairment shown at school. Providing treatment within a school allows providers to observe the students in structured and unstructured settings (eg, classroom and cafeteria), speak regularly with the students' teachers, observe the direct effects of treatment, and provide services on a frequent basis over an extended period of time. These advantages of school mental health services are well suited to address the chronic and pervasive problems of adolescents with ADHD.

As a result, most of the psychosocial treatment outcome research for adolescents with ADHD has been conducted in schools, it is important to critically review this literature in order to understand future directions for the development and evaluation of services. Future development of other clinic-based and community-based services may be informed by such a review because some of the most effective approaches may be provided and coordinated across multiple settings. This article begins by providing a description of the school-based services that have been developed and evaluated for adolescents with ADHD, followed by a review of the evidence for each treatment. The implications of this work related to modalities of treatment, models of care, and future treatment development and evaluation research are also discussed.

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