



From the CEO

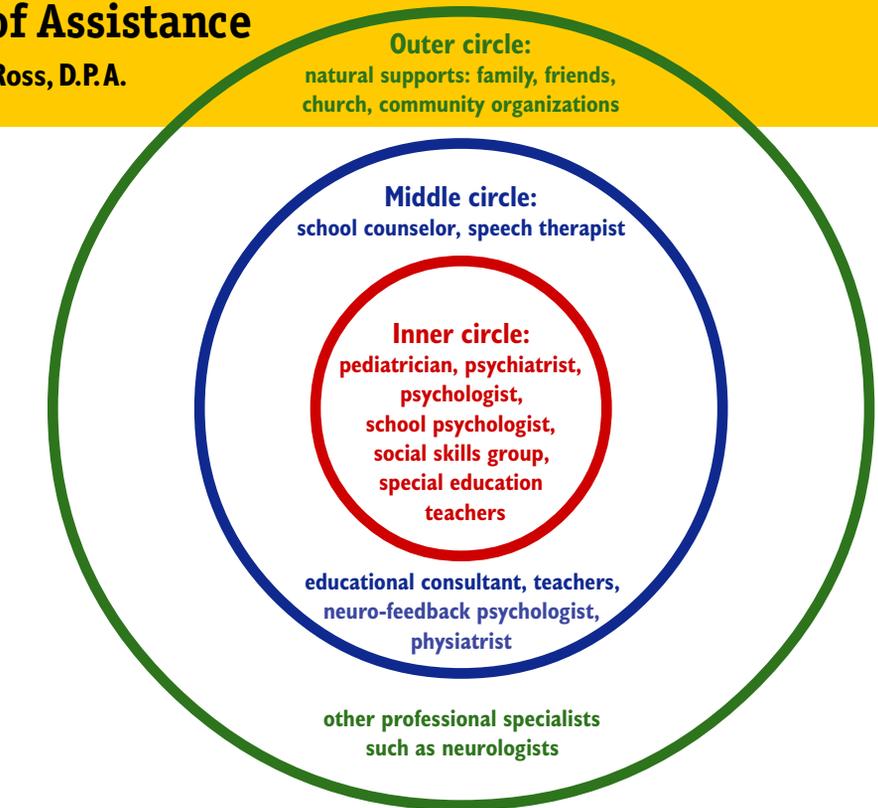
Circles of Assistance

by E. Clarke Ross, D.P.A.

IN 1987, CHADD was founded by Harvey Parker, Ph.D., and Fran Gilman and Carole Lerner, two mothers of school-age children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD). In creating the organization, they stated an essential premise of CHADD: the importance of professional and parent partnership. This partnership has since been expanded to a professional, consumer and family partnership. Almost every day, as CHADD CEO, I see first hand the advantages of such a respectful and productive partnership for individuals with AD/HD and those with co-occurring disorders.

My 15-year-old son, Andrew, has depended for many of his successes in life on this family-professional partnership. Although his official diagnostic classifications have changed over his life, the major challenges have remained constant. The degree of “functional impairment” from these challenges seems to ebb and flow depending on his age and the setting. First, Andrew was labeled as “speech and language delayed,” then as “other health impaired with inattentive AD/HD,” later as “pervasive development disorder, not otherwise specified,” and in March it was changed to “high functioning autism.” Significant anxiety has been a characteristic for many years.

The functional challenges have been the same, although their severity has changed. These challenges include expressive and receptive language, continuing and substantial inattention, failure to perform basic executive functions, and challenges in social connections and skills both with friends and in all settings. Executive functioning refers to the cognitive processes associated with initiating, implementing, monitoring and revising strategies and plans of action. Executive functioning requires sustained attention, organizational abilities and sound working memory.



We have had six months of family crisis as Andrew entered ninth grade at a large high school (2,000 students) that was unable to provide the supports that he requires to learn and to be socially accepted. He is socially isolated, anxious and academically failing. Given the stress of his new environment, Andrew is, for the first time in his life, fighting depression. Internalizing his behavior at school, he explodes at home, something he has never done before. Previously open to professional assistance, Andrew is now resistant to seeing many of his professional supporters. His social skills group psychologist seems to be his most trusted professional at this point in time.

The evidence-based science since the late 1990s has stressed the importance of multimodal treatment (see the Surgeon General’s *Report on Mental Health*, December 1999). Multimodal treatment has been the source of Andrew’s successes. Recently, and unfortunately, I have witnessed several prominent professionals in the field of AD/HD arguing that their specific professional services are more important than the services of other professions and that their services

should always be used first. This is sad and a disservice to those families with complex challenges that need coordinated, multiple and simultaneously provided interventions. I appeal to these professionals to place the needs of the child, the consumer and the family first and foremost.

Above is an illustration of the circles of assistance important in Andrew’s life. Those in the inner circle are the more essential professional supports. Those in the middle circle are vital supports. Those in the outer circle are fundamental to Andrew’s successes in life. The components of the circles will vary from family to family. Professionals need to recognize that they have an important role to play in the health and development of each child and consumer.

Let us remember the themes made popular by others: “It takes a village,” and “Can’t we all just get along?” Andrew needs the skill and talents of professionals, and he needs them all to work together in his best interests. Fortunately, for Andrew, this is the case. I hope that professionals nationwide will also focus on the needs of the child, consumer and family. ■