

*Beyond discrimination,
beyond special treatment*

**TOWARDS A BETTER
UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENTS
WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT
HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER
(ADHD)**

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We would like to warmly thank **Annick Vincent**, MD, FRCPC, psychiatrist at the *Institut universitaire en santé mentale du Québec* of the *Centre hospitalier Robert-Giffard*, for her extensive help in writing and revising this brochure. We are extremely grateful for her support.

This brochure is intended primarily for teachers, but also for anyone likely to work with students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Our goal is to suggest various intervention techniques that will help to reduce the impact of the difficulties students with ADHD experience with regard to learning and interpersonal relations. **Resource persons**¹ can refer to this document for suggestions on how to best support these students as well as advice on adapting teaching strategies to this clientele.

We hope that the information presented here will facilitate the integration of this clientele into the college community.

Also, please note that students with ADHD are responsible for informing the cégep of their intention to study at the school and of their need for adapted services.

The person in charge of the **Special Needs Services**² must always consider how the limitation will affect the student's learning process. For that reason, a one-on-one interview will be held with students in order to get to know them, understand their needs and clarify with them the services they will need to compensate for the effects of their disability. Students are required to present a medical certificate stating the diagnosis as well as any recommendations for accommodations at this initial meeting.

ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

What is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder?

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurological condition that results in difficulty controlling and halting ideas (inattention), movement (physical restlessness) and behaviour (impulsivity). Approximately 5 per cent of children have ADHD, while according to a recent American study, an estimated 4 per cent of adults are also affected by this disorder.

When they reach the usual age for attending cégep, teens and young adults with ADHD are usually limited by cognitive-attention problems (distractibility, mental restlessness, organizational problems, forgetfulness and loss of objects) and associated disorganization (procrastination or difficulty beginning and completing tasks, tendency to scatter one's attention, tardiness, difficulty keeping track of time).

¹ Translator's note: This generic term is being used throughout the text to designate the person who provides academic guidance to students with disabilities (French *intervenant*). If necessary, please change throughout text to suit your cégep's reality.

² Translator's note: This generic term is being used throughout the text to designate the cégep's service catering to students with Special Needs. If necessary, please change throughout text to suit your cégep's reality.

This is an impediment to them at school, at work and in their private life. At times, persons with ADHD also have difficulty modulating their emotional responses (thin-skinned, hypersensitive, short-fused). Many sufferers are less restless and hyperactive, and some channel this hyperactivity into sport. Verbal impulsivity as well as impulsive decisions or spending may still be problematic. It may be difficult for them to wait their turn, so they will sometimes cut off others or impose themselves.

Because of the symptoms of ADHD and their effects, many sufferers have low self-esteem and a chronic feeling of underperformance.

Associated academic problems

ADHD is **not** a learning disability (LD) in itself, but in many cases, can lead to major learning difficulties. Learning disabilities and ADHD are distinct neurological disorders that are identified, diagnosed and treated differently. Treating ADHD will not correct a LD, but it will help identify the specific treatments for the LD. Around 30 to 40 per cent of persons with a LD also have ADHD. Therefore, if one of these disorders is diagnosed, it is important to test for the other.

Postsecondary students may have more difficulty compensating for the deficits associated with ADHD. In cégep and at university, the type of cognitive demands and the amount of personal organization required to meet these demands are increasingly complex and trying. It is common for these students to be discouraged and to rebel at times. For others, this is an ideal time to accept outside help and to talk to resources.

Teachers may have noticed that their students do not pay attention or are hyperactive or impulsive. Some ADHD sufferers only show signs of inattention. Nevertheless, the same intervention techniques will be used to reduce the impact of ADHD symptoms on daily functioning.

Causes

The exact causes of ADHD are not known. In most cases, ADHD is hereditary, but can also, albeit rarely, be linked to the consequences of a neurological condition at an early age (e.g. premature birth, neonatal distress, early neurological disease of an infectious nature, such as meningitis).

ADHD is a neurological disorder that is not caused by a poor upbringing or psychological stressors. However, a person's environment can modulate its expression and course. For example, the presence or absence of adapted support and help to remedy this disorder can lead to behavioural problems (e.g. opposition, delinquency), low self-esteem, anxiety, and in some cases, mental health problems (anxiety, panic or obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression).

Neuropsychological aspects

To better understand the effects of ADHD, we might compare how information circulates in the brain to a road network. Studies on how the brain of ADHD sufferers functions have revealed an **impairment of the region responsible for controlling or**

inhibiting certain behaviours (in medical jargon, these are referred to as “executive functions”, which are responsible for “turning the engine on, braking, changing directions and prioritizing on the road”). The information-transmission network appears to be defective, as though it is lacking traffic lights and road signs and the cars have a faulty ignition or brake system. Scientists have suggested a dysfunction of certain information-transmission mechanisms involving neurotransmitters, such as dopamine and noradrenaline.

Consequently, ADHD is linked to an impairment of the modulation of attention, motivation, movements (hyperactivity) and the ability to wait (impulsivity). Persons with ADHD are able to concentrate, but have difficulty doing so. They need more time to get started, are easily distracted, get fed up more easily, and are forgetful. It is not because they do not know how to do things, but rather because they cannot do them. **They have the WILL, but the ABILITY is lacking.** Keeping this principle in mind is essential to understanding the interventions required and realizing that these interventions must be kept in place to be effective.

Individuals with ADHD do not act this way ON PURPOSE; they have an impairment in the modulation of their executive brain functions. We must adapt the environment to help them, and try to find the appropriate medical treatment.

ADHD and adaptations in school

ADHD treatment begins with confirmation of the diagnosis and subsequent educational accommodations. It is so important for the affected individuals, their family, helpers, teachers and the resource persons who work with them to understand ADHD. Often, simply understanding the disorder makes it easier to put into place effective, personalized accommodations.

In cégep or at university, students with ADHD will require help on a daily basis.

- Students with ADHD have trouble concentrating. They are distracted by surrounding stimuli, which can lead to lost information or wasted time. They would benefit from sitting at the front of the classroom, near the teacher. Giving more time to distracted students will only be effective if they are monitored closely (e.g. divide the task into smaller parts, give students a break between tasks).
- Depending on each student’s needs, an individualized action plan drawn up by the student and the resource person is necessary to outline the strategies for dealing with daily problems (role of the Special Needs Services).

When ADHD symptoms remain disruptive, medication can be prescribed. A clinical evaluation may require time to complete and involves gathering information from the individual and his or her family and friends. The doctor must also check for the presence of any related diseases, if applicable. **There are no neuropsychological tests that provide a clear-cut ADHD diagnosis; only the person’s clinical history can be used to make a diagnosis.** Often, clinical questionnaires are filled out to measure the **intensity** of symptoms in various areas of home and school life. Neuropsychological evaluations are often very important in determining the person’s

intelligence quotient and detecting the presence of specific learning disorders. Note that these disorders differ from the learning disabilities associated with ADHD.

Medication acts like a pair of biological “glasses” that helps improve the brain’s ability to focus. It enhances information transmission, similar to traffic officers being placed at strategic intersections, or fixing a car’s ignition and brake systems.

Teaching strategies

We should keep in mind that one of the goals of education is to promote student independence. Cégep is the place where students should be able to make use of this skill. Generally speaking, when students have access to and **use** all the necessary resources, their performance will be similar to that of other students. The transition to college is an important step in the lives of all young adults, including those with ADHD. All college students are required to adapt to a new way of life, a much more diversified curriculum and increasingly abstract concepts. Students with ADHD, however, experience additional challenges. Problems with organization, planning and management, procrastination, chronic low self-esteem or perfectionism are examples of difficulties their disability may entail. In college, students also typically have more teachers. This means having to adapt to each of them, their teaching style and their specific academic requirements. As a result, it is often suggested that these students have fewer courses in their schedule.

Support

Role of teachers

Teachers who have students with ADHD in their classroom can expect to meet with them more regularly outside class compared to other students. Teachers will also be required to work closely with the **counsellor**³ in charge of students to ensure that they always have access to the right services at the right time.

Various teaching strategies (see appendix) can also be used to promote learning. It is strongly suggested that they be used.

Academic support

Role of resource persons

- Provide assistance in understanding instructions;
- Help plan assignments and exams and manage study time;

³ Translator’s note: This generic term is being used throughout the text to designate the person at the Special Needs Services who is responsible for welcoming and integrating students with disabilities (including arranging for services to facilitate their studies) (French *répondant*). If necessary, please change throughout text to suit your cégep’s reality.

- Explain to students the importance of following their course outline and the strategies to succeed;
- Follow up with teachers, make them aware of the student's issues and provide support;
- Promote the optimal development of students through personalized activities (self-esteem, communication, etc. exercises);
- Put in place the services and accommodations offered to students and ensure that these are delivered appropriately (software, electronic agenda, recorder, electronic dictionary).

English Help Centre

[Translator's note: Replace this section with the service used by your cégep.]

Students with ADHD can also make use of the tutoring service offered to students who require personalized support to succeed in school.

Evaluation: exams and assignments

Exams are situations in which adaptations may be necessary, without, however, compromising academic standards. Academic performance must always be measured using standardized, objective criteria.

It is important for students to know what and when to study. In light of recommendations made by a professional, students may be entitled to use a memory aid or do their assignment or exam in a separate room to promote concentration. Other students need to be in a group in order to be stimulated. Keep in mind that all accommodations must be personalized.

Written exam

Some students experience difficulty with syntax, grammar and vocabulary, which significantly hinders their performance on written exams. Strategies for such situations include:

- allowing students to use a computer and specialized software (correction, text organization, vocal synthesis, word predictor);
- allowing note-reading;
- allowing support for correction;
- allowing students to use an electronic dictionary and digital recorder for narrative tests;
- favouring short-answer exams, which may be more suitable than long essays;
- giving students frequent breaks, which helps them do well. However, they may also experience difficulty with exams featuring highly complex sentences.

Time factor

Given that students with ADHD sometimes require more time to complete exams, it has become standard practice to offer:

- **50 per cent more time** for essay writing in class or during an exam (lengthy text or lengthy reading beforehand).

In certain particular cases, the additional time given can be further extended. Teachers are **advised** to talk to students and the resource person about exams and possible accommodations before the start of a course. They make for valuable resources when it comes to adapting courses.

Remember that the counsellor and the Special Needs Services team are always available to advise teachers on assignments, exams, adapted classrooms, and audio recordings (cassettes, MP3).

Where to hold exams

Generally speaking, students can request to write their exam in an adapted classroom (free of disruptions) in order to have access to technical aids. This helps to evaluate the student's level of knowledge and minimize the impact of ADHD on the exam writing. In this case, it is important to follow the procedure for administering adapted exams.

Individual work

No additional time is required for written assignments with long deadlines. Teachers should favour short assignments, providing clear instructions and specifying deadlines and repeating these as needed.

Teamwork

Certain disciplines often require teamwork. Keep in mind that this may be more difficult for students with ADHD since they tend to be forgetful and have trouble getting to work quickly.

SOME COURSES OF ACTION

Providing students with ADHD with an environment of encouragement, comprehension and stimulation will foster their development and help reduce the obstacles associated with their disorder.

Attitudes to adopt

- Clearly set out the expectations of each party at the beginning of the semester and repeat them as needed (assignment deadlines, exams).
- Be vigilant and do not give in to manipulation from students trying to obtain preferential treatment or to use their disability as an excuse for their performance.

- Openly discuss the problem with students to foster interactions that can lead to finding constructive ways to act given the differences.
- Give students the respect to which they are entitled and give them as much leeway, responsibilities and initiatives as they are able to take on, while offering ongoing support.
- Respect students' rate of progress and their ability to adapt to new situations.
- Be consistent.

Technical support

Computers should be favoured for students with learning disabilities and ADHD. Text correction can be provided by software such as WordQ, ReadPlease and Inspiration. Students with dysgraphia will benefit from using computers to improve the legibility of texts. Having their documents on computer media helps them improve their organization. Other tools students are strongly suggested to use include an electronic agenda, such as a Palm Pilot, an electronic dictionary and a digital recorder.

Accommodations

To serve this clientele, we require a medical certificate. An evaluation report from a neuropsychologist with recommendations would also be preferable.

Various accommodations will allow students to compensate for the effects of their limitations. It is important to note that medication is very helpful for students with ADHD. We can offer:

- a letter of explanation to teachers;
- a note-taking service;
- additional time for exams;
- access to an adapted classroom;
- an adapted schedule;
- use of a computer and correction software (WordQ, ReadPlease and Inspiration) (for students with dyslexia or dysorthographia, or based on a doctor's recommendation);
- use of books-on-tapes;
- use of sound productions (MP3);
- preparation workshops for the Ministerial Examination of College English;
- access to a resource person to point out errors (for students with dyslexia or dysorthographia, or based on a doctor's recommendation);
- a note-reading service (for students with dyslexia or dysorthographia, or based on a doctor's recommendation);

- adapted teaching aids (homework help service, supervision of assignments, etc.);
- academic support (work methods, organizational skills, time management, etc.);
- adapted evaluations;
- use of an electronic dictionary;
- use of a digital recorder;
- use of an electronic agenda (i.e. Palm Pilot);
- mentoring;
- regular meetings with the teachers;
- regular meetings with the educator;
- an outline of the number of hours required for studying and homework.

CONCLUSION

Education is the first strategy of intervention. Thanks to the information available on ADHD, we can learn about the nature and impact of this disorder and be in a better position to provide accommodations. It is essential to remember that **the will is there, but the ability is lacking**. This is a biological disorder and every individual has a distinct clinical portrait. Once diagnosed, many adults feel as if a weight has been lifted off their shoulders, since there is finally an explanation for all the difficulties they have been experiencing. Some say that they considered themselves to be not very smart, stupid or lazy. Sufferers must understand that ADHD is not an excuse, but rather an explanation for what they experience and what happens in their environment.

Persons with ADHD can also be very intuitive and creative; they make connections that others do not and often have original ideas. However, their symptoms affect their pursuit of long-term projects. Treating ADHD adequately allows many sufferers to grow and develop their full potential.

We hope this brochure has helped you gain insight into the multi-faceted and sometimes difficult reality of students with ADHD, and that the information it contains will guide and facilitate the assistance you will provide them. We are convinced that the most important factor in the successful integration of these students is the compassion shown by their teachers.

If your job entails contact with students with ADHD and you have identified certain needs as a result of this interaction, whether they relate to a student or your own role, please do not hesitate to use your college's Special Needs Services.

Hélène Savard
For the Special Needs Services team
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Suggested resources

In Québec, individuals with ADHD can seek support and obtain information from the Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec (AQETA) and from *Parents aptes à négocier avec le déficit d'attention* (PANDA). Books on ADHD are also available, while the Internet is useful for seeking information. It is always recommended to read the reviews on ADHD books.

Below are some excellent resources:

Web site links

www.aqeta.qc.ca

Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec

www.associationpanda.qc.ca

PANDA Association (*Parents aptes à négocier avec le déficit d'attention*) (French only)

<http://www.attentiondeficit-info.com/adhd/>

A site specialized in ADHD by Dr. Annick Vincent. Scientific articles, tips and many suggestions for resources and books, several of which provide tips for schools. Some of these resources are in English, including the books and DVDs produced by Dr. Vincent listed below:

Books

- ***My Brain Needs Glasses***
- ***My Brain Still Needs Glasses***

Impact!Éditions

DVDs

- ***Portrait of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder***

Produced by the Teaching Division of the *Institut universitaire en santé mentale* of the *Centre hospitalier Robert-Giffard*. Includes supporting testimonies. Clinical and scientific information provided by Dr. Annick Vincent, MD, and Martin Lafleur, Ph.D.

All the participants in this DVD were volunteers. Part of the DVD sales proceeds go to the hospital Foundation, to a special section for ADHD instruction.

The English and French versions are available from the hospital's Instruction Division (Tel.: 418-663-5146 or www.enseignement_CHRG@ssss.gouv.qc.ca)

Learning disabilities, communication disorders, and neurological disorders

Teaching strategies to benefit all students

Here are some teaching strategies to promote student involvement in learning, help them assimilate and retain concepts, allow them to develop and improve specific competencies, and provide them with the opportunity to achieve their potential, in keeping with their limitation.

LD: learning disability

ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

TBI: traumatic brain injury

Strategies for organizing/planning lessons

- Write the “agenda” (class content) on the board (e.g. 8:00 a.m.: reading, 9:00 a.m.: discussion on the reading, 10:00 a.m.: break).
- When writing on the board, use colour codes and different shapes or spacing to differentiate the class content from noteworthy material, supplies needed, etc. (e.g. Write the title of an activity in green, the objective of the exercise in white and the supplies needed in red.)
- Repeat or have students repeat assignment instructions, lessons and activities, since repetition is a useful method for memorization.
- Give tangible examples (with supporting documents, if possible) of your expectations for an assignment, activity or formal lesson, along with the assignment criteria. (e.g. I expect 30 pages double-spaced, with a table of contents and a bibliography. Something that looks like this [hold up a sample].)
- If possible, use formative evaluation for highly complex lessons or those requiring greater organizational and strategic skills. (e.g. this is a practice test)
- Provide access to course and background readings and to lecture notes prior to class.
- Adapt evaluations to each student’s functional limitation. (e.g. For ADHD: break down the instructions into steps [Step 1: read the text; Step 2: underline the passages where the author mentions...; Step 3: indicate why you think...].) (e.g. For TBI: essay questions with access to lecture notes.) (e.g. For LD: use few words, keep the vocabulary simple or use only words that have been fully explained when giving instructions and asking questions, put

punctuation marks into boldface [e.g. ?, !], use multiple-choice and true and false questions.)

- Have students write down what they need for their courses, including the supplies and any preparation they need to do (*e.g. for our next class, you'll need the newspaper, a marker, etc.*).
- As much as possible, use time references found in everyday life to help students organize their academic and personal schedules, plan assignments and anticipate exams.
(*e.g. on October 31st, or Halloween, you'll need to hand in...*)
- Remind students of deadlines.
(*e.g. at this point, you should have done this reading, started this assignment, contacted this person, etc.*)
- Give frequent short breaks (2-3 minutes) to help students with attention/concentration disorders.
(*e.g. change textbooks, take a sheet to the front of the class, hand out a document, hand in an assignment, tell a joke, etc.*)
- Space out reading material.
- Use larger, easy-to-read fonts.

Strategies for managing learning

- Go over the material covered in the previous class and make connections with the current class.
(*e.g. last week, we discussed... , so today we can talk about...*)
- Explain the lessons and activities of the next class and make connections with the current class.
(*e.g. in the next class, we will practise using... because today we were able to... so, please practise...*)
- At the end of each lesson or activity, summarize what students need to retain, apply or generalize, and explain why.
(*e.g. Who can tell me what we covered today? It's important to remember... because when we visit... you will need to...*)
- As often as possible, call upon the episodic memory (memory of events and personal experiences) of students rather than on their semantic memory (memory of abstract concepts, pure knowledge) for all lessons, since students with a learning disability often have trouble with the latter.
(*e.g. Who can tell me about the last letter they received or wrote? What did it say? How was it structured? Give an example of the content of an information letter...*)
- Explain the importance of a lesson by giving examples or asking students to find examples from everyday life at school or work.

(e.g. for those of you who work, the concept of equality allows you to have standardized schedules that are fair for everyone...)

- As often as possible, use tangible, physical references, point to them and mention them often, repeating the name of that reference (reference work, bibliography, instructional tools, posters in the classroom, maps, etc.).
- To promote learning and consolidate student understanding, use many practical examples related to their age group and everyday reality.
(e.g. young people learn better when they can relate to the lesson.)
- Explain the purpose of the lesson and the outcome of the learning by illustrating with many examples, situation scenarios, role playing, etc., and tell them how this knowledge will be useful in everyday life, how they can generalize it or apply it to their lives, thus making the lesson more meaningful.
- Present assignments and instructions in parts. Defining each step will help students to get a sense of the time they have to carry out an assignment, the work involved and the material they will need.
- When explaining a concept or lesson, avoid excessive verbiage. For students with a learning disability, attention/concentration problems, a traumatic brain injury or Asperger's syndrome, wordy lectures cause them to tune out and lose their focus on the lesson at hand.
- As much as possible, use tables, diagrams and organization charts to consolidate, tie in and summarize lessons.
- As much as possible, use images, pictograms and codes to explain, consolidate or summarize information.
(e.g. a pencil = written assignments)
- Avoid lengthy presentations if there are no visual aids, hands-on activities or breaks. Lectures with no practical applications and long discussions that fail to make frequent references to the initial topic and connect with the subject matter should also be avoided.
- When having students work in groups, emphasize deadlines and the steps involved, as this structures the assignment.
- With their agreement, have students sit at the front of the class in order to be able to capture their attention by occasionally calling on them or making eye contact. This will help prevent them from daydreaming.
- Add intonation when speaking, use a variety of methods to draw students' attention.
(e.g. gestures, lighting, jokes, objects, etc.)
- Hold pop quizzes and ask students to repeat what was just said.

- Open with sensational, surprising statements to capture their attention and improve the retention of new knowledge.
(*e.g. Did you see the report on ... on the news yesterday? 50 per cent of students are...*)
- Announce the new lesson and let students know what you expect of them.
- Point out noteworthy information and material that will be on the exam.
- Pop quizzes are good for getting students' attention. But do not go into specifics or the finer points of a lesson. Test their understanding of a concept or task or validate this understanding through examples from everyday life, which helps determine their knowledge retention.
- Give students frequent feedback on what they do and say.
- Use a variety of teaching methods (*e.g. the multi-sensory approach, where all the senses are used for learning*).
- Be consistent in your evaluation methods.
- Allow students to use technological devices (*e.g. laptop computer, electronic dictionary, electronic agenda [Palm], digital recorder, correction tools, etc.*).
- Build a glossary of terms used in the field studied and allow students to refer to it.

Strategies and accommodations for evaluations

- For subjects other than English, use multiple-choice rather than essay questions. Given their poor spelling, essay questions do not adequately reflect students' true level of knowledge.
- Alternatively, students can be evaluated orally, if they wish.
- Allow students to read the questions aloud.

Reading strategies for students

Teachers should go over (repeat) these strategies and even strongly recommend them:

- Anticipate a word or group of words from previous content.
- Identify key words and highlight them with a marker.
- Clarify the purpose for reading and keep it in mind.
- Explore the text structure to help promote understanding.
- Skim through the text to get an idea of the content (title, illustrations, subheadings, sections, etc.).
- Identify the words to which pronouns and substitute terms refer.
- Use the context to clarify the meaning of idioms and proverbs.

- Use punctuation as clues.
- Call attention to the links established by conjunctions and prepositions in the text.
- Assemble various pieces of information from clues found throughout the text.
- For dyslexic students, make textbooks available in audio format, as this can facilitate their learning.
- To increase their reading speed, students should practise reading a short text (200 to 250 words) aloud every night, four times in a row, timing themselves on each occasion. This exercise in “over-reading” should progressively improve their reading time. A different text should be used each night and the exercise should be done five times a week.

Writing strategies

- Recall past writing experiences.
- Use triggers to stimulate the imagination.
(*e.g. a work of art, an object, a photo, etc.*)
- Clarify the purpose for writing and keep it in mind.
- Think of the audience who will be reading your text.
- Reflect on the possible content (exploring and selecting ideas).
- Think about the structure and organization of the text.
- Produce a web chart, diagram, sketch, plan, etc.
- To maintain momentum and inspiration, write without worrying about making mistakes.
- Read the text aloud.
- Make changes, if needed.
- Correct the text.
- Reread the text (using a software program such as ReadPlease).

Given the spelling difficulties experienced by these students, you can allow them to use self-correction grids to help them check important elements (*Did I answer the question? Did I add an “s” when it was necessary? Do the verbs agree with the subjects?*). The use of a grammar correction grid could also be allowed during exams.

N.B. The use of a computer will promote autonomy and enhance the performance of students in terms of reading, writing, revision and proofreading.

Study strategies for students

- Students can record the material presented in class. They can listen to the recording at their own pace at a later time and take more detailed notes.

- When doing homework, students should take frequent breaks (e.g. a 10-minute break every 50 minutes) in order to reduce the demand on attention. It might be necessary to divide the lesson or homework period into two or even three blocks of time.

I would like to thank Dr. Dave Ellemberg, neuropsychologist, and Dr. Annick Vincent, psychiatrist, for their help with this brochure.

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