

For some children with ADHD, music has similar positive effects to medication

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Professor William Pelham and team recently found that music may not affect the concentration abilities of children with ADHD as much as previously thought.

(Medical Xpress)—The findings are part of a study on the effects of distractors on children with ADHD. A team of researchers, led by FIU Center for Children and Families Director William E. Pelham Jr., set out to examine how distractions – such as music and television – affect children with ADHD.

Traditionally, Pelham said, [parents and teachers](#) believe distractors only have negative effects. Pelham set out to discover how music and videos actually impact the abilities of children with [ADHD](#) to focus in the classroom. Leading into the study, Pelham believed the music would have negative effects in many cases, and would have no effects at best. But even a world-renowned psychologist and leading authority on ADHD can be surprised by his own [research findings](#).

"If a kid says he can watch TV and focus, it's just not true. With television, we found out what we needed to know," said Pelham, who also serves as chairman of FIU's Department of Psychology. "But with music we actually discovered, in most cases, it didn't really affect the children."

While a few were distracted by music, the majority were not.

"And in some cases," Pelham noted, "we found listening to music helped the kids with ADHD to complete their work. Actually for this subgroup, the effect of music on them was nearly as effective as medication."

The research studied both medicated and non-medicated male students with ADHD, as well as a [control group](#) of [male students](#) who were not diagnosed with ADHD. The students were given the opportunity to weigh in on the music and video selections. The [radio stations](#) selected for the music portion of the study featured contemporary music including rock and rap.

"Rather than just assuming it's better for a child with ADHD to do their homework in complete silence, it may help their concentration to let them listen to music," Pelham said. "If parents want to know if listening to music will help their child's performance in school, they should try it. In psychology, we have what we call single-subject-design studies. Basically, it's trial and error. If a child's performance improves after trying the music for a period of time, then that's a pretty good indicator that the child falls into the subgroup of children that benefit from music."

While the research indicates music may help some, Pelham said there is opportunity to explore why and to what degree.

"There's actually a lot of different directions you could take this research," Pelham said. "But I'm an applied person. I like to find out what I can do to help people."

Provided by Florida International University

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