

# ADD & ADHD in Children

## *Recognizing the Signs and Symptoms*

It's normal for children to occasionally forget their homework, daydream during class, act without thinking, or get fidgety at the dinner table. But inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity are also signs of ADD or ADHD. ADD/ADHD can lead to problems at home and school, and affect your child's ability to learn and get along with others. So it's important to know what the signs and symptoms are and get help if you spot them in your child.

## **What is ADD / ADHD?**

We all know kids who can't sit still, who never seem to listen, who don't follow instructions no matter how clearly you present them, who blurt out inappropriate comments at inappropriate times. Sometimes these children are labeled as troublemakers, or criticized for being lazy and undisciplined. However, they may have ADHD.

Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a disorder that appears in early childhood. You may know it by the name attention deficit disorder, or ADD. ADD / ADHD makes it difficult for people to inhibit their spontaneous responses—responses that can involve everything from movement to speech and attentiveness.

The signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD typically appear before the age of 7. However, it can be difficult to distinguish between ADHD and normal "kid behavior." If you spot just a few signs, or the symptoms appear only in some situations, it's probably not ADD/ADHD. On the other hand, if your child shows a number of disruptive ADD/ADHD signs and symptoms that are present across all situations – at home, at school, and at play – it's time to take a closer look.

## **Myths about ADD/ADHD**

### **Myth #1: All kids with ADHD are hyperactive.**

Some children with ADHD are hyperactive, but many others with attention problems are not. Children with ADHD who are inattentive, but not overly active, may appear to be spacey and unmotivated.

### **Myth #2: Kids with ADHD can never pay attention.**

Children with ADHD are often able to concentrate on activities they enjoy. But no matter how hard they try, they have trouble maintaining focus when the task at hand is boring or repetitive.

### **Myth #3: Kids with ADHD choose to be difficult. They could behave better if they wanted to.**

Children with ADHD may do their best to be good, but still be unable to sit still, stay quiet, or pay attention. They may appear disobedient, but that doesn't mean they're acting out on purpose.

**Myth #4: Kids will eventually grow out of ADHD.**

ADHD often continues into adulthood, so don't wait for your child to outgrow the problem. Treatment can help your child learn to manage and minimize the symptoms.

**Myth #5: Medication is the best treatment option for ADHD.**

Medication is often prescribed for ADHD, but it might not be the best option for your child. Effective treatment for ADHD also includes education, behavior therapy, support at home and school, exercise, and proper nutrition.

## **Is it really ADD/ADHD?**

**Just because a child has symptoms of inattention, impulsivity, or hyperactivity does not mean that he or she has ADD or ADHD.** Many other things can cause symptoms that are identical to the symptoms of ADD/ADHD. Before an accurate diagnosis of ADD/ADHD can be made, it is important that you see a mental health professional to explore and rule out the following possible causes of the ADHD-like symptoms:

- **Major life events** or traumatic experiences that have caused stress (e.g. a recent move, death of a loved one, bullying, illness, divorce).
- **Learning disabilities** or problems with reading, writing, motor skills, or language.
- **Psychological problems** including anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder.
- **Behavioral disorders** such as conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder.
- **Medical conditions**, including thyroid problems, neurological conditions, epilepsy, and sleep disorders.

### ***Signs and symptoms of ADD & ADHD***

When many people think of ADHD, they picture an out-of-control kid in constant motion, bouncing off the walls and disrupting everyone around. But this is not the only possible picture. Some children with ADD/ADHD are hyperactive, while others sit quietly (with their attention miles away). Some put too much focus on a task and have trouble shifting it to something else. Others are only mildly inattentive but overly impulsive.

**The 3 primary characteristics of ADD/ADHD are inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.** The signs and symptoms a child with ADD/ADHD has depends on which characteristics predominate. Children with ADD/ADHD may be:

### ***Which one of these children may have ADD/ADHD?***

- A. The hyperactive boy who talks nonstop and can't sit still.
- B. The quiet dreamer who sits at her desk and stares off into space.

### C. Both A and B

The correct answer is “C.”

- Inattentive, but not hyperactive or impulsive.
- Hyperactive and impulsive, but able to pay attention.
- Inattentive, hyperactive, and impulsive (the most common form of ADHD).

Children who only have inattentive symptoms of ADD/ADHD are often overlooked, since they're not disruptive. However, the symptoms of inattention have consequences: getting in hot water with parents and teachers for not following directions; underperforming in school; and clashing with other kids over not playing by the rules.

### ***Inattentive signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD***

#### **Symptoms of inattention in children:**

- Doesn't pay attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Has trouble staying focused; is easily distracted
- Appears not to listen when spoken to
- Has difficulty remembering things and following instructions
- Has trouble staying organized, planning ahead, and finishing projects
- Frequently loses or misplaces homework, books, toys, or other items

Children with ADD/ADHD can pay attention when they're doing things they enjoy or hearing about topics in which they're interested. But when the task is repetitive or boring, they quickly tune out.

Not paying close enough attention is another common problem. Children with ADD/ADHD often bounce from task to task without completing any of them, or skip necessary steps in procedures. Organizing their schoolwork and their time is harder for them than it is for most children. Kids with ADD/ADHD also have trouble concentrating if there are things going on around them; they usually need a calm, quiet environment in order to sustain attention.

### ***Hyperactive signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD***

#### **Symptoms of hyperactivity in children:**

- Constantly fidgets and squirms
- Often leaves his or her seat in situations where sitting quietly is expected
- Moves around constantly, often running or climbing inappropriately
- Talks excessively, has difficulty playing quietly
- Is always “on the go,” as if driven by a motor

The most obvious sign of ADD/ADHD is hyperactivity. While many children are naturally quite active, kids with hyperactive symptoms of ADD/ADHD are always moving.

They may try to do several things at once, bouncing around from one activity to the next. Even when forced to sit still – which can be very difficult for them – their foot is tapping, their leg is shaking, or their fingers are drumming.

### ***Impulsivity signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD***

#### **Symptoms of impulsivity in children:**

- Blurts out answers without waiting to be called on hear the whole question
- Has difficulty waiting for his or her turn
- Often interrupts others
- Intrudes on other people's conversations or games
- Inability to keep powerful emotions in check, resulting in angry outbursts or temper tantrums

The impulsivity of children with ADD/ADHD can cause problems with self-control. Because they censor themselves less than other kids do, they'll interrupt conversations, invade other people's space, ask irrelevant questions in class, make tactless observations, and ask overly personal questions.

Children with impulsive signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD also tend to be moody and to overreact emotionally. As a result, others may start to view the child as disrespectful, weird, or needy.

### **Positive effects of ADD & ADHD in children**

In addition to the challenges, there are also some positive traits associated with people who have ADD or ADHD:

- **Creativity** – Children who have ADD/ADHD can be marvelously creative and imaginative. The child who daydreams and has ten different thoughts at once can become a master problem-solver, a fountain of ideas, or an inventive artist. Children with ADD may be easily distracted, but sometimes they notice what others don't see.
- **Flexibility** – Because children with ADD/ADHD consider a lot of options at once, they don't become set on one alternative early on and are more open to different ideas.
- **Enthusiasm and spontaneity** – Children with ADD/ADHD are rarely boring! They're interested in a lot of different things and have lively personalities. In short, if they're not exasperating you (and sometimes even when they are), they're a lot of fun to be with.
- **Energy and drive** – When kids with ADD/ADHD are motivated, they work or play hard and strive to succeed. It actually may be difficult to distract them from a task that interests them, especially if the activity is interactive or hands-on.

Keep in mind, too, that ADD/ADHD has nothing to do with intelligence or talent. Many children with ADD/ADHD are intellectually or artistically gifted.

# Helping a child with ADD/ADHD

Whether or not your child's symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity are due to ADD/ADHD, they can cause many problems if left untreated. Children who can't focus and control themselves may struggle in school, get into frequent trouble, and find it hard to get along with others or make friends. These frustrations and difficulties can lead to low self-esteem – as well as friction and stress for the whole family.

But treatment can make a dramatic difference in your child's symptoms. With the right support, your child can get on track for success in all areas of life.

## ***Parenting tips for children with ADD/ADHD***

If your child is hyperactive, inattentive, or impulsive, it may take a lot of energy to get him or her to listen, finish a task, or sit still. The constant monitoring can be frustrating and exhausting. Sometimes you may feel like your child is running the show. But there are steps you can take to regain control of the situation, while simultaneously helping your child make the most of his or her abilities.

While ADD/ADHD is not caused by bad parenting, good parenting strategies can go a long way in correcting problem behaviors. Children with ADHD need structure, consistency, clear communication, and rewards and consequences for their behavior. They also need lots of love, support, and encouragement.

There are many things parents can do to reduce the signs and symptoms of ADHD – without sacrificing the natural energy, playfulness, and sense of wonder unique in every child.

## **School tips for children with ADD/ADHD**

Think of what the school setting requires children to do: Sit still. Listen quietly. Pay attention. Follow instructions. Concentrate. These are the very things kids with ADD/ADHD have a hard time doing—not because they aren't willing, but because their brains won't let them. But that doesn't mean kids with ADD/ADHD can't succeed at school. There are many things both parents and teachers can do to help children with ADHD thrive in the classroom. It starts with evaluating each child's individual weaknesses and strengths, then coming up with creative strategies for helping the child focus, stay on task, and learn to his or her full capability.

## **Treatment for ADD or ADHD**

If your child struggles with ADHD-like, don't wait to seek professional help. **You can treat your child's symptoms of hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity without having a diagnosis of ADD/ADHD.** Options to start with include getting your child into therapy; implementing a better diet and exercise plan; and modifying the home environment to minimize distractions.

If you receive a diagnosis of ADD/ADHD, you can work with your child's doctor, therapist, and school to make a personalized treatment plan that meets his or her specific needs. Effective treatment for childhood ADD/ADHD involves behavioral therapy, parent education and training, social support, and assistance at school. Medication is sometimes used, however, it should never be the sole ADD/ADHD treatment.

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