



A WAY OF BEING WITH CHILDREN

Suspecting Your Child Has ADHD

A Guide for Parents

Understanding ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects children and often continues into adulthood. It is characterized by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that interfere with daily functioning or development. ADHD is not a result of bad parenting, lack of discipline, or laziness; it is a medical condition rooted in brain development and function.

ADHD Symptoms vs. Normal Childhood Behavior

It's important to understand that many ADHD symptoms, such as being distracted, energetic, or impulsive, are also very typical behaviors for children—especially at younger ages. Kids are naturally curious, full of energy, and still developing self-regulation skills. This can make it tricky to determine whether a child's behavior is part of typical development or indicative of ADHD.

The key distinction is impact on daily functioning.

For a diagnosis of ADHD, the symptoms must go beyond what is typical for a child's age and developmental stage. They need to be persistent, occur in more than one setting (like at home and school), and cause significant interference with daily functioning.

For example:

- A typical child might occasionally forget to finish their homework or get distracted during class.
- A child with ADHD, however, may struggle to complete tasks nearly every day, regularly lose important items, or be unable to stay seated for even short periods—so much so that it impacts their ability to learn, form relationships, or follow routines.



Why This Distinction Matters

Without understanding the functional impact, parents or teachers might mistake normal, age-appropriate behavior for ADHD. It's very important to consider whether the child's behavior is concerning or whether the demand/instruction is beyond the child's developmental abilities and therefore setting them up for failure. For example:

- A kindergartener who struggles to sit still during storytime is likely displaying age-appropriate behavior, as young children naturally have shorter attention spans.
- However, a 10-year-old who constantly leaves their seat, disrupts lessons, and can't focus long enough to finish any assignment may be showing signs of ADHD if these behaviors interfere with their ability to succeed in school or maintain friendships.

Signs and Symptoms of ADHD

ADHD symptoms generally fall into two categories: **inattention** and **hyperactivity-impulsivity**. Children may exhibit symptoms in both categories or predominantly in one. While every child can be inattentive or hyperactive at times, those with ADHD experience these behaviors more frequently and severely.

- **Inattention:** difficulty staying focused; making careless mistakes; appearing not to listen when spoken to directly; struggling to follow through; trouble organizing tasks, often losing items; easily distracted.
- **Hyperactivity-impulsivity:** fidgeting, tapping or squirming; difficulty staying seated when expected, running or climbing inappropriately in situations where it is not suitable; excessive talking or blurting out answers; trouble waiting their turn or interrupting others.



How ADHD Is Diagnosed

Diagnosing ADHD requires a comprehensive evaluation by a healthcare professional, such as a paediatrician, psychologist, or psychiatrist. The process typically includes:

- **Clinical interviews:** Parents, teachers, and sometimes the child are interviewed to gather information.
- **Behavioral questionnaires:** Tools like the Conners Rating Scale or Vanderbilt Assessment Scale.
- **Observation and history:** The clinician will look at the child's developmental, medical, educational, and family history to rule out other conditions.
- **DSM-5 Criteria:** To confirm ADHD, the child's symptoms must meet the criteria outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5).

Treatment Options

Although there is no cure for ADHD, various treatments can help manage symptoms and improve the child's quality of life.

1. **Lifestyle adjustments** - Healthy diet, exercise, adequate sleep, mindfulness practice.
2. **Therapy**
 - Parent training
 - Coping skills development
 - Social skills training
 - Classroom interventions
3. **Medication**
4. **Combination therapy** - medication and therapy often produce the best outcomes.



When to Seek Help

If your child consistently displays ADHD symptoms across multiple settings (e.g., home, school, and social environments), and these behaviors are affecting their academic performance, relationships, or self-esteem, it's time to consult a healthcare professional. **Early diagnosis and intervention are crucial for helping your child thrive.**

Get more resources at: www.centerforchildcounseling.org/awayofbeing