



Understanding ADHD: Information for Parents

Almost all children have times when their behavior veers out of control. They may speed about in constant motion, make noise nonstop, refuse to wait their turn, and crash into everything around them. At other times they may drift as if in a daydream, unable to pay attention or finish what they start.

However, for some children, these kinds of behaviors are more than an occasional problem. Children with **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)** have behavior problems that are so frequent and severe that they interfere with their ability to live normal lives.



According to national data, ADHD affects about 9.4% of U.S. children ages 2-17—including 2.4% of children ages 2-5 and 4%-12% of school-aged children. Boys are more than twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with ADHD. Both boys and girls with the disorder typically show symptoms of an additional mental disorder and may also have learning and language problems.

ADHD is a chronic condition of the brain that makes it difficult for children to control their behavior.

The condition affects behavior in specific ways. For example, children with ADHD often have trouble getting along with siblings and other children at school, at home, and in other settings. Those who have trouble paying attention usually have trouble learning. An impulsive nature may put them in actual physical danger. Because children with ADHD have difficulty controlling this behavior, they may be labeled "bad kids" or "space cadets."

Effective treatment is available. If your child has ADHD, your pediatrician can offer a long-term treatment plan to help your child lead a happy and healthy life. As a parent, you have a very important role in this treatment.

Left untreated, ADHD in some children will continue to cause serious, lifelong problems, such as poor grades in school, run-ins with the law, failed relationships, and the inability to keep a job.

ADHD includes 3 groups of behavior symptoms: inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.

Symptoms of ADHD

| Symptoms of ADHD | |
|-------------------|---|
| Behavior symptom: | How a child with this symptom may behave: |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Inattention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often has a hard time paying attention, daydreams • Often does not seem to listen • Is easily distracted from work or play • Often does not seem to care about details, makes careless mistakes • Frequently does not follow through on instructions or finish tasks • Is disorganized • Frequently loses a lot of important things • Often forgets things • Frequently avoids doing things that require ongoing mental effort | Back to Top |
| Hyperactivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is in constant motion, as if "driven by a motor" • Cannot stay seated • Frequently squirms and fidgets • Talks too much • Often runs, jumps, and climbs when this is not permitted • Cannot play quietly | |
| Impulsivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently acts and speaks without thinking • May run into the street without looking for traffic first • Frequently has trouble taking turns • Cannot wait for things • Often calls out answers before the question is complete • Frequently interrupts others | |

Not all children with ADHD have all the symptoms.

Children with ADHD may have one or more of the symptom groups listed in the table above. The symptoms are usually classified by the following types of ADHD:

- **Inattentive only (formerly known as attention-deficit disorder [ADD])**—Children with this form of ADHD are not overly active. Because they do not disrupt the classroom or other activities, their symptoms may not be noticed. Among girls with ADHD, this form is more common.
- **Hyperactive/impulsive**—Children with this type of ADHD show both hyperactive and impulsive behavior, but they can pay attention. They are the least common group and are frequently younger.
- **Combined inattentive/hyperactive/impulsive**—Children with this type of ADHD show a number of symptoms in all 3 dimensions. It is the type that most people think of when they think of ADHD.

If your child has shown symptoms of ADHD on a regular basis for more than 6 months, discuss this with your pediatrician.

Realize, it is normal for all children to show some ADHD symptoms from time to time. Your child may be reacting to stress at school or home, bored, or just going through a difficult stage of life. It does not mean he or she has ADHD.

Sometimes a teacher is the first to notice inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity and bring these symptoms to a parent's attention.

Other times, questions from the pediatrician raised the issue. At routine visits, pediatricians often ask questions such as

"How is your child doing in school?"

- *"Are there any problems with learning that you or your child's teachers have seen?"*
- *"Is your child happy in school?"*
- *"Is your child having problems completing class work or homework?"*
- *"Are you concerned with any behavior problems in school, at home, or when your child is playing with friends?"*

[Back to Top](#)

Your answers to these questions may lead to further evaluation for ADHD. Learn more here. ([/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/I-think-my-child-may-have-ADHD-How-do-I-find-out-for-sure.aspx](#))

Additional Information & Resources:

- Causes of ADHD: What We Know Today (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Causes-of-ADHD.aspx>)
- Treatment & Target Outcomes for Children with ADHD (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/Pages/Treatment-of-ADHD-and-Related-Disorders.aspx>)
- Common ADHD Medications & Treatments for Children (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Determining-ADHD-Medication-Treatments.aspx>)
- How Schools Can Help Children with ADHD (<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/adhd/pages/Your-Child-At-School.aspx>)
- Understanding ADHD (<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/add-adhd/understanding-adhd>) (Understood.org)
- Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) (<http://www.chadd.org/>) or 800/233-4050
- National Institute of Mental Health (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>) or 866/615-6464

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