

## **Does Your Child Have ADHD?**

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Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD, also known as ADD) has been a popular buzzword for over a decade. With the enormous and growing numbers of children being treated for it, it is important for parents to become more familiar with the signs, symptoms, and treatments available. The primary symptoms include, but are not limited to, inattentiveness, impulsivity, hyperactivity, or difficulty paying attention, following rules or staying on task from beginning to end. The activity level is often elevated, along with some or all of the following symptoms:

- Fidgets, squirms, is restless
- Easily distracted, seems to daydream, has difficulty staying quiet
- Has difficulty completing tasks or following through with assignments or directions
- Often shifts from one uncompleted activity to another
- Talks excessively, often interrupts and/or doesn't seem to listen
- May engage in physical aggression or risk-taking behavior without considering the consequences
- Angry outbursts, fights easily, is impulsive

Characteristics resulting from this disorder can affect school performance, peer/social relationships, or self-image. During evaluation, it is critical to keep in mind that the above characteristics are a part of being human or simply being a kid. However, it is when these behaviors become extreme or become an obstacle in developing relationships that further assessment and observation may be required. Many children with ADHD have a learning disability as well. This has nothing to do with a child's ability level but rather the manner in which they learn, retrieve and store information. In fact, most children with ADHD have been recognized as highly intelligent and largely creative in their abilities and talents.

Most ADHD children encounter school difficulties because they find it harder to stay on task or because they are unable to concentrate or pay attention to instructions. Even the slightest disturbance in a classroom, such as someone whispering or another child using the pencil sharpener, can act as a disturbance in school performance. This is not to say they are less intelligent or lack the ability to learn just as other children do. On the contrary, these children are often very bright, but until their needs are addressed, their academic needs often go unmet. This is where the prevalence of early intervention becomes critical. If a child truly has ADHD, critical years of development may be lost cognitively, socially, emotionally and academically.

If you're a parent, it's only natural to ask yourself, "Is my child active or hyperactive"? Children are known to have naturally high energy levels; however, when their activity becomes a flaw in their personality, there is a call for concern. In time they acquire a label of being a problem, which in turn will affect their self-concept, often leading to seeing themselves as annoying or failures. This can lead to depression in children, and there has been speculation that ADHD and depression may be related.

Evaluations for ADHD can be performed by a number of different sources. Every school is required to provide a series of tests to children if there is a suspected problem or at the request of a

parent. Some medical doctors are more versed in their ability to evaluate a child with this condition, but the most resourceful, helpful and knowledgeable authority will be a psychiatrist or mental health professional. If you as a parent are not satisfied with the results of an evaluation or feel it is inconclusive, one can never go wrong with a second opinion. A child with ADHD is most typically treated with medication such as Adderall, Welbutrin, Ritalin, Cylert, Clonidine, and Dexedrine. Whether or not treating your child with medication is deemed appropriate will depend largely on the degree of his/her problem.

Parenting a child with ADHD is not an easy task. It requires unconditional love, patience, commitment, strength and a firm backbone, along with the ability to apply concrete rules and structure. The following are a few suggestions for working with ADHD children:

- Restructure or avoid situations that are more difficult for the child.
- Give the child direct instructions regarding social situations and follow through with consequences. Consistency is crucial. Give instructions in private to avoid humiliation.
- Praise children for successful behavior and offer empathy for the struggle to control their behavior.
- Make directions precise, concrete and brief to avoid confusion.
- Provide structure – specific times for waking, TV time, bedtime, chores, etc.
- Allow the child to make choices within reason, to develop self-control.
- Provide your child with opportunities to make small accomplishments and offer praise. A little praise goes a long way in developing a feeling of accomplishment and pride.

Although this is a common disorder, it is important to have your child properly and thoroughly evaluated by a psychiatrist or mental health professional who specializes in this particular area of their field. If you suspect that your child has ADHD, step back and assess his/her behaviors, interaction with others and where the primary difficulties of their actions exist. Keep documentation of significant obstacles and their sources in the child's daily life.

Remember, it is equally important to take care of yourself as a parent. If you are trying to care for a challenging child with little sleep or without a sufficient support system, tensions rise, making a difficult situation even worse. Give yourself some credit. Caring for a child with ADHD can be overwhelming at times, often causing parents to reevaluate their ability level as a parent. Take time for yourself, seek therapy, or join a support group of other parents facing similar challenges. Parenting in these situations is not impossible, just more demanding.