

ADHD Spectrum

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes a child's behavior is out of control, this is part of childhood, and behavior will vary in form and intensity for every child. However, for some children, behavioral difficulties are more than an occasional problem. Children with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) have personality and behavior traits that interfere with their daily lives, their education, their social interactions, and their relationships with friends and family members. This edition of PLUK NOTES provides information on ADHD as it pertains to kids.

DEFINITION OF ADHD

The American Academy of Pediatrics defines ADHD as "a condition of the brain that makes it difficult for children to control their behavior." It is one of the most common chronic conditions of childhood. Authorities disagree on the percentage of kids with ADHD; most estimates are between 5% and 15% of the children in the U.S. Authorities do agree that approximately three times more boys than girls are diagnosed with ADHD.

The cause of ADHD is still undetermined. Research shows that ADHD is a biological disorder involving the chemicals that send messages to the brain, and, that ADHD runs in families. Research also indicates that those with ADHD show a lower level of activity in the part of the brain that controls attention.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD

ADHD includes three types of behavior: inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsivity.

Inattention—the child has difficulty paying attention, or is easily distracted, does not follow through with tasks, is disorganized, loses important things, or forgets information or instructions.

Hyperactivity—the child is in constant motion, squirming or fidgeting, not able to stay seated, is loud or at least cannot play quietly, runs, climbs, jumps, etc.

Impulsivity—the child lacks of control of his or her actions, speaks without thinking, cannot wait, lacks patience, runs into the street without looking, interrupts others, and makes decisions without thinking of the consequences.

DIAGNOSING ADHD

The only way to determine with certainty that a child has ADHD is for a physician to diagnose the disorder. Most often, pediatricians will determine whether a child has ADHD by using guidelines developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. The guidelines are for children between 6 years to 12 years of age. The diagnostic guidelines establish that the problematic behavior(s) must:

- Occur in more than one setting (such as home, school and social settings);
- Be more severe than that shown in other children of the same age;
- Have started before the child reached his or her 7th birthday;
- Have continued for more than 6 months; and
- Have made it difficult for the child to function appropriately at school, home and/or in social settings.

THE ADHD SPECTRUM

The ADHD Spectrum is quite complex. It has changed over time and will undoubtedly continue to change. At one time, ADHD had a companion disorder named ADD or Attention Deficit Disorder. Today, more authorities agree that the most accurate way to look at ADHD is to consider different types of ADHD. These types include:

Inattentive Only (formerly considered ADD)—these kids are not overly active and do not disrupt the classroom. This is the most common type among girls with ADHD.

Hyperactive/Impulsive—Children with this type are hyperactive and impulsive, but can pay attention.

Combined Inattentive/Hyperactive/Impulsive—this includes all three sets of symptoms and is the most commonly diagnosed type of ADHD.

Another aspect of the ADHD Spectrum is **Coexisting Conditions**. Some children thought to have ADHD may have a different condition or ADHD and another, coexisting, condition. Common coexisting conditions include:

Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Conduct Disorder. Up to 19% of kids with ADHD have one of these two disorders. They tend to lose their temper easily and annoy people on purpose. They are defiant or hostile toward authority, break rules or damage property.

Mood Disorder/Depression. About 18% of kids with ADHD have mood disorders

Anxiety Disorder. These affect about 25% of kids with ADHD. Kids with anxiety disorders have feelings of fear or panic and extreme degrees of worry, making it difficult to function.

PLUK RESOURCES

PLUK is Montana's parent center. For information and assistance phone 800-222-7585 or plukinfo@pluk.org.

PLUK's Family Support Staff are available statewide to assist with issues regarding your child.

Books and videos on this topic and others are available for checkout statewide from the TRIC/PLUK Library.





ADHD TREATMENT BASICS

Treatment must be individualized and should include:

- A long-term management plan,
- Education about ADHD (both parents and the child),
- Teamwork among those involved in the child's life,
- Behavior therapy, and
- Options for considering medication.

Medication has been and continues to be a controversial topic. For parents of a child with ADHD, medication options are usually considered only after a high degree of consultation with the child's pediatrician. It is possible that ADHD can be treated and/or managed with medication, and for many children with ADHD, medication becomes an important component of the treatment plan.

ADHD & Medications

For most children with ADHD, stimulant medication is a safe and effective way to manage or relieve ADHD symptoms. A physician is the only person who can prescribe medication. The pediatrician who made the diagnosis should be the one to make the recommendation for medication. The physician can prescribe different types of stimulants:

- Short-Acting (immediate release), and lasts 2-4 hours
- Intermediate-Acting, (4-6 hours)
- Long-Acting. (8-10 hours)

If medication is prescribed, the pediatrician will determine the dosage and adjust as appropriate. It typically takes a couple tries to find the right combination. Parents need to work with the child's pediatrician, to discuss dosage, type of administration, and to learn strategies for handling potential side effects.

ADHD & Behavior Therapy

Most professionals recommend a combination of medication and Behavior Therapy for a child with ADHD. This combination of strategies is a "multimodal treatment approach." Behavior therapy is meant to change the child's physical and social environments to help the child improve his or her behavior. There are many methods, but the most common behavior therapy techniques include:

- Positive Reinforcement,
- Time-outs,
- Response Cost, and
- Token Economy.

Parents can work with the child's pediatrician or recommended therapists to develop a management team to help with implementing behavior therapies.

ADHD Essential Teamwork: Parents & Schools

Working with the child's school and teachers is extremely important. Parents can work with school personnel and need to consider themselves a part of the team to help their child. Classroom management techniques are essential and can include:

- Keeping a set routine and schedule of activities,
- Using a system of clear rewards and consequences,
- Sending daily or weekly reports or charts to parents,
- Seating the child near the teacher,
- Using small groups for activities,
- Encouraging students to pause a moment before answering,
- Keeping assignments short or broken into sections, and
- Providing close supervision with tasks.

TIPS FOR THE FUTURE

There is no cure for ADHD and it does follow children into adulthood. However, most individuals learn ways to cope with the condition and to compensate for difficult symptoms in his or her life. There are many tips for helping the child with ADHD. The basic strategies are:

- Planning and keeping a daily schedule,
- Cutting down on distractions,
- Organizing the house,
- Rewarding positive behavior,
- Setting reachable goals,
- Organizing your child's life (with charts, lists, etc.),
- Limiting choices, and
- Using calm discipline.

For parents of teenager with ADHD, there are additional strategies acknowledging that parents can use to help their child survive these years. In addition to general strategies, some specific tips for the parents of a teenager with ADHD are:

- Helping your teenager make and keep useful lists,
- Keeping charts at home,
- Keeping a clear routine,
- Establishing a quiet place to do homework,
- Organizing storage for school supplies and other items,
- Teaching your teen to get enough sleep every night
- Talking about problems and issues, and
- Helping your teen become safety conscious (particularly if your teenager expects to drive a car or if he or she enjoys high-risk sports).

Educating children, parents, families, and other individuals about ADHD is important for future successes. There is a wealth of written material available at libraries, bookstores and online. There are support groups and training opportunities for children, parents and professionals throughout the U.S. and internationally.

RESOURCES

The Attention Deficit Information Network, Inc.
475 Hillside Ave., Needham, MA 02194
781 455-9895 • www.addinfonetwork.com

Children and Adults with ADHD (CHADD)
8181 Professional Pl, Ste. 201
Landover, MD 20785
800 233-4050 • www.chadd.org

National Attention Deficit Disorder Association
1788 Second St., Ste. 200
Highland Park, IL 60035
www.add.org