

ADHD in Children and Adolescents

What is ADHD?

ADHD stands for **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**. ADHD causes children and adolescents to have difficulty in a number of areas, such as academic performance, making friends, and getting along at home. Although ADHD can cause significant impairment for children and adolescents, there are established treatment options that can help.

What are the Symptoms of ADHD?

There are two major symptom clusters:

- **Inattention.** Some symptoms include:
 - Difficulty focusing on schoolwork
 - Making careless mistakes
 - Having trouble organizing tasks
 - Being easily distracted
- **Hyperactivity/impulsivity.** Some symptoms include:
 - Having trouble sitting still
 - Interrupting others' conversations
 - Being in near-constant motion
 - Talking too much

These symptoms may indicate ADHD when they are more frequent or severe compared to other children of the same developmental level. There are three types of ADHD: **Primarily Inattentive**, **Primarily Hyperactive-Impulsive**, and **Combined**.

How is ADHD Diagnosed?

- ADHD can be diagnosed by a qualified mental health professional or physician.
- Reports of ADHD symptoms from at least two different sources, in two different settings, are required for diagnosis.
 - For instances, symptoms would need to be endorsed both at home or at school.
- In order to consider a diagnosis of ADHD, the examiner looks for impairment to the child or adolescent, which can mean significant problems at home, school, or in other settings.
- Symptoms must be present before age 12 and for at least six months.

What Causes ADHD?

Genetics are partially responsible for ADHD, as is the environment in which a child or adolescent lives. ADHD emerges in childhood and is associated with delays in development of the brain.

What Can Parents Do to Help Children and Adolescents with ADHD?

- Provide consistent, predictable routines
- Give short, clear instructions
- Help create organization systems for chores and homework
- Give small rewards for completing challenging tasks
- Monitor your child when he or she is at home, keeping an eye out for impulsive behaviors.

Treatment Options for ADHD

If you think your child or adolescent may have ADHD, seek an assessment from a qualified mental health professional. ADHD usually responds well to a combination of behavior therapy and medication.

Behavior Therapy:

- Effective treatment heavily involves parents. This form of treatment is often called "behavioral parent training" or "parent management training".
- The therapist teaches parents how to increase the behaviors they want to see more of in their children and decrease the ones they want to see less of.
- Parents learn how to set limits and be consistent, and children learn how to meet their parents' expectations.

Medication:

- Stimulants are the first line medication treatment for ADHD symptoms.
- It is recommended that medication be combined with behavior therapy in order to address the functional problems associated with ADHD.
- Both the dosage and type of medication need to be carefully calibrated by a physician in order to have the best possible effects.