

Your Child and You - Introduction

What is ADHD?

Children with ADHD have a hard time paying attention, and are easily distracted. Often they have a hard time controlling their actions, even when they want to be good. Children with ADHD are more active than other children their age.

For your child to be diagnosed with ADHD, the symptoms must go on for at least 6 months. People must have noticed the symptoms before the child turned 7 years old. These problems must be seen in at least two areas of your child's life. These areas could be school, home, or when your child is around other people. Clinical mental health workers have specific guidelines to follow in making a diagnosis.

Paying Attention

Your child with ADHD will have a hard time with details. He or she may make a lot of mistakes in schoolwork, household chores, or other tasks. They have a hard time keeping track of things over time, including when they are playing. They may have a hard time making plans and looking ahead. They might be forgetful, and lose things like toys, school papers, keys, and books.

Children with ADHD will have these problems because they tend to notice everything that is going on. They try to pay attention to everything. This may be hard for them. They may start to avoid activities that require attention over time. They may start to feel bad about themselves. This is why we want to help you help your child.

Lack of Impulse Control

Lack of impulse control means your child has a hard time stopping to think before he or she acts. It can also mean they have a hard time when they have to wait for something they want. For example, they may have a hard time finishing chores before watching television. They may have a hard time waiting their turn, and may call out questions in class while the teacher is talking. Their frustration may lead to temper tantrums, and this is hard for the parents and the child.

Hyperactivity

Hyperactivity means that your child is much more active and restless than most kids his or her age. It looks like they have a very high energy level. They are not able to choose well how to use this energy. They may act like they don't want to obey, or sit still, even if they want to be good. Many parents say that grocery shopping with their ADHD child is stressful. Their child may talk a lot. Playing quietly may be very hard. Again this is hard for the parent and the child.

How many children have ADHD?

ADHD is very common. About 1% to 3% of school-aged children have all or most of the signs of ADHD. Another 5% to 10% of school-aged children show many signs of ADHD. However, children should only receive the ADHD diagnosis if the ways they act cause problems at home and at school. Other causes of problems need to be checked out first before giving a child a diagnosis of ADHD. Boys are three times more likely than girls to have signs of ADHD. The signs seem to get

better as the child grows up, but they do not always go away. Some adults show signs of ADHD that are close to those of children.

What causes ADHD?

No one knows exactly. Some people think it is "passed down" from parents to children. In some children, it might be a problem with their "body chemistry." This may affect the way the child's brain works. There is a need for more research on the subject. It is important that parents and children with ADHD do not blame themselves. It is no one's fault.

What can happen if ADHD is not treated?

Children with ADHD are more likely to perform poorly in school. They may have a hard time getting along with others. And they may keep having these problems as they grow up. The sooner children with ADHD get help, the sooner they can start feeling better about doing better at home and at school.

Many children with ADHD do learn to do much better in school and at home. And many parents are able to learn ways to help children with ADHD. This helps the parent, too! They feel more in control and less upset. Some parents discover they have ADHD also. Then they get help for their signs.

What help is available for ADHD?

Children with ADHD can be treated with special medications, such as Ritalin, Dexedrine, and Wellbutrin. These have been shown to be very helpful. The decision about taking medication needs to be made between an experienced professional and the parents. Counselors can also teach children and families some tools to help a child with ADHD. These tools can help the child:

- Control his or her actions at home.
- Control his or her actions at school.
- Get along better with others.
- Develop skills to finish chores and homework.

Each child is different. Your doctor and/or counselor will help find the best way for you to help your child and yourself. There is a lot you can do to help a child with ADHD.