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*Dedicated to helping children with emotional and behavioral problems,
by developing stronger more positive family relationships*

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a chronic disorder that affects millions of children, usually appears before age 7 and often persists into adulthood. The symptoms of ADHD fall into two categories:

- Hyperactivity-impulsive behavior
- Inattention

For a diagnosis to be given for either type, the symptoms must be present for at least six months and affect a child's ability to function in at least two areas of life. Generally the symptoms persist at home and at school. If the symptoms are only present at home or only at school, look for other reasons for the behaviors. It may be a relationship issue with a parent, a teacher, or peers.

Preschoolers normally have a short attention span and aren't able to stick with one activity for long. This does not mean they have ADHD. Children of all age levels can have attention span problems depending on the level of interest in a particular activity. It is common for teenagers to listen to music or talk to their friends for hours but be much less focused on completing their homework.

Signs and symptoms of hyperactivity-impulsive behavior may include:

- Fidgets or squirms frequently
- Often leave his or her seat in the classroom
- Often runs or climbs excessively when it's not appropriate
- Frequently has difficulty playing quietly
- Always seems on the go



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- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers before questions have been completely asked
- Frequently has difficulty waiting for his or her turn
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others' conversations or games

Signs and symptoms of inattention may include:

- Often fails to pay close attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Often has trouble sustaining attention during tasks or play
- Seems not to listen even when spoken to directly
- Has difficulty following through on instructions
- Often fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or other tasks
- Avoids or dislikes tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Frequently loses needed items; i.e. books, pencils, toys
- Can be distracted easily
- Often forgetful

Girls are more often diagnosed with inattention, whereas boys are more often diagnosed with hyperactive. Inattentive girls will often daydream, whereas inattentive boys are more likely to play or fiddle aimlessly. Teachers often notice the more conspicuous behavior of the boy, while ignoring the behavior of the girl.

Please keep in mind that every child is unique and no child should be classified as having ADHD/ADD just because they are different from their friends or siblings.



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How you can help at home

Show your child lots of affection. Focus on the positive aspects you see in your child. Tell your child you love them. Give them hugs. Focusing on the negative can harm your relationship with your child as well as your child's self esteem.

Be consistent. The more consistent you are the easier it is for your child to know what to expect. It helps to have a regular bedtime, regular meal times, and regular study times. It is often difficult for a child with ADHD/ADD to deal with a change in a routine.

Be patient. Stay calm when dealing with your child. You are the adult and need to help regulate the environment. It is not fair to expect the child to do this.

Make sure your child is rested. When your child is tired their symptoms are often worse. Making sure your child gets 9 to 10 hours of sleep is very important.

Try to avoid situations you know are difficult for your child. This may be things such as shopping, going to movies, places that are over stimulating.

Engage with your child in a positive way. Find ways to enjoy being with your child. Identify the positive, less difficult ways to interact with your child. Spend some much needed alone time daily doing what your child likes to do with you.

Help your child get organized. Children with ADHD/ADD are often unorganized. Have them gather everything they need for the next day each night before going to bed and have a specific place to put it until morning.



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Having structure helps the child know there is a predictable routine, which helps them feel safe and often helps improve their behavior.

Allow enough time for them to process your directions. Your child will need more time to mentally process what you have just asked him/her to do. It helps if you only ask them to do one or two things at a time. Giving them a multiple list generally means they will lose focus along the way and not complete the tasks.

How you can help at school

Take advantage of any special programs your school offers for children with ADHD/ADD.

Communicate often with your child's teacher. Make sure they recognize the need to be clear with their instructions and possibly allow more time for child to complete an in school assignment.

It may be possible for child to use a computer for writing assignments. Many classrooms today have computers available for help.

Please keep in mind that caring for a child with ADHD/ADD can be challenging for the whole family. It can affect the marriage relationship, as well as the relationship between siblings. Try to remember to be patient and give time for your own well being. ■

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