

Maryland School Mental Health Alliance*
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Children and Adolescents
Information for School Clinicians

Definition

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is characterized by *developmentally inappropriate* levels of:

- Inattention (trouble focusing, getting distracted, trouble sustaining attention, making careless mistakes, losing things, trouble following through on things, poor organization, doesn't seem to be listening)
- Impulsivity (acting without thinking, interrupting, intruding, talking excessively, difficulty waiting for turns)
- Hyperactivity (trouble sitting still, fidgeting, feeling restless, difficulty engaging in quiet activities)

ADHD is a neurobiological disorder that affects 3 to 7 percent of school-age children. Until relatively recently, it was believed that children outgrew ADHD in adolescence as hyperactivity often diminishes during the teen years. However, it is now known that ADHD nearly always persists from childhood through adolescence and that many symptoms continue into adulthood. In fact, current research reflects rates of roughly 2 to 4 percent among adults.

There are three types of ADHD:

- ADHD Combined Type (trouble with inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity)
 - "Classic ADHD"
- ADHD Predominately Inattentive Type (trouble with attention, sluggish)
 - May seem bored or unmotivated
- ADHD Predominately Hyperactive Impulsive Type (trouble with impulsivity and hyperactivity)
 - Occurs more often in younger children

Why do we care?

Although individuals with this disorder can be very successful in life, without proper identification and treatment, ADHD may have serious consequences, including school failure, family stress and disruption, depression, problems with relationships, substance abuse, delinquency, risk for accidental injuries and job failure. Additionally, at least 2/3 of individuals with ADHD have another co-existing condition, such as learning problems, anxiety or behavior problems. Early identification and treatment are extremely important. The symptoms of ADHD are often first noticed at school.

What can we do about it?

- **Confirm diagnosis with a thorough evaluation**
 - Obtain behavioral checklists from caregiver and teacher (see resources below)
 - Rule out other causes (e.g., vision or hearing problems, learning or language disorder, medical problem or medication side effect, depression, anxiety, trauma)
 - Evaluate for co-existing conditions
- **Once diagnosed, ADHD in children or adolescents often requires a comprehensive approach to treatment called "*multimodal*" and includes:**
 - Parent and child/adolescent education about diagnosis and treatment
 - Behavior management techniques
 - Medication

- School programming and supports
- **Specific clinical strategies include:**
 - Educate parents, teachers and the child or adolescent about ADHD
 - Set up a school-home note system
 - Teach parents and teachers to be consistent
 - Teach appropriate use of praise and rewards
 - Use at least five times as many praises as negative comments
 - Praise should be immediate, specific and true
 - Instruct parents and teachers in giving appropriate commands and reprimands
 - Use of clear, specific commands
 - Giving private reprimands as much as possible (i.e., not in front of other students or siblings)
 - Reprimands should be brief, clear, neutral in tone, and as immediate as possible
 - Work on improving social relationships by:
 - systematic teaching of social skills in a social skills group
 - teaching social problem solving
 - teaching other behavioral skills often considered important by children, such as sports skills and board game rules
 - decreasing undesirable and antisocial behaviors
 - helping your child in developing a close friendship
 - Make a referral for a medication evaluation, if appropriate
 - If the student with ADHD is on medication, help the prescriber evaluate the effectiveness of the medication with behavioral checklists at home and at school

Key Resources/Links

1. **National Resource Center on AD/HD: A Program of CHADD**, funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
<http://www.help4adhd.org/index.cfm>
2. **Identifying and Treating Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder: A Resource for School and Home** <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/needs/speced/adhd/adhd-resource-pt1.pdf>
This U.S. Department of Education resource guide is designed for families and educators and provides information on the identification of AD/HD and educational services for children with AD/HD.
3. **Center for Children and Families, University of Buffalo** Free downloadable forms and resources for clinicians, caregivers, and educators working with children ADHD
http://ccf.buffalo.edu/resources_downloads.php
4. **National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality** offers free toolkits for professionals, including Vanderbilt Rating Scales www.nichq.org/nichq
5. **National Association of School Psychologists.** *Diagnosis and Treatment of Attention Disorders: Roles for School Personnel.*
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/add_fs.aspx
6. **ADHD.com:** <http://www.adhd.com/hcp/hcp.jsp>
A website providing healthcare professionals with information and tools regarding ADHD

**Developed by the Center for School Mental Health (<http://csmh.umaryland.edu>) in collaboration with the Maryland School Mental Health Alliance.*